2026 AMA WINTER ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

Bridging at the Frontiers: Marketing for a World in Transition

February 9 • Virtual
February 13-15 • Madrid, Spain

PROCEEDINGS

Volume 37

Co-Chairs:

Michael Haenlein, ESCP Business School

K. Sudhir, Yale University

Ela Veresiu, York University

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Foreword

Welcome to the 2026 AMA Winter Academic Conference!

The Danyang–Kunshan Grand Bridge runs for about 165 km and carries high-speed rail on the Beijing–Shanghai railway line. It is the longest bridge in the world. Bridges connect previously separate areas and, in the process, enable activities and exchanges that would otherwise be impossible or impractical. It is this idea that inspired our theme—**Bridging at the Frontiers: Marketing for a World in Transition**—for the first AMA Academic Conference held outside of North America. In a moment shaped by the increasing importance of artificial intelligence and geopolitical tensions, the distinctive contribution of marketing is not to simplify complexity away, but to serve as a bridge, connecting ideas, methods, and communities—a task AMA has always aimed to advance.

Our conference program is designed to put this bridging function into practice. Our pre-conferences aim to connect emerging domains to core marketing questions, such as the **Better Marketing for a Better World** pre-conference, which links marketing research with societal challenges. Our special sessions aim to bring together scholars working on the same problem using different lenses. An example is the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* special session on **Reclaiming Marketplace Inclusion**, which bridges scholarship with policy debates and discusses the potential problems and untapped potential of areas where more inclusion is needed. Beyond these, the program includes many sessions that bridge the technological frontiers of AI and technology with human challenges, as well as our SIG sessions, which have bridged communities and scholars for many years.

We are grateful to everyone who has helped to make this conference such an outstanding success. The 2026 AMA Winter Academic Conference is, with over 1,100 submissions, the largest AMA Academic Conference ever. We want to thank the authors who submitted their research, the reviewers who provided comments and guidance, and the track chairs, special session organizers, and many others who helped us to shape this program. Last but not least, we thank the AMA professional staff, specifically Riley Fickett and Marilyn Stone, without whose help none of this would have been possible.

For many decades, AMA has bridged scholars and academic communities across all continents. It has long been our aim to showcase this by organizing a conference outside of North America. We are thrilled to see this happening in Europe this year, and we are sure it is not the last example of AMA building bridges—both academically and geographically.

We look forward to seeing you, whether virtually or in person, at Winter AMA 2026 in Madrid.

Sincerely,
Michael, Sudhir, and Ela

Michael Haenlein, ESCP Business School
K. Sudhir, Yale University
Ela Veresiu, York University
2026 AMA Winter Academic Conference Co-Chairs

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Best Overall Paper

"Silent partners: How using AI suppresses consumer disclosure and word-of-mouth"

Youjung Jun, Yonsei University
David Finken, ETH Zurich
Jennifer Sun, Yonsei University

Best Papers in Tracks

Advertising Promotion and Marketing Communiciation

"Consuming After Ideology: How Advertising Constructed the Flexitarian Consumer"

Jonatan Sodergren, University of Bristol
Ileyha Dagalp, University of Gothenburg
Jack Waverly, University of Manchester
Avi Shankar, University of Bristol

AI and Technology

"Why Recruiting AI Talent can be Bad for Marketing?"

Ali Obaidan, The University of Leeds
Sourindra Banerjee, The University of Leeds
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Consumer Behavior

"Silent partners: How using AI suppresses consumer disclosure and word-of-mouth"

Youjung Jun, Yonsei University
David Finken, ETH Zurich
Jennifer Sun, Yonsei University

Consumer Protection, Public Policy and Regulation

"Carbon Labels and Consumer Flight Choices"

Shitai Zhang, New York University
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Culture, Consumption and Markets

"Old Practices for New Pressures: Reading as a Cultural Repertoire of Digital Disconnection"

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Digital Marketing, Social Media and Online Platforms

"When firms talk back: Heterogeneous Effects of Management Responses on Ratings and Review Activity"

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Emerging Markets and International Marketing

"Navigating Learning Advantage of Newness and Time Compression Diseconomies in Relation to Earliness and Speed of SME Internationalization"

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Marketing Strategy and Organization

"Turning Service into Profits: Cross-Selling Synergies and Organizational Design"

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New Products and Innovation

"The Impact of Inclusive Design Product Extensions on Existing Consumers' Response Toward the Brand"

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Retailing, Sales Management, and Personal Selling

"How Retailers Use Shelf Signals to Increase Product Availability and Enhance the Customer Experience"

Tom Gruen, University of New Hampshire
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Services and Customer Experience

"From Safety to Engagement: Measuring Safe Customer Experience and Well-being in Omnichannel Retail"

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Jamie Carlson, The University of Newcastle
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Christian Ringle, Hamurg University of Technology
Dhruv Grewal, Babson College

Sustainability and Social Responsibility

"Choosing to Make a Difference: The Salience of Choice Increases People's Support for the Environment"

Shilpa Madan, Singapore Management University
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Jinyan Xiang, Virginia Tech
Krishna Savani, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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(DIS)ENTITLEMENT TO EATING MEAT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE PLANT-BASED FOOD CHOICES

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Keywords: disentitlement, entitlement, plant-based food choice, self-focus, communication

Description: This research investigates how disentitlement, a reduction in the perceived right to eat meat, shifts consumer food choices toward plant-based options.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates whether reducing perceived entitlement to eat meat can shift consumers' food choices toward plant-based options, and why, and under which conditions such a shift occurs. We conceptualize disentitlement as a reduction in the perceived right to eat meat, elicited by prompting consumers to reflect on reasons why eating meat may not be an unquestionable right. We test whether eliciting disentitlement increases plant-based choice in incentive-compatible settings. We further examine reduced self-focus as a psychological process underlying the effect and assess whether the source of reasons matters by comparing self-generated with externally provided content.

Method And Data

We report four preregistered experiments with meat-eaters (N = 2,918; U.S. and U.K.; Prolific). Study 1 used a writing task (disentitlement vs. control vs. entitlement) and an incentive-compatible food (plant-based vs. meat) choice. Study 2 replicated the main effect and measured self-focus using a scale; mediation was tested with PROCESS and corroborated by pronoun-based quantitative text analysis. Study 3 embedded disentitlement in an NGO-style social-media campaign and measured food choice in an online food order context, with campaign attitudes controlled for. Study 4 used a 2 (intervention: disentitlement vs. control) × 2 (source: self-generated vs. externally provided) design to test interaction effects on food choice.

Summary of Findings

Across studies, eliciting disentitlement increased plant-based choice relative to control (and to entitlement in Study 1). In Study 2, the effect was fully mediated by reduced self-focus, with convergent behavioral evidence from fewer self-focused and more other-focused pronouns. Study 3 generalized the disentitlement effect to a communication context. Study 4 identified a boundary condition: disentitlement promoted plant-based choice only when reasons were self-generated; externally provided reasons attenuated the effect.

Key Contributions

First, we introduce and operationalize disentitlement as a scalable, psychological lever that shifts meat-eating consumers' food choice from meat to plant-based options. We thereby move the literature beyond correlational links between meat entitlement and resistance to plant-based eating by demonstrating causal, downstream choice effects. We also identify reduced self-focus as a key psychological mechanism linking disentitlement to plant-based choice. Furthermore, integrating self-determination and self-persuasion perspectives, we specify a boundary condition

with direct managerial implications: disentitlement is effective only when it is self- generated rather than externally provided. More broadly, the present research contributes to consumer behavior research on psychological barriers to sustainable actions and offers guidance for designing interventions that translate into measurable behavioral outcomes. Managerially, the findings provide actionable insights for marketers, NGOs, and policymakers seeking to promote plant-based food choices.

References are available upon request.

A dynamic account of decision-making via belief updating from description and experience

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Keywords: Learning from experience, Learning from description, Ecological rationality, Bayesian updating

Description: This paper shows how a hybrid model of learning from experience and learning from description explains how agents understand the structure of environments to make utility-maximizing decisions.

Research Questions

How do agents understand the structure of environments to make utility-maximizing decisions? Model-based accounts of decision-making from description suggest agents should update beliefs via Bayes' rule over a known state space and act on expected value. In contrast, model-free, reinforcement-based accounts of decision-making from experience suggest agents learn effective policies directly from realized outcomes without an explicit model. This paper addresses two key questions: 1) Between learning from description and experience, which one is more important in decision-making? and 2) Does one override the other if both exist in the information set available to the individual?

Methods and data

Contrary to many studies in this line of research, this paper lets both accounts of decision-making take place. Hence, a participant gains information through a weighted average, ω, of descriptive $Q_{t,description}(s,a)$ and $Q_{t,experience}(s,a)$ accounts:

$$Q_{t,hybrid}(s,a) = Q_{t,description}(s,a) * \omega + (1-\omega)Q_{t,experience}(s,a) \text{ [11]}$$

The action taken by the individual is in the form of a probabilistic choice where the likelihood of choosing the action is dependent on the Q-value of that specific state-action pair and a coefficient called the exploitation parameter (β)

$$Probability(a) = \frac{\exp(\beta * Q(s,a))}{\sum \beta * Q(s,a')} \text{ [2]}$$

To collect data, we use a modified version of Charness & Levin's (2005) experiment proposed by Alós-Ferrer & Garagnani (2023). In this experiment, the conflict between Reinforcement and Bayesian reasoning is simulated in an environment where participants bet on the color of a ball (black or white) and receive a reward if the ball drawn from the urn matches their bet. Each

individual completes sixty rounds, with the environment resetting after each round. Thirty rounds of the game are played in a four-ball setting, and the other thirty rounds in a six-ball setting.

A total of 101 participants (51 males and 50 females; age ranging from 24 to 71, with an average of 43.2) were recruited to complete the experiment through the Prolific platform.

Summary of findings

Results show that a dynamic hybrid of the two approaches outperforms pure-Bayesian, pure-reinforcement, and static-hybrid baselines in fit and out-of-sample prediction. On average, behaviour moves toward the Bayesian benchmark over rounds, with slower convergence when description and experience conflict. Taken together, these findings move beyond a static "rational versus irrational" dichotomy by providing a dynamic process account of convergence. Adaptive belief updating and dynamic reweighting explain accuracy, heterogeneity, and when feedback and incentives incentivize Bayesian-consistent choice.

The findings also demonstrate the individual-level heterogeneity and gender differences in learning from experience. Results indicate that females tend to rely more on and learn better from experience. Further analysis on top performers corroborates this conjecture, as 66% of the participants who scored equal to Bayes or better were females. Additionally, the same pattern whereby the reliance and accuracy of decisions from experience improve in the latter stages are observed in the top performer subsample.

Summary of key contributions

This paper demonstrates that a hybrid model of model-free learning from experience and model-based learning from description best describes the adaptation of agents to four different experimental settings. Contemporary literature suggests dominance of experience even when description is available; however, no study investigated the temporal dynamics of reliance on

experience and description. Ert & Lejarraga's (2018) study is the only exception where authors show that participants incorporate information from both experience and description into their decisions. This study lends credence to this account by highlighting the temporal dynamics of reliance on description vs. experience and showcases agents' tendency to learn from description during the initial steps, followed by a shift in their learning to experience in the later stages. The model-free account of learning from experience in this study converges to Bayes given ample time to the agent, which may obscure the identification of description/experience reliance. The second experiment in this study creates a setting where descriptions provided to participants differ from the mechanisms of the game. The findings show that similar patterns are replicated, albeit with a smaller size. The reliance on experience increases as the experiment progresses, and females tend to learn better; however, the incongruent instructions slow down the shift to experience and reduce the accuracy of the learning from experience. Ultimately, the results replicate in two other datasets from Alós-Charness & Levin (2005) and Charness & Levin (2005), with the latter employing a significantly different experimental setting.

A PLACE I'VE (NEVER) SMELLED: REAL VS. IMAGINED OLFACTION AND RETROSPECTIVE VS. PROSPECTIVE NOSTALGIC FRAMING IN VR EXPERIENCES

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Keywords: virtual reality, nostalgia, olfaction, retrospective, prospective

Description: This paper proposes and finds that colder temperatures make it easier for consumers to imagine using a product.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

VR is a particularly compelling tool to evoke nostalgia due to its highly immersive nature. However, while some initial research investigates memory within VR (Kostyk et al., 2024), nostalgia has merely been touched on. In line with Cheung et al. (2020), we consider retrospective nostalgia as the traditional understanding of nostalgia, which is focused on longing for the past, while we consider prospective nostalgia to refer to a forward-looking focus of nostalgia with respect to imagined future experiences.

Further, despite the rapid, recent advancement of sensorially rich virtual reality and some initial evidence that multisensory experiences are beneficial in VR (i.e., Cowan et al., 2023; Flavian et al., 2021; Melo et al., 2022; Weidner et al., 2023), prior research has barely explored nuances in the effects of sensory inputs in VR. Some senses, like scent, might be more relevant to imagine and/or experience, while other senses, like touch, might only be experienced

vicariously (Luangrath et al., 2022). Additionally, while research suggests that imagined and real scent are both beneficial, is one more impactful than the other under certain conditions?

Method And Data

Study 1 was a 2-level (nostalgic framing: retrospective vs. prospective) between-subjects study, which tested whether high immersivity VR led to higher patronage responses than low immersivity VR via imagery vividness and evoked nostalgia ($H_{1\text{-}2}$). The study involved the smell of cinnamon and had participants participate in a VR experience for a holiday market they had been to before (retrospective) or not been to before (prospective). A final sample size of 186 Prolific panelists (women = 45.7%, men = 52.7%, 1.6% non-binary/third gender, and 0% prefer not to say; M_{age} = 40.1 years, SD_{age} = 11.5 years) participated.

Study 2 was a 2 (nostalgic framing: retrospective vs. prospective) X 2 (scent: imagined vs. real) between-subjects design testing whether prospective nostalgic framing led to higher patronage responses with imagined vs. real smell (H_3). This study used a theme park VR experience in an in-person controlled laboratory setting with either an imagination prompt for apple pie, popcorn, and vanilla waffle cones or a real spray with the same scent profile. A final sample size of 113 undergraduate students (women = 49.6%, men = 49.6%, 0% non-binary/third gender, and .9% prefer not to say; M_{age} = 20.0 years, SD_{age} = 1.1 years) participated.

Summary of Findings

The results of both studies provided support for our three hypotheses and also ruled out alternative explanations. The findings extend the literatures on VR, nostalgia, and sensory marketing by illustrating the role that VR system immersivity plays in evoking nostalgia via imagery vividness and showing that under high immersivity, which is naturally high in vividness,

real vs. imagined smells can trigger evoked nostalgia differently depending on whether participants are experiencing retrospective or prospective nostalgic framing.

Statement of Key Contributions

While most marketing studies focus on retrospective nostalgia through traditional media, little is known about how immersive technologies influence how nostalgia is experienced, and prior research in marketing has not sufficiently addressed how different types of nostalgia function within a consumer-facing context. We address this gap by examining how appeals to retrospective nostalgia (nostalgia for an actual past experience) vs. prospective nostalgia (nostalgia for an experience one has never had before) affect evoked nostalgia differently as a function of low vs. high immersivity and real vs. imagined scent. These findings provide nuance to the literature on the effects of nostalgia and scent on consumer responses. As such, we also contribute to the nostalgia literature in the consumer domain.

We also furnish evidence that imagery vividness explains the effect of immersivity on evoked nostalgia, and we show that under high immersivity (which is naturally more vivid), effects on evoked nostalgia depend on whether an olfactory input is imagined or real (Study 2). We also rule out several alternative explanations. Further, we offer guidance for how brands can use immersive VR environments to deepen emotional engagement, specifically nostalgia.

References available upon request.

A Study of the Sensory Perception Route to Store Image and Customer Loyalty

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Keywords: Sensory, Perception, Store Image, Word of Mouth, Repurchase Intention, Loyalty.

Description: This study examines how implicit and explicit sensory perceptions in Delhi coffee shops shape store image and drive customer loyalty through repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth, using response latency and surveys on 400 customers to reveal subconscious cues' dominant role.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How do implicit and explicit sensory perceptions of in-store experiences affect the store's image and customer loyalty, particularly regarding repurchase intentions and word-of-mouth (WoM) recommendations? Despite extensive research on sensory marketing, prior studies have largely overlooked the dual processing of sensory cues at explicit (conscious, deliberate) and implicit (automatic, subconscious) cognitive levels. This gap limits our understanding of how human senses, such as sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste, shape holistic store perceptions and drive loyalty in retail settings like coffee shops.

This study addresses this matter by investigating coffee shop customers in Delhi, India, a vibrant market where sensory-rich environments play a key role in differentiation. Using a sample of 400 respondents, we employ response latency measurements to capture implicit perceptions (e.g., automatic associations with store ambiance) and questionnaire-based surveys for explicit evaluations (e.g., conscious ratings of sensory appeal). We test a structural model linking sensory perceptions to store images as a mediator and loyalty outcomes (repurchases and WoM) as dependents. Grounded in dual-process theories of cognition and sensory branding frameworks, this research question investigates whether implicit cues have a stronger effect.

Summary of Findings

The structural equation modeling of data from 400 customers of Delhi coffee shops reveals that both implicit and explicit sensory perceptions significantly shape store image, but with distinct impacts on loyalty. Implicit perceptions, measured via response latency (e.g., rapid, subconscious reactions to aroma, lighting, and music), emerge as the stronger predictor of store image, explaining 35% more variance than explicit perceptions. Store image fully mediates the path from sensory perceptions to repurchase intentions and partially to WoM.

Visual and olfactory cues dominate implicit effects, fostering automatic positive associations, while explicit tactile and gustatory perceptions drive conscious evaluations. Multisensory integration amplifies store image by 22%, with loyalty highest in high-sensory congruence settings. Model fit is robust (CFI = 0.96, RMSEA=0.04), confirming differential cognitive processing. These patterns hold across demographics, underscoring implicit routes' primacy in fast-paced retail like coffee shops. The findings contest unidimensional sensory models, emphasizing the significant influence of subconscious senses on customer loyalty within India's competitive café market.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances sensory marketing theory by integrating dual-process cognition (implicit vs. explicit) into store image-loyalty frameworks, filling a critical gap in retail experience research. Theoretically, it provides the first empirical validation of response latency for implicit sensory perceptions, demonstrating their superior influence on store image over explicit measures, contributing novel evidence to embodied cognition and associative learning theories. By modeling the store image as a mediator in a multisensory context, we refine loyalty formation pathways, showing implicit cues' 50% greater elasticity in emerging markets.

Methodologically, the hybrid approach (surveys) offers a replicable toolkit for capturing subconscious processes, surpassing traditional self-reports prone to bias. Practically, marketers gain actionable insights: prioritize olfactory/visual cues for implicit loyalty boosts (e.g., signature coffee scents yielding 18% higher repurchase), integrate multisensory strategies for 25% store image gains, and tailor Delhi-specific tactics amid cultural sensory preferences. In India's booming coffee sector, such information informs competitive positioning against global chains. Overall, the work elevates multisensory marketing from intuition to science, with generalizable implications for global retail loyalty in experience-driven economies.

AUTOMATION AVOIDANCE IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Keywords: automation consumption, social influence, capability neglect, romantic relationships

Description: This research contributes to a growing stream of literature on technology adoption by providing new insights on the influence of romantic relationship motives, in particular, when and how the desire to form a new romantic relationship may result in resistance to automation consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Automations are ever-present in consumers' daily lives. From automatic cookers to power assisted bicycles, marketers introduce technology to everyday tasks. Automation improves efficiency and enables consumers to do more with less (De Bellis, Johar, and Poletti 2023). Despite these advantages, consumers may, counterintuitively, resist automation adoption. In a departure from prior work that focuses on solo consumptions (De Bellis, Johar, and Poletti 2023; Leung, Paolacci, and Puntoni 2018), we investigate automation adoption in joint consumptions with a romantic partner. We show that consumers have lower preferences for automation when forming rather than maintaining a romantic relationship. This effect occurs because, while

automation offers numerous benefits, it, at the same time, denies consumers the ability to signal their task capability to romantic partners. We term this mechanism capability neglect. While capability neglect may not be a particular concern in solo consumptions, it emerges as a crucial factor in joint consumptions with a romantic partner. In particular, when forming a romantic relationship (as opposed to when maintaining an existing romantic relationship), it is vital to signal one's skills and capabilities to the potential partner (Griskevicius et al. 2007; Sundie et al. 2011).

Method And Data

To test our theorizing, we conducted a series of 10 studies. In the first pair of studies, we collected initial evidence for the effect of romantic relationship stage on the preference for automation by measuring participants' relationship status (study 1a) and by experimentally manipulating relationship stage (study 1b). In the next pair of studies (Studies 2a and 2b), we investigated capability neglect as the underlying mechanism while ruling out automation capability as an alternative explanation. Examining signaling-related moderators, we investigated the role of partner presence (Study 3a) and signaling feasibility (Study 3b). Examining capability-related moderators, we investigated the role of capability level (Study 4a) and feature diagnosticity (Study 4b). In the final study, we demonstrated a preference reversal through the type of the capability (Study 5). When the automated feature was perceived to facilitate the demonstration of one's capability (i.e. financial capability), the results reversed, and the romantic formation motive increased rather than decreased the preference for the automated option.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1A, single individuals exhibited a lower preference for the automated option compared to individuals in a relationship. In Study 1B, individuals with the romantic formation motive exhibited lower preferences for automated option than participants with the romantic maintenance motive and those with the nonromantic formation motive. In study 2A, the results revealed that the automated option were less preferred among participants with a romantic formation motive compared to those with a romantic maintenance motive. Similarly, participants with the romantic formation motive reported greater capability neglect. Furthermore, PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes 2013) revealed a significant indirect effect through capability neglect. Study 2B provided further process evidence while ruling out automation perceptions as an alternative mechanism. Results of Studies 3A and 3B demonstrated the difference between romantic formation and maintenance motives disappeared when the partner was absent and when it was no longer feasible to signal (due to the time constraint). Results of Studies 4A and 4B demonstrated that the difference between romantic formation and maintenance motives on the preference for automation disappeared when individuals lacked the task capability and when the feature was nondiagnostic. Results of Study 5 demonstrated a preference reversal through the moderating role of capability type.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research makes two important contributions to literature. First, while prior work on automation adoption mainly focused on solo consumption, our research examines automation adoption in the context of joint consumption. Specifically, we demonstrate that joint consumption with a romantic partner uniquely impacts preferences for automation and the effect

depends on the stage of the romantic relationship. Second, our research examines a novel mechanism—capability neglect—the belief that using automated product or feature would mask one's capabilities and skills. We demonstrate that capability neglect underlies the resistance to automation among consumers in the romantic formation stage (as opposed to those in the romantic maintenance stage) because of the belief that automation, despite its numerous benefits, would deny one's ability to signal their capabilities to their romantic partners.

References are available upon request.

BEYOND THE MAT: YOGA CONSUMPTION AS EXSITENTIAL CARING

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Keywords: Existential Caring Consumption, Patanjali Yoga Consumption, Modern Yoga Consumption, The Yoga Sensemaking Process.

Description: This paper explores how traditional and modern yoga practices shape consumers' existential meaning-making and lead to distinct forms of caring consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Current literature often categorizes yoga styles into broad classifications, such as physical versus spiritual or modern versus traditional, oversimplifying their nuances. Studies like Cramer et al. (2016) emphasize health outcomes, while Feuerstein (2013) explores historical and spiritual dimensions, yet both overlook how specific yoga features engage practitioners or address cultural, social, and theoretical aspects like existential consumption and the interplay of symbolic and ritual consumption (Rook, 1985; Levy, 1959). These gaps leave unexplored the connections between yoga styles, practitioners' existential concerns, and caring behaviors.

This study fills the gap by characterizing modern and Patanjali yoga through five core features each, providing a framework for understanding their distinct approaches to existential concerns

like identity and meaningfulness (Yalom, 1980; Koole et al., 2006). It also examines how these consumption practices correspond to self-focused or altruistic caring behaviors and their reflection on practitioners' existential struggles.

To address these gaps, the study asks: How do modern and Patanjali yoga practices relate to existential concerns and caring behaviors? It highlights yoga's role in existential consumption and how symbolic and ritual consumption align with existential concerns, extending into caring behaviors within consumer culture.

Method and Data

This study employs a multi-level approach—macro (historical texts), meso (netnography), and micro (in-depth interviews) levels to provide a comprehensive understanding of yoga consumption. Over 15 years, the first author participated in yoga classes across Asia and North America, capturing lived experiences and highlighting Eastern and Western distinctions. Historical texts and scholarly works, including De Michelis (2004) and Strauss (2005), highlight cultural divergences between traditional Patanjali yoga and modern yoga. The netnographic study analyzed 200 posts from platforms like Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook, focusing on yoga studios, products, and consumer discussions. Fifteen interviews with practitioners and instructors were recorded, transcribed, and coded thematically in open, axial and selective stages.

Summary of Findings

Yoga, originating in Indian religious traditions, was historically practiced as a holistic lifestyle promoting spiritual growth rather than physical exercise (Alter, 2004; Strauss, 2005). Patanjali's Yoga Sutras emphasize self-discipline and spiritual harmony through the eight branches, including

ethical principles (yama), personal observances (niyama), postures (asana), breath control (pranayama), meditation (dhyana), and spiritual enlightenment (samadhi) (De Michelis, 2004; Singleton, 2010). Over time, yoga evolved into a simplified consumer-driven phenomenon, shaped by cultural borrowing and commercialization. (Askegaard & Eckhardt, 2012; Kniazeva & Belk, 2012). Existential consumption, in which people engage with consumption practices to address fundamental existential concerns, was transformed. Different yoga styles now serve different forms of existential consumption focusing more on physical self-care outcomes than spiritual matters (Rook, 1985; Chaudhry et al., 2023).

Self-care is defined as "the practice of activities that are necessary to sustain life and health, normally initiated and carried out by people for him- or herself" (PAGB, 2017). In contrast, other-care behaviors are rooted in empathy, moral responsibility, and collective well-being, emphasizing prosocial actions, ethical consumption, and altruistic practices (De Groot & Steg, 2009; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). Foucault's theory of "care of the self" bridges self-care and universal care, suggesting that personal well-being is interdependent with relational practices that prioritize others' well-being (Foucault, 1984; Rose, 1998). Two distinct styles of yoga are distinguished by unique characteristics, leading consumers to engage with either modern or Patanjali yoga based on their existential concerns. By categorizing five distinct features of each type of yoga, we offer a systematic framework to differentiate these styles. Interviews revealed that practitioners tend to embody specific self-concepts, which are echoed and reinforced through their engagement with their respective yoga practices. Based on our interviews, the Modern yoga style is perceived as more physical-oriented, self-oriented, future-oriented, maximalist-oriented, and social norms-oriented, while Patanjali yoga is experienced as more holistic-oriented, balanced-oriented, present-oriented, minimalist-oriented, and self-contentment-oriented.

Modern yoga practitioners exhibit self-concepts that are self-image conscious, personal success driven, goal-centric, materially attached, and social acceptance seeking—leading toward identity-based existential consumption and self-care behavior. In contrast, those who engage with the Patanjali yoga style express self-concepts that are life coherent, world contribution focused, mindful, materially detached, and inner satisfied—leading toward meaningfulness-based existential consumption and universal care behavior.

Key Contribution

In this article, we conceptualize Patanjali and Modern yoga within an Existential Caring Consumption (ECC) framework. In this framework, Patanjali yoga is primarily associated with ritual consumption, while modern yoga is primarily associated with symbolic consumption in relation to existential concerns. Patanjali yoga has a defined structure and specific stages that are systematic and repetitive but also carry significant meanings. This style of yoga goes beyond a physical exercise and includes teachings such as Yama and Niyama (ethical and disciplinary principles). Additionally, Patanjali yoga practices, rooted in Indian cultural heritage, often include \instructions such as morning meditation, a specific diet, and structured lifestyle patterns, which introduce a way of life to its practitioners. While some modern interpretations of Patanjali yoga, particularly those promoted by figures like Baba Ram-Dev, have led to its commercialization and commodification in India, the traditional structure and existential depth of this practice remain intact for those who engage with it beyond its market-driven adaptations. According to our interviews, the experience of deep harmony with the world can strengthen one’s sense of commitment and care toward the surrounding world. We believe that the ECC model serves as a framework demonstrating participants’ beliefs that the original form of yoga (Patanjali), if aligned

with deep engagement of the practitioner, can contribute to world betterment. For instance, one of our Patanjali yoga practitioners, shared that after experiencing a profound loss of a child, years of yoga practice inspired him to channel his pain into building a 300-girl school, transforming his grief into a universal caring behavior.

In contrast, modern yoga is considered a form of symbolic consumption, as it emphasizes identity expression and lifestyle. It often contributes to enhancing people's perception of their bodies, boosting self-confidence, reducing stress, and serving as a cultural domain that helps people feel better about themselves. It offers quick and effective practices that fit into the busy schedules of modern life, making it a practical tool for self-betterment. Modern yoga is the most widespread, (De Michelis, 2004; Singleton, 2010) largely due to its accessibility, adaptability, and appeal to contemporary wellness culture. This popularity has helped normalize yoga as a daily practice but also contributes to its decontextualization from its traditional, philosophical roots. Beyond yoga, this form of deep connection with cultural phenomena can be also seen widely with practices, traditions, and icons. They can represent multiple dimensions of engagement, existing simultaneously as popularized activities and as meaningful experiences. Popularized practices appeal to broader audiences through accessibility and adaptability, while deeper engagements emerge as people or groups find profound significance in these practices, transforming them into sources of identity, lifestyle, and spiritual connection. This dual dynamic highlight the coexistence and evolution of practices, where surface-level appeals and transformative depth enrich the human experience in diverse ways. Thus, the two extremes borrow from each other while retaining their essential differences. The Existential Caring Consumption (ECC) framework captures this richness within the two contexts of yoga, showing how practices engage with multiple layers of meaning and motivation .While previous research has largely emphasized the reciprocal

connection between mind and body (e.g., Nagel, 1993; Martin, 2000; Van der Kolk, 2014), such as physical yoga reducing mental trauma or meditation alleviating physical pain—our findings suggest that this relationship extends beyond internal experiences. We find that focusing on the mind versus the body in yoga not only influences internal states but also leads to distinct behavioral outcomes: self-care versus other care.

Breaking Bread: How *Dinner with Strangers* Fosters Authentic Social Connection and Reduces Loneliness

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Abstract

Dinner-with-strangers platforms such as *Timeleft* and *Storiboard* represent a growing form of structured, non-romantic social interaction in an era of rising loneliness. This paper develops a theoretical model integrating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Belongingness Hypothesis (BH) to explain their potential and limitations. Drawing on qualitative insights from 20 international participants, we argue that these events meet core psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) and partially fulfil belongingness criteria through positive, voluntary contact. However, they rarely provide the stability and continuity required for enduring belonging. We present propositions for future research and design principles for platforms seeking to address the loneliness epidemic.

Key Contributions

This paper makes three primary contributions to theory and practice. First, it advances the theoretical integration of *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) into the study of loneliness interventions. While SDT has been extensively applied in education, workplace, and health contexts (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), its application to casual social technologies remains underdeveloped. By mapping the needs for autonomy (volitional engagement), competence (confidence in navigating new social situations), and relatedness (authentic interpersonal connection) onto the micro-dynamics of dinner-with-strangers events, we extend SDT into the realm of ephemeral, low-stakes social contact. The proposed model demonstrates how such encounters can yield temporary psychological need satisfaction without necessarily producing enduring relational bonds.

Second, the paper reframes loneliness by introducing the concept of the *presence gap*. Traditional loneliness research conceptualises the phenomenon as a deficiency in the number or depth of social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981; Weiss, 1973). Our findings suggest a complementary dimension: the absence of uncurated, non-performative presence. Participants valued being “seen” in spaces free from romantic or transactional expectations, underscoring a distinction between social contact that alleviates state loneliness and the sustained intimacy required to address trait loneliness.

Third, the study provides actionable implications for platform design and public health interventions. For social technology developers, the findings highlight the value of low-pressure, ideologically safe environments that encourage repeated participation without coercing intimacy. For policymakers, dinner-with-strangers models offer potential as targeted interventions for individuals in transitional life stages, such as migrants or remote workers, where social networks are in flux. However, we caution against positioning such formats as stand-alone solutions; without opportunities for ongoing contact, their impact is likely to be palliative rather than transformative. By integrating qualitative insights with SDT's motivational framework, the paper deepens both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for addressing contemporary loneliness.

1. Introduction

Loneliness has emerged as a pressing public health issue, associated with elevated risks of psychological distress, chronic illness, and premature mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). While digital platforms ostensibly offer opportunities for connection, they frequently reinforce curated self-presentation and algorithmic segmentation, which can erode the authenticity and spontaneity of social interaction (Turkle, 2017). In response, *dinner-with-strangers* platforms such as *Timeleft* and *Storiboard* have gained traction by facilitating small, face-to-face gatherings among previously unacquainted individuals, deliberately removing romantic or networking imperatives. This paper examines the implications of these encounters for experiences of loneliness, adopting *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) as the primary theoretical lens. Drawing on qualitative insights from 20 participants across six countries, we conceptualise these events as instances of "social contact without social performance" and evaluate both their capacity and their limitations as interventions within the broader loneliness landscape.

2. Literature Review

Loneliness is a subjective perception of inadequate social connection, distinct from the objective state of social isolation (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Weiss (1973) distinguishes between emotional loneliness, characterised by the absence of close, intimate attachments, and social loneliness, which arises from a lack of a broader, supportive network. More recent scholarship highlights the notion of alienation, a perceived disconnection from society or even from one's own sense of self (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Findings from this study indicate

an additional dimension, which we term the *presence gap*: the absence of opportunities for uncurated, embodied interaction, even among individuals who maintain existing relationships.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that human well-being depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). While relatedness is most directly linked to loneliness, autonomy and competence also influence how individuals' approach, navigate, and sustain social connections. Crucially, these needs can be fulfilled not only through enduring relationships but also in brief, situational contexts, such as structured social encounters.

Loneliness interventions have traditionally encompassed cognitive-behavioural approaches, social skills training, and community engagement (Masi et al., 2011). Although digital tools may increase the number of connections, they do not necessarily enhance their quality (Nowland et al., 2018). In contrast, structured offline gatherings, such as dinner-with-strangers events, can provide high-quality, emotionally resonant interactions that have a disproportionate positive impact on subjective well-being.

3. Methodology

This study employed semi-structured interviews with 20 users of Timeleft and Storiboard, conducted across six urban locations: London, Amsterdam, New York, Mumbai, Riyadh, and Copenhagen, etc. Participants represented a range of ages (mid-20s to late 40s), occupations, and cultural backgrounds, providing a diverse set of perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and explored participants' motivations for attending dinner-with-strangers events, their comparisons of these experiences with dating applications, their perceptions of ideological comfort, and their reflections on loneliness outcomes. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The coding process combined inductive identification of emergent themes with deductive mapping of responses to the three basic psychological needs outlined in Self-Determination Theory. In addition, the analysis examined divergences in experience between one-time and repeat attendees, offering insight into the temporal dynamics of engagement with such events.

4. Findings

Many participants were motivated to attend dinner-with-strangers events following relocation or periods of social network stagnation, seeking both connection and renewed confidence. (Blair) described having to "*start from scratch socially*" after moving to Amsterdam, while (Hasan) valued the dinners as a safe entry point into a new city as a queer man from Bahrain. These motivations align with the Self-Determination Theory needs of relatedness, seeking belonging, and autonomy, choosing when and how to engage, with the structured format further enhancing competence.

Participants frequently contrasted these dinners with the "*transactional*" feel of dating applications (Charlie), favouring unpressured conversations. (Hasan) noted that the absence of sexualised expectations created a greater sense of comfort, in contrast to prior experiences of objectification on dating platforms. By reducing impression-management demands, these events protect autonomy and foster authenticity, resonating with Goffman's (1959) distinction between frontstage performance and backstage presence.

A further dimension of comfort arose from shared ideological values, although tolerance for differing perspectives varied. For example, (Elisa) chose to limit interaction with a conservative attendee, while (Tobias) embraced engagement with contrasting viewpoints. This pattern reflects a design tension between homophily, connection through similarity, and the potential benefits of respectful diversity in fostering relatedness.

In terms of loneliness outcomes, most participants described the experience as "*uplifting*" or "*energising*" (Liam), with repeat attendees sometimes forming micro-communities. However, several emphasised that a single dinner cannot "*cure*" loneliness, as deep bonds require repeated and mutual investment (Hasan). This distinction aligns with SDT's recognition that momentary satisfaction of relatedness can provide temporary relief but does not equate to the sustained fulfilment associated with enduring relationships.

5. Discussion

This study advances theoretical understanding of loneliness by extending Self-Determination Theory (SDT) into the domain of ephemeral, low-stakes social interactions. The findings demonstrate that autonomy, competence, and relatedness, core psychological needs identified by SDT, can be satisfied within the short, structured context of dinner-with-strangers events. These gatherings offer participants the freedom to choose engagement (autonomy), the

confidence to navigate new social situations through facilitation and clear structure (competence), and authentic connection fostered by shared meals and attentive listening (relatedness).

The introduction of the *presence gap* concept further refines the conceptualisation of loneliness beyond the established emotional and social dimensions. This gap refers to the absence of opportunities for uncurated, embodied interaction, even for individuals who may not be socially isolated in a conventional sense. By recognising the presence gap, the study highlights how brief but high-quality moments of genuine social presence can contribute to momentary well-being.

Integrating SDT with the Belongingness Hypothesis (BH) provides a more comprehensive framework for evaluating both the immediate and enduring effects of loneliness interventions. SDT offers a mechanism-based understanding of how situational contexts meet psychological needs, while BH delineates the relational continuity necessary for sustained belonging. Together, these perspectives differentiate between the temporary alleviation of *state loneliness*, as achieved through single or occasional dinners, and the deeper, ongoing relational ties required to address *trait loneliness*.

From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that social technology designers should develop dinner-with-strangers formats that are autonomy-supportive, competence-enhancing, and structured to promote authentic relatedness without romantic or transactional expectations. Encouraging repeat participation with some degree of continuity among attendees could help these interactions progress toward satisfying BH's second criterion for lasting belonging. For public health practitioners, such events represent a scalable tool to deliver short-term relief from loneliness, particularly for individuals navigating transitional life stages such as relocation, migration, or remote work shifts. However, they should be positioned as *gateway interventions* rather than comprehensive solutions, ideally integrated into broader community strategies that cultivate stable, enduring relationships. By acknowledging both their strengths and their limitations, dinner-with-strangers models can be strategically employed to address facets of the modern loneliness epidemic in both targeted and systemic ways.

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CERTIFYING AUTHENTICITY: CONCEPTUALIZING INDEXICAL BRAND AUTHENTICITY THROUGH STANDARDIZING AGENCIES

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Keywords: Brand authenticity, Indexical authenticity, Certification, Institutional trust, Standardizing agencies

Description: This paper lays the conceptual foundation for understanding how third-party and standard certifications function as an institutionalized form of indexical brand authenticity in contemporary marketplaces.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Authenticity has been widely studied as a critical driver of consumer-brand relationships. Consumers value authenticity because it signals trustworthiness, integrity, and alignment with personal values (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Grayson and Martinec (2004) propose three forms of authenticity: indexical, iconic, and existential. Indexical authenticity refers to tangible evidence directly connecting an object or brand to its claimed origin or quality. Iconic authenticity involves symbolic resemblance (e.g., replicas or imagery evoking an original).

Existential authenticity is subjective, arising when consumers feel true to themselves (Arnould & Price, 2000; Leigh et al., 2006).

Indexical authenticity has been extensively examined in contexts such as heritage brands (Beverland, 2006), wine appellations (Beverland, 2005), and subcultural consumption (Leigh et al., 2006). Tangible cues such as origin, craftsmanship, or documentation provide indexical evidence. Yet, this body of work largely emphasizes brand-internal or producer-generated markers. Moulard, Raggio, and Folse (2016) argue that authenticity research requires greater conceptual clarity and refinement, especially concerning indexical authenticity. While researchers recognize the role of verification, they seldom distinguish between brand-generated evidence (e.g., heritage claims) and externally conferred evidence (e.g., certifications).

Although prior research has acknowledged indexical authenticity as evidence-based verification, it has not systematically theorized certification as a distinct subtype. Certifications differ fundamentally from brand-origin cues. They are external, standardized, and institutionally codified. This creates a unique form of indexical authenticity that has yet to be formally conceptualized.

Research Questions

How do third-party certifications and standardizing agencies function as a distinct, institutionalized source of indexical brand authenticity; in what ways does this form of authenticity differ from brand-generated or symbolic authenticity cues; and under what conditions does certification-based authenticity shape consumer perceptions and brand positioning? Addressing these questions responds to calls for greater conceptual clarity in authenticity research by foregrounding the role of external institutions in the co-construction of brand authenticity.

Summary of Findings

This paper introduces Certifying Indexical Authenticity (CIA) as an institutional-regulatory subtype of indexical authenticity. CIA highlights how authenticity is co-constructed not only by brands and consumers but also by certifying institutions.

We define *Certifying Indexical Authenticity (CIA) as the perception that a brand is authentic because it has been validated by an independent certifying or standardizing agency through formal marks, seals, or certifications*.

CIA (Certifying Indexical Authenticity) differs from brand-generated indexical cues (heritage, craftsmanship) as these arise from the brand's own history, origin, or production process. In contrast, CIA is not brand-authored but externally conferred by independent certifying institutions, creating a separation between producer and validator. CIA rests on institutional trust and external verification. The framework clarifies how certifications operate as authenticity cues by transferring institutional credibility through three distinct transfer mechanisms.

Statement of Key Contributions

We extend authenticity scholarship in three ways. First, we expand the typology of indexical authenticity by introducing an institutional-regulatory subtype, clarifying that authenticity is not only derived from direct evidence but also from codified certification. Second, we identify distinct mechanisms through which CIA operates. Third, we theorize boundary conditions, including category risk level, consumer trust in institutions, and cultural context. For managers, CIA highlights how certification marks (e.g., ISI, BIS, ISO) can be leveraged as strategic resources for authentic brand positioning, especially in markets with trust deficits. For certifying agencies, this conceptualization underscores their expanded role in shaping consumer-brand relations beyond

compliance. For consumers, CIA provides assurance, reducing uncertainty in complex categories such as food safety, healthcare, and electronics. For policymakers, CIA emphasizes the societal value of certification systems in fostering marketplace trust and legitimacy.

REFERENCES: References are available upon request.

CHILLING CLOSELY: COLDER TEMPERATURES PROMOTE EASE OF IMAGINING VIA REDUCED PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE

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Keywords: temperature, imagination, psychological distance, cold

Description: This paper proposes and finds that colder temperatures make it easier for consumers to imagine using a product.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Within sensory marketing and embodied cognition research, ambient temperature has emerged as a subtle yet powerful environmental cue that can influence consumer judgments and mental processing. Among this body of work, prior research has demonstrated that coldness is systematically associated with psychological distance (Ijzerman & Semin, 2009; Park & Hadi, 2020; Togawa et al., 2023) as a function of construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Coldness, in particular, has been found to cue greater psychological distance, which subsequently leads to more abstract thinking. Park and Hadi (2020) illustrated this principle, finding that colder background imagery increased perceived psychological distance for luxury items, largely due to the association between coldness and social distance (i.e., Williams & Bargh, 2008).

However, it remains unclear whether the association between coldness and psychological distance is universally applicable across all categories of consumer products or across all dimensions of psychological distance. We propose that for products not inherently associated with social signaling or status—such as utilitarian goods, non-luxury items, or products

consumed in solitary settings—colder environmental conditions or imagery may enhance consumers' mental imagery abilities (i.e., Cheema & Patrick, 2012).

Method And Data

Study 1, a 2-level (temperature: cold vs. warm) between-subjects experiment, tests the effect of coldness on ease of imagining (H_1) via psychological distance (H_2) using a smartwatch as the focal product and a summery vs. wintry background as the temperature manipulation. Additionally, Study 1 extends the effects to a downstream consumer response variable (purchase intentions) and rules out arousal, processing fluency, systematic processing, and visual clarity as alternative explanations. One hundred ten Prolific panelists (women = 62.7%, men = 35.5%, non-binary/other = 1.8%, and prefer not to say = 0.0%; M_{age} = 45.2 years, SD_{age} = 14.8 years) participated.

Study 2, a 2 (temperature: cold vs. warm) X 2 (psychological distance: near vs. far) between-subjects experiment, employs process by moderation to provide a more robust test of the mechanism of psychological distance. This study utilizes ads for lamps framed alongside summery vs. wintry images and wording. Additionally, we include typicality as a covariate in this study. 220 Prolific panelists (women = 61.8%, men, 34.5%, 3.2% non-binary/other, and 0.5% prefer not to say; M_{age} = 38.5 years, SD_{age} = 14.1 years) participated.

Summary of Findings

We identify a novel pathway by which coldness facilitates ease of imagining through decreased psychological distance. Study 1 provides direct evidence of this mechanism using a smartwatch ad, finding that cold backgrounds improve consumers’ ability to simulate product use and increase purchase intentions. Importantly, we rule out key alternative explanations, including

arousal, systematic processing, processing fluency, mood, and visual clarity. Study 2 extends these findings by employing a process-by-moderation design to test the congruence between temperature cues and psychological distance. The results show a significant interaction: coldness enhances ease of imagining when paired with proximal framing, further supporting our psychological proximity account.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several key contributions to the literature on sensory marketing, temperature, psychological distance, and mental imagery in consumer behavior. While prior work has established that coldness is metaphorically and perceptually linked to increased psychological distance—especially in the context of luxury or status products (e.g., Park & Hadi, 2020)—our findings challenge the generalizability of this relationship. Instead, we show that coldness can, under certain conditions, reduce psychological distance and enhance mental imagery, particularly for products that are not inherently social or symbolic in nature.

Collectively, these findings advance theory by refining our understanding of how temperature cues operate beyond social metaphors, revealing that coldness can promote inward focus and cognitive engagement rather than mere detachment. Practically, this research informs marketers and designers on how to structure visual and environmental cues to foster consumer engagement and imagination. Finally, we lay the groundwork for future research exploring embodied cognition in physical environments, including lab-based temperature manipulations and field studies involving real-world consumer behavior.

References available upon request.

CONSUMER LEARNING: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: Consumer Learning, Internal Knowledge, Consumer Experience, Cognitive Effort

Description: The study advances the academic understanding of consumer learning by systematically reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing existing research.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer learning is central to how individuals acquire and apply knowledge in marketplace decisions. Consumers learn in multiple dimensions. It occurs through learning about product and brand quality, including tangible and intangible attributes (Che and Erdem 2015) and about attribute importance (Chylinski 2012). It also involves the acquisition of procedural knowledge, such as skills that result in new knowledge (Murray and Haubal 2007), category knowledge

(product attributes) (Alba and Hutchinson 1987), and brand knowledge (brand attributes) (Zhou 2002). Although the topic is widely studied, its synthesis in terms of reviews is limited. Given the varied processes involved in consumer learning, it is essential to understand the different theoretical perspectives, antecedents, outcomes, contexts, and characteristics.

Hence, we answer the following research questions-

RQ1: What are the theories applied in the research on consumer learning in the past?

RQ2: In what context has consumer learning been researched in the past?

RQ3: What are the characteristics in the consumer learning literature?

RQ4: What are the methods used to study consumer learning?

Summary of Findings

We conducted a systematic literature review analyzing 111 peer-reviewed articles published between 1997 and 2025 to synthesize key findings in consumer learning research (Vrontis and Christofi 2021; Paul and Barari 2018). The findings indicate that consumer learning has been predominantly examined through Bayesian and dynamic choice models, with empirical emphasis on retail stores, online platforms, and social networks (Zseleva 2019; Huang and Liu 2017). Internal knowledge, product attributes, and experiential interactions emerge as the most influential drivers of consumer learning, shaping outcomes such as cognitive effort, emotional responses, brand attitudes, and choice behavior (Bhatnagar et al. 2023; Huang 2019; Zhang and Hauser 2015). Methodologically, experimental designs and mathematical modeling dominate the field. (Matveenko and Starkov 2023; Wilson et al. 2021). Importantly, the synthesis reveals an

emerging shift toward technology-mediated and algorithmic learning environments, while highlighting a relative neglect of sustainability-oriented outcomes, consumer well-being, and learning in emerging markets, signaling critical gaps in the current literature.

Key Contributions

This study advances the consumer learning literature by consolidating and critically synthesizing almost three decades of research. This helped to understand how consumers acquire, update, and apply knowledge in contemporary marketplaces. It demonstrates that existing research is predominantly anchored in rational, Bayesian, and choice-based models, revealing a strong cognitive orientation that prioritizes consumer beliefs and information processing (Pease 2023; Huang 2019). By contrast, the review underlines systematic underrepresentation of emotional, social, and contextual learning processes, particularly in technology-mediated and algorithm-driven environments. The study further contributes by identifying how internal knowledge, experiential interactions, and product attributes jointly shape learning outcomes such as cognitive effort, emotions, brand attitudes, and decision behavior (Zhao, Zhao and Helsen 2011; Lakshmanan and Krishnan 2011). This study further extends the field of consumer learning by positioning it as a mechanism linking digital interfaces, sustainability-oriented choices, and consumer well-being. By articulating these linkages, the study reorients consumer learning from a purely decision-theoretic construct toward a broader, ethically and socially defined process with implications for managers and relevant policymakers.

References are available on request

CONSUMER MOTIVATIONS IN PRE-OWNED LUXURY ONLINE PURCHASES: A CASE STUDY OF AN EMERGING ECONOMY

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Keywords: pre-owned luxury online buying, peer-to-peer sharing platforms, wise consumption, conspicuous consumption, sustainable consumption

Description: This research examines the relationships among product characteristics, customer factors, and online platforms in pre-owned luxury online (POLO) purchases, which encompass wise, value, and sustainable consumption, and how these factors subsequently impact repurchase intention.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to clarify the factors that influence purchasers' perceptions of buying second hand luxury apparel on peer-to-peer (P2P) online shopping platforms. This study identifies critical gaps in POLO research and offers valuable insights on enhancing online sales and interacting more effectively with Saudi consumers in the digital marketplace.

INTRODUCTION

A circular economy focuses on reducing waste and optimising resource use, contrasting sharply with the traditional linear economy of 'take, make, dispose'. It emphasises the need to eliminate waste and pollution, prolong the life of products and materials, and restore natural systems (Nikolaou & Tsagarakis, 2021). POLO refers to previously owned items from notable brand names that have retained their luxury appeal. This allows consumers to obtain high-quality, prestigious items at considerably reduced prices (Cai et al., 2025; Park et al., 2025; Stolz, 2022). Online secondhand clothing channels offer an efficient shopping experience, enabling consumers to conveniently acquire high-quality garments at below-market prices (Roux, 2006). Research shows that buying secondhand products can fulfil the desire for status and offer opportunities to obtain luxury items and prestigious brands (Edbring et al., 2016; Turunen & Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015). Thrift stores have begun selling branded items at higher prices, taking advantage of increased consumer demand (Machado et al., 2019). Studies indicate that luxury goods and brands are linked to uniqueness, perceived value, attitude to buy second hand, economy, and emotional worth (Kim & Gupta, 2012).

Research on the purchase of second-hand goods has been limited, emerging in the last decade (Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023; Aycock et al., 2023). The primary motivations for buying pre-owned items include economically wise consumption (cost and satisfaction from pricing), sustainability (detachment from the system, ethical concerns, and ecological impact), and conspicuous consumption (the practice of buying and using goods or services to display wealth and social status, rather than for their practical value). This study aims to 1) provide valuable insights into both academia and industry, and clarify why Saudi consumers purchase POLO, with a focus on three key motivations: wise spending, conspicuous consumption, and sustainability.

2) define the influence of these factors on the desire and intent to repurchase POLO as an indicator of wise, conspicuous, and sustainable behaviour.

Although the topic has extensively well studied, conspicuous consumption (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019; Ki et al., 2017; Turunen & Poyry, 2019) and sustainable consumption (Cervellon et al., 2012; Chloe et al., 2024; Turunen et al., 2020) have been well examined, the concept of wise consumption has received relatively less attention. A comprehensive analysis of consumer attitudes and intentions has been conducted using various theories and frameworks from social psychology. Scholars consistently recognise the importance of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1985, 1991). These models help businesses reduce waste management costs and raw material use, offering competitive advantages consistent with sustainability trends. This paper is organised as follows. The next section—Literature Review—provides a brief overview of consumer motivations in the research on POLO purchases, focusing on wise, conspicuous, and sustainable consumption. Hypotheses Development describes the research model and proposes number hypotheses regarding this study's analyses of consumer POLO. Empirical Study presents the survey methodology and models for analyses and Results presents the results of the statistical analyses. Finally, Conclusions summarises the key findings regarding POLO and consumer preferences, and presents study contributions, recommendations, and opportunities for future study.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The effect of Product Determinants, Personal Value, and Online Platform on Wise Consumption

Ki et al. (2024) recontextualised luxury resale consumption, emphasising that it goes beyond mere social status displays to prudent spending and sustainable use of luxury goods. The affordability of SHL products significantly influence customer perceptions (Stolz, 2022). Research indicates that well-maintained pre-owned items positively impact attitudes towards secondhand consumption. According to Turunen and Poyry (2019), customers regard pre-owned luxury (POL) goods as a wise investment because they retain value.

> H1. Consumers who see POL products as (a) affordable, (b) well-maintained, (c) value-retaining, and (d) well-crafted are likelier to consider POLO purchases as wise consumption.

Consumers tend to exaggerate their stylistic tastes, revealing the consumer-driven factors that influence lifestyle and social class (Kessous & Valette-Florence, 2019). Previous studies (e.g., Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967) have found that people consume luxury brands for social-function reasons, indicating that attitudes towards luxury brands directly and indirectly influence luxury brand purchase intention.

Lee and DeLong (2022) observed that consumers' perceptions of secondhand apparel are influenced by its alignment with their style. The positive link between social-function perspectives and purchase intentions examined in American and Chinese contexts suggests that rich lives often incorporate hedonistic values and varied consumption (Bian & Forsythe, 2012; Lin & Mattila, 2006).

> H2. Consumers who associate POLO with their personal values as (a) a personal aesthetic style, (b) a high-class lifestyle, and (c) better and casual usage, are likelier to see POLO purchases as wise consumption.

A platform website could enhance customer engagement with a treasure hunt feature that enables participants to discover rare secondhand luxury jewellery at reduced prices, a feature that users may perceive as a responsible initiative (Park et al., 2020). Rudawska et al. (2018) found that the pursuit of treasure significantly influences consumers' perceptions of secondhand luxury. Previous studies have shown that secondhand goods offer value that transcends low prices to satisfy consumer needs (Moon et al., 2019, 2020; Sheth et al., 1991). Regarding the costs of eco-friendly items, environmentally conscious consumers (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2012) tend to adopt responsible behaviour by purchasing environmentally friendly products, often checking for organic labels confirming the use of recycled materials. Research has examined the risks and advantages of online POL purchases; however, no association has been found between consumption and maintenance, including both official and informal uses.

> H3. Consumers who perceive POLO platforms as offering (a) authenticity verification and (b) the excitement of treasure hunting are likelier to see POLO purchases as wise consumption.

The effect of Product Determinants, Personal Value, and Online Platforms on Conspicuous Consumption

Purchasing expensive products primarily to attract attention to one's wealth and social status is known as "luxury conspicuous consumption" (Ki et al., 2017). According to Bukhari (2022, p. 24), the consumption of luxury goods by Saudi Arabians is driven by personal disposable income, suggesting that the affordability of these goods is vital to shoppers. Certain dedicated informants displayed brand-conscious shopping behaviour and considered secondhand luxury handbags as financially valuable and intelligent purchasing choices (Ki et al., 2024; Zhang & Kim, 2012). The desire for high-profile goods with enduring value and exceptional quality and craftsmanship motivates the purchase of POLO products (Amatulli et al., 2020; Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Chloe.ki. et al., 2024; Turunen and Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015).

> *H4. Consumers who perceive (a) affordability, (b) good care, (c) value retention, and (d) the craftsmanship of POL products are likelier to view POLO purchases as conspicuous consumption.*

Individual motivations—consumer-originated determinants—primarily drive specific and observable aspects of POLO consumption. Previous research suggests that consumers buy POL products to express themselves through unique styles and aesthetic preferences reminiscent of classic luxury items (Hansen, 2010). Additionally, research shows that consumers purchase POLO products for symbolic and economic reasons, including the desire for a better quality of life, increased practicality, and ease of use (Amatulli et al., 2018; Turunen & Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015). Consumers strongly associate these traits with overall POLO consumption.

> H5. Consumers who perceive POLO as (a) a personal aesthetic style, (b) a symbol of a high-class lifestyle, and (c) better and casual usage are likelier to view POLO purchases as conspicuous consumption.

Zhou et al. (2018) recognised that the authenticity and transparency of vendors are vital factors in building trust in e-commerce platforms. Treasure hunting is often viewed as an exciting activity (Cervellon et al., 2012); discovering a unique artefact enhances the experience, such as expanding one's collection of luxury secondhand possessions (McIntosh & Schmeichel, 2004; Turunen & Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015; Zonneveld & Biggemann, 2014). This theme

focuses on treasure hunting—the rarity of the find—and the importance of personality reflected in secondhand items (Gierl & Huettl, 2010).

> H6. Consumers who perceive POLO as (a) authenticity verification and (b) treasure hunting pleasure are likelier to view POLO purchases as conspicuous consumption.

The effect of Product Determinants, Personal Value, and Online Platform on Sustainable Consumption

Turunen et al. (2020) classified the sale and purchase of reusable household POL products as sustainable consumption because of their lifespan-extending qualities. POL goods are associated with sustainability and economy, highlighting eco-conscious motivations for secondhand consumption (Carrigan et al., 2013; Turunen & Leipamaa-Leskinen, 2015). Acquisition is often motivated by cost effectiveness or sustainability. Carrigan et al. (2013) emphasise secondhand fashions as a way to become a more sustainable consumer. Earlier data suggest that purchasing secondhand luxury accessories may represent a critique of materialism and consumerism (Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013).

> H7: Consumers who perceive POLO purchases as (a) affordable, (b) well cared for, (c) value-retaining, and (d) reflecting the craftsmanship of POL products are likelier to view POLO purchases as characteristic of POL items.

According to Amatulli et al. (2018), POL goods enable customers to display their sophisticated lifestyle and unique aesthetic preferences—such as antiques from a particular historical period—without harming the environment. Furthermore, in contrast to first-hand luxury, secondhand luxury is a more environmentally sustainable choice; consumers are likelier to purchase POL items frequently and casually rather than new, full-priced luxury products (Ki et al., 2023d; Ki et al., 2021; Niinimaki & Armstrong, 2013).

> H8. Consumers who evaluate their POLO purchases based on (a) personal aesthetic style, (b) a high-class lifestyle, and (c) better and casual usage are likelier to view POLO purchases as sustainable consumption.

According to Perez et al. (2022), Yang et al. (2022), Kumagai (2021), Ki et al. (2021), and Niinimaki and Armstrong (2013), consumers tend to wear POL items more often and casually than new, full-priced luxury products; POL is a more environmentally friendly alternative to luxury items. The ability of POL retail outlets to accurately assess and verify the authenticity of their luxury-branded goods significantly influences their profitability (Kent et al., 2018). The value provided by luxury resale merchants is enhanced by the enjoyment of browsing and treasure hunting, and the authenticity verification offered by POL sellers (Ferraro et al., 2016).

> H9. Consumers who perceive POLO as (a) authenticity verification and (b) treasure hunting enjoyment are likelier to see POLO purchases as sustainable consumption.

Outcomes of Attitudes Towards POLO

The value-belief-norm (VBN) theory, introduced by Stern et al. (1999) and grounded in norm activation theory (Schwartz, 1977), is explained by Yang et al. (2022) in the context of the sustainable fashion industry. Zahid et al. (2022) showed that individuals with a deep understanding of environmental sustainability are consistently influenced by their purchasing intentions when acquiring secondhand apparel. Chloe et al. (2024) investigated how

responsible, conspicuous, and ecologically sustainable purchasing impacts online secondhand luxury.

> ***H10. Consumers who perceive POLO purchases as forms of (a) wise consumption, (b) conspicuous consumption, and (c) sustainable consumption are likelier to buy POL products from online platforms again.***

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Survey and Model Development

Online surveys were conducted with Saudi buyers who had purchased POL clothes in the last 1–2 years. Besides data gathering and numerical characterisation, quantitative identification was used to communicate results, generalisations, and unexpected relationships (Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023; Aycock et al., 2023c; Stolz, 2022). The survey was conducted using Google Forms, tailored to the study's specific context (Yang et al., 2024). The questions were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale, spanning from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree (see Table 1). The questionnaire collected information about participants' experiences in Saudi Arabia with POL, their views and attitudes towards POLO goods, and their intention to repurchase. A qualifying question was provided to guarantee response relevancy and quality. The survey garnered 807 responses from July 15, 2024 to February 23, 2025, with a total of 305 complete responses.

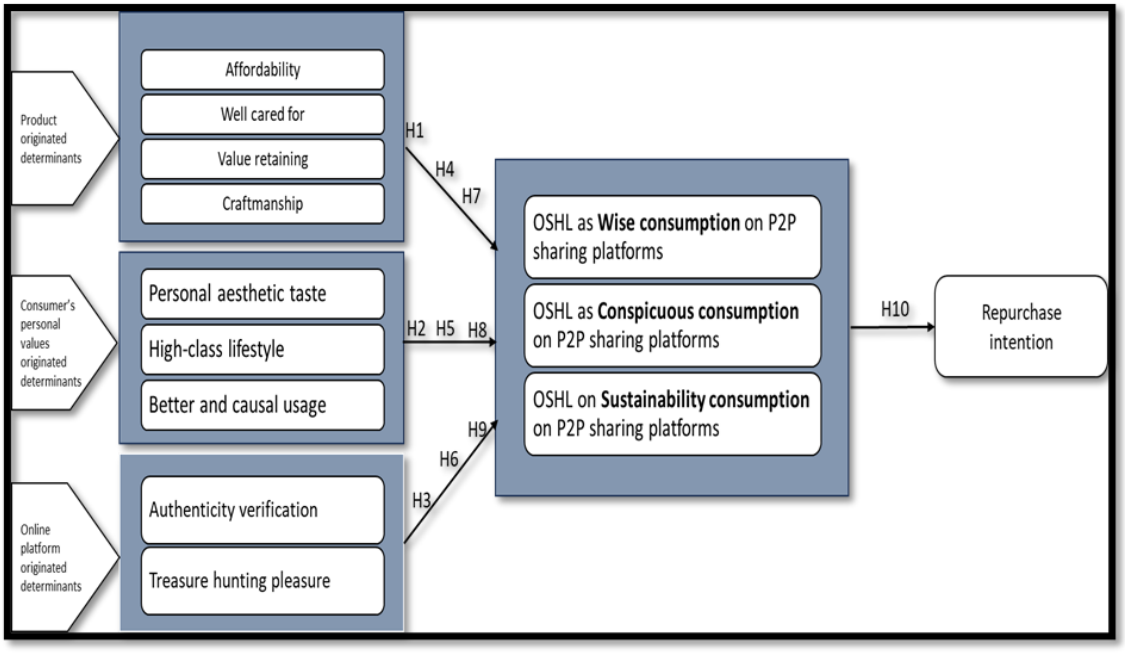


Figure 1. Proposed model of consumer motivations in POLO purchases

Smart-PLS 3 was employed to build a hierarchical component model, enabling the use of both formative and reflective measurement scales (see figure 1). PLS-SEM was selected for this research because of its effectiveness with small sample sizes and suitability for formative assessment and exploratory studies. Bootstrapping was used to evaluate the discriminant validity of the hypotheses along with a descriptive analysis.

The initial phase of data analysis involved evaluating the validity and reliability of the measurement model using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Common method variance was eliminated to prevent ambiguous scale items.

The final phase involved using the model to analyse the strength and significance of the correlations among the latent variables. This aided in understanding consumers' attitudes and intentions regarding POLO products and the potential for future purchases in the emerging pre-owned luxury sector.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

All values for composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were above the 0.7 criterion (Mackenzie et al., 2011), indicating that the model reliability was strong. It also indicates that all AVEs exceed the threshold of 0.5, signifying that all constructs have strong convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2009; MacKenzie et al., 2011; Schmiedel et al., 2014). Discriminant validity is confirmed, since most values are below the critical threshold of 0.90. Finally, there are no concerns about multicollinearity, as the variance inflation factors (VIFs) for the constructs range from 1.09–4.43. The model met all criteria for reliability, validity, and collinearity.

Table 1 shows that consumers' perception of POLO as a wise consumption method is positively correlated with affordability (β = 0.117*), personal aesthetic taste (β = 0.188**), high-class lifestyle (β = 0.14*), authenticity verification (β = 0.203**), and treasure hunting pleasure (β = 0.281**); exceptions were well cared for, value-retaining, craftsmanship, and better casual usage. The factors influencing POLO as a form of conspicuous consumption are limited to high-class lifestyle (β = 0.273**), authenticity verification (β = 0.241**), and treasure hunting pleasure (β = 0.23**).

The insignificant correlations include affordability, value-retaining, and craftsmanship in POLO as a sustainable consumption model. Regarding significant relationships, it is important to note that although the influence of well cared for (β = 0.145*), personal aesthetic taste (β = 0.147*), better casual usage (β = 0.191*), authenticity verification (β = 0.143*), and treasure hunting (β = 0.195*) was significantly linked to sustainable consumption, only high-class lifestyles showed no significant effect. Ultimately, the study revealed that wise consumption (β = 0.271**), conspicuous consumption (β = 0.164*), and sustainable consumption (β = 0.474**) had a significant impact on customers' intent to repurchase POLO.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study advances the fields of the circular economy and collaborative consumption by exploring the motivations behind POLO purchases among Saudi consumers, with a focus on the factors that influence their sustainable choice (see Table 1). The findings suggest that consumers perceive online secondhand luxury as a wise choice due to its affordability and sustainability, with no associated stigma around the purchase of secondhand items. It is also a prudent way to showcase their personal aesthetic taste and high-class lifestyle. Our findings support previous research demonstrating that choosing POLO items instead of new ones is a

smart and environmentally friendly option that helps reduce overconsumption (Turunen et al., 2020). Hoeve,futhe esach can consume the

Table 1. Results of the Study

Hypothesis	Hypothesized Relationship	Estimate	Accepted/ Rejected
Wise consumption			
H1 (a)	AFF -> WC	0.117*	Accepted
H1 (b)	WCF -> WC	0.014	Rejected
H1 (c)	VR -> WC	0.046	Rejected
H1 (d)	CM -> WC	0.011	Rejected
H2 (a)	PAT -> WC	0.188**	Accepted
H2 (b)	HL -> WC	0.14*	Accepted
H2 (c)	BCU -> WC	0.016	Rejected
H3 (a)	AV -> WC	0.203**	Accepted
H3 (b)	THP -> WC	0.281**	Accepted
Consumer consumption			
H4 (a)	AFF -> CC	-0.118	Rejected
H4 (b)	WCF -> CC	0.012	Rejected
H4 (c)	VR -> CC	-0.032	Rejected
H4 (d)	CM -> CC	0.025	Rejected
H5 (a)	PAT -> CC	0.022	Rejected
H5 (b)	HL -> CC	0.273**	Accepted
H5 (c)	BCU -> CC	0.178	Rejected
H6 (a)	AV -> CC	0.241**	Accepted
H6 (b)	THP -> CC	0.23**	Accepted
	Sustainability Consumption		
H7 (a)	AFF -> SC	0.012	Rejected
H7 (b)	WCF -> SC	0.145*	Accepted
H7 (c)	VR -> SC	0.091	Rejected
H7 (d)	CM -> SC	-0.047	Rejected
H8 (a)	PAT -> SC	0.147*	Accepted
H8 (b)	HL -> SC	0.078	Rejected
H8 (c)	BCU -> SC	0.191*	Accepted
H9 (a)	AV -> SC	0.143*	Accepted
H9 (b)	THP -> SC	0.195*	Accepted
Repurchase intention			
H10 (a)	WC -> RI	0.271**	Accepted
H10 (b)	CC -> RI	0.164*	Accepted
H10 ©	SC -> RI	0.474**	Accepted

This study also emphasises the importance of platform qualities in shaping consumers' perception of POLO as a sensible investment. Consumers assess platforms by verifying the authenticity of retailers and platforms, and by providing an optimal environment for treasure hunting, which are key factors influencing their purchasing choices. These findings indicate that consumers carefully evaluate sales channels for online second-hand luxury items before making a decision.

The determinants related to personal factors and channels showed significant positive effects, as did the influence of POLO as a form of conspicuous consumption on repurchase intention. This research found that consumers' desire for a high-class lifestyle, as well as their preferences for POLO, influence their perception of POLO as a symbol of conspicuous consumption.

The factors influencing how people perceive online secondhand luxury as a sustainable form of consumption show a minimal connection with value retention and proper causal use. The more affordable Saudi customers find online secondhand luxury items, the less they consider them sustainable spending. This research suggests that customers who associate POLO purchases with sustainability prioritise quality and preservation over cost. Furthermore, subjective norms may be examined in future study to assess their impact on consumption behaviours and preferences.

The data show that online secondhand luxury goods, characterised by wise, conspicuous, and sustainable purchasing, significantly and positively influence customers' likelihood of repurchasing POLO items. This suggests that practitioners should adopt various measures to build confidence in secondhand luxury products, ensuring that customers view their choices as informed and prudent.

Finally, companies must evaluate how macroeconomic factors influence the demand for their products, as the global environmental movement has gained momentum due to the trade tariff war. Tariffs are likely to substantially affect the spending of businesses, consumers, and governments and alter trade patterns. Therefore, companies must analyse how macroeconomic conditions impact the demand for their goods (Levy & Singhal, 2025).

Key Contributions

This study investigates the factors influencing buyers' attitudes towards pre-owned luxury items on peer-to-peer online purchasing platforms. Key influences include a desire to evade the traditional consumer system, economic motivations, and perceived sustainability. Sustainability, economic considerations, and detachment from the consumer paradigm positively influence second-hand purchases. Our research fills significant gaps in the literature on pre-owned luxury online and offers crucial insights for marketers aiming to enhance online sales and digital engagement with Saudi consumers. Consequently, this has a substantial effect on the purchase of used apparel.

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CONSUMER RESILIENCE AND SHOPPING ADDICTION MATRIX: A TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH WITH FUTURE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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Keywords: Consumer Resilience; Shopping Addiction; Typology; Mindful Consumers; Malleable Consumers; Struggling Adapters; Compulsive Shoppers

Description: The study presents a matrix integrating consumer resilience and shopping addiction to classify consumers as mindful, malleable, struggling adapters, and compulsive shoppers, capturing the fluidity of consumption styles.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The study is guided by a central research question: How does the interaction between consumer resilience and shopping addiction shape consumption styles? It further explains dynamic transitions in consumer behaviour within the retail context. Building on perspectives from the theory of planned behaviour, cognitive dissonance theory, and self-concept clarity, the study explores the interaction between these two psychological constructs. It is important to explore as psychology has long emphasised that addiction and resilience are intertwined, with resilience

depending on the mindset, and shopping addiction, in particular, has been recognized as a behavioural disorder that undermines well-being through uncontrollable urges and excessive consumption, especially in online and retail contexts.

Summary of Findings

The study adopts a typological approach, developing a two-by-two matrix by integrating two psychological constructs, consumer resilience and shopping addiction level. It classifies consumers into mindful, malleable, struggling adapters, and compulsive shoppers. To achieve the desired state of mindful consumption, consumer self-concept clarity is crucial, and firms should facilitate the process.

Consumer types are dynamic and fluid in reactions influenced by situations, motivation, and self-regulation. Consumer resilience and shopping addiction levels both play an important role in shaping the mindset. The study serves as a reminder that approaching consumers with good intentions will help retailers in the long run. It will further help retailers understand the reasons for the changing nature of consumption; by utilising ethical practices, retailers can leverage this to their advantage. Additionally, these behaviours can vary depending on the level of consumer awareness. Furthermore, research questions are proposed to guide academicians and other stakeholders in promoting ethical strategies, fostering mindful consumption, and supporting consumer well-being in a sustainable marketplace.

Key Contributions

The study offers one of the first integrated, novel two-dimensional matrix of consumer resilience and shopping addiction in a retail setting. The matrix goes beyond simplistic categorization.

Importantly, it captures the fluidity of consumption styles, suggesting how consumers may transition across quadrants over time, with mindful consumption positioned as the desired state.

The matrix provides a conceptual lens that connects resilience as an adaptive capacity and addiction as a maladaptive tendency, showing how they jointly shape consumer vulnerability, adaptability, and overall behaviour. Furthermore, the framework underscores the strategic and ethical significance of these constructs. Understanding how shifts occur can help to make informed decisions on marketing plans, product development, brand positioning, and store/e-commerce design. Awareness of resilience and addiction factors provides firms with a competitive advantage in building sustainable strategies while reducing the risk of consumer exploitation.

References are available upon request.

Credibility, Trends, and Strains: Generational Perceptions of Sustainable Consumption

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Keywords: Sustainable Consumption, Generational Cohorts, Brand Credibility, Attitude–Behavior Gap.

Description: This qualitative research study explores how different generations perceive sustainable consumption and how these perceptions influence brand credibility and purchase intentions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The concept of generational cohorts has gained substantial traction in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior. Generational cohorts refer to groups of individuals who share similar experiences and characteristics, often due to being born during the same period (Mannheim, 2013) These cohorts—such as Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z— demonstrate distinct consumer behaviors, shaped by socioeconomic, technological, and cultural factors prevalent during their formative years (Schiffman, L. G., & Wisenblit, 2019)

The review of existing literature reveals differences in attitudes, behaviors, and motivations toward sustainable fashion across these cohorts, leading to the formulation of a critical research question: "*How does the perception of sustainable products differ across generational cohorts, and what implications do these differences have on brand credibility and purchase intention from consumers' perspective*?"

In today's competitive marketplace, brand credibility has become a key factor in consumer decision-making. Defined as the believability of the information conveyed by a brand, brand

credibility encompasses elements of trustworthiness and competence (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Sustainability has become a significant concern for consumers and businesses, as environmental and social issues have gained prominence on the global stage (Guzmán & Davis, 2017). Sustainability initiatives can significantly enhance a brand's credibility by aligning the brand with consumer values and expectations. Research indicates that consumers are more likely to trust and support brands perceived as genuinely committed to sustainable practices (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006).

This paper examines the relationship between brand credibility and sustainability, arguing that brands perceived as credible are better positioned to capitalise on sustainability as a competitive advantage.

Method and Data

This study employs a qualitative research design combining focus groups and a projective free word association technique to examine generational differences in sustainable consumption. Focus groups are a well-established method in social and behavioral research for exploring shared meanings, attitudes, and contrasts in consumption practices (Hayward et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2021). They are particularly effective for studying mundane and sustainable consumption, as they allow socially embedded norms to emerge and be challenged (Browne, 2016; Weckroth & Närvänen, 2024).

To capture latent meanings and implicit associations, the study integrates free word association as a projective technique. Originating in clinical psychology (Barone et al., 2020), projective methods enable participants to express underlying attitudes, beliefs, and self-concepts through unstructured stimuli (Donoghue, 2000). Word association has evolved as a robust tool for uncovering consumer interpretations of complex concepts such as sustainability (Soley & Smith, 2008; Scaraboto, 2022) and is especially suitable for engaging younger cohorts, including Generation Z and Millennials (Relja et al., 2024).

Sustainable fashion was selected as the focal stimulus due to the fashion industry's environmental and social impacts (Fletcher, 2007; Boström & Micheletti, 2016). After an initial discussion, participants viewed a short video illustrating environmental, social, and economic harms, followed by guided discussion. Participants from Generations X, Y, and Z were recruited through a two-stage screening process, resulting in a final sample of 95 participants (Gen X = 30; Gen Y = 32; Gen Z = 33).

Summary of Findings

The focus group analysis reveals clear generational differences in how sustainability is perceived, evaluated, and enacted, despite a shared acknowledgment of its importance. Generation X participants associated sustainability with practicality, ethical responsibility, and product durability, emphasizing transparency and resource efficiency. This cohort expressed strong skepticism toward greenwashing and viewed brand credibility as a prerequisite for purchase intention, particularly distrusting large brands' sustainability claims (Baek et al., 2010b; Beard, 2008; Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Generation Y exhibited a dual orientation: strong sustainability values coupled with pragmatic concerns regarding price, availability, and information clarity. While open to sustainable consumption, this cohort reported confusion around labels and limited trust in brand claims, resulting in a behavioral gap between attitudes and purchase decisions (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Brand credibility was conditional on perceived authenticity and accessibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Generation Z showed the strongest alignment between sustainability and personal identity, frequently invoking social justice, environmental ethics, and collective responsibility. Participants emphasized circular economy practices and demanded transparency and activism from brands (Gazzola et al., 2020; Park & Lin, 2020). However, skepticism persisted due to limited visibility of impact and higher prices, reinforcing the need for tangible, traceable sustainability outcomes. Overall,

findings highlight sustainability as a value-laden yet generationally differentiated construct, with brand credibility and perceived impact central to sustainable consumption across cohorts.

Key Contributions

Through this study, it was possible to identify that consumers with knowledge of sustainable consumption, sustainable products, and corporate social responsibilities are aware not only of greenwashing but also woke washing (Walter et al., 2024). This research contributes to the fields of generational marketing and sustainability branding, providing guidance for researchers and practitioners on tailoring strategies to different age groups.

This study extends the understanding of generational cohort effects on sustainable consumption by introducing qualitative nuance through focus groups. It synthesizes behavioral motivations, value orientations, and brand perception frameworks, integrating them into the context of sustainable fashion (Gwozdz et al., 2017; Henninger et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2017).

The findings underline Social Sustainability as the strongest dimension of sustainability for consumers to become a driver of brand credibility and purchase intention. In addition, evidence the need for differentiated marketing strategies. For Generation Z, brands should prioritize value-driven storytelling, community engagement, and transparent activism. For Generation Y, simplifying product information and improving access to sustainable goods can bridge the attitude-behavior gap. For Generation X, emphasizing ethical certification is crucial to building brand trust (Beard, 2008; Johnstone & Tan, 2015).

References

References are available upon request.

CROSS BORDERS, BUILDING BRANDS: CONSTRUCTING A BI-CULTURAL BRAND PERSONALITY

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Keywords: cross-cultural brand personality, scale development, brand evaluation, global brand management

Description: We develop and validate a cross-cultural brand personality scale for the U.S. and Japan and show that it improves predictive performance for global brand management applications.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand personality scales have become influential tools for expressing brand meaning and analyzing consumer-brand relationships, particularly in the U.S. market where the most widely used instruments were originally developed. However, attempts to apply these scales internationally have yielded mixed results, as factor structures often shift across countries and cultural contexts. Despite the global scope of contemporary brand management, there is

currently no validated brand personality scale that generalizes across major markets. This raises a fundamental question for both researchers and managers: Can brand personality be measured in a way that is psychometrically valid, culturally equivalent, and managerially interpretable across countries? To address this issue, the present research develops and tests a cross-cultural brand personality scale across the United States and Japan, two large markets with distinct cultural-psychological profiles and brand symbolism systems. We further examine whether incorporating negative trait dimensions expands conceptual coverage and improves prediction of brand evaluation outcomes. Together, these inquiries target the foundational measurement requirements needed to support global brand management and comparative brand tracking in multicultural markets.

Method And Data

The research comprises a multi-study scale development program conducted with U.S. and Japanese consumer samples. Prior work (Oue et al, in press) established an initial pool of 44 brand personality items, of which 15 represented negative traits, each corresponding to an item in Aaker's (1997) original pool as either its opposite meaning or as the same meaning with negative valence. Study 1 (U.S. and Japan, $n \approx 600$ per country) conducted exploratory factor analyses (EFA) in parallel to identify latent structure and eliminate items that cross-loaded or produced divergent factor solutions between countries. Study 2 (U.S. and Japan, $n \approx 600$ per country) conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to examine cross-country measurement equivalence. Results establish configural invariance, indicating that respondents in both markets organize the items into comparable latent dimensions. Study 3 (U.S. and Japan, $n \approx 1{,}200$) tested predictive validity by modeling the effects of the derived dimensions on brand appeal and purchase intent, with each respondent evaluating a single brand between-subjects. Across

studies, composite reliability, discriminant validity, and structural relationships were assessed using EFA, CFA, and SEM. The resulting scale satisfies key psychometric requirements for application in cross-cultural brand management contexts.

Summary of Findings

The studies yield three main findings. First, a coherent cross-cultural factor structure emerges for both the United States and Japan, demonstrating that brand personality can be represented by latent dimensions that are conceptually and psychometrically comparable across markets. The positive dimensions align with prior scale development work and capture the spaces of sincerity, excitement, competence, and delicacy. Second, the scale exhibits satisfactory internal consistency and discriminant validity, and the CFA results support configural invariance, indicating that consumers in both countries interpret and organize the items similarly. Third, the dimensions show robust predictive validity. Structural models estimated for 75 U.S. and 75 Japanese brands indicate that positive dimensions are associated with higher brand appeal and purchase intention, whereas the negative dimension Bad in Some Way (BSW) is associated with lower evaluations. Importantly, the magnitude of BSW's negative effects exceeds those of any positive dimensions. For the 20 multinational brands included in both markets, analyses of mean factor scores show that these relationships are substantively consistent across countries. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that the proposed scale provides cross-culturally interpretable profiles and improves prediction for global brand management applications.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to cross-cultural brand measurement by developing and validating a brand personality scale that performs reliably in both the United States and Japan. The scale is

the outcome of a multi-stage process involving item generation, parallel exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and cross-country equivalence testing. The resulting structure retains the major positive trait spaces found in prior scale development work and introduces a structured negative dimension that expands conceptual coverage. Importantly, the instrument satisfies internal consistency and discriminant validity requirements and achieves configural invariance across countries, establishing that consumers in both markets organize the items into comparable latent dimensions. Beyond the psychometric evidence, the scale demonstrates practical utility for modeling downstream brand outcomes. Structural models estimated for 75 U.S. and 75 Japanese brands show that brand personality dimensions account for systematic variation in brand appeal and purchase intention, with the negative dimension Bad in Some Way (BSW) exerting the largest effects in magnitude. For the 20 multinational brands observed in both countries, these predictive relationships are substantively consistent. Together, the research provides a validated measurement tool for cross-cultural brand personality assessment and a methodological foundation for comparative brand tracking and global brand management applications.

References are available upon request.

CUSTOMER SEGMENTATION BASED ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: CREATING CLUSTERS BASED ON THE BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS USING NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Natural Language Processing (NLP); Customer Segmentation; Psychographic Segmentation; Big Five Personality Traits

Description: This paper explores how natural language processing can be used to segment customers according to Big Five personality traits using social media text.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Customer segmentation in marketing has traditionally relied on demographic, geographic, and behavioral variables, which often fail to capture deeper psychological drivers of consumer behavior. Psychographic segmentation, particularly personality-based approaches, offers richer explanatory power but has historically depended on psychometric surveys that are costly, static, and difficult to scale. At the same time, the growth of unstructured consumer-generated content on digital platforms presents new opportunities for data-driven psychological inference.

This study investigates the following research question: How can natural language processing techniques be used to segment customers according to the Big Five personality traits model based on naturally occurring language data? The paper focuses on whether linguistic and emotional

cues embedded in social media comments can be analyzed to infer openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. By incorporating both English and Moroccan Dialect (Darija), the study also examines the applicability of AI-driven psychographic segmentation in multilingual and underrepresented linguistic contexts.

Method and Data

The study follows the CRISP-DM framework to structure the analytical process from problem understanding to interpretation. A qualitative dataset of 1000 publicly available social media comments related to products and services was collected. The dataset includes comments written in both English and Moroccan Dialect (Darija), reflecting real-world multilingual consumer expression.

Text preprocessing involved cleaning raw data by removing noise such as emojis and irrelevant symbols, normalizing spelling variations, tokenizing text, and removing stop words. Special attention was given to preprocessing Darija due to the lack of standardized orthography. Sentiment analysis was applied to extract emotional cues from the text, which supported personality interpretation. The proposed analytical approach involves the use of unsupervised k-means clustering to group consumer comments based on linguistic and emotional features. The resulting clusters are intended to be interpreted in relation to the Big Five personality traits, providing a foundation for personality-based psychographic segmentation.

Summary of Findings

The analysis produced distinct clusters that align with the conceptual characteristics of the Big Five personality traits. Language associated with openness emphasized creativity, imagination, and innovation. Conscientiousness-related clusters reflected structured and reliability-oriented expressions. Extraversion was associated with socially oriented and enthusiastic language, while

agreeableness was characterized by themes of harmony, care, and prosocial values. Neuroticism-related language reflected concern, dissatisfaction, and emotional sensitivity.

Sentiment analysis complemented the clustering results by providing emotional context that supported personality interpretation. The findings indicate that personality-related linguistic cues can be identified in unstructured social media text and used to form meaningful psychographic segments. The inclusion of both English and Darija demonstrates that such cues are not limited to a single language and can be observed in underrepresented dialects, supporting the feasibility of AI-driven personality-based segmentation in diverse contexts.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to marketing research by demonstrating how personality-based psychographic segmentation can be operationalized using AI and natural language processing. Theoretically, it bridges personality psychology and computational marketing by showing that the Big Five traits can be inferred from naturally occurring language rather than traditional surveys. Methodologically, the paper presents an NLP pipeline structured within the CRISP-DM framework, proposing bilingual preprocessing and unsupervised clustering as key components of the analytical approach..

From a managerial perspective, the study highlights how personality-driven segments can inform message personalization and communication strategy. By linking personality traits to distinct linguistic patterns, the research provides a foundation for tailoring marketing content to psychological preferences. While exploratory and limited by dataset size, the study establishes a structured basis for future research to scale and refine AI-enabled psychographic segmentation.

References are available upon request.

DESTINATION DUPES: A BEACH, FINANCIAL STRAIN, AND WEATHER CASE IN THE UNITED STATES

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Keywords: financial strain theory; Holiday Climate Index (HCI) Beach; consumer debt; weather; destination dupe

Description: This study quantitatively establishes destination dupes offering the case study of two United States National Seashores: Cape Cod, Massachusetts and Gulf Cost, Florida.

ABSTRACT

Study results indicate that consumer debt was negatively related to visits at a legacy tourism destination (Cape Cod, Massachusetts, United States), but positively related to visits at a lower-priced destination dupe (i.e., duplicate): Gulf Coast, Florida, United States. Favorable weather promoted beach visits at both destinations.

INTRODUCTION

Substitute travel is a well-developed topic in the tourism literature. For example, Han, Hyoung ad Oh (2015, p. 370) reported that "tourists are often willing to substitute an original site with another choice when the original site becomes unavailable or they are not satisfied with their experience." Specific to coastal tourism, two of the most salient predictors of substitute destination decisions are (i) activity motivations (e.g., beach recreation) and (ii) site-specific attributes (e.g., white sand beaches) (Ha, Hyong, Noh and Oh, 2015).

Currently, there is a rapidly evolving travel and tourism trend in popular press and on social media called "destination dupes," or destination duplicates. The term "dupe" comes from the fashion industry, with a leading fashion magazine defining dupes as "cheap alternatives to premium or luxury products" (Schulz, 2025). Similarly, the defining characteristic of a destination dupe is lower cost compared to a premium-priced, luxurious destination. The term destination dupe first appeared in an Expedia (2023) travel report. On the TikTok social media site, #traveldupe has garnered over 1.3 billion views (Bondarenko, 2023). Despite the burgeoning popularity, inquiries into destination dupes as travel substitutes have not previously been a topic of academic inquiry.

Addressing the knowledge gap, we consider beach visits to a legacy destination and a substitute, destination dupe in the United States: (i) Cape Cod National Seashore at Herring Cove

Beach, Massachusetts (coordinates: 42.044178, -70.2174675) and (ii) Gulf Coast National Seashores at Perdido Key Beach, Florida (coordinates: 30.2952494, -87.4577057). The two locations both feature coastal recreation (i.e., motivating activities), white sand beaches, and marine-based hospitality (i.e., site-specific features). Cape Cod has a long history as a legacy luxury beach destination dating back to the 1950s (Alexander, 1953). Gulf Coast exhibits the key characteristic of a destination dupe: lower vacation costs (Kolberg, 2025).

We apply financial strain theory, which asserts decision-making is altered with rising financial obligations (French and Vigne, 2019). As financial stress increases, individuals emphasize affordability to avoid any additional financial burdens (Shafir, 2013). Based on theory and research-based evidence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: During high consumer debt, legacy destinations will observe decreased visitation.

Hypothesis 2: During high consumer debt, destination dupes will observe increased beach visits.

Weather is also a factor for substitute destination decisions—including destination dupes—as it is an important site-specific characteristic that is desirable to beach recreationalists (Han et al., 2015; Lele, 2024; Ma and Craig, 2024; Rutty et al., 2020; Scott, Matthews, Borrowes and Eyazaguirre, 2019). Our focal weather variable is Holiday Climate Index-Beach (HCI-Beach) (Scott et al., 2019). A literature review about coastal tourism and climate change indicated that the relationship between weather, climate, and beach visitation is complex, thus an index approach is desirable to singular weather variables (Arabadzhyan et al., 2019). The HCI-Beach was crafted and validated for beach tourism, capturing the three facets of weather known to influence beach-goers: thermal comfort, aesthetic, and physical (Martin, 2005; Ma and Craig,

2024; Rutty et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2019). It is widely understood that beach visitation increases with favorability of index values, and vice versa (e.g., Ma and Craig, 2024; Rutty et al., 2020). What is not understood is the relative impact of consumer debt and weather on beach visits at legacy destinations and destination dupes.

Research Question 1: What is the relative impact of consumer debt and weather on beach visits?

METHODS

The dependent variables are monthly beach visits at Herring Cove Beach (Cape Cod, Massachusetts) and Perdido Key Beach (Gulf Coast, Florida) reported by the National Park Service (2025). Continuous monthly data was available for both locations from 2002, thus data was obtained January 2002-December 2024. The two beaches were chosen because (i) traffic is to dead-end beach access, and (ii) the beaches are the highest traffic beach locations with complete timeseries. This observational method more accurately captures recreational motives (Seither and Craig, 2025).

The two independent variables are consumer debt and weather. Consumer debt (i.e., credit card, mortgage, personal debt) was obtained from the Federal Reserve System (2025). Debt was only available monthly, and the data timeseries corresponds with the dependent variable (2002-2024). Debt-levels were determined by splitting values into the four percentile bands: low (0-25th), medium-low (26-50th), 51-75th (medium-high) and high (76-100th).

The daily atmospheric (1990-2024) data used to calculate beach weather (i.e., HCI-Beach) were obtained from NASA (2025): sunshine hours (A), precipitation (P, mm/day), wind speed (W, mean daily km/h), and thermal comfort (TC) (°C) based on Masterson and Richardson's (1979) the Humidex formula (Scott et al., 2019). Data was aggregated to monthly

for analysis. The HCI-Beach data range was long-enough (35-years) to detect if climate change occurred. The index's equation is represented as: *2(TC) + 4(A) + 3(P) + W*. Each sub-index score is scaled from 0-10, with aggregate ranges from 0–100 falling into the categories including: dangerous (0-10), unacceptable (10-39), marginal-acceptable (40-59), good-very good (60-79), and excellent-ideal (80-100).

One-way ANOVAs were run for Cape Cod and Gulf Coast with debt-level and weather as independent, fixed factors (Table 1). Bonferroni's post-hoc tests were run for each fixed factor to illuminate where differences emerged between categories (not shown).

Table 1. Univariate ANOVA analysis for Cape Cod and Gulf Coast.

Cape Cod	*df*	*F*	*p*	*ηp²*
Corrected Model	15	102.22	.000	.80
Intercept	1	4,392.17	.000	.92
Debt-level	3	38.34	.000	.23
HCI	3	418.80	.000	.77
Debt-level * HCI	9	9.64	.000	.19
Error	380			
Total	396			
Corrected Total	395			
R^2	.803			
Gulf Coast	*df*	*F*	*p*	*ηp²*
Corrected Model	11	8.95	.000	.20
Intercept	1	618.02	.000	.62
Debt-level	3	5.36	.001	.04
HCI	2	30.71	.000	.14
Debt-level * HCI	6	0.70	.648	.01
Error	384			
Total	396			
Corrected Total	395			
R^2	.204			

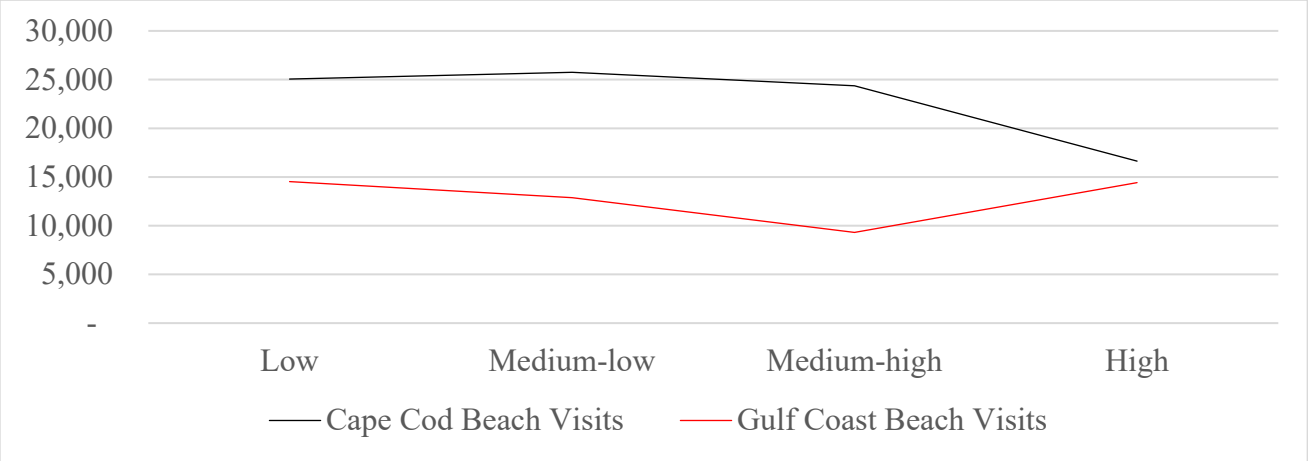
Lastly, paired-sample t-tests were run for the most historic 10-years of available HCI data (1990-1999) and compared to the most recent 10-years (2015-2024) to determine if climate changed at each location (not shown).

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 was supported. Debt-level was significant for beach visits at Cape Cod (F=38.34, df=3, p=.000) (see Table 1). Bonferroni's post-hoc test indicates a significantly lower number of beach visits occurred under high debt compared to the other three debt-levels. *Hypothesis 2* was supported. Debt-level was also significant for beach visits at Gulf Coast (F=5.35, df=3, p=.001). Bonferroni's post-hoc test indicates a significantly higher number of beach visits occurred under high debt compared to medium-high debt.

Though not hypothesized, we also observed visits decrease (p=.000) from low to medium-low debt, and medium-low to medium-high debt (see Figure 1). That is, visits declined at Gulf Coast as consumer debt rose, until high consumer-debt levels at which point visitation significantly increased by approximately 5,000 monthly visits at Gulf Coast. The corresponding decrease at Cape Cod was of comparable trajectory. Beach visits corresponding with the four bands of consumer debt is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Beach visits sorted by consumer debt-levels (2002–2024).



Results from paired-sample t-tests demonstrate significant change in HCI-Beach for Cape Cod (t=4.81, p=.000, df=119), but not Gulf Coast (t=.52, p=.680, df=119). To add more

granularity, we ran paired-sample t-tests sorted by seasons. Two significant differences emerged: fall at Cape Cod (t=3.60, p=.000, df=29, *mean Δ*=4.69) and summer at Gulf Coast (t=-3.62, p=.000, df=29, *mean Δ*=-3.35).

Research Question 1 asked about the relative strength of consumer debt and weather. HCI-Beach was a more salient predictor than debt-levels for Cape Cod (F=418.80, df=3, p=.000, ηp^2=.77) and Gulf Coast (F=30.71, df=2, p=.000, ηp^2=.19). As evidenced by the F-statistic and effect size (ηp^2), the magnitude of weather influence is greater at Cape Cod. At both locations, Bonferroni's post-hoc test indicates a difference between all categories of the index (p=.000), where visits increased as favorability improved. We also observed an interaction effect between weather and consumer-debt for Cape Cod (F=9.64, df=9, p=.000); high debt and unfavorable weather were inversely related to beach visits (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

This is a small-scale study about an emerging trend in travel and tourism: destinations dupes, a type of substitute destination where cost is the defining consideration. Financial strain theory (French and Vigne, 2019) is the basis for our two hypotheses. *Hypothesis 1* was supported, where visits to the traditionally more expensive legacy destination (Cape Cod) declined with high consumer debt. Results also suggest that debt may not linearly suppress travel, rather redirect it once affordability thresholds are breached (see Figure 1). As a compliment, *Hypothesis 2* was also supported where travel to a substitute, destination dupe (Gulf Coast) increased with high consumer debt.

The rapid rise of consumers seeking destination dupes reflects shifting tourist priorities driven by economics and climatic conditions (Lele, 2024). Findings to *Research Question 1* demonstrate that consumer debt and weather conditions—captured via the HCI-Beach—

significantly influenced visitation patterns irrespective location. Notably, weather demonstrates a stronger influence than debt at both, accentuating the imperative to integrate weather into tourism economic models.

The weather profile for Gulf Coast is superior to that of Cape Cod, though Cape Cod's HCI-Beach conditions are improving across all seasons (not shown). The one observation of worsening HCI-Beach was summer at Gulf Coast. Yet, it had no unacceptable or dangerous HCI-Beach months, so it stands to reason the effect size of weather was smaller compared to Cape Cod (ηp^2 =.14 v. ηp^2 =.77). The greatest improvement in HCI-Beach was 9% in the fall at Cape Cod comparing 1990-1999 (*mean HCI-Beach*=50.21) to 2015-2024 (*mean HCI-Beach*=54.90).

Research Directions

The dupe characteristics observed during financial strain—a decline in beach visits to the luxurious Cape Cod, and an increase in visits to the low-cost Gulf Coast—provide preliminary support for the exploration of destination dupes in the academic literature. Study findings also provide the basis for larger-scale studies to investigate: (i) other coastal destinations that could be considered dupes, (ii) destination dupes for other sub-sectors of tourism, and (iii) causal linkages between specific substitutes and legacy destinations. Two methodological possibilities for these inquiries are large-scale surveys and intercept studies, neither of which the research team has the resources to accomplish, unfortunately (a limitation).

Implications

Cape Cod's reliance on premium-priced, discretionary travel makes it vulnerable during economic downturn and personal financial strain. Strategic pricing, such as early-booking discounts and bundled offers, can help sustain demand (Picazo and Moreno-Gil, 2018; Peng et al., 2014; Senbeto and Hon, 2020). To mitigate revenue losses from poor weather in non-beach

months, investing in cultural events and indoor attractions can provide alternative tourism opportunities and stabilize visitor numbers (Dalir, 2024). The finding that HCI-Beach is (i) more favorable in the summer than Gulf Coast, and (ii) Cape Cod's beach weather is improving year-round is consequential. Destination managers can message these findings to existing and prospective consumer-bases to help preserve and attract beach visitation, respectively.

Gulf Coast's affordability attracts budget-conscious travelers, especially during financial strain (Peng et al., 2014; Senbeto and Hon, 2020). Unlike Cape Cod, its low temperature variability supports year-round tourism, making sustained marketing efforts essential for visitor retention beyond peak months (Dalir, 2024). During high financial strain, Gulf Coast observed an influx of beach visitors. Yet, HCI-Beach conditions are deteriorated with rising temperatures in the summer (not shown). This is a concern for destination managers because extreme heat has an inverse effect on coastal tourism and beach visitation (Arabadzhyan et al., 2019; Craig, 2025). Lastly, results suggest Gulf Coast destination managers should have a contingency plan for if / when financial strain from consumer debt lowers. Historically, lower levels of consumer debt corresponded with lower visitation at Gulf Coast (Figure 1).

Limitations

The novel study is not without limitation. First, we were unable to causally link the legacy destination (Cape Cod) to the substitute destination (Gulf Coast). Second, we were unable to match debt-level, traveler behaviors, and other socio-demographics because we used macro-level observational methods. Of note, Fitchett (2025) found that tourists do not accurately perceive temperature when making tourism and travel decisions when asked. Thus, for temperature-related inquiries, observational methods like ours are preferred. Lastly, only

monthly data is reported by the Federal Reserve System (2025) and National Park Service (2025), requiring aggregation of the HCI-Beach to monthly for analysis.

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DEVELOPING A SCALE FOR TREASURE HUNTING

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Keywords: Treasure Hunting, scale development, thrill seeking, price sensitivity, PAD

Description: The goal of this investigation is to 1) conceptualize and develop a scale for treasure hunting, 2) test that scale via exploratory and confirmatory analyses, and 3) validate the scale within a nomological network of likely antecedents and consequences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Whether looking for a good deal, seeking that one special item, or simply shopping for entertainment, consumers love the hunt for treasure (Belk et al., 1988; Machado et al., 2019; McCree, 1984; Strahle & Klatt, 2017). Some retailers have picked up on this consumer trend and adjusted their layouts to facilitate consumers' treasure hunting desires, or even incorporated it into their entire business models (e.g., off-price retailers such as the TJX Companies, 2025). However, research on treasure hunting remains underdeveloped in marketing and existing treasure hunting definitions are often contextually restrictive (Machado et al., 2019; Strahle & Klatt, 2017). To address this deficiency, we pose the following question: Is it possible to conceptualize and measure a consumer's propensity to engage in treasure-hunting-like behaviors? To address this question, we developed and validated a scale for treasure hunting.

Method and Data

We conducted two studies. Study 1 (N = 381) was designed to conceptualize and develop the treasure hunting scale. This was done by following the established scale development and validation recommendations offered by Churchill (1979) and Gerbing & Anderson (1988). Additionally, previous scale development studies were followed as a baseline for this research (Han et al., 2024; Mirbagheri & Najimi, 2019). Study 2 (N = 319) was designed to assess the nomological validity of the proposed treasure hunting scale and to also ensure that the scale differs from other common shopping goals (e.g., impulse buying, searching, and browsing; Novak et al., 2003; Rook & Fisher, 1995; Schlosser, 2003). We rely on optimum stimulation level (OSL) to make predictions about what likely drives treasure hunting (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1992; Avornyo et al., 2019; Hebb, 1955; Leuba, 1955; Mohan et al., 2012; Möller & Herm, 2013; Orth & Bourrain, 2005; Zheng et al., 2023). Likely antecedents (i.e., sensitivity to the retail environment, the curiosity dimensions of thrill seeking and joyous exploration dimensions, and price sensitivity) and consequences (i.e., pleasure, arousal, and dominance, as well as propensity to treasure hunt and preference for retailers with variable inventory) were examined to test this nomological network.

Summary of Findings

The results of Study 1 led to the development of a Treasure Hunting scale with numerous items and dimensions. Each item loaded on its hypothesized subdimension and was significant (all p's < 0.001), with acceptable AVE, CR, and α levels (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). For Study 2, after further testing the scale's validity, SmartPLS was used to assess its nomological validity. We hypothesized that sensitivity to the retail environment (H_1), sensation seeking (H_2), curiosity ($H_{3a/b}$), and price sensitivity (H_4) were antecedents to the proposed treasure hunting scale ($R^2 = 0.347$). The paths for all variables except for sensation seeking ($p = 0.597$) were significant and positive ($p < 0.001$), providing support for H_1, $H_{3a/b}$, and H_4. Further, the model hypothesized that pleasure, arousal, and dominance (H_{5a-c}), treasure hunting frequency, liking, and patronage (H_{6a-c}), and preference for retailers with variable inventory (H_7) all acted as consequences of treasure hunting. The results of the analysis support H_{5-7}, as all proposed consequences were significant and positive ($p < 0.001$). The results found support for all proposed antecedents and consequences except for sensation seeking (H_2).

Statement of Key Contributions

This research offers a deeper academic understanding of treasure hunting than has been previously advanced. Specifically, we expand on the concept of treasure hunting, what it is, and how it influences consumer behavior in unique and novel ways. Additionally, we connected treasure to existing theory by demonstrating how the consumer's desire to reach an optimal stimulation level (OSL) influences treasure hunting. Finally, we developed and validated a scale to measure treasure hunting. From a practical standpoint, this research enables retailers to identify shoppers who excel in treasure hunting. Furthermore, this research will allow marketers to determine whether their target markets are likely to respond positively to treasure-hunting experiences. This is true even if the retailer is unsure whether its customers are treasure hunters and converts those shoppers to being treasure hunters if that is desirable. Likewise, retailers could use subdimensions of the treasure hunting scale to identify whether target customers score higher on some aspects of the scale but not others, enabling them to create a more tailored, segmented approach to treasure hunting beyond a broader appeal to this shopping goal.

References Available Upon Request

DIGITAL DISHONESTY OR AN EXTENSION OF THE SELF? HOW SELF-CONSTRUAL SHAPES WILLINGNESS TO DIGITALLY ENHANCE APPEARANCE

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Keywords: digital appearance enhancement, self-construal, presentation, self-overlap, beauty

Description: This research demonstrates that consumers' willingness to engage in digital beauty work depends jointly on self-construal and image presentation format, showing that interdependent (vs. independent) consumers are more likely to adopt digital appearance-enhancing technologies because they perceive greater self-overlap between the beautified image and the true self when unedited and beautified images are presented side-by-side.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Digital beauty work—the use of technologies such as photo-editing apps and beauty cameras to enhance appearance in digital images—is a pervasive yet under-researched consumer behavior. Prior research has largely focused on observers' reactions to appearance management or on offline beauty practices, leaving open the question of how consumers themselves psychologically experience digitally altered representations of their appearance. Although digital enhancements are often framed as "digital dishonesty," we propose that they can instead function

as a form of digital self-extension, depending on how consumers construe the self and how digital images are presented.

This research examines when and why consumers are willing to engage in digital beauty work. Specifically, we investigate how self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) interacts with presentation format (whether unedited and beautified images are shown side-by-side or whether only the beautified image is shown) to shape adoption of digital appearance-enhancing technologies. We theorize that these effects operate through perceived self-overlap, defined as the degree to which consumers view the self represented by the beautified image as overlapping with their true self. In doing so, we identify conditions under which discrepant digital self-representations are assimilated into, versus resisted from, the self-concept.

Method and Data

We test our conceptual framework across eight studies employing multiple methods, samples, and operationalizations. A pilot study uses Google Trends data to examine whether consumers from more collectivistic U.S. states show greater interest in digital beauty products. Study 1 provides correlational evidence using a laboratory paradigm in which participants choose between unedited and beautified photos of themselves. Study 2 allows participants to directly interact with a commercially available beauty app and manipulates whether participants see only their beautified image or both the unedited and beautified images side-by-side.

Subsequent studies extend the framework to digital beauty advertising contexts, using manipulated ads featuring models rather than participants' own photos. Across studies, self-construal is measured or experimentally primed, and presentation format is manipulated. Dependent variables include willingness to use beauty apps, intentions to share beautified images, and incentive-compatible choices (e.g., selecting a paid app subscription over cash).

Perceived self-overlap is measured using validated items. Several studies are pre-registered, and alternative explanations—including self-improvement motivation, self-concept clarity, public self-consciousness, social norms, social comparison threat, and discomfort—are empirically ruled out.

Summary of Findings

Across studies, we find a robust interaction between self-construal and presentation format. When consumers see unedited and beautified images side-by-side—making discrepancies between self-representations salient—interdependent (vs. independent) consumers are more willing to engage in digital beauty work. This effect emerges for willingness to use beauty apps, intentions to share beautified images, and consequential choices.

Mediation analyses consistently show that these effects are driven by perceived self-overlap: interdependents perceive greater overlap between the beautified image and their true self when seeing both the unedited and beautified images, whereas independents perceive less overlap under the same conditions. Critically, when only the beautified image is shown, the effect of self-construal is eliminated. These findings replicate across contexts in which consumers view their own images and in advertising contexts featuring models, demonstrating that side-by-side presentations prompt self-referential discrepancy processing. Together, the results show that digital beauty work is not uniformly experienced as inauthentic, but instead depends on both cultural self-views and situational cues.

Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions. First, it advances understanding of digital beauty work by shifting focus from external judgments of deception to consumers' internal experiences with digitally altered selves. Second, it demonstrates that responses to digital

appearance enhancement depend jointly on self-construal and image presentation, identifying perceived self-overlap as a central psychological mechanism. Third, the findings extend self-construal theory by showing that interdependents perceive greater overlap not only between the self and others, but also between multiple aesthetic versions of the self.

Finally, the research contributes to the literature on digital self-extension by identifying when discrepant digital self-representations are assimilated into versus resisted from the self-concept. Beyond theory, the findings offer actionable implications for the design and communication of digital beauty technologies, showing that commonly used before–after presentation formats may differentially influence adoption across cultural markets.

DOMINANCE OVER NATURE BELIEF SCALE: MEASURING THE BELIEF IN HUMANS' ABILITY TO DOMINATE NATURE

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Keywords: Human-nature relationship; Dominance orientation; Environmental attitudes; Scale development

Description: This paper develops and validates the Dominance over Nature Belief Scale (DoNBS), a measure capturing the belief in humans' ability to dominate nature, and examines its implications for sustainability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Dominance orientations—worldviews in which humans are seen as superior to nature—have been widely examined in sustainability research, as they are considered to underlie unsustainable lifestyles. Dominance as a concept inherently requires two components to become actionable: a belief that humans have the right to dominate nature and a belief that they have the ability to do so. To dominate nature, humans must therefore be seen as both morally and practically superior to it. Despite this conceptual interdependence, existing measures focus only on the right facet, leaving the ability facet unexamined. Yet without the capacity to exert control, moral entitlement

alone cannot translate into action. This omission limits our understanding of dominance orientations and how these beliefs relate to environmental attitudes and behaviors.

This research asks: How can the belief in humans' ability to dominate nature be conceptualized and measured, and what are its implications for sustainability? To address this question, we develop and test the Dominance over Nature Belief Scale (DoNBS) as the first instrument capturing the ability facet of dominance orientations. Used alone, the DoNBS isolates this overlooked dimension; used alongside right-oriented scales, it enables a more complete and multidimensional assessment of dominance orientations.

Method and Data

The DoNBS was developed following established scale-development procedures. An expert brainstorming session with eight scholars generated an initial pool of items capturing humans' perceived ability to dominate nature. We then conducted 40 semi-structured interviews to refine the construct and ensure the items reflected lay understandings of dominance. A focus group with four participants unfamiliar with the topic assessed item clarity and accessibility, leading to the removal of ambiguous statements. Three scale-development experts subsequently reviewed the items, further refining wording, eliminating redundancy, and adding missing conceptual elements.

The resulting scale, comprising 20 items, was tested through an online survey with 200 U.S. participants recruited via Prolific. Analyses included reliability assessment, exploratory factor analysis, and correlations with related constructs such as Anthropocentrism, the New Environmental Paradigm, Connectedness to Nature, and Mastery over Nature. Regressions assessed the DoNBS's predictive validity for environmental attitudes and sustainable behaviors.

To complement this correlational evidence with causal insights, we also conducted a lab experiment manipulating perceived human ability to dominate nature. Participants were randomly assigned to view a news segment describing either a successful or unsuccessful human attempt to divert a river's course, allowing us to test the behavioral consequences of heightened perceived ability.

Summary of Findings

The online survey provided evidence for the reliability and validity of the DoNBS. Exploratory factor analysis supported a unidimensional structure, with all retained items (15) loading on a single factor. The scale demonstrated high internal consistency and clear discriminant validity relative to existing right-oriented dominance measures.

DoNBS scores were positively associated with the belief that humans contribute to environmental problems, with pro-environmental identity, and with reported sustainable behaviors. These effects remained significant when controlling for Mastery over Nature, a scale capturing the right facet of human dominance, indicating that the ability facet captures meaningful variance not explained by right-oriented measures of human dominance.

Collectively, these results show that perceptions of human ability are systematically linked to sustainability-relevant attitudes and behaviors.

To complement these results, a lab experiment manipulated perceived human ability to dominate nature and examined its behavioral consequences. Participants exposed to a high-ability news segment donated more of their potential lottery earnings to an environmental organization (WWF) than those in the low-ability condition, providing causal evidence that increased perceptions of human ability can enhance pro-environmental action.

Overall, the findings indicate that the ability facet of dominance is measurable, distinct from existing constructs, and relevant for predicting sustainability-related outcomes.

Key Contributions

This research makes three primary contributions. First, it conceptualizes the belief in humans' ability to dominate nature as a distinct component of dominance orientations. Although dominance inherently includes both a right and an ability dimension, prior work has focused exclusively on the right facet. By articulating and defining the ability facet, this research advances theory on dominance orientations and, more in general human–nature relationships. Second, it provides the first validated scale capturing this ability-oriented dominance belief. The DoNBS offers a reliable and empirically distinct instrument, that can be used independently or alongside existing right-oriented measures, to obtain a more complete and nuanced assessment of dominance orientations.

Third, the findings show that the ability facet is associated with environmental responsibility, pro-environmental identity, and sustainable behaviors, beyond the effects of existing dominance constructs. Together, these contributions broaden understanding of dominance orientations and their role in shaping sustainability-relevant attitudes and actions, going beyond the traditional negative role associated to them. By uncovering this overlooked facet of anthropocentric worldviews, the DoNBS enriches sustainability research and opens new avenues for theoretical development and for interventions that may foster more responsible human–nature interactions.

References are available upon request.

ECO-FRIENDLY CHOICES IN THE MIND: AN EEG STUDY OF CONSUMER WILLINGNESS TO PAY

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KEYWORDS: Consumer Neuroscience, Consumer Behaviour, EEG, Willingness-To-Pay, Green Pricing.

DESCRIPTION: This study uses electroencephalogram (EEG) and behavioural measures to uncover the neural and economic drivers of consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) a premium for eco-friendly products in the Indian context.

ABSTRACT

This study examines neuroeconomic and behavioural drivers of consumers' WTP for green products. Using within-subject design, participants provided WTP valuations for green and conventional products while neural activities were recorded using EEG. Behavioural results reveal a consistent tendency to pay a premium for green products along with complementary neural evidence.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer neuroscience has emerged as a powerful approach for addressing long-standing limitations in traditional marketing research. Conventional self-reporting techniques, such as surveys and interviews, are prone to biases and often fail to capture the implicit processes

underlying consumer decision-making (Morwitz & Fitzsimons, 2004; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). This is particularly evident in willingness to pay (WTP) research, where stated preferences often diverge significantly from actual purchase behaviour. As Breidert, Hahsler, and Reutterer (2006) noted, traditional WTP measurement methods lack validity in estimating true economic value because they rarely encompass observed choice behaviour. Experimental designs that incorporate neuroscientific tools can bridge this gap by providing implicit, real-time measures of valuation, thereby offering more reliable predictors of actual consumer choice (Ariely & Berns, 2010; Falk, Berkman, and Lieberman, 2011). The Ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC), a neural region associated with consumer decision-making, is central to valuation processes, integrating preferences, goals, and reward signals (Hare, Malmaud, & Rangel, 2011). Evidence shows that neural markers from this region can forecast both individual purchasing decisions and large-scale market outcomes that sometimes outperform traditional measures (Berns & Moore, 2012; Falk, Berkman, & Lieberman, 2012). Yet, despite the optimism, questions surrounding ecological validity and practical feasibility remain. Much of this evidence stems from functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), a costly and invasive method for consumer testing, which may itself distort cognition and choice (Szalma & Hancock, 2011).

Electroencephalography (EEG), by contrast, offers an affordable, non-invasive, and more naturalistic alternative for neuromarketing research. EEG allows participants to remain in a comfortable setting, provides high temporal resolution, which has already been widely used to study consumer attention and emotional engagement (Wang & Minor, 2008; Smith & Gevins, 2004). Importantly, EEG enables repeated exposures to realistic stimuli, supporting greater generalizability of results to everyday consumption contexts. These advantages make EEG particularly suitable for investigating consumer WTP, a critical behavioural measure in marketing

research. The Indian context presents unique challenges and opportunities. The income disparities, limited and dynamic consumer knowledge, and varying levels of environmental awareness complicate preference articulation and purchasing behaviour. Additionally, India is witnessing a surge in interest in sustainability, with eco-friendly products increasingly perceived as both necessary and aspirational (Kennedy, 2024). A review of the extant literature suggests lack of neuroscience-based research examining WTP for green products, especially in the Indian context.

This study seeks to address this gap by combining EEG measures with behavioural WTP assessments to capture both stated and revealed preferences for green versus conventional products. Importantly, research such as the classic Coke versus Pepsi study (McClure et al., 2004) has demonstrated that branding elements can significantly influence brain responses and consumer preferences. To ensure that the neural activations observed in our experiment are attributable solely to the "greenness" of a product, all branding cues (e.g. brand name, logo, and typography) were carefully removed. By focusing on affordable and familiar products stripped of brand influence, this study isolates the intrinsic value consumers attach to sustainability. In doing so, it provides novel insights into how eco-friendliness is evaluated and acted upon in the Indian marketplace. More broadly, the study contributes to consumer neuroscience by demonstrating the utility of EEG in examining sustainable consumption in a large emerging economy, offering both theoretical and practical implications for marketers and policymakers. The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To Analyse Differential WTP Between Green and Conventional Products: The primary objective is to assess whether consumers express a systematically higher WTP for eco-friendly and sustainable products in comparison to conventional alternatives.

2. To Investigate the Neurological Correlates of WTP Using EEG: By recording EEG signals during the product evaluation task, the study aims to uncover oscillatory activity in specific frequency bands (e.g., beta and gamma), which correlate with reward processing and cognitive engagement. This analysis seeks to elucidate the neurological mechanisms underlying WTP decisions and whether distinct brain activation patterns emerge when evaluating green versus conventional products.

3. To Verify Higher WTP for Green Products Using a Price Slider Mechanism: To avoid hypothetical bias commonly present in self-reported measures, the study employs an interactive price slider within the PsychoPy software. The slider displays a lower bound, an upper bound, and a mean reference price, allowing participants to indicate their willingness to pay for each product in real time. This approach enables the measurement of participants' behavioural valuation under experimental conditions, facilitating a direct comparison of WTP for green versus conventional products and confirming any observed disparities

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Eleven participants, all aged between 25 to 45, were recruited for this pilot study. Participants were shortlisted using a screening questionnaire designed to assess their green buying behaviour, and only those who demonstrated consistent pro-environmental purchasing tendencies were invited to take part. All participants reported no history of neurological illness, were not under psychiatric medication or substance use, and had normal or corrected-to-normal vision. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the study.

Experimental Design and Procedure

Upon arrival at the lab, participants were given a brief verbal and written explanation of the experiment and provided informed consent. Following EEG electrode placement, participants were seated comfortably in a dimly lit and sound-attenuated room. The experiment was designed and presented using PsychoPy software. Before beginning the main task, participants completed a short practice trial to familiarise themselves with the procedure.

In the main task, participants were shown a total of 24 products, consisting of 12 green products and their 12 conventional counterparts. To ensure sufficient exposure and reliable neural data, each of the 24 products was presented five times, resulting in a total of 120 slides. Products were selected based on their common use and affordability for a wide range of consumers, thereby minimising the influence of income differences on willingness to pay. The selected products ranged in price from ₹62 to ₹1,523 ($0.68 to $16.99), with a mean price of ₹478 ($5.27) (see Figure 1 (A). To eliminate brand-related biases, all identifying elements were removed from the product images. Only the product itself was displayed, with the label “Eco-friendly” or “Conventional” aiding the customer to distinguish between the sustainable and non-sustainable variants. Commonly used products were chosen to ensure participants’ familiarity with them, thereby reducing the likelihood of novelty effects influencing their responses. This design allowed for a more accurate assessment of participants’ WTP for the “greenness” of the product, rather than for any brand or design-related attributes.

The order of presentation was fully randomized across all repetitions. Each product was displayed on the screen for 10 seconds, during which participants indicated their WTP using an on-screen slider. After each product presentation, a blank screen with a fixation cross (“+”) in the centre was

shown for 5 seconds, serving as an inter-trial interval. The entire process lasted for approximately 22–23 minutes and EEG data was recorded throughout. Following the completion of the task, the participants were debriefed and the electrodes were removed cautiously.

EEG Preprocessing:

Raw EEG data were visually inspected, and noisy channels were marked as bad and subsequently interpolated using a spherical spline method. Signals were re-referenced to the average reference, down sampled to 512 Hz, and bandpass filtered between 0.5 and 30 Hz. Independent component analysis (ICA; FastICA algorithm) was applied, and components reflecting ocular and movement artifacts were identified and removed. Out of eleven participants, two were excluded from the analysis due to excessive EEG contamination by muscle artifacts, and the remaining participants were included in subsequent analyses. EEG was segmented into epochs time-locked to stimulus onset (−2 to 10 s). For spectral analysis, artifact-free epochs (0–5 s) were used. Power spectral densities (PSDs) were estimated for each channel using Welch's method (window length = 1.024 s, 50% overlap, frequency range = 1–30 Hz, frequency resolution = 0.98 Hz). For each subject, PSDs were averaged across epochs separately for the *eco.* and *conv.* conditions. Beta-band activity (14–20 Hz) was further extracted in 2-Hz bins (14–16 Hz, 16–18 Hz, 18–20 Hz). Grand-averaged scalp distributions were visualized using spherical spline interpolation with consistent scaling across conditions.

The results are illustrated through Figure 1, which includes A: Schematic representation of the experimental paradigm followed by the types of items, B: Grand-averaged topographies of beta-band power (14–20 Hz, in 2-Hz bins) for eco-friendly (top row) and conventional (bottom row) conditions. Warmer colours indicate higher power ($\mu V^2/Hz$), and C: Comparison of actual prices

and average willingness to pay (WTP) for eco-friendly and conventional products across participants (NM01–NM05).

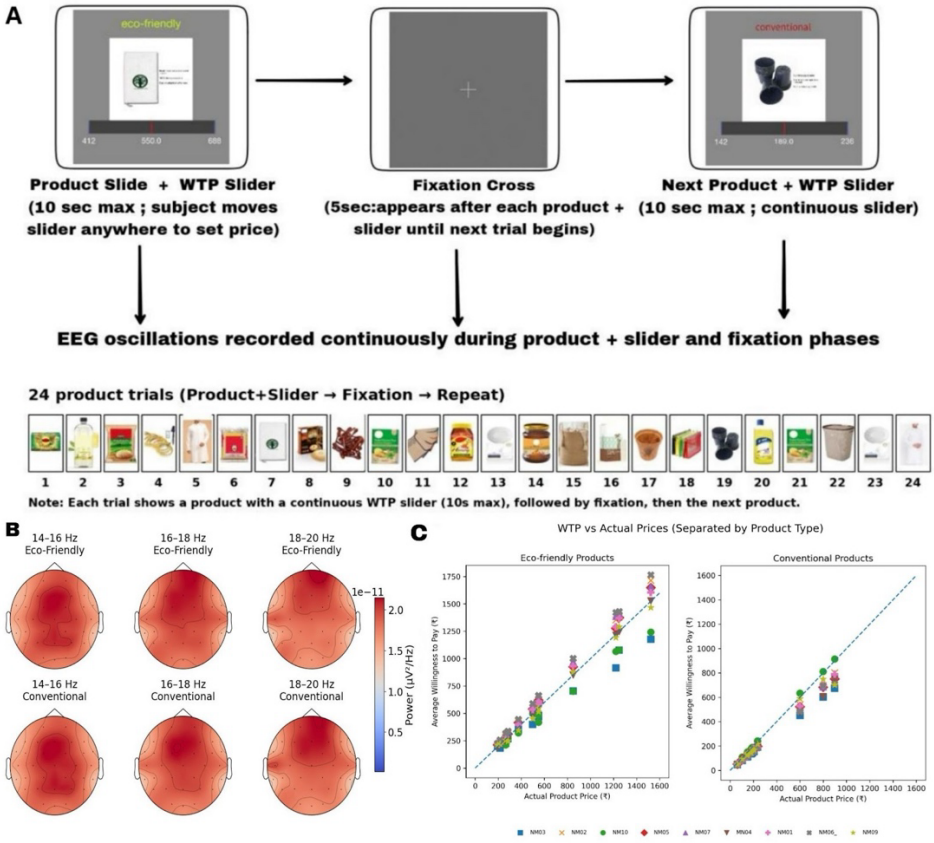


Fig 1: Overview of the experimental paradigms (A), neural activity (B), and behavioural valuation (C). Source: Authors own work

RESULTS

In this pilot study, participants showed a consistent tendency to report higher WTP for green (ECO) products compared to conventional (CONV) products. For each participant, mean WTP was computed separately for the two conditions using the slider-based response measure, and the paired differences were evaluated across subjects (N = 9). The average WTP in the ECO condition (mean

= ₹665.3; SD = ₹ 75.8) exceeded that in the CONV condition (mean = ₹264.7; SD = ₹25.0), corresponding to a mean paired difference of 400.6. A paired-samples t-test indicated a statistically reliable difference, $t(8) = 14.66$, $p < 0.001$, with a large paired effect size ($dz = 4.89$).

Topographical maps of beta-band power (14–20 Hz, separated into 2-Hz bins) for the eco-friendly and conventional conditions are shown in figure 1 (B). Visual inspections suggested that, in the eco-friendly condition (top row), beta-band power was consistently higher across central and frontal scalp regions compared to the conventional condition (bottom row). In the higher beta range (18–20 Hz), both conditions showed frontal–central beta-band maxima. By visual inspection, the eco-friendly condition appeared to exhibit a slightly more focal frontal–central distribution, whereas the conventional condition showed a comparatively more diffuse beta-band pattern. Although descriptive differences in beta-band topographies were observed between conditions (Figure 1B), global beta power did not differ significantly between eco-friendly and conventional stimuli ($t(9) = -1.28$, $p = .23$). Given the limited sample size, the observed topographical patterns should be interpreted as exploratory.

These results provided strong evidence that consumers place higher monetary value on sustainable product attributes. In contrast, EEG analyses revealed exploratory neural patterns associated with the evaluation of green products. Visual inspection suggested differences in beta-band oscillatory activity and event-related potentials, potentially reflecting variations in attentional and evaluative processing. The slider-based WTP task confirmed that the observed premium for green products was not an artefact of hypothetical bias. Participants consistently placed their WTP for green products toward the higher end of the slider scale, and statistical comparisons replicated the t-test findings. This provided behavioural validation of the WTP differential and strengthened the robustness of the results.

DISCUSSION

This study contributes to research on sustainable consumption by viewing WTP for green products as a valuation process shaped by both behaviour and underlying neural activity. Much of the existing literature treats green price premiums as reflections of attitudes or stated preferences. In contrast, the present work adopts a process-oriented perspective, suggesting that sustainability-related valuation emerges from consumers' cognitive and emotional engagement with green attributes during evaluation. From this perspective, green products are not simply priced higher because consumers say they value sustainability, but because sustainability cues may become embedded in internal value representations. This interpretation aligns with emerging insights from consumer neuroscience and helps connect green marketing research with neuroeconomic models of value formation. Building on this conceptual foundation, the broader research programme is designed to triangulate stated WTP obtained through price sliders with revealed WTP from incentive-compatible BDM auctions and neural evidence from EEG. The combination of these complementary measures provide a complete picture of how consumers form and justify their WTP for green products.

IMPLICATION & CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that consumers behaviourally validate higher WTP for green products. Moreover, this behavioural premium is mirrored in distinct neural signatures of value processing, reinforcing the conclusion. The main study following the pilot study includes another element of behavioural economics through a BDM Auction in order to check the true WTP rather than the stated values as was done through the slider in this study. Across the pilot study, the participants exhibited a higher WTP for green products when compared to the conventional alternatives

available in the market. This indicates that the attributes of sustainability are linked to a measurable price premium within the surveyed cohort. This underscores that the observed premium is not solely an artefact of hypothetical survey bias.

From a consumer neuroscience perspective, the EEG findings offer preliminary insights into the neural dynamics accompanying green product evaluation. While no statistically significant differences in global beta-band power were observed between conditions, the exploratory topographical patterns suggested potential variations in frontal–central oscillatory activity during the evaluation process. Although the pilot nature of the study and the limited sample size should be interpreted cautiously, the study still highlights the feasibility of using EEG for the investigation of valuation processes in a realistic experimental setting. It is noteworthy that an important psychological determinant of WTP is perceived pricing and the present pilot study focuses on the valuation behaviour. Therefore, the future work can explicitly focus on measuring the perceived price and test its role as a mediator and moderator of the green premium observed here.

Some limitations of the study are the inability to generalise due to the small sample size and the explicit labelling of “green products” might have introduced bias. Additionally, the price slider task provides a behavioural anchor. Thus, future research should focus on these limitations by working on larger and diverse sample sizes, measuring price and perceived price fairness and employing mechanisms such as a Becker–DeGroot–Marschak (BDM) auction to capture actual willingness to pay.

Overall, this study provides proof of concept for a comprehensive approach to evaluate green products, linking consumer behaviour with neuroscience. It demonstrates both practical feasibility and clear neural patterns, setting the stage for larger, more detailed studies that can deepen

theoretical insights and support managerial and policy decisions related to sustainable consumption.

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EMBODIED SIGNALS AND SOCIAL SCAFFOLDING: HOW CONSUMERS CONSTRUCT HEALTHY EATING

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Keywords: Health, Embodiment, Sociality, Practice, Meaning

Description: This qualitative study examines how consumers construct healthy eating through embodied bodily signals and social relationships in everyday life.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Prior consumer research has largely examined healthy eating through individual-level determinants such as health consciousness, nutritional knowledge, and attitudes, often treating food choice as a stable outcome of personal motivation (Michaelidou and Hassan 2008; Meiselman 2016). While embodiment research recognizes that bodily sensations inform consumption decisions, it has primarily emphasized positive outcomes such as vitality and well-being, offering limited insight into how aversive bodily signals also shape food evaluations (Cornil and Chandon 2016; Lupton 2018). Similarly, social influence research has focused on norms, modeling, and social comparison, with less attention to how relationships actively structure and redistribute agency in everyday eating practices (Herman et al. 2003; Higgs 2015). Addressing these gaps, this research asks: How do consumers construct healthy eating through embodied bodily signals and social relationships in everyday life? Specifically, the study examines how consumers interpret bodily feedback as diagnostic cues for health, how

interpersonal relationships function as scaffolds or constraints on eating practices, and how embodied experiences and social dynamics jointly shape ongoing food-related decisions. By foregrounding lived experience and relational processes, this research conceptualizes healthy eating as an embodied and socially situated consumer practice rather than a purely individual choice.

Method and Data

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to examine how consumers construct healthy eating through embodied experiences and social relationships in everyday life. Consistent with interpretivist consumer research, this approach emphasizes lived experience, meaning-making, and process rather than measurement of predefined constructs (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Spiggle 1994). Data were collected through sixteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews with adult consumers varying in age, gender, cultural background, and living arrangements. Interviews lasted between 42 and 90 minutes, generating over sixteen hours of audio and approximately 320 pages of verbatim transcripts. The interview protocol elicited narratives concerning bodily sensations related to food consumption (e.g., energy, heaviness, digestive comfort), social interactions surrounding eating, and everyday strategies for maintaining health-oriented routines.

Data analysis followed an iterative process of open, axial, and selective coding, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, mechanisms, and relationships across cases (Charmaz 2014). Constant comparison, memo writing, and repeated engagement with the data supported analytical rigor and theoretical development (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008; Lincoln and Guba 1985). Through this process, higher-order themes were developed to capture how embodied feedback and social dynamics jointly shape healthy eating practices.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that consumers construct healthy eating through the ongoing interpretation of embodied bodily signals and the influence of social relationships in everyday life. First, participants relied on the body as an interpretive guide, using sensations of vitality, lightness, digestive comfort, and mental clarity, as well as aversive cues such as heaviness, discomfort, and fatigue, to evaluate whether foods aligned with their health aspirations. These embodied signals functioned as diagnostic feedback, often outweighing nutritional information or institutional health claims in shaping food choices (Cornil and Chandon 2016; Lupton 2018). Through repeated experience, consumers engaged in reflective embodiment, learning to translate bodily responses into personalized eating routines.

Second, healthy eating emerged as a socially scaffolded practice rather than an individual endeavor. Relationships with partners, friends, family members, and peers shaped access to food, structured routines, and redistributed agency over eating decisions. Some relationships supported healthy routines through shared discipline and accountability, while others constrained choice by normalizing indulgence or limiting autonomy (Herman et al. 2003; Higgs 2015; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Together, these findings highlight healthy eating as an embodied and relationally negotiated consumer practice.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to consumer behavior theory by conceptualizing healthy eating as an embodied and socially scaffolded practice rather than an outcome of individual attitudes or self-control. First, it extends embodiment research by demonstrating that consumers rely not only on positive vitality cues but also on aversive bodily signals, such as heaviness and discomfort, as diagnostic information in everyday food evaluation (Cornil and Chandon 2016; Lupton 2018).

By highlighting reflective embodiment, the study shows how bodily meaning develops over time through repeated interpretation rather than immediate sensation alone.

Second, the research advances understanding of social influence by reframing it as relational scaffolding that redistributes agency over consumption. Moving beyond models of norms and modeling, the findings show how relationships actively enable, constrain, or stabilize healthy eating through shared routines, delegated discipline, and normalized indulgence (Herman et al. 2003; Higgs 2015; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Together, these contributions reposition healthy eating as a negotiated consumer practice shaped through bodily experience and social coordination, offering a process-oriented framework for examining health-related consumption in everyday life.

EMODIVERSITY ENHANCES HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: emodiversity, hedonic consumption, emotions, satisfaction, willingness-to-pay

This paper demonstrates that fostering *emodiversity*—the experience of a rich mix of emotions—enhances consumer satisfaction and willingness-to-pay in hedonic consumption contexts, offering a strategic alternative to the traditional focus on maximizing positive emotions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research asks whether consumer satisfaction and willingness-to-pay in hedonic consumption are shaped not only by the intensity of positive emotions, as conventional marketing theory suggests, but also by the diversity of emotions experienced during consumption. Specifically, the central research question is: *Does emodiversity—the experience of a varied and balanced mix of emotions, including both positive and negative emotions—enhance consumer satisfaction and willingness-to-pay in hedonic experiences?*

Building on this core question, the research further examines how and why emotional variety influences consumer evaluations across different hedonic contexts. It investigates whether experiencing multiple distinct emotions leads consumers to perceive their experiences as richer, more meaningful, and more engaging than experiences dominated by uniformly positive affect. In addition, the research explores whether the effects of emodiversity generalize across diverse consumption domains, such as dining, entertainment, and cultural consumption, and whether these effects extend beyond subjective enjoyment to economic outcomes such as willingness to pay.

By addressing these questions, the research aims to challenge the prevailing assumption that negative emotions are inherently detrimental to consumer experiences and to clarify the role of nuanced emotional journeys in shaping consumer satisfaction, engagement, and value perceptions.

Method and Data

The research combines one large-scale field study with two controlled field experiments conducted in real consumption settings. Study 1 draws on experience-sampling data collected in France in 2013–2014 via a smartphone application. A total of 4,614 participants (32,836 observations) reported their momentary emotional states at randomly prompted times. Emodiversity was operationalized as emotional richness, measured by the number of simultaneously experienced positive emotions (out of nine). This large, naturalistic dataset allowed us to examine how emotional variety relates to satisfaction in everyday hedonic experiences.

Study 2 employed a randomized field experiment with 68 professional and trainee sommeliers in Barcelona during a blind wine-tasting session. Participants were assigned to either a low- or high-emodiversity framing condition while tasting an identical set of three wines. Emodiversity was manipulated through instructions emphasizing either a single shared emotion or distinct emotions across wines. Satisfaction with the tasting experience and willingness-to-pay for the wine set served as key dependent variables.

Study 3 was conducted at a 2-Michelin-star restaurant in Copenhagen and involved 231 participants attending a curated non-alcoholic drink-tasting experience. Emodiversity was experimentally manipulated by pairing drinks with either exclusively pleasant visual stimuli (low emodiversity) or a mix of pleasant and unpleasant stimuli (high emodiversity). Participants reported satisfaction, willingness-to-pay, and psychological richness following the experience.

Summary of Findings

Across three field studies and four supplementary studies, this research demonstrates that emodiversity systematically enhances consumer satisfaction and willingness to pay in hedonic consumption contexts. Contrary to the traditional assumption that hedonic value is maximized by intensifying positive emotions and eliminating negative ones, our findings reveal a complementary pathway: expanding the range of emotions experienced during consumption. Emodiversity can be generated through exposure to multiple positive emotions or, under certain conditions, through the inclusion of negative emotions that add contrast, meaning, or depth to the experience.

Importantly, the effectiveness of negative emotions is context dependent. In high-end, meaning-rich environments, such as Michelin-starred dining experiences, carefully introduced negative or

unsettling stimuli can enhance engagement and perceived value, whereas similar stimuli may undermine enjoyment in more utilitarian or family-oriented settings. These results highlight emodiversity as a nuanced design principle rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy.

The findings also point to potential underlying mechanisms. Emodiversity may operate similarly to experiential variety by slowing hedonic adaptation and reducing satiation, thereby sustaining pleasure over time. By revealing emodiversity as a distinct and impactful dimension of hedonic experience, this research broadens existing theories of consumer emotion and opens new avenues for understanding how emotional complexity shapes satisfaction and economic value.

Key Contributions

This research makes several important contributions to the marketing and consumer behavior literature.

First, it introduces emodiversity as a novel and theoretically meaningful dimension of hedonic consumption, extending existing emotion-based frameworks that have traditionally emphasized the maximization of positive affect and the avoidance of negative emotions. By demonstrating that a varied and balanced emotional experience can independently enhance satisfaction and willingness to pay, the research challenges dominant assumptions about how hedonic value is created.

Second, the findings bridge emotion research and consumer behavior by showing that emotional variety, rather than emotional intensity alone, plays a critical role in shaping consumer evaluations and perceived value. Across multiple field studies and experiments in diverse hedonic domains, the research provides robust empirical evidence that emodiversity has

consistent and economically meaningful effects on both experiential outcomes and monetary valuations.

Third, the research offers actionable implications for practitioners. It identifies emotional variety as a strategic design principle that can be leveraged by firms and cultural institutions to deepen engagement, enrich experiences, and differentiate offerings in competitive and emotionally saturated markets.

Finally, by highlighting the context-dependent role of negative emotions and calling attention to unanswered questions about mechanisms and boundaries, the research opens new avenues for future inquiry into emotional dynamics in consumption.

EMOTION PENALTY IN POLITICAL SPEECH: HOW LIBERALS' PREFERENCE FOR RATIONALITY RESULTS IN IRONIC POLITICAL CHOICES

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Keywords: Emotion, Attitudes and Persuasion, Political ideology, Decision-making, Experiments and Experimental Design

Description: Across four experiments (N=1002), we find an emotion penalty, stronger among liberals: simply including emotion in political speeches reduces political support, which challenges the common belief and practice that emotions in political communication are always beneficial and effective.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Political discourse has become increasingly emotionally charged (Cavendish 2023), which is fueling polarization (Rahrig et al. 2024) and shaping how consumers evaluate candidates and vote (Salmela and Von Scheve 2018). While this trend has intensified in recent years, emotions have long been used across the political spectrum to persuade (Webster and Albertson 2022), and are widely assumed to strengthen persuasion. Accordingly, political communication research has mainly compared the effectiveness of different emotions (e.g. Brader 2005; Van 't Riet et al. 2018), consistently drawing on evidence that emotions boost persuasion (Petty and

Briñol 2014) – without having examined whether emotional delivery itself, regardless of valence, benefits or harms political arguments. The underlying, untested assumption is that emotional delivery benefits political arguments.

This leads us to ask: What is the effect of emotional expression in political speech on perceptions of rationality, political support, and voter attitudes and behaviors? Understanding the true effect of emotional delivery on political arguments is crucial since it affects electoral outcomes and the health of public debate.

In this research we posit and demonstrate an "emotion penalty": a systematic tendency for consumers to evaluate political arguments less favorably when delivered with emotion (vs. delivered neutrally), which means emotions may, in fact, undermine political arguments.

Method And Data

To test our theory, we conducted four experiments with balanced liberal and conservative samples (N = 1002) in two cultures, UK and US. We pretested several topics, arguments and emotions and selected the most appropriate ones.

In study 1 (N=300), UK participants listened to a liberal economic policy argument delivered with an emotional (i.e. enthusiastic) versus neutral tone, then rated how likely they were to vote for the speaker (-100 to 100 = *Definitely yes (vs. not), I am 100% sure I would (vs. not) support*). Participants also rated to what extent they agreed that the argument presented was rational (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*). Political ideology was measured with a single item "*When it comes to politics, do you think of yourself as*:" (from 1 = *Extreme Left* to 7 = *Extreme Right*) (Aybar et al., 2024).

Study 2 (*N*=201) employed a similar design. US participants listened to a liberal fiscal policy argument, delivered with an emotional (i.e. angry) versus neutral tone, and then answered the same items as in study 1.

In studies 3 (UK) and 4 (US) (*N* = 501), we replicated study 1 and 2 with conservative arguments.

Summary of Findings

The predicted interaction between condition and political ideology emerged across both studies 1 and 2: Liberals voted for a liberal candidate less when liberal arguments were expressed with emotion (vs. neutrally). The effect was not significant among conservatives. Liberals also perceived the emotion-laden argument as less rational, while conservatives didn't.

Moderated mediation revealed that emotional delivery reduced liberals' rationality perceptions, which in turn lowered their voting intentions; no such effect occurred among conservatives.

In studies 3 and 4, while emotions made the argument seem generally less rational, and lowered voting intentions, there was no interaction between condition and political ideology on any measures: Conservatives' voting intentions for their candidate remained higher than liberals' - no paradoxical voting intentions emerged.

In summary, while emotions are used across the political spectrum (Ridout and Searless 2011), they can backfire particularly among liberals. Despite valuing rationality, liberals react irrationally by penalizing emotional appeals from their own candidates. This paradox suggests that liberal candidates may inadvertently weaken their own support by delivering emotionally

charged messages. These findings challenge the conventional wisdom that emotions enhance political persuasion and offer valuable insights for leaders and political communication specialists to craft more effective communication strategies.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research challenges a long-standing assumption in political communication and persuasion research: that emotions strengthen political arguments. Prior studies compare the effectiveness of different emotions but do not test whether the presence of emotion - irrespective of valence - enhances or undermines persuasion. We introduce and demonstrate an "emotion penalty", whereby emotionally delivered arguments are evaluated less favorably than identical arguments delivered neutrally, due to a common lay belief that emotions signal irrationality. This finding nuances dominant theories of persuasion that assume emotional appeals are inherently persuasive, advancing understanding of the interplay between delivery style, perceived rationality, and political consumer behavior.

We further contribute to marketing by identifying perceived rationality as a key mediator: voters who value rationality interpret emotional appeals as less rational and therefore less persuasive. Notably, we uncover a paradox among liberals who, despite historically favoring emotional communication, penalize emotional delivery from their own candidates more than conservatives do. This extends research on political consumer behavior, persuasion, and ideology by showing how philosophical values shape message reception in unexpected ways.

Our findings also offer practical insights for political candidates, strategists, and policymakers, who can refine communication strategies by avoiding emotional delivery that may weaken support—particularly among liberal audiences. This is particularly important amid rising

emotionality in politics and increasing polarization. Non-profits, advocacy groups, media organizations, and civic educators may also draw on this work to better understand voter reactions and foster healthier democratic discourse.

References are available upon request.

Extended Abstract Template

Feeling the Sound, Seeing the Taste: A Comprehensive Review of Crossmodal Sensory Effects on Consumer Behavior

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Keywords: Crossmodal Sensory Effects, Multisensory Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Sensory Perception, Systematic Review

Description: Crossmodal Sensory Effects, Multisensory Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Sensory Perception, Systematic Review

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – 200 Words

Consumer experiences are inherently multisensory, as individuals integrate visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and haptic cues when evaluating products, brands, and environments. Research in marketing and consumer psychology shows that stimulation in one sensory modality can systematically influence perception in another, a phenomenon known as crossmodal sensory interaction. While robust findings exist for certain sensory combinations, particularly those involving vision, taste, and smell, empirical evidence remains fragmented and uneven across modalities.

Prior reviews have mainly focused on selected sensory pairings or specific contexts, offering valuable but partial insights. Consequently, there is limited clarity regarding which crossmodal interactions are well established, which are supported by emerging but inconsistent evidence, and which remain largely unexplored in consumer research. This lack of systematic mapping constrains theory development and limits the effective application of multisensory principles in marketing practice.

Against this background, this study addresses the following research question: Which combinations of sensory modalities have been extensively studied, which are moderately investigated, and which remain largely unexplored in empirical research on consumer behaviour? By classifying crossmodal sensory effects, the study provides a structured overview of the current knowledge base and informs future multisensory marketing research.

Method And Data (Not Applicable For Nonempirical Papers) – 200 Words

This study employs a systematic review methodology to synthesize empirical research on crossmodal sensory interactions in marketing and consumer psychology. A comprehensive literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Search terms combined core constructs related to crossmodal perception, multisensory integration, marketing, and consumer behavior.

Studies were included if they empirically examined interactions between at least two sensory modalities, reported consumer related outcomes, and were published in peer reviewed outlets. Conceptual papers, unimodal sensory studies, and articles without consumer relevance were excluded. Applying these criteria resulted in a final sample of 120 empirical studies.

Each study was systematically coded according to the sensory modalities involved, the direction of sensory influence, and the consistency of reported effects. Based on citation patterns, methodological rigor, and replication across contexts, sensory combinations were classified as well investigated, moderately investigated, or largely unexplored. This structured classification enables a comprehensive mapping of the empirical landscape and provides a transparent basis for identifying research gaps and future directions in multisensory marketing.

Summary of Findings – 200 words

The systematic review reveals substantial imbalances in the empirical investigation of crossmodal sensory interactions in consumer behavior. Sensory combinations involving vision, taste, and smell are extensively studied and show consistent effects on perception, evaluation, and choice. In contrast, interactions involving auditory–haptic and olfactory–auditory pairings remain largely unexplored, despite theoretical relevance and suggestive findings from adjacent disciplines.

Moderately investigated combinations, such as auditory–gustatory or visual–olfactory interactions, show promising but context dependent effects, often moderated by sensory congruence, product category, and situational factors. These findings indicate that crossmodal effects are neither uniform nor additive but depend on the alignment and integration of sensory cues.

Overall, the results demonstrate that current multisensory marketing knowledge is shaped by methodological convenience and established research traditions rather than by the strategic relevance of sensory combinations. This uneven distribution limits theory development and constrains the application of multisensory principles in emerging contexts such as digital, immersive, and technology mediated consumer experiences. By systematically mapping well studied, emerging, and neglected sensory pairings,

the review provides a structured overview of the empirical landscape and highlights underutilized opportunities for future multisensory marketing research and practice.

Statement of Key Contributions – 200 words

This paper contributes to marketing and consumer psychology research by providing a systematic synthesis of empirical work on crossmodal sensory interactions. By reviewing and classifying 120 peer reviewed studies, the paper consolidates a fragmented literature and offers an integrative overview of how interactions between vision, sound, smell, taste, and touch shape consumer perception and behavior.

First, the study advances multisensory marketing theory by introducing a structured classification framework that distinguishes well investigated, moderately investigated, and largely unexplored sensory combinations. This framework highlights asymmetries in empirical attention and clarifies where theoretical knowledge is robust and where it remains underdeveloped. By mapping crossmodal effects across all five sensory modalities, the paper extends prior reviews that focused on selected pairings or specific contexts.

Second, the findings outline a clear research agenda by identifying underexplored interactions, particularly auditory haptic and olfactory auditory pairings, as promising avenues for future research. These gaps are especially relevant in emerging digital, immersive, and AI mediated consumer environments.

Third, the review offers practical relevance by informing evidence based sensory strategies for product design, branding, retail atmospherics, and digital interfaces. Overall, the paper bridges theoretical synthesis and practical guidance, supporting rigorous research development and informed multisensory marketing practice.

References are available upon request.

TITLE: FROM DISSONANCE TO CONTINUANCE: UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN QUICK COMMERCE PLATFORMS

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Keywords: Quick Commerce, Cognitive dissonance Theory, Behavioural Reasoning Theory, Consumer Behaviour

Description:

This study examines consumer continuance intention toward quick commerce platforms in emerging economies through the lens of post-adoption evaluation. Drawing on Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Behavioral Reasoning Theory, it analyses how value reinforcement factors and ethical–experiential concerns influence post-adoption cognitive dissonance. The research highlights the role of social and environmental responsibility concerns in shaping continued platform usage. The findings offer insights into sustainable digital consumption and platform retention behavior.

Extended Abstract

Research Questions

Quick commerce (Q-commerce) platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart have rapidly transformed retail consumption in emerging markets by offering ultra-fast deliveries within 10–20 minutes. While these platforms deliver unmatched convenience, they simultaneously raise concerns regarding environmental sustainability, gig-worker welfare, urban congestion, and ethically questionable interface designs. As consumers become increasingly aware of these implications, their post-adoption evaluations may extend beyond functional utility to include moral and psychological assessments. Existing mobile commerce research has largely emphasized adoption drivers such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and trust, while offering limited insight into why users continue or discontinue usage after adoption. In particular, the role of negative reasoning, ethical conflict, and post-consumption discomfort remains underexplored. This creates a critical gap in understanding continuance intention, especially in high-frequency, low-involvement digital services such as Q-commerce.

Grounded in Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT) and Behavioral Reasoning Theory (BRT), this study addresses the following research question:

RQ1. How do value reinforcement factors influence continuance intention toward quick commerce platforms?

RQ2. How do expectation violations and social–environmental responsibility concerns contribute to post-adoption cognitive dissonance?

RQ3. Does post-adoption cognitive dissonance mediate the relationship between these factors and continuance intention?

To address this question, the study proposes an integrative framework that incorporates both enabling forces (reasons for continuance) and inhibiting forces (reasons against continuance), positioning Post-Adoption Cognitive Dissonance (PACD) as a central mediating mechanism.

Method and Data

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from users of major Q-commerce platforms in India, including Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart. Respondents were required to have placed at least one order within the preceding three months to ensure recency of platform experience.

Using a purposive sampling approach, a total of 335 valid responses were obtained from urban and semi-urban regions of West Bengal. Data collection involved both offline questionnaires and online survey distribution through digital networks. The sample size exceeded recommended thresholds for complex structural equation models.

Measurement items were adapted from established scales in mobile commerce, service marketing, and consumer behavior literature. The model included:

- Value Reinforcement Factors (VRF)
- Expectation Violation Factors (EVF)
- Social and Environmental Responsibility Concerns (SERC)
- Post-Adoption Cognitive Dissonance (PACD) as a mediator

All constructs were measured using five-point Likert scales. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4, suitable for exploratory theory development, higher-order constructs, and non-normal data conditions

Summary of Findings

The structural model demonstrated strong explanatory and predictive power, explaining over 50% of variance in continuance intention.

Key findings reveal that:

- Perceived value for money, social influence, and trust in platform significantly enhance continuance intention.
- Perceived time-saving, despite being central to Q-commerce positioning, does not significantly influence continuance, suggesting normalization of delivery speed as a baseline expectation.
- Perceived risk and delivery inconsistency significantly increase post-adoption cognitive dissonance.
- Social and Environmental Responsibility Concerns (SERC) exert a strong positive effect on PACD, indicating that ethical and sustainability issues generate meaningful psychological discomfort among users.
- Post-Adoption Cognitive Dissonance negatively influences continuance intention, confirming its pivotal mediating role between experiential evaluations and behavioral outcomes.

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that consumers' decisions to continue using Q-commerce platforms are shaped not only by functional benefits but also by ethical conflict, emotional discomfort, and post-usage reflection.

Key Contributions

This research offers several important theoretical and practical contributions.

First, the study extends Cognitive Dissonance Theory by conceptualizing post-adoption cognitive dissonance as a dynamic evaluative mechanism operating in continuous digital consumption contexts, rather than as a one-time post-purchase emotion.

Second, it introduces and empirically validates Social and Environmental Responsibility Concerns (SERC) as a multidimensional construct, demonstrating that moral and sustainability considerations significantly influence post-adoption platform behavior.

Third, the research advances digital consumption theory by proposing a novel Value Reinforcement–Expectation Violation (VRF–EVF) framework, which captures the asymmetrical influence of enabling and inhibiting cognitions on continuance intention.

Fourth, by integrating Behavioral Reasoning Theory with Cognitive Dissonance Theory, the study provides a dual-theoretical lens that explains how “reasons for” and “reasons against” coexist and compete in shaping post-adoption decisions.

Finally, the findings contribute to the emerging market literature by illustrating that even convenience-driven services such as Q-commerce are subject to ethical evaluation, highlighting the growing importance of responsible platform design and sustainability-oriented engagement strategies.

“Reference are available upon request”

FROM POLARIZATION TO CONNECTION: MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING TRUST AND INCLUSION ACROSS DIVIDED CONSUMER SEGMENTS

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Keywords: Consumer Polarization, Brand Trust, Inclusive Marketing, Brand Authenticity, Social Identity Theory.

Description: This research introduces the Bridge Marketing Model, an empirically grounded framework that helps brands build trust across ideologically divided consumer segments by shifting the focus from message content to strategic message framing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In the modern marketplace, consumer polarization has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central organizing principle of consumer identity (Weber et al. 2021). This *affective polarization* reflects divisions rooted in identity and emotion rather than simple policy disagreement (Iyengar et al. 2012; Mason 2018), rendering traditional demographic segmentation insufficient (Holliday et al. 2024). Major industry research indicates that 74% of consumers believe that a brand's impact on society makes trust a critical purchasing factor (Edelman 2020). However, brand

messages are often filtered through ideological echo chambers (Sunstein 2018) or clash with varying moral intuitions (Haidt 2012), leading to potential alienation or boycotts of the brand. This study addresses the gap between market reality and current brand strategy by exploring how marketers can move from diagnosing polarization to prescribing actionable solutions to reduce polarization. Guided by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), this study investigates the following questions: 1) What communication builds questions? 2) How can brands maintain authenticity while appealing to diverse values systems? and 3) What role does *superordinate identity* construction (Gaertner and Dovidio 2014) play in bridging consumer divides?

Method and Data

To generate contextually grounded insights, this study employed a qualitative research design using in-depth semi-structured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). We used purposive sampling to recruit 35 participants with a robust representation across ideological segments: 12 progressives, 9 moderates, 11 conservatives, and 3 non-aligned participants. The sample comprised 88% working professionals recruited through university alumni networks and professional panels to ensure that the insights reflected established consumers. The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and explored experiences of brand inclusion, alienation, and perceived inauthenticity. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. To ensure rigor, we maintained a structured audit trail (Nowell et al. 2017) and conducted a negative case analysis (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Recruitment reached thematic saturation at interview 30, with five additional interviews confirming stability. While providing deep insights into consumer behavior, a noted limitation is the study's primary focus on general retail and service categories, which may vary in high-stakes industries.

Summary of Findings

The primary insight is the primacy of message framing over ideologically divisive content. Participants indicated that how a brand communicates— its tone, transparency, and posture— serves as a stronger determinant of trust than taking explicit stances. The resulting Bridge Marketing Model addresses the research questions through four dimensions: (1) Shared Value Architecture and (2) Measured Neutrality address RQ1 by anchoring campaigns in universal human values (e.g., neighborhood safety) and justifying non-partisanship as mission-consistent; (3) Authentic Vulnerability addresses RQ2 by humanizing brands through strategic transparency; and (4) Participatory Narrative Construction addresses RQ3 by reframing the brand as a story-enabler. The model follows a sequencing logic in which the Shared Value Architecture serves as the essential entry point. This is critical because establishing a superordinate identity (Gaertner and Dovidio 2014) reduces initial identity-based defensiveness, making subsequent dimensions legible as sincere rather than performative. This framework helps brands move beyond woke-washing (Vredenburg et al. 2020) by focusing on stylistic delivery and strategic content selection that bypasses identity-based filters, though even well-explained neutrality may fail when crossing moral red lines (Haidt 2012).

Key Contributions

For academics, we operationalize the Common Ingroup Identity Model's concept of superordinate identity in a commercial context, providing a pathway for consumer recategorization. We extend the literature on brand authenticity by introducing Authentic Vulnerability, reframing authenticity from a passive state of non-hypocrisy to an active

communication of imperfections that builds trust. Additionally, we refine theories on brand silence by conceptualizing Measured Neutrality, showing that effective non-partisanship requires proactive communication of a unifying rationale. For practitioners, the Bridge Marketing Model provides an actionable compass for navigating hyper-fragmented identity politics. The model specifies boundary conditions, acknowledging that even well-explained neutrality may fail when it crosses moral red lines rooted in sacred intuitions (Haidt 2012). By shifting the focus from message content to message framing, the model provides tangible pathways, such as universal value anchoring and ceding narrative control, to mitigate the risk of alienation. This research empowers brand leaders to transform from partisans in cultural conflict into facilitators of inclusion, building resilient, relational trust across ideological divides.

References are available upon request.

FUNCTIONAL OVERLOAD: RETHINKING CHOICE COMPLEXITY FOR BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID CONSUMERS

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Keywords: Subjective cognitive load, Scarcity mindset, Decision fatigue, Perceived decision agency, Functional Overload

Description: The study reframes choice overload at the Bottom of the Pyramid as *functional overload*, demonstrating that decision difficulty arises from converging cognitive load, scarcity mindset, decision fatigue, and reduced agency—even in small choice sets—thereby challenging size-based overload models and offering actionable marketing and policy insights.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how decision-making at the Bottom of the Pyramid is shaped when choice complexity interacts with cognitive constraints. Dominant choice overload theories link dissatisfaction and deferral primarily to assortment size, assuming stable cognitive capacity and market familiarity (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000). These assumptions align with affluent settings but reflect BOP contexts characterized by scarcity, low literacy, and infrastructural uncertainty (Hamilton et al., 2019). Accordingly, the study poses the following research question: *RQ1: How does functional overload, which integrates choice complexity with internal cognitive and emotional constraints, shape decision satisfaction, choice deferral, and perceived decision difficulty in BOP contexts?* This question reframes overload as a mismatch between decision demands and functional readiness rather than a numerical excess of options. It examines whether subjective cognitive load, scarcity mindset, decision fatigue, and perceived decision agency jointly constitute overload, rather than merely moderating it (Botti & Iyengar, 2006; Inesi et al., 2011). By addressing these interacting forces, this research explains why even modest assortments can trigger hesitation, discomfort, and withdrawal among consumers who are structurally constrained. Therefore, the research question extends overload theory toward a psychosocial perspective that captures the realities of subsistence marketplaces and informs marketing and policy design.

Method And Data

We conducted a between-subjects experiment to investigate how assortment size affects decision-making among Bottom of the Pyramid consumers. Two hundred ninety-seven adults from peri-urban Kolkata, India, were recruited through purposive intercept sampling at markets, ration shops, and kirana stores. All earned below ₹20,000 monthly, had prior sachet-FMCG purchase experience, and provided consent. Participants were randomly assigned to either a small choice set of four shampoo sachets or a large set of sixteen, displayed using standardized laminated mock-ups under a two-minute time constraint. Instructions were delivered orally, supported by culturally familiar visuals to ensure comprehension. Choice satisfaction, deferral, and perceived difficulty were measured using established scales. Subjective cognitive load, scarcity mindset, decision fatigue, and perceived agency were modelled as a higher-order functional overload construct. A pretest ensured clarity. Reliability and validity met accepted thresholds. Manipulation checks confirmed that participants perceived the large-set condition as more complex. Data satisfied normality and variance assumptions. Structural equation modelling tested direct and mediated effects. Moderation and moderated mediation were examined using the PROCESS macro. Nonlinear patterns were explored through artificial neural networks, while fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis identified multiple configurational pathways leading to satisfaction or deferral.

Summary of Findings

The results show that increasing choice set size significantly worsened decision outcomes among BOP consumers. Participants exposed to larger assortments reported lower satisfaction, higher cognitive load, greater perceived difficulty, and more frequent choice deferral than those facing smaller sets, supporting the basic overload hypotheses. Structural equation modelling further revealed that larger choice sets elevated subjective cognitive load and reduced perceived decision agency. These internal states, in turn, explained downstream outcomes. Cognitive load mediated the negative effect of assortment size on satisfaction, while reduced agency mediated the likelihood of deferring choice. Moderation analyses demonstrated that scarcity mindset intensified the adverse effects of large assortments on satisfaction, deferral, and difficulty, indicating that chronic resource concerns amplify overload experiences. Moderated mediation results showed that decision fatigue strengthened the indirect effect of choice set size on satisfaction through cognitive load, with effects becoming strongest at higher fatigue levels. Artificial neural network analysis confirmed that cognitive load and perceived agency were the most influential predictors of both satisfaction and deferral, far outweighing the direct role of assortment size. Finally, fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis identified multiple pathways leading to low satisfaction and high deferral, consistently featuring high cognitive load, low agency, and fatigue.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our study advances the understanding of choice overload at the Bottom of the Pyramid by conceptualising it as a multidimensional condition rather than a simple consequence of large assortments. We introduce the concept of functional overload, which integrates subjective cognitive load, perceived scarcity, decision fatigue, and diminished perceived agency. The findings demonstrate that even small choice sets can be psychologically taxing when structural constraints intersect with vulnerability. These findings challenge dominant assortment-size explanations. While existing research has treated perceived agency as a passive outcome of choice, we show that agency actively mediates post-choice dissonance and deferral. Decision fatigue and scarcity mindset further intensify the effects of choice complexity, amplifying overload experiences. Methodologically, the combination of structural equation modelling, artificial neural networks, and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis indicates that overload emerges through multiple internal and contextual pathways, rather than through linear causation.

Managerially, rather than reducing the number of SKUs alone, effective interventions require cognitive-fit marketing, intuitive portfolio structures, benefit-based segmentation, and clear visual cues. Staged choice presentation, starter kits, and cross-brand bundles can lower uncertainty and facilitate trial. Local-language packaging and in-store signals can enhance perceived agency and confidence.

References are available upon request.

GIVING THANKS: HOW MANAGERS SHOULD RESPOND TO COMPLIMENTS IN POSITIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH

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KEYWORDS

Compliments, online reviews, word-of-mouth, positive reviews, managerial responses

DESCRIPTION

This research examines what words managers should use in responding to positive reviews so that consumers react positively.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is no longer a simple consumer-to-consumer exchange (Moore and Lafreniere 2020): 21.1% of the reviews posted on Google Local in 2020 were accompanied by a reply from the firm. Despite this low response rate, managers ought to reply to reviews: nearly 90% of consumers rely on reviews in making purchase decisions (Russell 2024) and over 70% of consumers expect managers to respond to reviews (Bazaarvoice 2020).

While managerial responses are unsurprising in the context of negative WOM (e.g., Herhausen et al. 2022), the value of managerial responses to positive WOM is less certain, as some research has found negative effects of responses to positive reviews (Wang and Chaudhry 2018). Further, industry and academia diverge in their recommendations for how best to respond. Review platforms recommend longer, tailored responses that repeat positive aspects of the review (e.g., Yelp; Moon 2023), while academics recommend brief, generic responses (e.g., "thank you"; Manis, Wang and Chaudhry 2020). Thus, there is little consensus on how managers should respond to positive reviews, and it remains unclear whether such responses can impact consumers positively. We address this issue by developing a norms-based model of what managers should say in response to positive reviews.

Method and Data

First, in a pre-test, we find that practitioners think managers should thank the reviewer and repeat a positive aspect of the review, which is in line with the conversational norm in everyday conversation to agree with the speaker. However, consumers view writing a positive review as comparable to complimenting the firm, so they think managers should also follow an additional conversational norm to be humble.

Second, we build on work that describes how people respond to compliments (e.g., Pomerantz 1978) to theorize about how managers can respond to positive reviews normatively. We propose that managers should *downplay* the compliments that their firms receive via positive reviews (e.g., "Dinner was fantastic!"), by shifting the content of the compliment (e.g., "Thank you! We're glad dinner was good.") or by shifting the recipient of the compliment (e.g., "Thank you! Our suppliers are a big help."). We theorize about why and when these strategies will elicit positive consumer outcomes, and test these strategies in six experiments.

Third, we find that our two recommended downplay strategies are underutilized in firm responses to reviews on Google Local.

Summary of Findings

We find that in the review context, consumers think managers should follow norms that guide responses to compliments, by agreeing with the speaker and being humble. We propose that managers can comply with both norms by saying thank you and downplaying the compliment. Multiple experiments show that, compared to no response and to responses recommended by industry and academics, downplay responses can positively impact consumers' choice, evaluations, and engagement intentions. Downplay responses are similar to these other responses in that they convey the manager's intention to agree with the reviewer (by offering a token of appreciation), but they have a greater positive impact because they also convey the manager's humility—and therefore better adhere to this context's additional conversational norm. We show via mediation analysis that inferences of humility and adherence to norms sequentially mediate the positive effect of downplay responses on outcomes. Finally, while both downplay strategies (shift content and shift recipient) can positively impact readers, separately and jointly, we find boundary conditions for these effects. Downplay responses are most effective when they: downplay instead of merely suggesting that the firm was overpraised; credit co-participants instead of nonparticipants; and shift to moderate praise terms instead of neutral descriptors.

Key Contributions

To marketing theory, we contribute by providing the first empirical test of different responses to compliments, and by using a norms-based lens to help explain why some responses perform better than others. Second, we identify a new pathway—humility and adherence to the

injunctive conversational norm—through which managerial responses influence consumers. Third, we identify three moderators of our proposed downplay strategies that highlight when they are most effective.

To marketing practice, we offer insights for firms and review platforms. First, our experiments show a positive impact of appropriate managerial responses to positive reviews (compared to no responses). Second, we examine how managers should respond to such reviews. We compare responses that downplay the compliment to responses recommended by industry and academics, and find that downplay responses more positively impact consumers' choice and evaluations of the firm. We also offer guidance on how to downplay the compliment by examining whether, to whom, and how much the manager shifts credit. Third, our findings show that normative managerial responses to positive reviews can increase user engagement. Thus, platforms might benefit from enabling users to interact with managerial responses as they do with reviews, for example, by rating them as helpful.

References are available upon request.

GOOD IS MORE CAUSAL THAN BAD: CORRELATION FRAMING AFFECTS PERCEIVED CAUSALITY

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Keywords: Consumer causal judgment, framing effects, valence asymmetry, density hypothesis.

Description: Consumers are more likely to believe that correlations framed in terms of positive outcomes (e.g., “Frequent jazz music listeners tend to have *better memory* than frequent pop music listeners”) reflect causality than those framed in terms of negative outcomes (e.g., “Frequent pop music listeners tend to have *worse memory* than frequent jazz music listeners”).

EXTENDED ABSTRSCT

Research Question

Understanding how consumers update causal beliefs is essential as they guide individuals' predictions and actions (Sloman 2005). One of the most prevalent and important sources of causal beliefs is correlation (Cheng 1997), especially correlational statements widely publicized in advertising and the media. Importantly, many correlations are framed either negatively, emphasizing harmful or undesirable outcomes, or positively, emphasizing beneficial or desirable outcomes.

Although the two framings are logically equivalent, the choice of correlation framing is not inconsequential. We theorize and find that positively framed correlations lead to higher perceived causality than negatively framed correlations.

We build our theory on the density hypothesis, which suggests that people perceive positive information as more similar to each other than negative information (Koch et al. 2016; Unkelbach et al. 2008). As a result, people are more likely to generalize observed positive descriptions to form global impressions than negative ones. For example, knowing someone is honest leads people to also see them as industrious, whereas knowing someone is dishonest is less likely to make people see them as lazy (Gräf and Unkelbach 2016). Extending this, we propose that correlation framing can impact global impressions. For example, when a correlation is framed positively, such as stating that morning tea drinkers tend to have better memory than afternoon tea drinkers, it induces the perception that morning tea drinkers are also better in other health aspects. In contrast, when a correlation is framed negatively, such as stating that afternoon tea drinkers tend to have worse memory than morning tea drinkers, it is less likely to induce the perception that afternoon tea drinkers are worse in other health aspects. We further propose that the stronger global impressions produced by positive framings can, in turn, increase perceived causality.

Method And Data

In all studies, we presented participants with either positively- or negatively-framed correlations from survey findings indicating that individuals with different consumption patterns tend to have different health characteristics. This operationalization of correlations reflects the way correlations are commonly communicated in newsletters and has been adopted in prior research (Daniels and Kupor 2023). In all studies (except for Study 5), we measured perceived causality using 7-point Likert items adapted from prior research. For example: Why do these respondents have different stomach health? (1 = *Definitely for reasons unrelated to the timing of tea consumption*, 7 = *Definitely because the timing of tea consumption affects stomach health*).

Summary of Findings

Studies 1A (N = 802) and 1B (501) demonstrated the main effect cross multiple scenarios and found that people reported a higher perceived causality in the positive framing condition than in the negative framing condition, even though positive outcomes (e.g., lower stroke risk) are less fluent to process than negative ones (e.g., higher stroke risk).

Study 2 (N = 800) extended the framing effect to correlational statements with numerical difference information and tested its influence on perceived magnitude. Half of the participants made causal judgments; the other half rated the correlation's magnitude (How large is the observed correlation? 1 = *very small*, 7 = *very large*). Positive framing increased perceived causality ($p < .001$), but did not affect magnitude judgments ($p = .771$).

Studies 3A -3C used a two-stage causal chain design to test whether differences in global impression building drive the effect. Study 3A asked participants in the positive (vs. negative) framing condition to predict how likely the reference group was better (vs. worse) in other health domains and found stronger global impressions in the positive ($M = 4.73$) than negative ($M = 3.96$; $p < .001$) framing condition. Study 3B (N = 600) replicated this and found that comparison framing (e.g., one group has worse or better stomach health than another) alone can induce differences in global impressions. Study 3C (N = 402) showed that global impressions in other domains significantly influenced focal causal judgments ($p < .001$).

In Study 4 (N = 801), we provide causal evidence by intervening in the global impression formation. We predicted that introducing valence-inconsistent information would attenuate the framing effect. Specifically, in the intervention condition, participants in the positive (vs. negative) framing condition learned that morning tea drinkers had better (vs. worse) memory, worse (vs. better) sleep quality, and worse (vs. better) heart health. The intervention significantly moderated the framing effect ($p = .033$): the framing effect replicated in the control condition but was attenuated in the intervention condition, primarily by reducing perceived causality in the positive framing condition.

Study 5 (N = 800) found that correlation framing can influence consumers' choices in an incentive-compatible setting. Participants were more likely to select the promoted product in the positive (51.9%) than in the negative framing condition (42.6%; $p = .009$). This was mediated by their causality judgments ($Z_{mediation} = 4.66$, $p < .001$).

Key Contributions

Overall, we found that people reported higher perceived causality when presented with positively framed correlations compared to negatively framed ones. This research contributes to the causal judgment literature by linking it to the density hypothesis for the first time. It also has practical importance in the big data era, where correlations are pervasive.

HIGHWAY TO HEALTH: IMPACT OF CONTESTS ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Keywords: Contests, Platforms, Customer engagement

Description

This study compares various contest designs on the overall physical activity outcomes of users in the context of a health-tracking application in India.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In this study, we examine how users' physical activity levels, especially their average outcomes, are impacted by different types of contests—winner-takes-all (WTA), sweepstakes (SSC), and Tullock contests (TUC) (Tullock 2001). A WTA contest is where the rewards are guaranteed to be won by the top performers. In SSC contests, the winners are randomly chosen from eligible participants with equal probabilities. In TUC contests, on the other hand, while the winners are randomly chosen from eligible participants, the probabilities of a participant being chosen are proportional to their effort compared to others. The three contests also represent different points on the skill-chance continuum.

The study is conducted in the context of a health app in India that helps users capture their cycling activities and logs the number of kilometres cycled by them. Consequently, our study focuses on the following research questions in the given context:

RQ1: What is the impact of different types of contests—WTA, SSC, TUC—on the average overall kilometres cycled by participating users in a city?

RQ2: How does the impact vary for participants with varying amounts of average weekly cycling intensities?

Method and Data

We ran a field experiment among users of a cycling activity tracking app in India. We chose three cities for our study, with each subjected to a different contest condition—WTA, SSC, TUC, respectively—for two weeks. In each city, there were three rewards of 1000 rupee value each to be won. We collected data for weekly cycling distances for each user on the app from two weeks before running the contest to one week after the contest. No other contests were run on the app for any of the cities in India during these five weeks to avoid any confounding effects.

We used difference-in-differences (DiD) method to study the effect of the treatments on the average weekly cycling distances for the participants. A control group was created for participants in a treatment city by comparing them with users in other non-treatment cities using propensity score matching (PSM). The variables used in PSM included demographic, psychographic, and behavioral factors. This alleviated any endogeneity concerns that could arise due to self-selection. The regression model is given in Equation 1.

$$\log(distance)_{it} = \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot post_t + \beta_2 \cdot treated_i + \boldsymbol{\delta} \cdot (treated_i \times post_t) + \gamma_i \cdot X_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

The term $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ is the variable of interest; a significant non-zero value indicates the causal effect of treatment.

Summary of Findings

The results show that average cycling activity decreases in WTA contests. While the SSC contest does not significantly impact the cycling activity of participants, the TUC contest shows a significant improvement in the cycling activity of participants. We further divided users into quartiles based on their average weekly cycling distances, with quartile 1 comprising participants in the lowest 25th percentile of performance, and quartile 4 comprising participants in the highest 25th percentile of performance. The users in SSC show no significant impact of the contest across all quartiles. The users in the bottom three quartiles in WTA condition show a significant decrease in their performance. In TUC condition, users in the top two quartiles show a significant increase in their performance while the bottom two show no significant change. As a robustness check, we defined quartiles based on life-time distances and ran the analysis. The results were found to be consistent.

Key Contributions

Our work makes several contributions to literature and practice. First, prior research on their effect on physical activity has largely generalized findings from WTA contests to all contest types, despite substantial evidence in the literature suggesting that different contest designs can produce heterogeneous effects on performance. This study focuses on three widely used but theoretically distinct contest formats. We find that WTA reduces overall physical activity while TUC increases it. SSC leads to no significant change in physical activity.

Second, we bridge Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) and Goal Systems Theory (GST) by showing that external rewards affect extrinsic and intrinsic motivations differently in each contest design, resulting in a different outcome.

Third, while literature on health apps such as Fitbit supports gamification techniques, such as contests, we argue that the contingencies of reward attainability and crowding out need to be considered.

In terms of managerial implications, health apps such as Fitbit should reconsider their most popular contest mechanisms of WTA and SSC contests, as they do not increase physical activity levels. Importantly, none of the three contests improved the physical activity levels of low performers, which is primarily the goal of all such efforts of these apps.

References

References are available upon request.

HOW DELIBERATE CONTENT CREATION AMPLIFIES PERCEIVED INJUSTICE AND PREDICTS RETALIATORY BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: perceived injustice, consumer confidence, protest participation, retaliatory behavior, time-series modeling

Description: This paper examines whether deliberate content creation can amplify feelings of perceived injustice, and if expressions of perceived injustice in deliberate, less moderated online content can foreshadow real-world retaliatory outcomes such as changes in consumer confidence and protest participation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

The proliferation of digital content has made social listening central to how marketers monitor consumer sentiment and anticipate societal disruption. Yet most current approaches rely on impulsive, highly moderated content such as tweets, which are constrained by platform design and automated filtering. This raises a critical question: are we systematically overlooking slower, deeper signals of discontent embedded in deliberate, less moderated content, and if so, what do these signals predict? Specifically, this research asks whether deliberate content creation amplifies perceived injustice and whether expressions of perceived injustice in such content can foreshadow downstream retaliatory outcomes. We conceptualize retaliatory outcomes along a spectrum of increasing aggressiveness, from latent (consumer confidence), to instrumental (protest participation). Our first study examines the psychological mechanism: does writing about injustice in a deliberate rather than impulsive manner heighten perceived injustice and escalate retaliatory intentions? Our second study examines the predictive utility: do linguistic markers of perceived injustice embedded in long-form, less moderated consumer-authored narratives reliably precede macro-level indicators of societal unrest and economic pessimism? In doing so, we seek to reposition deliberate, long-form, consumer-generated content as a valuable early-warning signal for marketers, policymakers, and platform managers.

Method and Data

We answer these questions using two complementary studies that combine experimental

methods with large-scale text analytics and time-series modeling. Study 1 is a between-subjects experiment in which adults read a consumer service failure vignette and wrote an online review either immediately (impulsive condition) or after a brief delay designed to induce more reflective processing (deliberate condition). We then measured perceived injustice, protest participation intention (boycott-based), and hate crime intention, along with control variables such as anger rumination. Manipulation checks used narrativity markers (length, temporal sequencing, causal connectors, verb tense) to confirm that the delay induced more deliberate, story-like content creation.

Study 2 analyzes a corpus of 1,620 self-published e-books from Smashwords (over 58 million words) as an example of deliberate, less moderated consumer-generated content. Using LIWC-based natural language processing, we applied a validated "grievance" dictionary to quantify perceived injustice expressions in each quarter. We then estimated Vector Autoregression models linking quarterly grievance language to two U.S. outcomes from 2008–2022: consumer confidence, and protest events, controlling for GDP, inflation, inequality, hate crime legislation, election proximity, trust in government, and voter turnout.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 shows that cognitive mode during content creation matters. Compared to impulsive reviewers, participants in the deliberate condition produced longer, more narrative reviews with greater temporal and causal structure, confirming successful manipulation of processing mode. The deliberate condition yielded significantly higher perceived injustice and protest participation intention, while direct effects on hate crime intention were non-significant. However, mediation analyses revealed that perceived injustice significantly transmitted the effect of deliberation onto hate crime intention, suggesting that hostile retaliatory tendencies may require both reflective processing and heightened injustice perception. Protest participation, by contrast, appeared to flow more directly from deliberation, consistent with its instrumental character.

Study 2 extends these insights to macro-level outcomes. Linguistic markers of perceived injustice in self-published books significantly predicted declines in consumer confidence approximately three quarters later and increases in protest participation roughly two quarters later, even after accounting for economic and political controls. These results support the idea that deliberate, injustice-laden narratives function as early indicators of latent and instrumental retaliation. Contrary to expectations, perceived injustice language predicted subsequent decreases in hate crimes, indicating that expressive, narrative forms of injustice articulation may sometimes diffuse, rather than exacerbate, the likelihood of hostile violence. Together, the studies demonstrate both psychological and predictive roles for deliberate injustice narratives.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to marketing theory and practice in four main ways. First, it introduces a two-dimensional framework for online content that distinguishes between cognitive mode

(impulsive vs. deliberate) and platform moderation (high vs. low). This typology shifts attention from solely where content appears or how often it occurs to how it is mentally produced and structurally governed, helping marketers differentiate ephemeral noise from deeper signals of discontent. Second, we show that the mode of content creation is not merely a stylistic detail but a psychological mechanism: deliberate narrative construction amplifies perceived injustice and reshapes retaliatory intentions. This insight bridges dual-process theories of cognition with consumer retaliation research, demonstrating that slow, reflective storytelling can intensify grievances and alter downstream behavior.

Third, we position long-form, less moderated consumer narratives—such as self-published books—as underutilized leading indicators of societal tension. By combining dictionary-based text analytics with VAR models, we demonstrate that injustice expressions in these narratives anticipate declines in consumer confidence and surges in protest participation months in advance, offering marketers and policymakers a longer predictive horizon than typical social media analytics. Finally, the unexpected dampening relationship with hate crimes highlights boundary conditions and opens a new agenda on how different expressive channels may redirect or diffuse hostile aggression, informing both brand risk management and digital governance debates.

LIMINALITY AND BRAND AUTHENTICITY: LEVERAGING CONSUMER TRANSITIONS FOR AUTHENTIC BRAND POSITIONING

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Keywords: Consumer liminality, Life-stage transitions, Brand authenticity, Authentic brand positioning

Description: This study lays the conceptual bedrock for understanding consumer liminality as a foundational condition shaping the relevance and value of brand authenticity in contemporary marketplaces.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brand authenticity has emerged as a central concern in contemporary marketing strategy (Fritz et al., 2017), yet less attention has been given to the consumer-side contexts that shape how authenticity is perceived. One such underexplored context is liminality, the transitional phase in which consumers navigate uncertainty, ambiguity, and identity reconstruction. Originating in anthropology, liminality refers to the threshold stage between separation from a prior state and incorporation into a new one (Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1960 [1909]). Extant research has not systematically examined how consumers' liminal states shape their perceptions of authenticity and

subsequent evaluations of brand authenticity. This gap is surprising given that liminal moments intensify consumers' search for meaning, stability, and identity affirmation (Epp & Price, 2008; Noble & Walker, 1997). These conditions make authenticity cues particularly salient.

The limited work connecting liminality and authenticity suggests that transitional consumption contexts can heighten authenticity experiences. For example, consumer rituals often function as "authenticating acts" that validate identity (Arnould & Price, 2000; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Similarly, studies of transformative consumption (e.g., adventure travel, festivals) reveal how liminal environments intensify perceptions of genuineness and self-discovery (Kozinets, 2002; Tumbat & Belk, 2011). Recent scholarship also identifies paradoxes of authenticity in liminal settings, highlighting tensions between commercial staging and perceived realness. Yet, these insights remain fragmented and do not offer a systematic theorization of how consumer liminality shapes brand authenticity perceptions. Thus, this paper advances the literature by proposing that liminal states in consumer lives act as critical antecedent contexts for authenticity evaluations. Specifically, we argue that identity reconstruction, existential meaning-seeking, and heightened emotional vulnerability during liminality make consumers more attentive to authenticity cues in brands. In turn, these perceptions co-create brand authenticity and support authentic brand positioning.

Research Questions

How does consumer liminality, temporary states of transition in consumers' lives, function as a foundational condition that makes brands' authenticity signals especially salient and valuable; through what psychological pathways do liminal experiences translate into perceptions of brand authenticity; and what are the theoretical and managerial implications of foregrounding liminality as an antecedent to authenticity?

Summary of Findings

The paper introduces consumer liminality as a distinct antecedent to brand-authenticity perceptions and articulates three interrelated psychological pathways, identity reconstruction, existential meaning-seeking, and emotional vulnerability, that mediate the liminality and authenticity link. It specifies how different liminal contexts (e.g., life transitions, ritualized consumption, socio-economic dislocation) alter consumers' cognitive and affective receptivity to authenticity signals and how brands can (but also risk) mobilize these states. The framework outlines boundary conditions (e.g., temporal stage of liminality, prior brand attachment, social norms) and distinguishes community-based (societal) vs. market-based liminal triggers and authentication mechanisms. Managerially, the paper maps implications for positioning, narrative strategies, and ethical cautions when brands engage liminal consumers.

Statement of Key Contributions

1. Theoretical novelty: We introduce and theorize consumer liminality as a previously underused antecedent in brand authenticity research, shifting attention from static brand attributes to consumers' situational states.

2. Boundary and taxonomy: This research offers a taxonomy of liminal contexts and boundary conditions that refine where and when authenticity cues will succeed or fail.

3. Managerial implications and ethics: Provides actionable guidance for brand positioning in liminal marketplaces while highlighting ethical risks (manipulation, exploitation) and measurement priorities (capturing stage, duration, and intensity of liminality).

4. Research agenda: We lay out clear empirical approaches as tractable future research propositions.

REFERENCES: References are available upon request.

MORE THAN A GAME: THE EFFECT OF INTER-FAN RIVALRY ON FAN MOTIVATION TO ATTEND RIVALRY GAMES

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Keywords: Inter-fan banter; Inter-fan rivalry; Attendance motivation; Perceived risk; Fan engagement

Description: This paper examines how light-hearted and intense forms of inter-fan banter influence fans' motivation to attend rivalry games.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Inter-fan rivalry refers to the competitive and often antagonistic interactions between fans of rival teams, driven by strong team identification and motivated by the desire for social recognition, emotional regulation, and the protection or enhancement of self-esteem (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1996; Gross, 1998b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A key behavioral expression of inter-fan rivalry is inter-fan banter, which ranges from light-hearted banter that is playful, non-threatening, and socially inclusive, to intense banter that is provocative, confrontational, and perceived as an identity threat. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, this study conceptualises inter-fan banter as an interaction ranging from light-hearted banter, which is playful, non-threatening, and serving as an emotional regulation strategy, to intense banter, which is provocative, confrontational, and perceived as an identity threat (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Accordingly, this study examines how different forms of inter-fan banter, light-hearted versus intense, affect fans' motivation to attend rivalry games. We address two research questions in line with this aim: **RQ1**: How does the type of inter-fan banter (light-hearted vs. intense) influence fan motivation to attend rivalry games? **RQ2**: How do perceived rivalry, perceived risk, and fan engagement mediate the relationship between banter type and game attendance motivation, and how is this relationship moderated by fan identification?

Method and Data

This research consisted of eight between-subject experimental studies examining how inter-fan banter influences fans' motivation to attend rivalry games. Across studies, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: light-hearted banter, intense banter, or a neutral (non-banter) control condition. Participants were recruited via Prolific using pre-screening

surveys of English Premier League, National Football League, and Major League Baseball fans in the United Kingdom and United States. Participants first selected the teams they followed and subsequently ranked teams according to perceived rivalry intensity, with these rankings used to identify relevant rival pairings. Only self-identified fans of the selected rival teams were invited to participate. The rivalries examined included Liverpool versus Manchester United, Manchester United versus Manchester City, Arsenal versus Liverpool, Green Bay Packers versus Chicago Bears, and New York Yankees versus Boston Red Sox. After exposure to scenario-based banter manipulations, participants completed validated multi-item measures of motivation to attend games, perceived risk, perceived rivalry, fan engagement, and fan identification using seven-point Likert scales. Data were analysed using one-way ANOVA and Hayes' PROCESS macro (Models 4, 6, and 7) to test mediation, serial mediation, and moderated mediation effects, with 5,000 bootstrap resamples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Manipulation checks confirmed that participants accurately perceived the emotional tone of the banter scenarios.

Summary of Findings

Across eight experimental studies involving football and baseball fans in the United Kingdom and United States, the findings demonstrate that the emotional tone of inter-fan banter plays a central role in shaping motivation to attend rivalry games. Intense banter consistently increased perceptions of hostility and elevated perceived risk, which in turn reduced fans' motivation to attend rivalry games, particularly among fans with low levels of team identification. At the same time, intense banter strengthened perceived rivalry, which increased motivation to attend games, producing a dual effect by simultaneously discouraging and encouraging attendance. In contrast, light-hearted banter increased motivation to attend rivalry games. This positive effect operated through a serial mediation process in which light-hearted banter heightened perceived rivalry,

which subsequently increased fan engagement and, in turn, motivation to attend rivalry games. Importantly, light-hearted banter generated levels of perceived rivalry comparable to intense banter but without activating perceptions of risk. Fan identification moderated several of these effects, such that highly identified fans showed more stable attendance motivations and were less negatively affected by intense banter, whereas low-identified fans were more sensitive to increases in perceived risk. Overall, the findings reveal that inter-fan rivalry produces both psychological benefits and costs, depending on the form of banter and the level of fan identification.

Key Contributions

This research advances sport and consumer research by positioning inter-fan rivalry as a distinct and influential psychological mechanism shaping attendance motivation. It extends rivalry theory beyond teams and athletes by demonstrating that fan-to-fan interactions directly influence motivation. The findings enrich Social Identity Theory by identifying inter-fan banter as a powerful identity-relevant stimulus that can either reinforce or threaten fans' social identities, with fan identification acting as a critical boundary condition. The study further contributes to consumer engagement literature by shifting the focus from firm-driven to consumer-generated engagement, showing that light-hearted banter stimulates emotional and behavioural engagement. In addition, it extends brand rivalry theory by illustrating how rivalry operates through consumer-to-consumer interactions, revealing new psychological and behavioural outcomes. The research also advances fan motivation theory by demonstrating the dual role of banter: light-hearted banter enhances motivation through perceived rivalry and engagement, whereas intense banter suppresses motivation by increasing perceived risk. From a managerial and policy perspective, the findings show that the tone of inter-fan interaction is a critical

mechanism shaping fan motivation. Promoting light-hearted, playful rivalry can enhance engagement and attendance, while managing hostile banter through clear codes of conduct and safer fan environments can reduce perceived threat, improve inclusion, and support attendance at rivalry events.

NEURAL INSIGHTS ON STYLE OF PROCESSING: EXPLORING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISUALIZERS AND VERBALIZERS USING EEG IN RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS

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Keywords: Style of Processing, Event-Related Potentials, Visualizers, Verbalizers, LPP

Description: This research uses event-related potentials (ERPs) to provide neural validation for the Style of Processing (SOP) scale, demonstrating distinct neurophysiological patterns for "visualizers" and "verbalizers" across passive viewing and simulated shopping tasks.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The Style of Processing (SOP) scale identifies consumers' preferences for either visual or verbal information, yet its conceptualization has been challenged regarding whether it reflects genuine neurobiological differences. While foundational studies consistently show visualizers favor creating mental images and verbalizers prefer semantic processing, these physiological underpinnings have lacked direct neurobiological validation until recently. This research aims to answer the following question: How do consumers with different styles of processing perceive

products and brands, and what are the underlying motivational and affective processes that drive these differential effects? Specifically, this paper extends previous work by using event-related potentials (ERPs) across two studies to unpack how SOP and information modality interact across the stages of consumer attention, meaning, and motivation.

Method and Data

Across two studies, we build a neural framework demonstrating differences in cognitive and emotional processing. In Study 1, nineteen visualizers and 20 verbalizers were selected based on the 22-item SOP Scale. Participants passively viewed 180 images from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS), and EEG data were recorded from 32 electrodes to analyze the Late Positive Potential (LPP). We examined both the posterior LPP (p-LPP), associated with affective salience, and the frontal LPP (f-LPP), which reflects emotional regulation. Study 2 utilized a modified version of the SHOP (Save Holdings Or Purchase) task with ten visualizers and eight verbalizers to better approximate real-world consumer decision-making. Participants rated their "liking" of products and brands presented separately and their "wanting" of specific brand-product pairings while EEG was recorded to analyze P200 (attentional bias), N400 (semantic integration), and LPP (motivational salience).

Summary of Findings

Study 1 revealed that visualizers showed larger overall p-LPP amplitudes than verbalizers, confirming heightened engagement with visual affective stimuli. A style-by-hemisphere interaction emerged: visualizers demonstrated significantly larger amplitudes over the right hemisphere, while verbalizers showed left-hemisphere dominance. Study 2 behavioral results

showed verbalizers engage in systematic, cue-by-cue evaluation, while visualizers are more brand-driven in purchase intentions. ERP results aligned with this: verbalizers showed larger P200 amplitudes and enhanced sensitivity to N400 effects for brands, suggesting more effortful engagement with verbal information. While LPP amplitude showed no main effect of style, a significant interaction revealed visualizers processed stimuli more quickly during "wanting" than "liking," suggesting heightened motivation enhances their processing efficiency.

Key Contributions

This research makes a significant contribution to the academic marketing discipline by providing direct neurophysiological evidence across multiple tasks and processing contingencies, empirically and neurologically validating the Style of Processing (SOP). By using EEG, we demonstrate that the preferences identified by the scale correspond to distinct, measurable brain activity patterns, specifically hemispheric asymmetries and differences in the timing of neural responses. This grounds a large body of behavioral research in neurobiology, offering a more robust framework for future studies on sensory marketing and advertising effectiveness. Managerially, the findings suggest marketers can design more personalized experiences, such as using visually rich interfaces for visualizers and clear, compelling ad copy for verbalizers to facilitate their systematic evaluations.

References are available upon request.

NUMBERS, IMAGES, AND STATUS: FUNCTIONAL AND SYMBOLIC VALUE OF VISUAL REFERENCE FOR QUANTITATIVE ATTRIBUTES

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Keywords: visual reference, quantitative attributes, concreteness, social status, consumer evaluation

Description:

This research investigates how visual references for quantitative product attributes shape evaluation through functional and symbolic pathways.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers frequently encounter numerical product attributes (e.g., size, weight, capacity) in marketing communications, yet such information is often abstract and difficult to interpret. This research asks: *How do visual references accompanying quantitative attributes influence consumer responses, and through what mechanisms?* Specifically, we examine whether visual references serve (1) a functional role by increasing the perceived concreteness and comprehensibility of numerical information, and (2) a symbolic role by conveying social status meanings that influence product evaluation. We further investigate when each pathway dominates and whether individual differences in consumers' need for status moderate symbolic

effects. By integrating insights from numerical cognition, visual information processing, and status consumption, this research addresses a gap in prior literature that has largely overlooked how quantitative attributes can be visually represented and symbolically interpreted.

Method and Data

Across four studies, including one eye-tracking experiment and three controlled online experiments, this research systematically examines the effects of visual references for quantitative attributes. Study 1 uses eye-tracking to compare consumer attention and product evaluations when size information is presented numerically versus visually. Study 2 employs a 2x2 experimental design to test whether visual references enhance perceived concreteness and product evaluation, particularly when numerical denotations are absent. Study 3 manipulates the social status of visual references while holding functional information constant to examine symbolic effects on willingness to pay. Study 4 tests the moderating role of consumers' need for status and assesses positive affect as the underlying mechanism. Data were collected from diverse samples, including university students and online panels, using validated perceptual and evaluative measures.

Summary of Findings

Results demonstrate that visual references play a dual role in shaping consumer responses. Functionally, visual references attract greater attention and increase perceived concreteness of quantitative attributes, particularly when numerical information is absent, leading to more favorable product evaluations. Symbolically, visual references can convey social status meanings that influence consumer valuation beyond functional comprehension. High-status visual references elicit positive affect that transfers to the focal product, increasing willingness to pay. However, these symbolic effects are not universal; they are significantly stronger among

consumers with a high need for status. Importantly, when numerical information is explicit and easily interpretable, the functional benefits of visual references diminish, highlighting boundary conditions for their effectiveness.

Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to consumer behavior and marketing communication literature. First, it extends research on numerical cognition by demonstrating how visual references can reduce the abstraction of numerical attributes through increased perceived concreteness. Second, it advances understanding of visual communication by revealing that visual references are not purely informational but also symbolic carriers of social meaning. Third, it integrates functional and symbolic processing perspectives to show that visual references can simultaneously inform and persuade consumers, depending on contextual and individual factors. Finally, the findings offer actionable insights for marketers on how to strategically design visual references to improve comprehension and enhance perceived value without unintended negative inferences.

References are available upon request.

OPTIMIZING PROMOTIONAL COMPETITIONS: THE IMPACT OF SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE CONTEST ENTRY TYPES

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Keywords: promotional contests; contest entry type; procedural fairness; consumer engagement; purchase intention

Description:

This research examines how subjective versus objective contest entry types influence consumer responses through procedural fairness, enjoyment, and engagement.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Promotional contests are widely used marketing tools designed to increase consumer engagement and stimulate purchase behavior. These contests often differ in how participants enter, with some relying on objective, fact-based tasks (e.g., quizzes or puzzles) and others relying on subjective, opinion-based tasks (e.g., writing or creative submissions). While prior research has examined the effects of winning competitive promotions, relatively little is known about how contest entry type shapes consumer perceptions and responses, particularly through psychological mechanisms such as perceived fairness, enjoyment, and engagement. Moreover, existing literature has largely overlooked how contextual factors such as contest outcomes (winning versus losing) and organizational type (for-profit versus non-profit) may alter these effects.

This research examines how subjective versus objective contest entry types shape consumer participation likelihood, purchase intention, and brand attitudes. It further investigates whether these effects operate through procedural fairness, enjoyment, and consumer engagement, and whether they vary across contest outcomes and organizational contexts.

Method and Data

This research consists of three studies, including one correlational study and two experimental studies. Study 1 employed a repeated-measures correlational design in which participants evaluated both subjective contests (e.g., writing, design, slogan

contests) and objective contests (e.g., quizzes, puzzles, memory tasks). Ninety-five valid participants rated each contest type on perceived fairness, enjoyment, engagement, participation likelihood, and purchase intention.

Study 2 used a 2 × 2 between-subjects experimental design manipulating contest entry type (subjective vs. objective) and contest outcome (win vs. lose). Participants were randomly assigned to contest scenarios and subsequently reported their behavioral intentions and psychological responses.

Study 3 extended the design by examining organizational context using a 2 × 2 between-subjects experiment that manipulated contest entry type (subjective vs. objective) and organization type (for-profit vs. non-profit). Across studies, mediation and moderated mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS to test the proposed psychological mechanisms.

Summary of Findings

Across all studies, objective contests consistently generated higher participation likelihood, purchase intention, and more favorable brand attitudes compared to subjective contests. These effects were primarily driven by increased perceptions of procedural fairness. Mediation analyses revealed that procedural fairness fully mediated the relationship between contest entry type and participation likelihood and played a dominant role in shaping purchase intentions and brand attitudes.

Enjoyment and consumer engagement also contributed to consumer responses, although their effects were secondary and context dependent. Enjoyment partially

mediated participation likelihood and fully mediated purchase intention in certain conditions, while consumer engagement appeared to play a more salient role in contexts involving unfavourable outcomes. Moderated mediation analyses further indicated that when participants experienced losing outcomes, procedural fairness and consumer engagement became particularly important in attenuating negative reactions, especially in objective contests. Organizational context also shaped these relationships, such that perceptions of fairness tended to be more influential in for-profit settings, whereas enjoyment was relatively more salient in non-profit contexts.

Key Contributions

This research makes several important contributions. First, it advances the literature on promotional contests by distinguishing between subjective and objective contest entry types as a key design feature shaping consumer response. Second, it identifies procedural fairness as a central psychological mechanism explaining why objective contests are more effective in driving participation and purchase intentions. Third, by integrating procedural justice theory, flow theory, and signaling theory, this research offers a process-based framework that explains how contest design signals fairness and credibility to consumers. Finally, the findings provide actionable insights for practitioners, suggesting that marketers can optimize contest effectiveness by emphasizing transparency and objective evaluation criteria, particularly when consumers face unfavorable outcomes.

OVERESTIMATING OTHER CONSUMERS' FOCUS ON SECONDARY PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES

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Keywords: self-other difference; product attributes; judgment and decision-making; manager's perception

Description: Consumers believe that other consumers value non-core attributes (e.g., packaging, aesthetics, brand) more than they do when deciding to buy a product.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

What matters most to a consumer when deciding to buy a product? Prior research revealed that consumers prioritize core product attributes (e.g., price, quality, functionality, longevity) over non-core attributes (e.g., packaging, aesthetics, brand, trendiness) when making purchase decisions. However, do consumers believe it is the same for others? Social prediction influences consumer behavior. Yet, making accurate social judgments remains challenging. For instance, consumers believe the same product will be more efficacious and useful for others or that other consumers will dislike dissimilar product options more than

they do. Considering the prevalence of social prediction error, it is both theoretically and practically important to examine whether consumers think others place different levels of importance on product attributes than they do when deciding to buy. These inferences are consequential in the marketplace because consumers often have to anticipate others' preferences, such as when making decisions for others (e.g., gifting), as well as in professional settings, such as when marketers forecast which product features consumers might value.

Summary of Findings

We propose that consumers engage in an "asymmetric projection" depending on the type of product attribute. Across six main and two supplemental studies (total $N = 3,352$), we found that consumers systematically misjudge the importance that other consumers place on product attributes: overestimating the importance others place on non-core product attributes, and accurately estimating the importance others place on core product attributes.

A pretest ($N = 299$) established that consumers consistently classify some attributes as core and others as non-core. Study 1A ($N = 293$) and Study 1B ($N = 398$) revealed that consumers overestimate the importance other American consumers place on non-core product attributes (e.g., packaging, aesthetics, brand, trendiness, resale value, and uniqueness), but not core product attributes(e.g., price, quality, functionality, longevity, and user-friendliness) in incentive-compatible studies across different products. Study 2 ($N = 300$) replicated this pattern (Cohen's d ranging from 0.48 to 0.66 for non-core attributes) with 30 products using a direct comparative judgment scale. Study 4 ($N = 403$) revealed that the core-noncore asymmetry attenuates for close others (best friend), but persists for generic others. Study 5 ($N = 399$) revealed that professional product managers also overestimate consumers' focus on non-core attributes. Finally, Study 6 ($N = 400$) revealed that marketing professionals overestimate how persuasive consumers find ad content emphasizing non-core product

attributes compared to ads emphasizing core product attributes. Across studies, we also found speculative process evidence that believing others to be materialistic and status-driven partly explains the asymmetric misperception between core and non-core product attributes.

Key Contributions

Our findings offer implications. Theoretically, we identify a new self-other asymmetry at the product attribute level. We demonstrate asymmetric projection, in which consumers project their preferences for core attributes onto others but rely on stereotypes of others (more naïve and materialistic) when predicting others' importance of non-core attributes. This fits within a third-person effect framework, in which consumers see themselves as rational buyers but view others as more susceptible to persuasion by superficial features. Our findings support previous research by showing that social prediction errors are linked to product attribute evaluation, which can help explain why consumers believe others are more materialistic, prefer hedonic goods, and favor over-packaged gifts. Finally, professionals showing identical patterns despite their expertise suggest that beliefs about consumer superficiality might not be easily corrected by experience. Practically, our findings have direct implications for product development and marketing communications, suggesting that managers' misperceptions may lead them to develop and market products that are misaligned with actual consumer priorities. Even more, consumers buying for acquaintances or colleagues might choose impressively branded but less practical items. Here, retailers, salespeople, and choice architects can assist gift-givers in making better decisions by reminding them that others value functionality just as much as themselves, and aesthetics not as highly as they believe.

Word count: 613/800 words.

POLITICAL MERCHANDISE:

WHEN IDENTITY DISPLAY TRIGGERS AN INGROUP PENALTY EFFECT

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Keywords: political consumption, partisan display, social identity, polarization, ingroup effects

Description: People who display political merchandise are viewed less favorably, even by individuals from the same political party, because partisan display activates observers' attributions of polarization.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions:

The consumption of political merchandise (e.g., lawn signs, bumper stickers, t-shirts) that signals consumer's political identity is prevalent in the marketplace, especially during election seasons. For example, the camouflage campaign hats for the Harris campaign in 2024 garnered

nearly $2 million in sales (Vasquez 2024), while the MAGA hats for the Trump campaign generated $80,000 per day in 2016 (Shoaib 2022). Further attesting to the prevalence of political consumption, we surveyed 153 Mturkers and found that 59.5% of them have used or displayed political merchandise. Despite its prevalence, little is known about how such political display is perceived by others. While it may be intuitive that people dislike political out-group members who engage in political display due to ideological disagreements, it is unclear how political consumption is perceived by in-group members. Specifically, how do Democrats/Republicans respond to a neighbor posting a lawn sign supporting their own party's candidate? We propose and find that partisan display activates observers' attributions of polarization, tainting the evaluations of the displayers.

Method and Data:

Study 1 tested whether observers view ingroup members displaying political merchandise more negatively than those who do not, and whether actors mispredict this ingroup penalty effect. Participants in the observer condition chose between an ingroup member with partisan display (i.e., laptop sticker) and one without. Conversely, participants in the actor condition predicted their likelihood of being chosen by ingroup members if they engaged in partisan display vs. not.

Study 2 tested the ingroup penalty effect in a political marketing context where partisan displays are more normative. Participants chose between two representatives from a local political organization, one wearing a political t-shirt and the other a plain t-shirt, for a one-on-one online interview.

Study 3 examined the underlying mechanism. Participants evaluated an in-group member who wore either a plain or a political t-shirt and rated the extent they believed that the target was polarizing along with some alternative processes (i.e., norm violation, political extremeness, moral grandstanding).

Study 4 provided further evidence for the process by comparing a non-polarizing identity (i.e., university identity) with a polarizing identity (i.e., political identity). We manipulated identity display using a t-shirt worn by an in-group member, displaying either political or university affiliations, or no display. A control condition with an identity-unknown target was included to assess preferences for political display over an unknown identity.

Summary of findings:

Across studies, we did not find any difference in results based on party affiliation. Therefore, we report results after collapsing across different party affiliations. Study 1 revealed that while actors expect those from the same political party to favor them more for expressing their shared identity through partisan display, most observers actually prefer individuals without such displays. This discrepancy indicates that users of political merchandise are unintentionally facing an ingroup penalty. Study 2 further demonstrates this ingroup penalty using a real choice, showing participants were less likely to engage with their party's representative when the representative displayed political merchandise. Notably, this penalty occurs even in contexts where such displays are common, indicating that violating social norms may not be the primary cause of the effect. Study 3 showed that the negative effect of political consumption is mediated by polarization attribution, even when controlling for alternative processes. Lastly, Study 4

revealed that while displaying student identity (vs. not) was perceived favorably among ingroups, which is consistent with ingroup favoritism, displaying political identity (vs. not) was perceived less favorably among political ingroups. Further, the consumer engaging in political display was liked less even when compared to an identity-unknown target, providing further evidence that political display backfires.

Statement of Key Contributions:

The display of political merchandise, such as t-shirts and stickers, has become increasingly prevalent in the U.S., even outside election cycles. One reason individuals choose to display political merchandise is to foster ingroup cohesion and increase liking from ingroup members. This expectation is supported by prior research on social identity, which finds that individuals tend to view others more favorably when they display their shared group affiliation.

This research proposes a theoretically novel boundary condition of this ingroup favorability effect. Contrary to actors' beliefs, we find that actors who display political merchandise (vs. not) are viewed more unfavorably by ingroup members. This ingroup penalty effect occurs because partisan display triggers attributions of political polarization. We reconcile our findings with social identity literature by demonstrating that while displaying polarizing identities (e.g., political identity) leads to ingroup penalty, displaying non-polarizing identities (e.g., university identity) results in ingroup favorability.

This research contributes to the literature on how political themes impact marketing. Second, we contribute to the social identity literature by demonstrating a moderating effect of identity polarization. Third, we contribute to the nascent political polarization literature by

studying how attributions of political polarization influence consumer behavior. Lastly, we contribute to the political science literature and shed light on campaign practices.

POSTING ASPIRATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IDENTITY, STATUS, AND CULTURE AT THE INDIAN BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID

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Keywords: Social media, Cultural identity, Aspiration, Social visibility, cultural collectivism

Description: This research shows that Indian BOP consumers actively use social media to express aspirations and status while staying rooted in local culture, offering clear insights for brands, social initiatives, and digital platforms.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Prior research on consumer aspiration and identity construction has largely examined material consumption and offline status displays among middle- and high-income groups (Belk, 1988; Charles et al., 2009). These studies implicitly assume individualistic agency and economic flexibility, rendering them insufficient for explaining identity work among structurally constrained Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) consumers. Within BOP contexts, consumption is embedded in scarcity, moral accountability, and collective norms, which fundamentally alter the meanings of aspiration and visibility (Viswanathan & Sreekumar, 2019).

With increasing internet penetration, social media has emerged as a critical arena for symbolic self-expression among low-income consumers, enabling non-material forms of status signaling and identity performance (Dey et al., 2020). However, existing digital consumption research privileges individual-level signaling while overlooking how communal oversight, cultural anchoring, and social surveillance shape what can be publicly expressed (Wallis, 2025). Cultural Identity Theory emphasizes identity as negotiated and relational, but the existing empirical work rarely explores how BOP consumers balance traditional values with global digital aesthetics (Ting-Toomey, 2015). This raises the following research question: *How do the Indian BOP use social media to perform aspirational identities, negotiate cultural embeddedness, and signal social status under conditions of economic scarcity, collective orientation, and high social visibility?*

Method And Data

To capture the layered dynamics of aspiration, identity, and digital behaviour among BOP consumers, this research employed a three-study sequential design.

Study 1 used a phenomenological approach. Twenty-six in-depth interviews were conducted through snowball sampling with BOP consumers from Kolkata and adjoining peri-urban areas. Participants were aged 18–35 and varied in education and occupation. A semi-structured protocol examined social media usage, aspirations, cultural expectations, and status expression. Data were thematically analysed following Moustakas (1994) to surface shared meanings and lived experiences.

Study 2 translated these insights into DEMATEL-based causal modelling. Five domain experts and the same twenty-six participants evaluated directional relationships among aspirational intent, self-presentation, cultural tension, peer comparison, and digital engagement. The analysis enabled the identification of cause–and–effect structures and revealed how emotional and social pressures shape aspirational performance online.

Study 3 employed a 2×2 between-subjects experiment to test behavioural outcomes. Social visibility (high vs. low) and cultural collectivism (primed vs. neutral) were manipulated using vignette-based scenarios. A total of 217 BOP participants from Kolkata and peri-urban settlements were randomly assigned to conditions. Posting intentions were measured through a structured Bengali questionnaire. Moderated regression and interaction effects were tested following extant literature (Aiken & West, 1991)

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, the findings reveal how Indian BOP consumers perform aspiration digitally through selective, culturally anchored self-presentation. Study 1 reveals that aspiration operates as a double-edged force: social media exposes users to elite lifestyles, generating both motivation and frustration. Participants rarely aspired to luxury ownership; instead, they pursued symbolic proximity through poses, hashtags, and modest brand cues. Cultural identity emerged as a negotiated rather than fixed concept, with users blending traditional aesthetics and global trends to maintain social legitimacy. Status signaling was thus subtle, curated, and relational, shaped by anticipated audience judgment. Social media engagement also served as a space for cultural continuity, where sharing rituals, festivals, and food helped affirm belonging and pride.

Study 2 establishes social media engagement as the primary causal driver, influencing status signaling through aspirational consumption and cultural identity negotiation. Aspirational intent and cultural negotiation mutually reinforced each other, indicating that digital aspiration is socially situated and emotionally layered rather than purely instrumental.

Study 3 demonstrates that higher social visibility increases intentions to post aspirational content, particularly when peer feedback is expected. However, collectivist priming significantly dampens performative posting, especially among women. These findings show aspiration is regulated by collective norms and gendered scrutiny.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to consumer research by embedding cultural identity negotiation, symbolic aspiration, and digital status signalling at the Indian BOP. It extends Cultural Identity Theory (Ting-Toomey, 2015) and the Status Signalling Model (Charles et al., 2009) by

demonstrating how digital self-presentation balances aspiration with cultural legitimacy in low-income contexts. It expands identity theory beyond offline rituals (Cova et al., 2021) by showing how BOP consumers creatively blend global aesthetics and local tradition through symbolic digital curations on social media. Aspirational consumption (Srivastava et al., 2020) is reconceptualized as performative, affordable, and interpretive for BOP consumers. Using DEMATEL, the study maps interdependencies and causal pathways among social media engagement, aspirational consumption, cultural identity negotiation, and status signalling. Experiment shows that aspirational expression intensifies under social visibility but is moderated by collectivist orientation and perceived cultural scrutiny.

The findings suggest that brands in the apparel, beauty, and technology sectors should shift their focus from purely transactional appeals to culturally grounded storytelling. For nonprofits, policymakers, and platforms, the study calls for developing inclusive digital programs, implementing gender-sensitive interventions, and implementing safeguards against aspirational overload among low-income users. The above insights reposition BOP consumers as thoughtful, strategic, and socially aware digital participants today.

References are available upon request.

RECONSIDERING CLEANLINESS: THE UNEXPECTED VALUE OF SOIL IN PRODUCE CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Soil cues, Nutritional completeness, Contagion effect, Packaging

Description: Despite a general aversion to dirt, produce with soil increases consumer purchase intentions by enhancing perceived nutritional completeness through symbolic contagion.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The pursuit of cleanliness is deeply embedded in market systems (Ipsos 2017; Argo et al. 2006; Morales and Fitzsimons 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly amplified this focus, heightening global attention to hygienic practices and sparking unprecedented demand for clean goods. However, a common retail practice involves displaying produce with residual soil rather than just showing clean ones. Various channels, including online platforms and physical stores, showcase both clean and dirty forms of produce across multiple categories. Notably, the same product is often presented in both states simultaneously, frequently at the same price. This inconsistency suggests consumers may derive value from soil beyond mere cleanliness. We

propose soil enhances purchase intentions by signaling nutritional completeness. Building on contagion theory, this research investigates whether and how residual soil on produce serves as a symbolic cue, enhancing consumers' perception of nutritional completeness and thereby increasing purchase intention.

Method And Data

We tested our hypotheses across three studies. Study 1 provided initial evidence that produce with low (vs. high) cleanliness elicits higher purchase intentions. Using a between-subjects design, participants were exposed to scenarios in which produce were either shown in low-cleanliness state (image with visible soil on the surface) or high-cleanliness state (appeared very clean, with no visible soil). Following the scenario, participants completed a questionnaire on purchase intentions, perceived cleanliness, and demographics. Study 2 replicated this finding and further demonstrated that perceived nutritional completeness mediates the relationship between cleanliness and purchase intentions. In a similar between-subjects design, participants were presented with scenarios in which they were shown either cleaned or dirt produce. Participants completed a questionnaire about their intentions to purchase, perceived nutritional completeness as well as other alternative explanations, manipulation checks, and demographics. Study 3 examined another boundary condition where the positive effect on produce with low (vs. high) cleanliness is attenuated when the product is packaged (vs. unpackaged). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (cleanliness: low vs. high) × 2 (package type: packaged vs. unpackaged) between-subjects design. Participants completed questions about their intentions to purchase, perceived nutritional completeness, manipulation checks, and demographics.

Summary of Findings

A one-way ANOVA in Study 1 showed that purchase intentions in the low cleanliness condition (M = 5.44, SD = 1.33) were significantly higher than in the high cleanliness condition (M = 4.99, SD = 1.21; $F(1, 198) = 6.16$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). The results of Study 2 indicated that participants' purchase intentions in the low cleanliness condition (M = 5.77, SD = .66) were significantly higher than in the high cleanliness condition (M = 5.46, SD = 1.13; $F(1, 198) = 5.61$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). Except for perceived nutritional completeness (.0627, 95% CI [.0003, .1680]), all other alternative explanations could not be mediators. In study 3, a 2 (cleanliness) × 2 (package type) ANOVA on the purchase intentions score revealed a significant cleanliness × package type two-way interaction ($F(1, 415) = 4.90$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). Further revealed that only in the unpackaged condition, the purchase intentions for low cleanliness products (M = 5.30, SD = 1.60) were higher than that for high cleanliness products (M = 4.69, SD = 1.61; $F(1, 415) = 6.08$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$).

Statement of Key Contributions

Theoretically, these findings challenge the entrenched view that cleanliness universally drives preference (Argo et al. 2006), demonstrating that soil can also evoke positive effects to promote purchase intentions. This extends research on non-declarative origin cues, revealing soil as a visual proxy for nutritional completeness. Additionally, we contribute to packaging literature by exposing its paradoxical role—while protecting products, it can undermine the symbolic value of soil.

For practitioners, our work offers actionable insights. Retaining soil reduces resource waste and costs linked to over-cleaning, aligning with sustainability goals. Retailers can leverage soil imagery or sell unwashed produce to harness nutritional completeness inferences. Critically, unpackaged formats maximize soil's benefits while reducing packaging waste.

References are available upon request.

REVEALING ATTIRE, DIVIDED AUDIENCE: THE (SK)INFLUENCE OF TRAINER OUTFIT LENGTH IN FITNESS ADVERTISING AND THE ROLE OF VISUAL ATTENTION

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Keywords: Fitness advertising; Attire style; Skin visibility; Body exposure; Objectification theory; Eye tracking

Description: This research shows that both more revealing and more concealing trainer attire in yoga advertising reduce effectiveness relative to standard clothing, and that these effects unfold through gender-specific perceptual pathways and gaze patterns revealed by an online experiment and an eye-tracking study.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines how the length of a female trainer's outfit (shorter-than-usual, standard, or longer-than-usual) shapes consumer responses to yoga advertising. Existing work highlights the importance of appearance cues in fitness marketing, yet little is known about how variations in skin visibility influence both cognitive and affective responses, particularly in a credence-based service such as yoga instruction. We therefore ask: How does trainer outfit length affect perceptions of the ad and the trainer, and in turn, intentions to participate in the promoted class? To what extent do these effects differ between men and women, given prior evidence on gendered reactions to sexualized or body-focused imagery? Additionally, how does visual attention to different body regions and ad elements operate as both an outcome of outfit length and a moderator of downstream evaluations? By integrating theories of source credibility, sexual appeals, objectification, and expectancy violations, we investigate whether deviations from standard yoga attire—whether toward greater exposure or greater concealment—help or hinder persuasion, and whether gaze patterns provide insight into the mechanisms underlying these responses.

Method and Data

Two studies conducted in Austria isolate the causal impact of outfit length in yoga advertising. Study 1 was a between-subjects online experiment (n = 300) in which participants viewed one of three yoga ads featuring the same female trainer depicted in a short, standard, or long outfit.

Participants then rated ad appeal, excitement, sensuality, informativeness, and convincingness, as well as trainer likeability, warmth, openness, reliability, confidence, and their intention to participate. Gender, age, and yoga experience were recorded as controls. Structural equation modeling tested direct, indirect, and moderated effects. Study 2 was a laboratory eye-tracking experiment (n = 96) using the same stimuli to capture gaze behavior. We recorded fixation count, hit rate, time to first fixation, and total fixation duration across four Areas of Interest: the trainer's head, upper body, lower body, and contextual ad elements. Participants then completed the same perception measures as in Study 1. Moderation analyses examined whether fixation patterns conditioned the influence of outfit length on evaluations and participation intentions. Together, the two studies disentangle perceptual, affective, and attentional mechanisms through which attire influences consumer responses.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, deviations from standard yoga attire produced indirect but meaningful consequences for advertising effectiveness. In the online experiment, neither revealing nor concealing outfits directly changed trainer evaluations or participation intentions, but each generated negative indirect effects. Short outfits reduced ad appeal—primarily among women—while long outfits diminished perceived sensuality, especially among men. These reductions subsequently lowered participation interest, although total effects remained modest. Gender played a central role. Women preferred standard attire, responded negatively to revealing clothing, and based participation intentions more on cognitive cues such as ad convincingness and trainer confidence. Men, in contrast, penalized long outfits for lacking sensuality and responded positively

to revealing clothing when it signaled trainer open-mindedness. The eye-tracking study showed that the trainer's face consistently drew the most attention, but shorter outfits shifted some gaze toward the upper body. Skin exposure did not meaningfully reduce attention to textual or branding elements. Gaze patterns also moderated attire effects. Prolonged fixations on the head or upper body amplified negative reactions to non-standard outfits, while attention to the lower body increased perceived trainer openness. Overall, standard attire generated the most favorable engagement, particularly when viewers inspected the ad closely.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to theory and practice in four ways. First, it identifies trainer outfit length as a consequential yet understudied visual cue in fitness advertising, demonstrating that both revealing and concealing deviations from standard yoga attire can reduce effectiveness through distinct psychological pathways. Second, it advances understanding of gender-specific processing of body-focused imagery, showing that women prioritize cognitive judgments of professionalism and authenticity, whereas men weigh affective qualities such as sensuality and inferred openness. Third, by integrating eye-tracking with self-reports, the work demonstrates that gaze is not merely an outcome of visual stimuli but also a moderator shaping how attire influences downstream evaluations and behavioral intentions. This helps refine objectification and expectancy-violations accounts by revealing how attention to the head, torso, or contextual elements alters interpretations of the trainer. Fourth, the findings offer actionable guidance for fitness professionals and marketers. Standard yoga attire appears to strike a "sweet spot" that appeals to mixed-gender audiences, avoids negative expectancy violations, and maintains credibility without triggering

adverse social comparison or objectification dynamics. Together, the studies provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how clothing choices affect persuasion in credence-based service advertising.

SHIFTING TOWARD QUALITY: HOW COMMUNICATING "COST PER WEAR" INFLUENCES CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR CLOTHING

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Keywords: clothing consumption, cost per wear, marketing communication, sustainable consumption, usage frequency

Description: This work examines *cost per wear*, calculated as the purchase price of a garment divided by the number of uses it lasts, as a potential communication tool for marketers and policymakers to increase consumer preference for high-quality clothing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers overconsume and underutilize clothing, resulting in substantial waste. The fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to environmental and ethical harm (Gordon and Hill 2015). Although higher-quality clothing is typically more durable and offers greater long-term value, saving both environmental and financial resources, consumers often opt for lower-quality, less durable alternatives with a lower purchase price. Previous research has shown that consumers often neglect usage frequency and durability considerations at the point of sale when such cues are not salient in the purchase environment (e.g., Goodman and Irmak 2013; Mittelman et al. 2020).

The present work examines the provision and effectiveness of *cost per wear* (CPW)—defined as the ratio of a garment's purchase price to the number of times it can be worn—as a potential marketing communication at the point of sale to increase consumer preference for high-quality, durable options. Building on research in unit pricing (e.g., Miyazaki et al. 2000), we propose that CPW functions as a usage-based unit price by specifying the cost of each wear, which can prompt durability considerations and help consumers evaluate a garment's economic value. We test the effectiveness of communicating CPW in six preregistered online studies.

Method and Data

A pilot study tested whether communicating CPW increases perceived economic value and preference for more expensive, high-quality clothing (i.e., with a lower CPW) vis-à-vis cheaper, lower-quality options (i.e., with a higher CPW). Study 1 and Study 2 examined evaluation mode (single vs. joint; Hsee and Zhang 2010) and purchase occasion (special vs. every day), respectively, as context-relevant boundary conditions. Study 3 had an incentive-compatible design and varied the direction and magnitude of the CPW difference between two sweaters from real brands (H&M and Patagonia), examining the case when a high-quality option's CPW is only slightly better—or even worse—than a lower-quality option's CPW. Study 4 and Study 5 tested when only one option in a choice set communicates CPW and examined whether the effectiveness of communicating CPW depends on third-party certification and how it compares to non-numerical, general durability claims, respectively.

Summary of Findings

The pilot study indicated that communicating CPW increases perceived economic value and preference for a high-quality, more expensive option with a lower CPW compared to a

lower-quality, cheaper option with a higher CPW. Study 1 and 2 found that the effect of communicating CPW on perceived economic value and purchase interest was mitigated when participants evaluated an option in isolation (vs. jointly with another option) and when consumers buy clothing for a special occasion (vs. for every day), respectively. Study 3 found that when the high-quality option's CPW compared favourably to an alternative, participants were less sensitive to the magnitude of the difference; when the high-quality option's CPW compared unfavourably to an alternative, the magnitude of the difference was more relevant in that larger (vs. smaller) differences had a stronger negative impact on preference for the high-quality option. Study 4 provided evidence that communicating CPW as a brand increases preference for the product and is perceived as more credible when the message is certified by an independent third-party. Lastly, Study 5 showed that communicating CPW can be more effective in increasing both perceived helpfulness to assess economic value and product preference compared to a general durability claim.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research integrates and extends research on usage frequency (e.g., Mittelman et al. 2020), unit pricing (e.g., Miyazaki et al. 2000), and sustainable clothing consumption (e.g., Chen and Liu 2023) by demonstrating that CPW as a unit price can increase consumer preference for sustainable clothing by providing information about its economic value. Unlike prior studies, our work examines the combination of a quantitative usage cue within clothing domain. Our findings also have practical implications for marketing and policy: Providing CPW at the point of sale can help consumers evaluate the long-term value of clothing, increasing the appeal of higher-quality garments despite their higher upfront cost. Importantly, this practice is only effective when CPW information can be compared, when everyday purchases are concerned, when the CPW

difference between options is substantial, and when it is verified by an independent third party. Under these conditions, communicating CPW information can outperform generic durability claims.

References are available upon request.

SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS GENERATIONS: CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS MADE IN ITALY

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Keywords: Digital Divide; Sustainable Consumption; Generational Cohorts; Made in Italy.

Description: This quantitative descriptive study examines generational shifts in Italian consumer perceptions, evaluating how the "Made in Italy" label is transitioning from a traditional marker of quality to a digital guarantee of ethical sustainability.

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study (N=220) examines generational shifts in ethical consumption regarding "Made in Italy". Findings reveal a divide: Gen Z and Millennials demand transparency and integrity, while older cohorts remain skeptical. To maintain relevance, the brand must transition from a symbol of tradition to a certified guarantee of sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, digitalization, and the urgency of sustainability are reshaping how consumers evaluate brands. Ethical consumption—aligning purchases with environmental, social, and cultural values—has become a defining force in market behavior. Consumers may now act as moral agents who influence supply chains, safeguard cultural heritage, and co-create the global perception of national brands such as *Made in Italy*. Long associated with craftsmanship, authenticity, and cultural identity, *Made in Italy* is increasingly assessed through environmental and social responsibility lenses. Generational identity plays a central role in ethical decisions. Building on the premise that formative experiences shape

chronically accessible decision heuristics and moral priorities (Prensky, 2001; Kahneman, 2011), this study focuses on Italy, where *Made in Italy* functions both as an economic pillar and a cultural symbol, and addresses the **research question**: how do perceptions and attitudes toward the Made in Italy label and sustainability vary across generations in Italy? To study this, we designed a structured questionnaire with attention to generational patterns. Understanding these patterns is academically relevant, and also offers practical insights for marketers, regulators, and policymakers who must communicate sustainability in ways that both resonate with values of the audiences across different ages.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cultural Branding Meets Sustainability: The Case of Made in Italy

Over the past century, "sustainability" has moved from a resource-management idea (e.g., 18th-century German forestry's Nachhaltigkeit) to a shared policy agenda. The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) fixed the intergenerational core of the concept; the 1992 Rio Summit mainstreamed action plans; Kyoto (1997) and Paris (2015) made climate commitments the legal backbone; and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015) broadened sustainability beyond the environment to social inclusion and responsible production. In Italy, those expectations meet a powerful cultural frame: *Made in Italy*. The *Made in Italy* label has long transcended its literal meaning of origin to become a cultural and symbolic construct. Historically, it emerged in the post-war decades as a marker of national identity and a competitive advantage in global markets, associated with craftsmanship, creativity, and style. Fashion, design, food, and luxury manufacturing all contributed to its consolidation as a narrative of excellence, rooted in artisanal skills and regional traditions but projected onto the global stage as a synonym of elegance and authenticity (Fortis, 2005). Over time, however, the meaning of *Made in Italy* has become more contested. Globalization and outsourcing

raised doubts about the actual provenance of products, while the proliferation of counterfeit and “Italian sounding” goods blurred its boundaries. As a result, consumer trust has increasingly depended not only on cultural reputation but also on mechanisms of certification, traceability, and institutional regulation . In this regard, legislation has played a crucial role: Law 350/2003 established that the *Made in Italy* label can only be used if the product is effectively and substantially made in Italy, while Law 55/2010 introduced the “100% Made in Italy” label, subject to strict requirements. In particular, to qualify for this indication, all main stages of the production chain—design, planning, processing, and assembly—must take place within the national territory. In the absence of these conditions, the use of the label constitutes a misleading practice and is punishable by law. Sustainability reshapes how *Made in Italy* is understood. For older generations, the label continues to evoke quality and durability, implicitly linked to responsible production. For younger consumers, however, heritage alone no longer suffices: they expect *Made in Italy* to demonstrate measurable environmental and social responsibility, aligned with global ethical standards. The label now stands at a crossroads, caught between cultural symbolism and ethical performance. If it can move beyond being a marker of origin to become a genuine guarantee of sustainability and supply chain transparency, being the economic pillar and a cultural ambassador for Italy in the twenty-first century.

Generational Cognition as Foundation of Ethical Consumer Behavior

As Dr. B. D. Perry once said: “Different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures” (Prensky, 2001). Generational cohorts—understood not merely as age bins but as sociologically distinct formations shaped by shared historical shocks—play a critical role in shaping decision-making styles. Following Mannheim’s (1953) seminal insight, cohorts develop enduring values and practices based on formative experiences and environment, not

just age. Kahneman's (2011) dual-process theory adds a cognitive dimension: *System 1* (fast, automatic, and intuitive) continuously generates impressions and responses, while *System 2* (slow, deliberate, and analytical) is engaged when effortful reasoning is required, such as in situations of novelty, conflict, or high stakes. Crucially, what feels "natural" to System 1 is not universal: it is conditioned by early socialization and cultural background. This means that generational cohorts, having been shaped by different historical and digital environments, bring distinct intuitive baselines to consumer decision-making, which in turn influence how they perceive sustainability and evaluate labels such as Made in Italy. Italy offers a compelling test case: *Made in Italy* functions as a dense symbol of quality, craftsmanship, and territorial identity—yet the cognitive and ethical readings of this label may differ significantly by generation due to their personal experiences.

Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964) came of age during the post-war *miracolo economico*, a period of rapid reconstruction and industrial growth. Their worldview was shaped by the rise of state television, a relatively homogenous media landscape, and limited political pluralism. These conditions fostered trust in institutions and stable consumer expectations. They internalized values of durability, national pride, and brand loyalty. *Made in Italy* signaled reliability and status, with minimal salience for environmental concerns during youth.

Generation X (1965 – 1980), formed amid the political unrest of the *Anni di piombo*, domestic terrorism, and early European integration, matured during a time of institutional disillusionment and the rise of consumer capitalism. Their experience of fragmented authority and increasing globalization shaped a pragmatic and often skeptical outlook. They respect artisanal quality but pair this with price vigilance and caution toward ethical claims. Research finds comparatively lower systematic engagement with ethical consumption among this cohort (Šálková Procházková, 2023; Brand et al., 2022).

Millennials (1981 – 1996) came of age during Italy's Tangentopoli scandals, the decline of traditional party politics, and the emergence of the digital economy. Their early adult years were marked by the global financial crisis and entry into the Eurozone, which compounded long-term youth underemployment. While exposed to sustainability education and policy discourse, many Millennials exhibit an "ideal–action gap" in practice. They often espouse green values but struggle with implementation due to structural and economic constraints (Bonera et al., 2020). Still, stable ethical consumption patterns—such as preference for certified wines—are evident among urban dwellers and women (Gazzola et al., 2022; Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014).

Generation Z (1997 – 2012), raised in fully digital environments, has been deeply shaped by climate anxiety, COVID-19, war crises, and the pressures of algorithmic culture. Their cognitive and moral development unfolded in a context of digital overload, constant information exposure, and personalized content streams. As a result, Gen Z exhibits a blended value orientation that combines strong personal values (honesty, fairness, responsibility) with pronounced social concerns (inclusion, environmental protection). They expect ethical claims to be verifiable, favoring brands that demonstrate authenticity and traceability—though intention–behavior gaps persist. (Weber, 2024).

The Digital Divide as a Moderator of Ethical Consumption

Decisions are also shaped by digital access and skill—especially relevant in Italy, where structural disparities persist. According to recent ISTAT data, among Italians aged 16–74 who used the internet in the past three months, only about 45–46% possess at least basic digital skills. Gaps by gender and geography remain significant, particularly in the Mezzogiorno (ISTAT, 2023). These gaps influence cognition in two key ways. First, they reduce exposure to the algorithmic "choice architectures" shaping much of Gen Z and Millennials'

decision-making—through infinite feeds, creator economies, and platform-specific sustainability narratives. Older cohorts may be less influenced by these environments, but they are also less likely to encounter the forms of sustainability messaging that increasingly "live" in those ecosystems. Second, digital literacy shapes how sustainability is perceived and evaluated. For digital natives, cues are often embedded in dynamic, glanceable formats—QR codes, certifications, influencer endorsements—that require both familiarity with digital interfaces and cognitive fluency to assess fast-moving claims. In contrast, individuals with low digital proficiency rely more heavily on traditional trust markers (e.g., durability, brand reputation) and may struggle to distinguish genuine efforts from greenwashing. The digital divide thus limits access to sustainability messaging and conditions the interpretive frameworks through which ethical claims are understood. Finally, one more layer of difficulty is already on the horizon: the role of Artificial Intelligence systems that increasingly act as Artificial Moral Agents (AMAs). These technologies do not simply deliver information, but actively filter, frame, and sometimes even nudge consumers' ethical choices. We are aware of the importance of this development, but exploring it in depth would take us far beyond the scope of this paper. For now, we simply acknowledge it as a critical direction for future research—one that deserves its own careful study.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research question, a quantitative descriptive approach was adopted, based on the administration of a structured survey. Data analysis focused on descriptive statistics (calculation of means and frequencies) to outline the trends within the sample. The instrument was developed to capture perceptions and self-reported consumption behaviors related to sustainability and Made in Italy, with particular attention to generational differences. Descriptive statistics were used to illustrate response patterns and to provide

context for the qualitative interpretation. The questionnaire was organized into five main sections:

1. **Demographics**, collecting basic information on respondents' age and citizenship, in order to classify them within the generational cohorts under study (Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers).
2. **Importance of traceability**, asking how relevant it was, in the purchase of fashion items and accessories, to know their origin, materials, and production process.
3. **Willingness to pay a premium price for sustainability**, aimed at measuring consumers' propensity to financially support certified sustainable products.
4. **Importance of supply chain transparency**, investigating the weight attributed to the clarity and verifiability of information across the different stages of production.
5. **Perceptions of *Made in Italy***, with questions assessing both the extent to which this label is associated with quality and sustainability, and the level of trust consumers place in the actual Italian origin of the products.

The questionnaire consisted of 23 closed-ended items, developed on the basis of existing literature on ethical consumption, sustainability, and country-of-origin effects. All items were measured using 5-point Likert scales, unless otherwise specified. The instrument was designed to capture perceptions, attitudes, and declared purchasing intentions rather than observed behaviors. The questionnaire was administered online between May and June 2025. To ensure balanced participation among the different generations, the distribution strategy relied on differentiated channels: social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook) and university mailing lists were used to reach younger cohorts (Gen Z and Millennials), while newsletters from consumer associations, professional networks, and industry-related groups (particularly in the agri-food and manufacturing sectors) were employed to reach Gen X and

Baby Boomers. This strategy, based on non-probability quota sampling, enabled the collection of a diverse generational sample, albeit without claiming full statistical representativeness. In total, 220 valid responses were collected. The generational distribution showed a strong presence of Gen Z (34%) and Millennials (38%), followed by Gen X (20%) and a smaller group of Baby Boomers (8%). All the respondents were Italians. As the study is based on self-reported data and non-probability quota sampling, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire Italian population but provide indicative insights into generational differences in attitudes toward sustainability and Made in Italy.

RESULTS

The analysis provides a nuanced picture of how Italian consumers across different generations interpret and practice ethical consumption in relation to sustainability and the *Made in Italy* label. The results show both areas of generational convergence—particularly in the enduring symbolic power of *Made in Italy*—and areas of divergence, especially regarding how sustainability is understood, valued, and translated into actual purchasing behavior.

Table 1. Generational Differences in Ethical Consumption and Perceptions of Made in Italy

Source: Authors own work (N = 220)

Dimension	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
Traceability (Mean score, 1–5)	4.3	4.0	3.6	3.2
Supply Chain Transparency ("very important")	68%	61%	47%	38%
Willingness to Pay More (<10%) for Certified Sustainable Products	71% willing	63% willing	39% willing	27% willing

Made in Italy: Symbol of Quality	78%	82%	84%	86%
Made in Italy: Symbol of Sustainability	54% (with skepticism)	59%	63%	65%
Trust in Authentic Origin (truly Italian)	36%	44%	58%	65%

The table highlights both convergence and divergence in how Italian consumers across generations relate to sustainability and the Made in Italy label. A strong consensus remains around Made in Italy as a symbol of quality, but younger cohorts are far less trusting of its authenticity and sustainability claims. Gen Z and Millennials consistently place higher importance on traceability and transparency, and they are also more willing to pay a premium for certified sustainability—sometimes significantly more. By contrast, Gen X and especially Baby Boomers remain pragmatic, often limiting their willingness to pay to minimal price differences, while anchoring trust in the cultural weight of Made in Italy rather than in verifiable certification. These patterns reflect broader generational conditioning: younger consumers, raised in digital and policy environments where sustainability is normalized, interpret it as a moral and personal responsibility, while older cohorts, shaped by periods of economic scarcity and institutional trust, continue to value durability, cost-efficiency, and tradition.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined how different generational cohorts in Italy interpret sustainability and ethical consumption in relation to the Made in Italy brand. While Made in Italy remains a recognized symbol of quality and authenticity, its legitimacy increasingly depends on transparency, traceability, and demonstrable responsibility. Gen Z emerges as a moral vanguard, combining strong sustainability concerns with digital activism and scrutiny of

greenwashing. Millennials share similar values but often show ambivalence in translating them into behavior, consistent with prior research describing them as a "confused green generation" (Bonera et al., 2020). Gen X, more pragmatic, expresses moderate support for sustainability without strong engagement, while Baby Boomers show the greatest loyalty to Made in Italy as a cultural marker, with limited willingness to pay for certified responsibility. These results can be understood through the dual lens of generational sociology (Mannheim, 1953), cognitive psychology and decision-making processes (Kahneman, 2011). Generational experiences leave enduring imprints on values, which in turn guide consumer heuristics. Practically, the study underscores the dual challenge facing *Made in Italy* brands: to preserve the heritage-based narrative of craftsmanship while also meeting the demands of a younger, digitally active, and ethically conscious consumer base. This requires investments in supply chain transparency, credible sustainability certifications, and communication strategies tailored to generational cognitive patterns. For younger cohorts, digital storytelling, social proof, and participatory engagement are critical; for older cohorts, trust, durability, and tradition remain more persuasive.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory study has several limitations that point to directions for future research. First, non-probability quota sampling limits generalizability, suggesting the use of probability-based designs and post-stratification weights. Second, descriptive analysis cannot disentangle cohort effects from correlated factors (age, income, education, region) or establish causality; multivariate regression with cohort interactions and socioeconomic controls is recommended. Third, digital literacy was not measured directly, and cohort membership was only a proxy; future studies should include explicit measures of digital skills and media exposure. Key constructs such as "willingness to pay" and "trust in *Made in Italy"*

were self-reported, which could be improved through validated scales or experimental designs. Overall, these extensions would enable a more precise understanding of generational differences in sustainability and cultural branding. The future competitiveness of *Made in Italy* will depend on its ability to evolve from a static origin label into a dynamic ethical brand that balances tradition, cultural identity, and global responsibility.

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF INFLUENCER-FOUNDED BRANDS: MAKEUP INFLUENCER BRANDS IN BRAZIL

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Keywords: Influencer; Brand Building; Makeup; Brazil; Netnography.

Description: This study seeks to understand how influencers began to create their own brands using strategies to leverage the parasocial relationship already built with their audiences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: How influencers began to create their own brands using strategies to leverage the parasocial relationship already built with their audiences?

Method and Data: This study adopted a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) to observe this construction via social media and its dynamics with consumers. The research context was Brazilian influencer makeup brands.

Summary of Findings: Our findings reveal that influencers, upon achieving celebrity status, may choose to create their own brands to enter the beauty market. Influencer private labels can be created through two strategies: co-creation with a traditional brand or seeking investment. These models depend on certain selection factors and have advantages and disadvantages.

Key Contributions: This research highlights a new phenomenon: influencer-founded brands. This new phenomenon marks a new stage in the influencer trajectory, when they go beyond celebrity status, acting as brand owners, unlike the endorsement and entrepreneurship modalities already highlighted in the literature. Our framework presents the strategies used to create these brands and how influencers act beyond tastemakers using the parasocial relationship built with the audience to create an engaged connection with the new brand.

THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL CARE MOTIVATION ON LUXURY CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: luxury, consumer behavior, parental care motivation, signal, family

Description: This study investigates the influence of parental care motivation on luxury consumption behavior, demonstrating that it increases preferences for luxury products that showcase family resourcefulness and handmade features.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The present study sought to determine whether the activation of parental care motivation significantly influences luxury product preference.

Method and Data

A perspective on luxury consumption stems from evolutionary psychology. Research has focused on mating motivation, which drives luxury consumption by signaling status, attracting mates, deterring rivals, and fostering competition (Griskevicius and Kenrick 2013; Hennighausen, et al. 2016; Sundie et al. 2011). However, another fundamental evolutionary motive—parental care motivation—has received significantly less attention in the context of luxury consumption. This study investigates changes in women's consumer behavior by analyzing how luxury preferences

transition from pre-mating to post-childbearing stages, focusing on the role of parental care motivation in shaping these preferences.

Evolutionary psychology posits that humans have inherited psychological mechanisms that promote survival and reproduction (Griskevicius and Kenrick, 2013). Parental care motivation is a core mechanism, prioritizing offspring's well-being and survival. It drives risk-averse behaviors, social conservatism, and stronger ingroup connections, all aimed at safeguarding and supporting children (Buckels, et al. 2015; Murray and Schaller 2012; Kerry and Murray 2018; Schaller 2018). Women, in particular, are more receptive to the activation of parental care motivation due to societal expectations and biological factors (Beall and Schaller 2019; Taylor et al. 2000). Thus, it is valuable to explore how women’s luxury consumption behavior evolves from the pre-mating stage to the post-childbearing life stages.

Consumers seek luxury products as a means of signaling their ability to provide (Nelissen and Meijers 2011), a strategic tool for demonstrating economic stability and preparedness. Parents tend to favor high-quality, durable products for their children and prioritize products that demonstrate their ability to provide for their families (Li, Haws, and Griskevicius 2019). Parental care motivation increases the appeal of luxury products associated with resourcefulness (Berger and Ward 2010). While status signaling remains a key driver of luxury consumption throughout life stages, the motivation evolves: mating motivation promotes conspicuous consumption to attract partners, whereas parental care motivation drives more practical, resource-signaling luxury purchases.

Hypothesis 1. Parental care motivation will increase the attitude toward luxury products that showcase family resourcefulness.

Hypothesis 2. This relationship is mediated by the desire to signal resourcefulness.

On the other hand, handmade luxury products are characterized by their superior craftsmanship, rarity, and quality, which elevate their perceived value among consumers (Kim 2018). The intricate details and unique imperfections of handmade items enhance their exclusivity, creating a sense of authenticity and personal connection for buyers (Fuchs et al. 2015). In the context of parental care motivation, authenticity is valued because it signals quality, reliability, and craftsmanship—traits that align with the protective and nurturing goals of parental care (Eibach and Mock 2011).

Hypothesis 3. Parental care motivation will increase preferences for handmade luxury products.

Hypothesis 4. This relationship is mediated by perceived authenticity.

Two experiments were conducted to test these hypotheses. Participants were recruited through Prolific, an online recruitment platform, and informed that they would be participating in two separate, unrelated studies.

STUDY 1

Method

Study 1 involved 61 female participants randomly assigned to either a parental care activation or a neutral control condition. In the parental care condition, participants imagined being a parent to a baby from twelve images and described their thoughts, feelings, and responsibilities. In the control condition, participants envisioned selecting and using a piece of furniture. Next,

participants evaluated a luxury SUV described as stylish, sophisticated, and family-safe, rating their attitudes and agreement with the statement, "Owning this SUV will show my resourcefulness." At the end, participants recalled the initial task and reported how much it made them think about being a parent, serving as a manipulation check. Finally, conspicuous consumption tendencies in luxury clothing (e.g., logo size preferences) were measured to isolate the effects of parental care motivation on luxury products signaling family resourcefulness, not personal status.

Results

Participants in the parental care condition reported thinking more about being a parent, confirming the manipulation's success ($p < .00$). The results revealed significant differences in attitudes toward the luxury SUV between the parental care and neutral conditions ($M = 5.08$ vs. 4.21, $F(1, 60) = 4.23$, $p = .044$). The desire to signal resourcefulness fully mediated the relationship between parental care and the appeal of the luxury SUV (figure 1). In contrast, no significant differences were found in the tendency for conspicuous consumption in luxury clothing ($M = 3.58$ vs. 3.55, $F(1, 60) = .01$, $p = .95$), suggesting that the effect is specific to luxury products that signal family resourcefulness. Hypothesis 1 and 2 were supported.

STUDY 2

Method

Study 2 replicated the activation procedure with 70 female participants but focused on luxury cars that are built with handmade leather interiors. Participants evaluated a luxury car described as having "every detail of its leather interior handcrafted by skilled artisans, ensuring the perfect

blend of comfort and style." They rated their attitudes toward the car, perceived quality, and perceived authenticity. As in Study 1, participants were asked to recall the first study and report the extent to which the imagination task made them think about being a parent.

Results

Study 2 manipulation was also successful ($p < .00$). The results demonstrated that parental care activation increased preferences for handmade luxury cars ($M = 6.31$ vs. 5.59, $F(1, 69) = 8.99$, $p = 0.004$), with perceived authenticity fully mediating the relationship between parental care motivation and product appeal (figure 2). These findings support Hypothesis 3 and 4 and highlight the importance of authenticity in shaping parental preferences for luxury.

Summary of Findings

This study investigates the influence of parental care motivation on luxury consumption behavior, demonstrating that it increases preferences for luxury products that showcase family resourcefulness and handmade features. These effects are mediated by desire to signal resourcefulness of the family to others through their luxury SUV cars (Study 1) and perceived authenticity of the handmade leather interiors of the cars (Study 2), respectively. The findings expand research on luxury consumption from prominent mating motivation to relatively underexplored parental care motivation.

Key Contributions

The research adds to the academic marketing discipline’s existing knowledge on the topic of luxury and evolutionary psychology. While previous research has largely emphasized mating

motivation, this study highlights the potential role of parental care motivation in influencing consumer preferences, especially for luxury products that convey family resourcefulness and authenticity. The results support evolutionary theory, which posits that parental care motivation drives behaviors and product choices aimed at improving the well-being and survival of offspring.

Non-academic stakeholders such as for-profit firms would find value in the manuscripts. The results, although it is a preliminary finding, have important practical implications for luxury brands. Marketers can leverage these insights by emphasizing family resourcefulness and authenticity in their messaging, particularly when targeting parents. For example, highlighting the craftsmanship, durability, and family-oriented features of family luxury products may resonate strongly with women consumers whose parental care motivation is activated.

References are available upon request.

THE NEXUS OF POLITICAL EVENTS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A NEUROMARKETING AND POLITICAL MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: Neuromarketing, BrandActivism, Political Consumerism, Brand Loyalty, GenZ, Corporate Trust, Boycott, Buycott, Brand Equity, Values Driven Brand

Description: This paper examines how political events reshape consumer behavior and brand loyalty by analyzing the short-, medium-, and long-term effects of different corporate response strategies in politicized markets, with particular attention to value alignment, consumer activism, and generational dynamics

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Political turbulence has become a defining feature of contemporary societies, and its effects increasingly spill over into the marketplace (Boström et al., 2019; Copeland and Boulianne, 2022). Consumers no longer evaluate brands solely on functional attributes or price; instead, they increasingly interpret corporate behavior through political, ethical, and value-based lenses (Khan et al., 2013). This paper examines how political events reshape consumer behavior and brand–consumer relationships, focusing on the strategic responses of firms operating in highly politicized environments. Drawing on political marketing and consumer behavior literature, and informed by insights from consumer neuroscience as an interpretive perspective (Ariely and Berns, 2010; Plassmann et al., 2012), the study explores how different corporate response strategies influence trust, loyalty, and brand equity.

The research adopts a qualitative, exploratory design based on secondary data, synthesizing academic studies, industry reports, surveys, and documented case evidence (Moorman, 2020; Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020). Key cases include Türkiye's 2025 protests and consumer-led shopping boycott (Reuters, 2025a; Reuters, 2025b), corporate reactions during the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States (Chintagunta et al., 2020), and the emergence of the "yellow economy" during the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests (Reuters, 2019; Reuters, 2020). Through comparative thematic analysis, the paper identifies five dominant firm response typologies to political events: supportive, neutral, oppositional, delayed, and performative, building on prior research on brand activism and political consumerism (Kotler and Sarkar, 2018; Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020). These strategies are evaluated based on their short-term, medium-term, and long-term effects on consumer attitudes, purchasing behavior, and brand reputation (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001).

Findings suggest that supportive and value-consistent responses can strengthen emotional bonds and long-term loyalty among aligned consumers, even at the cost of alienating others (Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020; Sweeney, 2018). Neutral and delayed responses, while often intended to minimize risk, frequently erode trust among value-driven consumers who interpret silence as complicity or indecision (Moorman, 2020; Kotler and Sarkar, 2018). Oppositional stances tend to polarize markets, generating short-lived gains within specific segments but posing significant long-term reputational risks (Food Dive, 2022). Performative activism—symbolic support without substantive action—emerges as the most damaging strategy, often triggering consumer backlash and enduring trust deficits (Vredenburg et al., 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020). Across cases, Generation Z plays a disproportionate role in mobilizing political consumerism, using social media to coordinate boycotts and buycotts and to hold brands publicly accountable (Edelman, 2022; Tara Health Foundation and Greenwald Research, 2021).

The study contributes to marketing scholarship by offering a structured typology of firm responses to political events and by clarifying how political consumerism operates across different time horizons (Copeland and Boulianne, 2022). While neuromarketing is not positioned as a primary explanatory framework, neuroscience-informed insights help illuminate the emotional and identity-driven mechanisms underlying consumer reactions (Zaltman, 2003; Wannow et al., 2024). Managerially, the paper provides guidance for navigating politicized markets, emphasizing authenticity, value alignment, and strategic consistency (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Overall, the research highlights that in an era of democratic strain and heightened polarization, brand strategy is increasingly inseparable from broader societal and political dynamics (Boström et al., 2019; Edelman, 2022).

Research Questions

RQ1. How do politically charged events alter consumer trust, loyalty, and purchase behavior toward brands operating in polarized social contexts?

RQ2. How can corporate responses to political events be systematically categorized, and what distinguishes the short-, medium-, and long-term consumer outcomes of these response strategies?

RQ3. How does political consumerism (e.g., boycotts and buycotts) mediate the relationship between firm response strategies and brand equity outcomes?

RQ4. How do generational differences—particularly the role of Generation Z—shape the intensity and direction of consumer reactions to corporate engagement with political issues?

Method and Data

This paper is a non-empirical conceptual–exploratory study grounded in qualitative secondary analysis, drawing on prior scholarship in political consumerism, brand activism, and consumer behavior (Boström et al., 2019; Copeland and Boulianne, 2022; Moorman, 2020).

Summary of Findings

This study finds that political events significantly reshape consumer–brand relationships by activating value-based and identity-driven evaluations of firms (Khan et al., 2013; Zaltman, 2003). Across the analyzed cases, consumers increasingly interpret brands as social and political actors rather than neutral market participants (Boström et al., 2019). As a result, purchasing decisions, trust, and loyalty are frequently mobilized as forms of political expression (Copeland and Boulianne, 2022).

A central finding is the identification of five distinct corporate response typologies to politically charged events—supportive, neutral, oppositional, delayed, and performative—building on and extending prior research on brand activism (Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020; Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020). These response strategies are associated with systematically different consumer outcomes across short-, medium-, and long-term horizons (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). Supportive and value-consistent responses tend to generate strong emotional alignment and loyalty among ideologically aligned consumers, often producing short-term sales or engagement gains and more durable long-term brand equity (Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020; Sweeney, 2018). However, such responses may simultaneously provoke backlash from opposing segments, resulting in a polarized but more clearly defined customer base (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020).

In contrast, neutral and delayed responses, commonly adopted to minimize immediate risk, frequently erode trust among value-driven consumers (Moorman, 2020). Silence or hesitation is often interpreted as complicity, indecision, or lack of integrity (Kotler and Sarkar, 2018), leading to diminished engagement and weakened emotional attachment over time. Oppositional responses produce the most pronounced polarization effects, occasionally yielding short-term gains within supportive segments but carrying substantial long-term reputational risks that constrain brand growth and cross-demographic appeal (Klein et al., 2004; Food Dive, 2022)

The analysis further reveals that performative activism—symbolic support without substantive action—emerges as the most damaging strategy (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Consumers rapidly detect inconsistencies between messaging and behavior, resulting in cynicism, backlash, and enduring trust deficits that are difficult to reverse (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020).

Across all cases, political consumerism—manifested through boycotts, buycotts, and digitally coordinated collective action—acts as a key mediating mechanism linking political events to market outcomes (Copeland and Boulianne, 2022). Social media amplifies these behaviors by enabling rapid coordination, public accountability, and moral signaling (Reuters, 2020; Edelman, 2022).

The findings highlight the disproportionate influence of Generation Z, whose digital fluency, value orientation, and expectations of corporate accountability intensify consumer responses and accelerate market-level consequences (Edelman, 2022; Tara Health Foundation and Greenwald Research, 2021). Collectively, these findings suggest that in politicized environments, authenticity, value alignment, and strategic consistency are central determinants of brand resilience and consumer trust (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

Key Contributions

1. Conceptual Advancement in Political Consumerism and Brand Strategy

This paper advances marketing scholarship by systematically linking political events to consumer behavior through a structured analysis of firm response strategies (Boström et al., 2019; Copeland and Boulianne, 2022). It extends the political consumerism literature by moving beyond individual-level motivations to examine how corporate actions during political crises shape trust, loyalty, and brand equity across time (Eilert and Nappier Cherup, 2020).

2. A Typology of Corporate Responses to Political Events

A central contribution is the development of a five-category typology of firm responses—supportive, neutral, oppositional, delayed, and performative—along with a comparative assessment of their short-, medium-, and long-term consumer outcomes (Mukherjee and Althuizen, 2020; Vredenburg et al., 2020). This framework provides a coherent lens for understanding why similar political contexts produce divergent brand trajectories.

3. Temporal Perspective on Consumer Reactions

The study introduces a time-horizon approach to political consumerism, demonstrating that immediate market reactions often differ substantially from medium- and long-term effects on trust and brand equity (Klein et al., 2004; Sen et al., 2001). This perspective helps reconcile inconsistent findings in prior research that focused on single time points.

4. Integration of Political Marketing and Consumer Psychology

By incorporating neuroscience-informed insights as a supporting interpretive lens, the paper clarifies the emotional and identity-driven mechanisms underlying consumer responses to brand activism (Zaltman, 2003; Plassmann et al., 2012; Wannow et al., 2024), without overstating causal claims. This interdisciplinary integration enriches theoretical understanding while remaining accessible to mainstream marketing research (Ariely and Berns, 2010).

5. Managerial Guidance for Politicized Markets

For practitioners, the study offers actionable insights into navigating politically polarized environments, emphasizing authenticity, value alignment, and strategic consistency as critical determinants of brand resilience (Kotler and Sarkar, 2018; Moorman, 2020). It cautions against neutrality and performative activism as high-risk strategies (Vredenburg et al., 2020).

6. Generational Insight into Market-Level Change

The paper underscores the outsized role of Generation Z in accelerating political consumerism through digital coordination and moral accountability (Edelman, 2022; Tara Health Foundation and Greenwald Research, 2021), positioning generational dynamics as a key factor shaping the future of brand–consumer relationships.

"References are available upon request."

THE UNEXPECTED FINANCIAL BENEFIT OF UNETHICAL WORK BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: unethical work behavior, consumer financial decision-making, fresh start mindset

Description: This research examines the link between work behavior ethicality and consumer savings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Unethical work behavior is a global problem that has been largely overlooked in consumer research. Its organizational consequences are well-established: unethical work behavior damages company reputation, undermines employee trust, and increases absenteeism and turnover (Chen, Chen, and Sheldon 2016; Cialdini, Petrova, and Goldstein 2004). However, little is known about its implications for consumers' financial behavior outside the workplace, despite its growing prevalence and importance (Ethics & Compliance Initiative 2024). In this paper, we ask: Does the way in which consumers earn money affect what they decide to do with it?

Method and Data

We present evidence from seven experiments, including lab studies.

Summary of Findings

When asked, people think that those who behave unethically at work will save less money than those who behave ethically. Contrary to this lay belief, we show that those engaging in unethical (vs. ethical) work behavior want to save more. This effect generalizes across different types of work behaviors, responsibility levels, and sample populations. We provide measured and manipulated process evidence that the effect is driven by consumers' desire to pursue a “fresh start.”

Statement of Key Contributions

Our work makes three key contributions. First, we highlight the importance and interdisciplinary merit of considering the systematic forces that affect consumers' financial decision-making. We thus enrich consumer financial behavior research by showing that the moral valence of income significantly alters savings. As such, a unique contribution of this work lies in bridging currently disconnected literature streams—namely, unethical work behavior and consumer financial decision-making. While prior research has primarily examined the consequences of unethical organizational behavior within organizational settings, this work shifts the lens to explore how such behavior influences private financial choices. Policymakers may draw on this research to better understand how consumers respond to unethical workplace behavior through their private financial choices. Second, we identify unethical work behavior as a novel antecedent of the fresh-start mindset. While prior work has predominantly focused on the consequences of a fresh-start mindset, we demonstrate that unethical work behavior can trigger a desire to “start over” (a-path). Third, this work extends prior research (Beshears et al. 2021) on temporal landmarks related to a fresh start and savings behavior (b-path), substantiating the potential of scalable interventions that encourage consumers to pursue fresh starts to counter chronically low saving rates.

References are available upon request.

THEY NOT LIKE US: SPECIESIST BELIEFS AND CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF PRICE FAIRNESS IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DETERMINED PRICING

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Keywords: Price Fairness, Speciesist Beliefs, Artificial Intelligence, Social Norm Violation

Description: This paper examines the effects of price decision makers (AI vs human) on forms of perceived price fairness and how speciesist beliefs shape these effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly given agency in decision-making, yet its effects on consumers' fairness perceptions are underexamined. Despite the important contributions of price fairness research, prior work has largely assumed human decision makers, and little is known about how price fairness judgments are formed when decision-making responsibility is given to AI rather than humans. In accordance with prior research (Huo et al., 2024; Schmitt, 2020), we posit that consumers may not see AI just as a tool but as a distinct social species, influencing how consumers perceive pricing decisions by AI. Specifically, the present paper proposes that speciesist beliefs function as a psychological mechanism that influences the perception of AI decision makers.

The price fairness literature suggests that price fairness judgments are influenced by culturally invoked in-group versus out-group comparisons. However, this research does not consider such attitudes in relation to AI. In response to this evident gap in the literature, we set out to answer the following research questions:

Does the price decision maker type (AI vs. human) affect consumers' price fairness perceptions, and do consumers' speciesist beliefs moderate this relationship?

Method And Data

We conducted a preregistered, between-subjects experiment in the context of NFL ticket pricing with 354 participants (51.1% female; M_{age} = 43.6) from the USA. Participants read an article describing the NFL Teams' partnership with Ticketmaster to implement dynamic price changes. On a different screen, participants were informed that they had paid 20% more for tickets than their friends for identical seats. We manipulated the pricing decision-maker as either an AI pricing agent or a human pricing manager. The primary dependent variables were perceived distributive fairness and procedural fairness. Speciesist beliefs were assessed as moderators, including moral-worth speciesist beliefs and rationality-oriented speciesist beliefs. Perceived social norm violation was measured as the mediator. We included technology anxiety and perceived process transparency as covariates.

Summary of Findings

A manipulation check confirmed that participants in the AI condition recognized that the AI was responsible for the price decisions compared to the human condition with the pricing manager. We conducted one-way ANOVAs to examine the direct effects of decision-maker type (AI vs. human) on perceived (a) distributive fairness and (b) procedural fairness. Decision-maker type had a significant effect on procedural fairness, with participants reporting lower procedural fairness in the AI condition compared to the human condition. In contrast, the direct effect of decision-maker type on distributive fairness was not statistically significant.

Speciesist beliefs were examined as moderators of the effect of decision-maker type on fairness perceptions. Moral worth speciesist beliefs did not significantly moderate the effect of decision-maker type. In contrast, the interaction between decision-maker type and rationality-oriented speciesist beliefs was significant for procedural fairness, such that with higher human rational superiority belief, procedural fairness was lower for participants in the AI condition compared to the human condition. Perceived social norm violation was significantly associated with changes in fairness perceptions. However, the indirect effect of decision-maker type on fairness through perceived social norm violation was not statistically significant, and there was no evidence supporting mediation or moderated mediation.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study extends the price fairness literature by examining speciesist beliefs as moderators of consumers' responses to AI-determined pricing. Prior research focuses on algorithm aversion and skepticism toward AI, but less research has looked at how fundamental belief systems shape fairness judgments when pricing responsibility is assigned to an AI pricing agent rather than a human pricing manager. Furthermore, by exploring speciesist beliefs as a key moderator in the context of AI, this study contributes to the growing literature on human-AI interaction and price fairness. Beyond academic contribution, this research also has implications for for-profit firms involved in ticket pricing. Firms and managers developing a pricing process can benefit from

understanding that giving AI agency without oversight in the price-setting process can negatively affect fairness perceptions, particularly among consumers with strong, specific beliefs.

References are available upon request.

TOO EARLY TO USE AI: EVALUATORS PERCEIVE CREATORS AS LESS CREATIVE WHEN AI IS USED EARLY IN THE PROCESS, COMPARED TO LATER.

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Keywords: AI integration, timing, authenticity, creativity

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Description: The current research finds that consumers and professional managers perceive creators as more creative when they integrate AI at the end of their creative work compared to the beginning.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Imagine two digital marketing managers, Sarah and Alex, presenting advertising campaigns created using artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Sarah used the AI tool's recommendations at the beginning to brainstorm ideas before refining them independently. Alex independently developed the campaign concept and used AI suggestions at the end to refine and improve it. Although both creators may have the same creative merit, do evaluators judge their creativity differently?

Prior research revealed that the timing of assistance affects creators' subjective experience: that human assistance early in an activity reduces creators' psychological ownership and task satisfaction (Koo et al. 2023), and that independent ideation prior to AI integration boosts originality and confidence (Qin et al. 2025). What remains unclear is whether an evaluator also treats the timing of AI integration (at the beginning vs. at the end) as a diagnostic cue to assess the creator, specifically to infer their merit, effort, and authenticity. In this research, we examine two questions: (1) Do evaluators assess creators differently based on the timing of AI integration? (2) Do these perceptions translate to differences in the economic outcomes?

Timing-based nuances are consequential. Creative work often requires creators to bring in other individuals and tools to move ideas toward implementation (Bouschery et al. 2023; Mahaney et al. 2025), which is a matter of the creator's strategic approach. However, an evaluator seldom observes the creative process directly and instead infers from observable cues (such as when AI enters the workflow), which often leads to biased final estimates (Ambady and Rosenthal 1992; Epley and Gilovich 2001). Existing evidence on AI-assisted work primarily examines the punitive social judgments that creators face when AI usage becomes visible

(Chamberlain et al. 2018; Reif et al. 2025). For example, consumers favor AI-produced products that hold lower symbolic value (Granulo et al. 2021), and managers update their trust and hiring decisions based on AI disclosure (Schilke and Reimann 2025). We suggest that when evaluators attend to the timing of AI integration by creators, negative judgments rooted in AI use are systematically patterned by timing cues.

Summary of Findings

In the current research, across 10 experiments (N = 3,721), we found robust support for this perceptual gap: consumers and professional managers perceive creators as more creative when they integrate AI at the end of the creative work, compared to at the beginning. The effect generalizes across several creative domains and holds regardless of the creator's expertise and whether evaluators are informed of the specific AI usage in relation to the timing (ideation vs refinement). At least two mechanisms underlie this effect: evaluators perceive creators who integrate AI at the end as more effortful and more authentic. Importantly, the time-based differentiation attenuates, but does not eliminate, when evaluators are informed that the creators adapted AI recommendations to fit their needs rather than implementing them directly. We also found organizational consequences: managers allocate larger bonuses and are more likely to promote work from those who integrate AI at the end, revealing costly implications.

Statement of Key Contribution

Our research underscores a broader tension in understanding human-AI collaboration. Successful creative outcomes rely on both the creator's skill and AI's capability (Huang 2025). Despite this functional interdependence, we find that timing cues systematically influence perceived creativity based on beliefs that are orthogonal to the collaborative dynamics. The current findings advance consumer research on the evaluation of AI-assisted work (De Freitas et

al. 2025; Doshi and Hauser 2024) by foregrounding the timing of AI assistance as a process factor that shapes judgment. Second, we link time-based evaluation to the literature on creativity and innovation (Valsesia et al. 2016; Verganti et al. 2020), revealing how evaluators construe the legitimacy of creative labor and the provenance of ideas. Finally, we contribute to the literature on human-AI collaboration (Arora et al. 2025; Chen and Chan 2024) by articulating how evaluators' impressions are shaped by process cues that inform their market legitimacy.

Word Count: 648/800

UTILITARIAN FOR ME PLEASE: THE IMPACT OF CONSUMPTION TARGET AND PRODUCT TYPE ON UPCYCLED PRODUCT PURCHASE

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Keywords: upcycling, gift-giving, utilitarian product, hedonic product, perceived preference uncertainty.

Description: Combining three studies using Etsy's sales data and experimental data, we find consumers prefer utilitarian over hedonic upcycled products for themselves, but this difference disappears when purchasing for others, which is mediated by perceived preference uncertainty.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – Upcycled products are defined as goods innovatively redesigned from waste materials to enhance value (Kamleitner, Thürridl, and Martin 2019). Since upcycled

products offer enhanced value and possess environmentally friendly characteristics, promoting them is considered more meaningful than promoting new or downcycled products. Consumers are primarily motivated to purchase upcycled products due to their inherent green value (Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Xu and Jeong 2025), aesthetic value (Kamleitner, Thürridl, and Martin 2019; Caprioli, Fuchs, and Van Den Bergh 2023), and emotional value (Park and Lin 2020; Shi, Huang, and Sarigollu 2025). However, some consumers also opt to avoid upcycled products due to perceived uncertainty regarding quality (Park and Lin 2020; Xu and Jeong 2025), monetary value (Hwang, Luo, and Mattila 2024), and contamination concerns (Meng and Leary 2021). Though prior research has identified reasons why consumers purchase or do not purchase upcycled products, it remains unclear which product type consumers prefer (utilitarian or hedonic), especially in the gift-giving context.

Method and Data – We conducted three studies combining experimental and field data. Study 1 (N = 480, Credamo) employed a 2 (consumption target: self vs. other; within-subjects) × 2 (product type: utilitarian vs. hedonic; between-subjects) mixed design to demonstrate that consumers prefer utilitarian upcycled products for themselves but exhibit no preference when purchasing for others. Study 2 (N = 240, Credamo) used the same design to replicate the interaction effect and test the mediating role of perceived preference uncertainty. Finally, Study 3 leveraged real-world sales and review data (N = 5,587, Etsy) to replicate the results, establishing the ecological validity of our findings.

Summary of Findings – Across one secondary data study and two experiments, we find that

consumers prefer utilitarian over hedonic upcycled products for themselves. This preference is driven by lower perceived preference uncertainty associated with utilitarian goods. However, this effect disappears in gift-giving contexts, where consumers show no significant preference between the two product types due to similar levels of perceived uncertainty. These findings elucidate why consumers favor utilitarian upcycled products for personal use yet exhibit no specific product type preference for gifting, advancing our understanding of mindful consumption dynamics.

Statement of Key Contributions – This research offers several theoretical contributions. First, it extends the literature on upcycled products. While traditional gift-giving literature suggests a preference for hedonic goods (Lu, Liu, and Fang 2016), our findings reveal this preference does not hold for upcycled products. Second, we contribute to the product type literature by identifying product origin (traditional vs. upcycled) as a critical boundary condition (Givi and Galak 2017). We show that the typical preference for hedonic gifts vanishes for upcycled products. Third, we establish perceived preference uncertainty as the underlying mechanism driving these divergences between self-purchase and gift-giving contexts. Specifically, lower uncertainty drives the preference for utilitarian self-purchases, whereas the uncertainty inherent in gifting neutralizes product type preferences. Practically, we offer actionable strategies for upcycled product sellers. Marketing for self-purchases should emphasize utilitarian benefits. For the gifting market, firms must mitigate the critical barrier of uncertainty. We recommend providing transparent product information, leveraging user-generated content for social proof, and utilizing tactics like “gift-friendly” labels.

WHEN AND HOW SIMPLIFIED NUTRITION LABELS IMPROVE FAST-FOOD CHOICES

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Keywords

Food; Nutrition Labeling; Fast-food; Inequality

One-sentence description

Can Nutri-Score labels lead to healthier fast-food choices? Yes, but the benefits are uneven, with a risk of widening nutrition gaps.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

To improve dietary choices, more than 44 countries have implemented simplified nutrition labels that summarize the nutritional quality of foods (Giner, Rodriguez, and Elasri 2023). For example, eight European countries have adopted the Nutri-Score label, which provides a color-coded A to E grade of the nutritional quality of packaged food products (Julia, Etilé, and Hercberg 2018). The French Health Ministry, which is considering expanding the Nutri-Score from grocery stores to restaurants and cafeterias (General Directorate of Health of the French Ministry of Health and Prevention 2023), has asked us to study whether, and when, they would improve the nutritional quality of fast-food meals.

It remains unclear whether the modest effects of Nutri-Score or other simplified nutrition labels found on grocery purchases (Dubois et al. 2021; Maesen et al. 2022) would hold in the markedly different context of fast-food restaurants, where people are choosing sandwiches or sodas for immediate consumption (vs. purchasing packaged foods to replenish their fridges or pantries), while typically paying little attention to nutrition (Burton, Howlett, and Tangari 2009; O'Dougherty et al. 2006). Unfortunately, current research in this area is limited. Research on food choices in restaurants has studied the effects of calorie information, not simplified nutrition labels (for a review, see (Bleich et al. 2017), or has focused on workplace cafeterias, not fast-food restaurants (Julia et al. 2021), leaving open the question of when and how these labels work.

More fundamentally, the mechanisms underlying the effects of simplified nutrition labeling are still poorly understood. A recent meta-analysis (Ikonen et al. 2020) found that some simplified nutrition labels influence the perceived healthiness of food products. While the lay

beliefs literature (Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006) suggests that these labels may also negatively influence inferences about other attributes, such as taste, cost, and fillingness, such effects are not reliably found for the indulgent foods sold in fast-food restaurants (Ikonen et al. 2020). Simplified nutrition labels may also influence eating goals, risk attitudes, or regulatory focus, suggesting other mechanisms of action that have only been explored for specific nutrition information (Fisher 2018), not simplified nutrition labels.

Similarly, little is known about the factors that moderate the effects of simplified nutrition labels. A meta-analysis (Robinson et al. 2023) found no moderation by socioeconomic position, but it examined calorie labeling, not simplified nutrition labeling. One particular concern is that these labels may worsen already significant dietary inequalities if they help middle-class consumers but have no effect, or even backfire, among lower socioeconomic groups, who tend to have the poorest diet and highest obesity rates (Devaux and Sassi 2013; Singh-Manoux, Marmot, and Adler 2005).

The primary objective of this research is to determine whether adding the Nutri-Score simplified nutrition label improves the nutritional quality of fast-food meals. We chose Nutri-Score because it is a well-designed and effective nutrition labeling system and the official simplified nutrition label in France, where the studies were conducted (Roberto et al. 2021; Zampelas 2023). Its second objective is to identify the distinct mechanisms underlying the effects of the Nutri-Score. Its third objective is to examine its boundary conditions by studying whether the effects of Nutri-Score vary across socioeconomic status (both measured objectively via income and subjectively via self-reported socioeconomic status) and geographic groups, and to understand the role of nutrition importance in explaining these differences. To achieve these

objectives, we conducted a long-term field study with a fast-food chain, two online experiments (including one with a nationally representative sample of consumers).

Summary of Findings

In Experiment 1, 812 participants were randomly assigned to either the control or the Nutri-Score condition. In both conditions, they were shown a fast-food menu and asked to choose one main course, one beverage, and one dessert, as if ordering a meal in a restaurant. In the Nutri-Score condition, the label was displayed next to each option. Next, participants answered questions about potential mediators, such as perceptions of product attributes (healthiness, taste, satiety, and price) or eating goals (importance of nutrition, taste, cost, and hunger). We used the FSA score to measure the nutritional quality of participants' choices, with lower scores indicating healthier meals. Displaying the Nutri-Score led to a statistically significant reduction of 0.90 FSA points ($p = .001$), indicating a 10.0% improvement in the meal's nutritional quality. Nutri-Score had the strongest effect on main courses (0.95 FSA points, an 18.6% improvement, $p = .004$) and desserts (1.41 points, a 10.0% improvement, $p = .011$). Mediation analyses showed that Nutri-Score improved nutritional quality by helping participants better identify the healthiest options, without affecting perceptions of taste, satiety, or price, nor the importance of any eating goals.

In the field study in collaboration with a leading French fast-food chain, we displayed the Nutri-Score on all menu items in two restaurants: one located in a lower-class provincial town and the other in a middle-class metropolitan area. For each of these treatment restaurants, we matched a control restaurant in the same type of area that did not display the Nutri-Score. We obtained information on 200,039 meals purchased during the 14 weeks before the intervention and the 16 weeks of the intervention. We then estimated the effect of Nutri-Score using a

difference-in-differences approach by comparing changes in meal purchases before and after the intervention between treated and control restaurants in each area. The field study replicated the positive effect of Nutri-Score found in Experiment 1 only in restaurants located in middle-class metropolitan areas. In these locations, displaying the Nutri-Score was followed by a 2.3% improvement in the nutritional quality of the meals, thanks to the choice of healthier desserts. However, in the restaurants located in lower-class provincial towns, displaying the Nutri-Score did not lead to the expected improvement in nutritional quality. In these locations, displaying the Nutri-Score led to a small (1.0%) decline in the average nutritional value of the meals, driven by all meal components.

Experiment 3 was similar in design and stimuli to Experiment 1, except that the sample was representative of the French population. 929 participants were randomly assigned to either the control or Nutri-Score condition. As pre-registered, we examined whether the effects of Nutri-Score varied based on participants' socioeconomic position (measured by subjective socioeconomic status, or SES, and income) and place of residence (metropolitan city vs. small town). We conducted subgroup analyses to test whether labeling effects differed across these groups. Overall, as in Experiment 1, Nutri-Score improved the nutritional quality of meals by 8.4%, primarily driven by a 19.5% improvement in dessert choices. Consistent with the field study, labeling significantly improved choices among middle-SES consumers but had no effect among low-SES participants. As a result, Nutri-Score widened the nutritional gap between SES groups. Importantly, the effectiveness of Nutri-Score depended on the importance participants placed on nutrition: it had no effect when nutrition was not a priority but produced large improvements when it was. Mediation analyses confirmed that differences in meal quality across

SES and residential groups were driven by differences in nutrition importance, not cost concerns, self-control, or beliefs about Nutri-Score.

Key Contribution

These findings have important implications for public policy because they show that simplified nutrition labels like Nutri-Score can improve the nutritional quality of fast-food choices, but mainly for consumers in middle-class metropolitan areas. Because the only mechanism driving this effect is easier identification of the healthiest options, one way to reduce socioeconomic disparities is to help consumers from lower-class provincial areas prioritize nutrition more when making food choices. The research also contributes to the literature by identifying when and for whom simplified labels work, highlighting that their impact comes mainly from helping people notice and use nutrition information, not from changing their beliefs or goals.

WHEN MORALS CLASH: HOW MORALLY INCONGRUENT PURCHASES FOR OTHERS AFFECT CONSUMERS AND THEIR CHOICES

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Keywords: moral incongruence, moral distress, close relationships, choosing for others

Description: This research examines how morally incongruent purchase requests from close others, such as being asked to buy meat from an omnivore partner while being vegetarian, impact consumer choices.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

While past research in consumer behavior has primarily focused on joint consumption (Belk, 2010) and gift-giving (Belk, 1979), less attention has been directed to understanding consumers making everyday purchases for others. Those that do focus on such purchases have examined buyers' tendency to seek options that recipients will like or that are mundane (Chang et al., 2012; Laran, 2010; Lu et al., 2016). However, oftentimes, such purchases can be immoral to the purchaser. In a survey we conducted (N=188), 23% of consumers in a relationship make immoral small purchases for their partner at least once a month. Yet no research has focused on understanding how, when, and why requests to make such immoral purchases influence the buyer's choices.

Although consumers generally tend to solely focus on pleasing the recipient, what happens when these requested purchases include items that go against the buyer's morality? It remains unclear how consumers react when another party requests they engage in immoral consumption. We propose that compared to a morally neutral, a morally congruent, or a disliked small pick-up, consumers asked to buy an immoral product for a close other will experience moral distress, that will in turn decrease their likelihood of making the requested purchase.

Method and Data

We tested these predictions in nine studies. In Study 1A (N=231), vegetarian or vegan participants in a romantic relationship with an omnivore were told their partner asked them to grab either pork sausages (morally incongruent), plant-based sausages (morally congruent), or crackers (morally neutral) while on a grocery run. Study 1B (N=339) replicated this with undergraduate students were asked to describe a product category that they found either morally

neutral, morally congruent, morally incongruent (a product that they usually boycott or avoid for moral reasons), or that they disliked, and to imagine a very close friend asked them to pick it up for them.

Studies 2 A-E (*N*=794) tested the mediating effect of moral distress in five contexts: self-described boycotted products, vegetarians asked to purchase meat, non-drinkers asked to purchase alcohol, politics, and firearms. Moral distress was measured with a pretested 4-item scale based on nursing literature.

Study 3 (*N*=202) tested the moderating role of the content of the ask, specifically if combining morally incongruent and neutral requests in a single ask influences decisions. Vegetarian participants were asked to imagine picking up products in different sequences.

Additionally, a pilot study (*N*=424) explored the relational consequences of such asks.

Summary of Findings

Findings reveal that morally incongruent requests from close others trigger moral distress, resulting in increased refusal to purchase a morally incongruent product. In Study 1A, a larger share of participants refused to purchase the morally incongruent product (12%; $p<.001$) compared to the morally neutral product (0%; $p=.004$). Similarly, in Study 1B, more participants refused to purchase the morally incongruent requested product category (37%) compared to the morally neutral product (8%; $p<.001$), the morally congruent one (5%; $p<.001$), or the disliked one (11%; $p<.001$).

All five studies in Series 2 show that a morally incongruent ask increases moral distress, which in turn increases refusal to purchase.

Regarding the format of the ask, Study 3 reveals an order effect ($p=.017$), such that participants felt increased levels of moral distress ($p=.01$) and were more likely to refuse when they were first asked for a morally neutral product followed by a morally incongruent one

(20.9% refused the morally incongruent purchase), vs. the opposite (6.8% refused the morally incongruent purchase).

Finally, our pilot study shows that relative to morally congruent purchases, incongruent purchases increased negative moral emotions, decreasing the positivity of feelings toward the partner. The requesting partner was perceived as less trustworthy.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to marketing theory where little work has explored how purchases for others have implications for oneself. It builds on this by exploring a unique purchase type: those morally incongruent with the focal consumer. We complement current knowledge on choosing for others. Prior work suggests that for everyday pick-ups, consumers have a recipient focus, and should simply select the recipient's preferred option (Liu et al., 2019). We show this is not necessarily the case. In morally incongruent pick-ups, buyers are more likely to refuse to purchase. This project is the first to look at everyday purchases made for others from a moral perspective. It also contributes to morality literature in psychology by identifying moderators of moral distress, such as the content of the ask.

This research brings substantive implications for policy makers in consumer welfare domains, such as eating. While over 52% of Americans have boycotted a brand (YouGov, 2023), academia has overlooked the impact of making immoral purchases for others. This work departs from traditional views by providing insights into the consequences of conflicting moral choices on individuals and their relationships. It offers practical implications for improving consumer welfare where conflicting preferences are prevalent and morals are challenged.

References are available upon request.

When Stars Fall: A Decade of Celebrity Transgression Research and Future Directions

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Keywords: Celebrity transgression, Systematic Review, Celebrity misconduct

Description: This study undertakes a systematic literature review (SLR) of celebrity transgression research published over the past decade, employing the TCM–ADO framework to systematically organize, synthesize, and integrate existing findings.

ABSTRACT

Celebrity transgressions exemplify how marketing must bridge cultural divides, societal polarization and ethical scrutiny in an era of socially conscious and aware consumers. This study systematically reviews 45 peer-reviewed articles (2015–2025) indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, following the SPAR-4-SLR framework. Five major themes were identified using Biblioshiny, which were synthesized through the TCM-ADO framework. This process unpacked key theoretical, methodological and contextual underpinnings, revealing 41 distinct antecedents across six subthemes: celebrity, consumer, brand, transgression context, influencers and contextual factors. The review concludes by proposing several promising avenues for future research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Celebrity endorsements remain a cornerstone of brand-building, particularly in markets such as India where public figures; especially athletes command extraordinary influence. In 2023, India's top ten celebrities secured 484 endorsement deals, with sports endorsements valued at $112 million, of which cricket alone accounted for $98 million (Statista, 2025). Celebrity endorsements enhance brand credibility (Amos et al., 2008; Liu and Liu, 2019) and enrich products with aspirational appeal (Choi and Rifon, 2012). Nevertheless, this marketing tool is characterized by inherent vulnerabilities and potential drawbacks.

When celebrities engage in misconduct such as substance abuse or discriminatory remarks; brands face the consequences of *celebrity transgression*, defined as a violation of societal or professional norms that undermines endorsement effectiveness (Um, 2013). In today's hyperconnected environment, such incidents are magnified across social media platforms, where cancel culture amplifies public scrutiny and mobilizes boycotts. Importantly, consumer responses are not uniform: while some transgressions lead to reputational and financial harm, others dissipate quickly or even paradoxically enhance celebrity visibility. Corporate responses also vary. For instance, Pepsi and Gillette severed ties with Tiger Woods following revelations of his extramarital affairs, whereas Nike retained him, underscoring the context-dependent nature of endorsement decisions.

New dynamics further complicate this landscape. The rise of social media influencers and the adoption of virtual endorsers by brands such as Prada and Samsung present both opportunities and challenges (Wei, 2024). While digital endorsers may mitigate risks associated with human misconduct, they raise new concerns about authenticity and ethical responsibility. These inconsistencies highlight the need for systematic synthesis of scholarship on celebrity transgressions. Addressing this gap, the present study offers a comprehensive review of academic work published between 2015 and 2025. Using a hybrid approach that combines bibliometric analysis with systematic review, it maps the intellectual contours of the field and distils key insights from publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How has the publication trajectory evolved over time, and which are the most cited documents?

RQ2: How are articles distributed across journals in this domain?

RQ3: What are the major themes in the celebrity transgression literature?

RQ4: What are the key antecedents, decisions, and outcomes of celebrity transgression?

RQ5: Which theoretical perspectives, context & methodologies dominate this area of research?

RQ6: What are the key future research directions?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, ensuring methodological rigor through three stages—assembling, arranging, and assessing. A Boolean search was conducted across Scopus and Web of Science using the terms *"celebrity transgression"* OR *"celebrity misconduct"* OR *"celebrity scandal"* OR *"negative celebrity publicity"*. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2015 and 16th July 2025, in English, and within the "Business and Management" category. After applying inclusion criteria and removing duplicates/irrelevant studies, 45 articles remained. Bibliometric and content analyses framework were applied to synthesize findings, map trends and identify gaps.

3. RESULTS FROM BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

The publication trend on celebrity transgression shows fluctuations and temporary declines but consistently rebounds, indicating a stable trajectory. Since 2021, output has risen, driven by factors such as widespread social media access, enabling public expression on celebrity misconduct, and post-Covid shifts in consumer behaviour that amplified the visibility and virality of such events (Mason et al., 2021b). Continuous 24/7 media scrutiny has blurred the lines between celebrities' personal and professional lives, exposing contradictions that attract academic interest. The growing use of celebrity endorsements, coupled with the rise of virtual influencers and AI-driven endorsers, has further heightened scholarly focus due to emerging reputational and ethical challenges.

The most cited work is Thomas and Fowler (2021) with 220 citations, offering an AI-focused perspective. Lee and Kwak (2016), with 95 citations, examine consumer moral reasoning toward admired public figures' misconduct and its impact on brand evaluations. Research

spans journals in psychology, advertising, sports, and brand management, with *Psychology & Marketing* and *Journal of Product & Brand Management* leading (five publications each, ABDC "A" rank), followed by Journal of Sport Management and European Sport Management Quarterly (four each), reflecting the prominence of athlete transgressions in the field.

4. THEMATIC ASSESSMENT

A thematic mapping of literature was conducted using Biblioshiny (see Figure 1), categorizing themes by centrality and density. The strategic diagram identifies four quadrants: emerging or declining themes (limited attention or waning relevance), basic themes (core foundations of the field), niche themes (methodologically developed but peripheral) and motor themes (both central and dense) shaping current and future enquiry.

From this analysis, five thematic areas emerge:

- Role of moral reasoning in athlete transgression
- Effect of Celebrity Transgression on Stock Returns and Spillover Effects to Competitors
- Attribution of blame
- Celebrity transgression and Relationship Quality
- Influencer Marketing

Athlete transgression emerges as a Motor Theme, underscoring its central and well-developed status. By contrast, influencer marketing, financial consequences, and relationship quality fall within the Emerging/Declining quadrant, reflecting limited current attention but notable potential for future research. Attribution of blame sits at the thematic core, serving as a common theoretical lens for interpreting consumer responses.

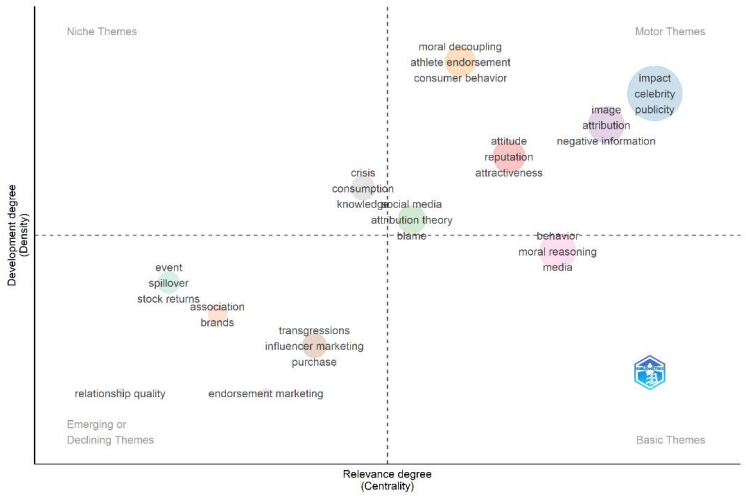


Figure 1: Strategic diagram depicting major themes in celebrity transgression literature

4.1 Role of moral reasoning in athlete endorsement

Athletes attract media attention for both their on-field performance and off-field behaviour, often subjecting them to public scrutiny and controversy. Given the substantial financial investment leagues and franchises make in acquiring athletes, individual misconduct can generate significant reputational and financial repercussions for the organization (Ge & Humphreys, 2020). This is largely because athletes function as emotional anchors for fanbases and are frequently positioned as the public face of franchises.

Research has examined the interaction between performance level and transgression severity, showing that athletes with strong performance records who commit minor transgressions are generally afforded greater consumer forgiveness (Lee & Kwak, 2016). The fan–athlete bond stems from perceived alignment between fans' values and the athlete's image. Consequently, when a favoured athlete engages in morally questionable behaviour, fans may adopt moral decoupling—separating on-field performance from off-field conduct to sustain admiration.

Other work has explored the role of empathy in shaping responses to athlete transgressions. While empathy has been widely studied in the context of brand transgressions, its relevance to fan–athlete relationships had been overlooked (Lee et al., 2021). Findings suggest that when fans empathize with athletes, they are more likely to respond with compassion, particularly when the misconduct is perceived as minor.

4.2 Effect of Celebrity Transgression on Stock Returns and Spillover Effects to Competitors

Celebrity transgressions trigger both reputational damage and stock price volatility. Empirical evidence suggests such incidents may trigger investor overreactions or underreactions, leading to market mispricing. For example, a study in China found that uninformed investors are especially vulnerable to these signals; observing a decline in stock value (Prentice & Zhang, 2017), they often interpret it as a buying opportunity, thereby increasing attention and trading activity around the affected firms.

Research on the relationship between celebrity misconduct and stock market performance reveals inconsistent outcomes. While initial declines in firm value and negative abnormal returns are frequently reported, these effects often dissipate over time, with stock prices gradually stabilizing. Importantly, the repercussions of celebrity misconduct are not confined to the sponsoring firm. Reputational shocks may also spill over to competitors, particularly in homogeneous industries. As demonstrated by Kleine et al. (2024), when a sponsoring firm experiences significant reputational fallout, rival firms may also face negative consequences, driven by heightened consumer scrutiny and generalized distrust within the product category.

4.3 Attribution of blame

Consumers' reactions to celebrity transgressions are highly context-dependent. They actively seek cues, assess situational details, and then form perceptions regarding the attribution of blame. For instance, a study by Rifon et al., (2022) examined the moderating role of celebrity gender in the context of prior transgressive behaviour and philanthropic efforts. The findings revealed that for male celebrities, if consumers could recall past philanthropic acts, they were more inclined to perceive the transgression as a one-time lapse; particularly when the severity of the transgression was low. This was not the case for their female counterparts.

Moreover, cultural context significantly influences blame attribution. Recognizing the Western-centric focus of prior research, Kang and Park (2021) conducted a cross-cultural comparison between South Korea and the United States. The study found that Korean consumers were more likely than their American counterparts to conflate a celebrity's

morality with their competence. As a result, they were more prone to directly attribute moral transgressions to the celebrity, regardless of situational context.

4.4 Celebrity transgression and Relationship Quality

The bond that loyal consumers develop with celebrities is often rooted in self-congruity, perceived companionship and entertainment value. These factors collectively foster parasocial relationships—one-sided emotional attachments initiated and sustained by the consumer. Building on this, Jones et al. (2022) introduced the concept of para-love shock, offering a novel perspective on celebrity transgression. Unlike earlier studies that emphasized moral reasoning, this concept highlights the emotional rupture fans experience, often manifested through collective reactions such as heartbreak and disillusionment, processed within fan communities and shaped by cultural narratives.

Related research has examined the tolerance afforded to male celebrities with a "bad-boy" image, a dynamic grounded in fantasy-based attachment. Such relationships emerge as fans engage with celebrity narratives across media platforms—magazines, films, television, and social media; allowing them to vicariously experience aspirational or escapist realities (Bennett et al., 2018). This attachment provides psychological release from routine life. Consequently, when a celebrity's transgressive behaviour aligns with their fantasized public image, it may not harm the relationship but instead act as a buffer, reinforcing visibility and, in some cases, enhancing public appeal. This effect is particularly evident in hedonic consumption contexts.

Additionally, since the relationship between celebrities and consumers is primarily grounded in parasocial bonds (a one-sided connection) (Kowert and Daniel, 2021), consumers often expect opportunities to express their feelings and opinions through comment sections on social media platforms. However, in the context of influencers, disabling the comment section is generally perceived negatively by followers, resulting in unfavourable evaluations and the spread of negative word of mouth, as documented in prior research (Daniels & Wu, 2024). Exceptions arise when followers consider such actions justified, such as during instances related to mental health concerns or personal crises. Because influencers actively involve their audiences in their personal lives, followers often believe they are entitled to voice constructive criticism. The dismissal of such feedback by influencers can ultimately weaken the perceived relationship quality between them and their followers.

4.5 Influencer Marketing: A new lens on celebrity endorsement transgression

The rise of social media has given prominence to a new category of celebrities—social media influencers (SMIs)—who have fundamentally reshaped the discourse on celebrity endorsements. Often described as micro-celebrities (Khamis et al., 2017), SMIs exert significant influence over their followers, largely through lifestyle portrayals and visual storytelling on audio-visual platforms. Emerging from the blogging culture of the late 1990s, they now dominate platforms such as YouTube and Instagram by engaging with wide audiences.

The key difference between traditional celebrities and social media influencers primarily lies in the source of their fame. Traditional celebrities typically emerge from institutionally recognized domains such as sports, film, music, or dance, where professional credentials and achievements validate their public status. In contrast, social media influencers often lack such formal institutional affiliations (Leung et al., 2022); their fame is largely self-generated through digital platforms and audience engagement. Moreover, brand endorsement strategies

differ between the two groups. Traditional celebrities are often preferred as brand ambassadors due to their established public image and widespread recognition, allowing brands to leverage their credibility and symbolic value to enhance consumer trust and engagement. Conversely, social media influencers are typically engaged to integrate brands into their content narratives, thereby increasing product visibility and relatability among followers who share similar lifestyles or consumption patterns.

This distinction is further evident in the nature of transgressions discussed in the literature concerning celebrities and social media influencers. Celebrity transgressions often involve moral or behavioural lapses such as drug intoxication, driving under the influence, or doping in sports, acts that undermine their perceived integrity and moral character (Matthews & Luebke, 2023). In contrast, influencer transgressions predominantly centre on issues of authenticity and transparency. Studies have shown that perceived inauthenticity or excessive product promotion frequently triggers community backlash, with followers directly attributing blame to the influencer (Kozinets et al., 2010).

Additionally, Cocker et al. (2021), using a netnographic analysis of YouTube communities, found that influencer misconduct, particularly overt or insincere promotion elicited direct blame toward influencers, although in some cases followers redirected blame to brands due to perceived power asymmetry and influencers' financial dependence.

5. TCM FINDINGS

This section presents findings from the TCM framework analysis, supplemented with insights from the ADO framework, to map the theoretical, contextual, and methodological foundations of celebrity transgression research. Together, these frameworks illuminate the cognitive and evaluative processes shaping consumer responses. Table 1 provides a comprehensive over view of the same.

Theories
Fourteen distinct theories have been applied, drawing from psychology, sociology, consumer behaviour, and marketing. Moral Reasoning Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory are the most frequently referenced. Moral Reasoning Theory explains how consumers, especially those strongly attached to a celebrity, assess transgressions, with responses influenced by severity and emotional involvement. Parasocial Interaction Theory addresses the one-sided relationships consumers form with celebrities, prompting defence or rationalisation of misconduct. Other theories appear less frequently, though some studies adopt multiple lenses, reflecting the field's interdisciplinary nature.

Context
Most studies focus on U.S. consumers (six), followed by Korea and China (two each), and Australia and London (one each). Cross-cultural comparisons reveal socio-cultural influences on reactions. Western dominance reflects the U.S. origins of cancel culture. Many studies analyse online communities, especially Instagram and YouTube comments, for their large user base and rich sentiment data.

Methods
From 45 studies, quantitative approaches dominate, with experiments (n = 19) most common. These manipulate variables such as transgression severity and brand attachment, using real or fictitious celebrities to balance ecological validity and control. Online surveys are also prevalent, analysed with models incorporating mediators and moderators. Qualitative

methods include in-depth interviews and netnography of social media content, followed by thematic, content, or sentiment analysis. Mixed-method approach was adopted by just a handful number of studies.

6. ADO Findings

6.1 Antecedents

This study identified 42 distinct antecedents from 45 sources, classified into six categories: consumer-related, celebrity-related, transgression-specific, brand-related, contextual, and influencer related. Celebrity and transgression-specific antecedents dominate, reflecting a research focus on the celebrity's attributes and the nature of the misconduct as primary drivers of consumer response.

Studies consistently distinguish between competence-based and moral/value-based violations, with the latter considered more severe and less forgivable. Severity amplifies consumer reactions: high-severity incidents are typically viewed as unjustifiable and provoke intense backlash, especially when harm to others is evident or when extensive media coverage magnifies the incident (Osborne et al., 2016). Importantly, scholars differentiate between *objective severity* (financial losses, number of victims) and *perceived severity* (subjective consumer judgments) which helps explain why similar incidents generate varying levels of scrutiny (Han et al., 2024).

Celebrity-related antecedents include gender, persona, and public image. Male celebrities often receive greater tolerance, particularly when aligned with a "bad-boy" image (Rifon et al., 2022), though forgiveness is conditional on prior prosocial behaviour and the perceived seriousness of the misconduct. Endorsement type also matters: when celebrities appear in fictional roles rather than their real-life identities, associated brands suffer less reputational fallout from actual scandals (Kennedy et al., 2018).

Brand-related antecedents highlight the importance of alignment between celebrity and brand. While traditional research emphasizes celebrity–product congruence, recent work stresses positioning fit. For instance, naturally controversial celebrities may strengthen brands pursuing image reinforcement, whereas incidentally controversial celebrities are better suited for revitalization strategies (Carrillat et al., 2019). Post-transgression responses are also brand dependent: competence-based trust may recover through strong performance, while integrity-based trust requires reparative actions. Furthermore, the effectiveness of recovery tactics may vary with brand age, as younger brands appear to benefit more from the use of virtual influencers compared to older, more established firms (Yao et al., 2025).

Consumer-related antecedents centre on loyalty, attachment, and moral reasoning. Fans frequently employ *moral decoupling*, separating admiration for performance from disapproval of misconduct (Lee et al., 2015). Empathy further fosters leniency for minor infractions. Parasocial relationships intensify these effects, with "para-love shock" describing the emotional rupture fans experience following transgressions.

Contextual antecedents emphasize the role of cultural and structural conditions. Norms and expectations shape tolerance levels, with cross-cultural studies showing significant variation in consumer responses. In homogeneous industries, reputational shocks may spill over to competitors through associative judgments and generalized distrust (Kleine et al., 2024). Media intensity further conditions outcomes, either amplifying or dampening backlash.

Finally, influencer-related antecedents reflect the rise of social media micro-celebrities. These figures face unique challenges such as accusations of inauthenticity. Netnographic evidence

indicates that community members expect influencers to promote products they genuinely use and like. While insincere endorsements often draw blame to the influencer, community members sometimes redirect responsibility toward the brand, acknowledging power dynamics and commercial pressures (Mardon et al., 2018).

6.2 Decisions

Consumer responses to celebrity transgressions are shaped by a constellation of cognitive and emotional mechanisms. Prominent among these are moral reasoning strategies which are influenced by factors such as the consumer's emotional attachment to the celebrity, internal attribution processes and cognitive processing styles. These mechanisms help explain the diversity of consumer reactions, particularly in morally charged transgression scenarios.

6.3 Outcomes

Outcomes refer to the consequences resulting from either engaging in or refraining from a behaviour (Khatri & Duggal, 2022). In the context of celebrity transgressions, outcome variables have predominantly focused on brand attitude, consumer attitude, purchase intention, brand evaluation, stock market returns, and consumer forgiveness. This focus reflects the disruption of the consumer–celebrity relationship that often follows a transgression. However, fewer studies have examined alternative outcomes such as brand desirability, post-scandal endorsement sharing, and trust—particularly distinguishing between competence vs integrity-based trust. This signals a potential gap in the literature, warranting further exploration of long-term reputational consequences and trust repair mechanisms.

Table 1- TCM-ADO Findings

Dimension	Subcategories	Details
Theories	Frequently used	Moral Reasoning Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory
	Others	Attribution Theory, Cognitive Dissonance Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Capital Theory, Contagion Theory, Image Repair Theory, Meaning Transfer Theory, Congruity Theory, Persuasion Knowledge Theory, Dual Agency Theory
Context	Countries	USA, China, Korea, Australia, London
	Platforms	Instagram, YouTube, TikTok
Methods	Quantitative	Experiments, Surveys, Event-based methodology
	Qualitative	Netnographic studies, In-depth interviews, Reviews
	Mixed-Method	Mixed-method combining interviews and model testing
Antecedents	Consumer-related	Fan identification, Celebrity fan relationship strength, Fan preference, Cancel culture, Cultural orientation/background of consumers, Negative moral

		emotions' impact on stigma formation
	Celebrity-related	Transgression history, Philanthropic history, Gender, Celebrity status, Endorser type, Celebrity image, Athlete status, Moral violation transgression by celebrity, Celebrity death, Off-field athlete misconduct, Athlete reputational crisis, Luxury brand ambassador misconduct
	Brand-related	Type of celebrity and brand positioning objective, Interaction between influencer type and brand type, Brand reputation, post-transgression performance and engagement in reparation
	Transgression-related	Objective vs. perceived severity, Severity, Misbehavior type, Repetition of negative news, Type of transgression, Types of sport celebrity transgression, Transgression diagnosticity, Negative meaning transfer, Negative publicity, Mode of media coverage, Misconduct of athlete, AI influencer transgression, Transgression relevance
	Contextual	Time delay, Culture, Industry homogeneity
	Influencer-related	Influencer type, falsely implicated influencer transgression, SMIs' deceptive content & follower response, Endorsement efforts by SMIs
Decisions		Moral reasoning choice, Internal attribution, Internal justification, Cognitive processing (memory: gist vs. detail), Information processing (analytic vs. holistic), Consumer appreciation of celebrity-positioning matchup, Celebrity sacredness
Outcomes		Brand evaluation, Brand image, Brand reputation, Purchase intention, Consumer brand evaluation, Brand

		attitude and intention to share endorsement, Brand image, Attitude towards athlete and sponsored brand, Transgression spillover, Boycott intention, Forgiveness, Apology, Trustworthiness, Digital engagement intentions, Stock prices (Abnormal stock returns, Competitor firm stock returns, Stock returns of sponsor of athlete's team, stadium and league, Boost in career), Integrity-based trust, Competence-based trust

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Drawing on the thematic analysis and TCM–ADO mapping, several gaps present opportunities for advancing celebrity transgression research.

First, *spillover effects* warrant further attention. Beyond stock prices, studies should examine broader metrics such as sales, comparing impacts across publicly listed versus privately held firms and considering cultural and institutional variations.

Second, the rise of *virtual influencers* raises new questions. Future work could identify the conditions under which they outperform human endorsers in post-transgression recovery such as product category, message format, or crisis timing. Third, research on *athlete transgressions* could move beyond moral emotions to explore responses like shame or self-consciousness, as well as intergroup biases in blame attribution.

Fourth, the role of *endorser portrayal* remains underexplored. While most of the studies investigate celebrity actions influencing brands, the reverse; how negative brand actions affect celebrity evaluations requires greater scholarly attention. Finally, methodological and contextual gaps persist. Current research is dominated by quantitative approaches and Western samples. Expanding qualitative and mixed-method studies, along with cross-cultural comparisons, would enrich theoretical development. Incorporating personality measures such as the Big Five and fixed vs. growth mindset can also improve predictions of forgiveness and negative word-of-mouth.

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WINDFALL DIET: HOW UNEXPECTED REDUCTION IN CALORIE INTAKE INFLUENCES SUBSEQUENT DIET BEHAVIOR

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Key words: Windfall diet, mental accounting, higher marginal propensity to consume, goal progress, self-regulation

Description: This paper demonstrates that unexpected "windfall" calories increase subsequent indulgent food choices when the windfall is mentally allocated within the same consumption account, consistent with within-account justification and a higher marginal propensity to consume.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: The present research examines how consumers interpret and respond to unexpected deviations in caloric intake within ongoing self-regulatory contexts. While prior work on windfalls has demonstrated that unanticipated gains in monetary and temporal resources promote discretionary behavior, comparatively little is known about whether and how similar processes operate in the domain of caloric budgeting, where resources are negatively valenced and closely tied to health goals and self-control. This research asks whether unexpected reductions in caloric intake are mentally construed as discretionary slack within a domain-specific mental account, and how such interpretations shape subsequent consumption behavior.

Specifically, this paper investigates the psychological conditions under which unearned caloric "savings" promote indulgence rather than sustained restraint, and how this effect depends on the perceived origin and framing of the windfall. Further, it explores whether consumers allocate these unexpected gains within the same account (e.g., food intake), consistent with mental accounting principles, or whether they flexibly integrate them across domains such as physical activity. By integrating perspectives from mental accounting, higher marginal propensity to consume, and goal progress theories, the research seeks to clarify when unanticipated progress toward a health goal functions as a signal of expanded budget versus a cue for continued commitment.

Method and Data: Across a multi-method investigation, participants encountered situations in which their caloric outcomes deviated from prior expectations and subsequently made consumption-related decisions. Unexpected caloric shortfalls were introduced through variations in how prior intake or expenditure information was framed, allowing the research to examine how such deviations were interpreted as an unexpected caloric surplus within ongoing regulatory contexts. Downstream choices and evaluative judgments were used to assess whether these interpretations promoted indulgence or sustained restraint.

The findings reveal a systematic pattern in how consumers respond to unexpected caloric feedback. When subsequent decisions were perceived as closely related to the original

deviation, participants were more likely to favor indulgent options within a localized mental account. In contrast, when the opportunity to use these gains arose in more distal or cross-domain contexts, the effect was substantially attenuated and, in some cases, reversed, suggesting that unexpected caloric information is not treated as fully fungible.

Process measures indicate that these responses are driven by how consumers mentally organize and justify unexpected shortfalls, rather than by shifts in stable preferences, general self-control, or demographic differences.

Summary of Findings: This research investigates how unexpected reductions in caloric intake influence subsequent consumption and how these effects depend on the domain in which "saved" calories are mentally allocated. Across a multi-method investigation, the findings reveal a systematic asymmetry in how consumers respond to caloric windfalls. When unexpected caloric savings are perceived to remain within the same consumption account, consumers exhibit a heightened tendency to indulge. In these cases, windfall calories are mentally construed as discretionary slack, increasing the perceived permissibility of allocating "saved" resources toward hedonic options.

In contrast, when the opportunity to use these unexpected gains arises in a cross-domain context, the effect is substantially attenuated and, in some cases, reversed. This pattern suggests that windfall calories are not treated as fully fungible across domains, but instead remain psychologically tagged to their source account, consistent with principles of mental accounting.

Collectively, these findings refine resource-based and self-regulatory perspectives by demonstrating that the behavioral consequences of unanticipated caloric feedback depend not only on the presence of a windfall, but also on how narrowly or broadly consumers define the mental account to which those calories belong.

Statement of Key Contributions: This research advances mental accounting theory by demonstrating that negatively valenced resources (calories) are nonetheless mentally budgeted and allocated in ways structurally similar to positively valenced resources. Unexpected caloric shortfalls are encoded as discretionary slack within a domain-specific account, and subsequent indulgence is most likely when consumption remains psychologically proximal to the source of the saving. By showing that domain boundaries, govern how "saved" calories are interpreted and used, the findings refine how mental accounts structure self-regulatory choice in health-related contexts.

The paper further extends the Higher Marginal Propensity to Consume (HMPC) framework by establishing that the preferential allocation of windfall resources generalizes to tightly constrained, non-storable domains. Even when resources cannot be accumulated or transferred in a literal sense, unanticipated gains are treated as psychologically spendable, highlighting the breadth of HMPC as a domain-general principle of resource allocation.

Finally, the research contributes to goal-progress theory by distinguishing earned from unearned progress in dietary regulation. Unexpected success weakens regulatory persistence and promotes compensatory indulgence within the same account, whereas effortful restraint fosters broader, cross-domain integration of food and activity. Together, these contributions clarify how unexpected feedback reshapes both the structure and scope of self-regulation in health-related choice environments.

Marketing Strategy and Organization

B2B TRADE FAIRS – A MARKET EVOLUTION PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: B2B trade fairs, market evolution, assemblage theory, ethnography

Description: This ethnographic study explores the influence that physical B2B trade fairs exert on their underlying market through the lens of assemblage theory, conceptualizing trade fairs as dynamic assemblages of diverse human, material, and immaterial parts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

B2B trade fairs remain integral to corporate marketing, facilitating engagement, information exchange, and interaction. Ongoing debates on the configuration and relevance of trade fairs were intensified by the COVID-19 interruption, accelerating experimentation with digital trade-fair platforms whose limits soon became evident. Despite the efficiency and cost benefits of virtual formats, physical trade fairs quickly regained prominence. By 2022, international attendance rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Industry leaders affirm that "the power of physical presence will not go away". This sustained demand for in-person formats raises a critical question: *why do businesses continue to rely on physical trade fairs, and what unique value do they offer?*

Existing studies often fragment trade fair value into isolated outcomes, overlooking how these elements interact systemically. A critical gap remains: a holistic perspective on B2B trade fairs that accounts for the interplay among multiple actors, their behaviors, and the market-shaping effects of these events. We address this by employing an ethnographic study design and an assemblage-theory lens, conceptualizing physical trade fairs as dynamic assemblages composed of heterogeneous human, material, and immaterial parts.

Method and Data

We conducted a two-year ethnographic study, with IRB approval, exploring the value creation and market influence mechanisms at physical B2B trade fairs. Our research utilized participant observation, active participation, and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected across five B2B trade fairs and their associated spaces, encompassing pre-event preparations, on-site interactions, and post-event reflections. These settings provided rich insights into participants' experiences, interpersonal dynamics, and processes of value

creation. The dataset comprises 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews, totaling approximately 720 minutes of audio recordings, as well as informal conversational interviews, field notes, and 56 participant ethnographic observation photographs. Our systematic qualitative analysis followed the Gioia methodology.

Additionally, we searched the WISO database (a comprehensive German language resource for newspapers, trade journals, and magazines) for articles covering the trade fairs we visited during our observation period from November 2021 to October 2023. The resulting dataset contains the full text of these articles—spanning general and specialized industry reporting—together with metadata (publication date, outlet, and trade fair reference). We analyzed this corpus to identify evidence of trade fairs' impact on market evolution using a two-stage hybrid text mining pipeline in Python on Azure.

Summary of Findings

B2B trade fairs function as assemblages of diverse human and non-human elements that both mirror and shape the market landscape. Rather than serving solely transactional purposes, they actively structure negotiations over the market's future. Their influence emerges through the fair's structural conditions and the interactions they facilitate, producing effects that extend well beyond the event itself.

Trade fairs temporarily concentrate dispersed markets by assembling people, products, and practices in a bounded space and time. This "micro-marketplace" enables intense comparison, coordination, and exchange. Organizers shape this concentration through infrastructure and access control, while participants engage via shared routines, producing a focused snapshot of the market that facilitates assessment, exploration, and strategic foresight.

Within the concentrated trade fair assemblage, participants engage in market shaping and probing activities. Exhibitors contribute to shaping the market by introducing new products, enabling tactile experiences, and constructing compelling narratives around their offerings. These actions are strategically orchestrated to reinforce market positioning, signal legitimacy, and shape broader industry perceptions. Visitors probe the market by observing competitors, suppliers, and customers, assessing relational fit, and interpreting symbolic cues to make sense of current dynamics. Together, these practices underpin the trade fair's capacity to enact, reinforce, and contest market structures.

Key Contributions

This ethnography reframes B2B trade fairs not as mere transactional sales platforms but as influential events embedded in broader market ecosystems. First, it shifts the analytical focus from firm-level outcomes to field-level dynamics, showing how trade fairs shape market evolution. Second, it advances the application of assemblage theory in marketing by conceptualizing trade fairs as dynamic configurations of heterogeneous elements that generate emergent opportunities and reconfigure markets. Third, it explains the continued relevance of physical trade fairs in an increasingly digital environment, demonstrating how their spatial and social density enables serendipitous interactions difficult to replicate online.

This study offers practical implications for organizers, managers, and policymakers. Organizers emerge as market architects whose curatorial decisions can redefine market boundaries. These changes are co-produced through interactions among participants, shaped by prior events and ongoing market dynamics, so organizers must balance innovation and continuity to preserve perceptions of market coherence. Firms can use trade fairs strategically to signal relevance and reposition across markets, geographies, or industries, while policymakers can leverage fairs to promote innovation and cross-sectoral exchange. Ultimately, the enduring value of physical trade fairs lies in their capacity to foster

serendipitous encounters, which can be amplified by structurally open, informal interaction spaces.

BRAND BRAINS AND SMART GAINS: BRAND ORIENTATION AS A DYNAMIC CAPABILITY FOR AI ADOPTION AND PERFORMANCE

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Keywords:Brand orientation; artificial intelligence adoption; dynamic capabilities; organizational decision making; firm performance

Description:This paper examines brand orientation as a strategic capability that drives firm-level AI adoption and performance, contingent on organizational decision-making dynamics.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in marketing and organizational processes, firms face mounting pressure to ensure that AI adoption aligns with long-term strategy and delivers meaningful performance outcomes. Existing research on AI adoption has primarily relied on technology-centric and organization-centric perspectives, emphasizing technical readiness, organizational resources, and environmental conditions. While these approaches have generated valuable insights, they often overlook the strategic role of branding in shaping how AI initiatives are evaluated, legitimized, and implemented across the firm.

Brand orientation (BO) reflects the extent to which organizational strategy and operations are guided by the brand and its long-term equity. Prior research links BO to strategic clarity, innovation quality, and sustained differentiation, particularly in dynamic and technology-intensive environments. However, little is known about whether and how BO shapes firm-level AI adoption, or whether AI adoption serves as a mechanism through which brand-led strategy translates into performance outcomes.

Accordingly, this study addresses two core research questions. First, does brand orientation function as a strategic capability that promotes firm-level AI adoption and subsequent performance outcomes? Second, under what organizational conditions does this relationship strengthen or weaken? Specifically, we examine political decision making as a boundary condition that may disrupt the translation of brand-led strategic intent into AI adoption.

Method and Data

The study draws on survey data collected from 279 firms operating in Egypt, an emerging market characterized by institutional uncertainty and accelerated digital transformation. Respondents were senior managers with direct involvement in AI-related initiatives, ensuring informed assessments of strategy, technology adoption, and organizational decision making.

Brand orientation was modeled as a higher-order construct encompassing four dimensions: brand importance, brand consistency, brand differentiation, and brand intelligence. Firm-level AI adoption captured the extent to which AI technologies were deployed across organizational functions rather than isolated pilot projects. Performance outcomes included AI-attributed performance and market-facing outcomes. Political decision making was measured using established scales capturing internal power dynamics, coalition building, and politically driven decision processes.

All constructs were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to estimate the moderated mediation model, given its suitability for higher-order constructs and prediction-oriented research. The analysis assessed direct effects, indirect effects through AI adoption, and the moderating role of political decision making on the relationship between brand orientation and AI adoption.

Summary of Findings

The results show that brand orientation has a positive and statistically significant effect on firm-level AI adoption. Firms with stronger brand-led strategies are more likely to deploy AI broadly across organizational activities rather than limiting adoption to isolated applications. In turn, firm-level AI adoption positively predicts both AI-attributed performance and market-facing outcomes, confirming that AI adoption serves as a key mechanism through which brand orientation translates into value creation.

Importantly, the findings reveal that organizational decision-making context conditions these effects. Political decision making significantly moderates the relationship between brand orientation and AI adoption. When political decision making is low, brand orientation strongly and positively predicts AI adoption, suggesting that strategic clarity and alignment facilitate implementation. In contrast, when political decision making is high, the relationship between brand orientation and AI adoption becomes non-significant, indicating that internal power dynamics and coalition-based decision processes dilute or obstruct execution.

Moderated mediation analyses further show that the indirect effects of brand orientation on both AI-attributed performance and market-facing outcomes through AI adoption weaken as political decision making increases. Together, these findings highlight that even strong brand-led strategies may fail to materialize in AI adoption when internal politics dominate decision processes.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to marketing, branding, and digital transformation scholarship. First, it extends AI adoption research by introducing brand orientation as a strategic capability that shapes whether and how AI is adopted at the firm level. By moving beyond technology-centric explanations, the study demonstrates that brand-led strategy plays a central role in legitimizing AI investments and aligning them with customer- and market-facing value creation.

Second, the study integrates brand orientation into the dynamic capabilities perspective, showing how brand-led strategy enables firms to sense AI opportunities, seize them through strategic investment, and reconfigure organizational processes for implementation. AI adoption is identified as a critical mechanism linking brand orientation to performance outcomes.

Third, the study advances understanding of organizational boundary conditions by identifying political decision making as a key factor that can disrupt the translation of strategic intent into action. This insight helps explain why firms with strong brand commitments may nevertheless struggle to implement AI initiatives successfully.

From a managerial perspective, the findings underscore the importance of embedding brand strategy into AI initiatives while actively managing internal decision-making dynamics. For policymakers and development agencies, the results suggest that brand-oriented capabilities may function as strategic “soft infrastructure” supporting effective AI adoption in emerging markets.

References are available upon request.

BRINGING MARKETING TO BOARD WORK: CONCEPTUALIZING BOARD MEMBER MARKET ORIENTATION

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Keywords: Market Orientation, Board Member, Theories-in-Use, Strategic Governance, Upper Echelon

Description: This study introduces the Board Member Market Orientation (BMO) construct, using a Theories-In-Use approach and 32 board interviews to explore how individual board members interpret and apply market insights in governance, and to identify key drivers and outcomes for board decision-making and organizational performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The critical importance of market orientation in today's dynamic markets is evident (Day & Moorman, 2010; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Quach et al., 2019). While the concept is well-studied at the organizational level, its manifestation in the boardroom, especially in the thinking and behavior of individual board members, remains largely uncharted. This is a significant gap, as boards shape long-term business strategy and can embed market-oriented governance across organizations. Most existing board-level research relies on upper-echelon demographic indicators, such as functional marketing experience, but overlooks how individual board members drive strategic decision-making. Despite the prominence of market orientation in marketing literature, little theory guides research at the board member level. The deeper mental models and practices remain unexplored.

To address this gap, this study adopts a Theories-in-Use approach to uncover the lived realities and practices of board professionals. The purpose of this study is to understand how individual board members engage with market orientation. Accordingly, we conduct a study

based on 32 in-depth interviews with board professionals, building a novel conceptualization of Board-Member Market Orientation (BMO) and proposing a framework outlining its key antecedents and outcomes.

Method And Data

This study is grounded in existing literature on market orientation, board-level research within the marketing discipline, and corporate governance. It employs a Theories-in-Use (TIU) approach (Zeithaml et al., 2020) to prioritize practitioner insights and uncover context-specific understandings of market orientation at the individual board member level. The research was conducted in two qualitative phases: the first phase (in 2022) involved in-depth interviews with nine board members with marketing backgrounds, providing exploratory insights into individual interpretations and enactments of market orientation. The second phase (in 2025) added 23 interviews with non-executive board members from diverse backgrounds, selected via theoretical sampling to ensure extensive board experience and representation across sectors. Altogether, 32 interviews were conducted, aligned with recommendations for theory-generating research.

The interview guide covered the BMO construct, its drivers, related marketing concepts, outcomes, and elements affecting BMO performance, ensuring findings were grounded in board-level contexts. Analysis followed the Gioia Methodology, using open, axial, and selective coding to inductively develop a data structure that links lived board experiences to theoretical insights. This process enabled the identification of the key dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes of BMO, resulting in the final integrated framework.

Summary of Findings

Inductive analysis using a Theories-in-Use approach reveals BMO as a three-dimensional construct: (1) market insight formation encompasses how board members use experiential sensemaking, external intelligence, and peer-enabled sensing to understand market dynamics; (2) market advocacy in board work involves the promotion of market issues on agendas, informal influencing among peers, and fostering open market-related dialogue within the board culture; and (3) market-oriented strategic guidance consists of strategy shaping, advising executives with market knowledge, and engaging external stakeholders through communication and network activation.

The analysis also identifies seven key antecedents of BMO: openness to change, low risk aversion, future orientation, intrinsic motivation to contribute, customer emphasis, change advocacy, and a systemic market perspective. The antecedents focused on individual-level cognitive and experiential traits that underpin market-oriented board engagement. Outcomes of BMO adoption span individual, board, and organizational levels, ranging from career advancement and work meaningfulness to greater opportunity capture, strategic risk mitigation, and improved strategic resilience.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study opens a novel area in market orientation research by exploring the concept at the board member level. It contributes significant new insights to academic marketing literature and actionable implications for enhancing governance and strategic decision-making in boardrooms. The developed BMO conceptualization and framework enrich strategic marketing by amplifying marketing's influence among top decision-makers. It demonstrates for the first time how market orientation manifests in individual board members within board-level decision-making.

The study bridges the gap between marketing theory and board research, offering insights into how market orientation contributes to boardroom dynamics and supports the integration of strategic marketing with management. It advances understanding in strategic management and corporate governance by providing a new perspective on how board members process and apply market intelligence, identifying seven individual characteristics as drivers of BMO, and mapping BMO's outcomes across individual, board, and organizational levels.

The findings highlight the importance of market literacy, strategic self-awareness, and cognitive and experiential diversity among board professionals. They provide a framework for board recruitment, self-assessment, and development, supporting more informed selection and training of board members. Ultimately, the study provides practical guidance for fostering a market-oriented mindset in board members to improve decision-making and organizational performance.

References are available upon request.

Extended Abstract Template

Enabling AI-Driven Marketing: Organizational Foundations of AI Transformation in German Retail

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence in Marketing, Organizational AI Readiness, Retail Marketing, AI Governance, Qualitative Research

Description: This study examines how organizational culture, structure, processes, employees, and data governance jointly enable or constrain the scalable use of AI in customer-oriented retail marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – 200 Words

Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in customer oriented marketing processes such as content creation, personalization, pricing, and service automation. While many retail firms experiment with AI based tools, few succeed in scaling these initiatives into sustainable, organization wide marketing capabilities. Prior marketing research has largely examined AI from technological, customer, or task specific perspectives, often focusing on adoption drivers or individual use cases. As a result, empirical insight into the organizational conditions that enable scalable AI use in marketing remains limited.

This gap is particularly relevant in retail, where AI driven marketing operates in complex organizational settings characterized by tight margins, legacy systems, regulatory requirements, and strong

interdependencies between marketing, IT, operations, and compliance. Existing readiness or transformation frameworks often remain abstract and provide limited guidance on how organizational elements interact in practice.

Against this background, this study addresses the following research question: Which internal organizational factors enable retail firms to move from isolated AI pilot projects to scalable and customer oriented applications in marketing? By focusing on organizational foundations rather than isolated technologies, the study clarifies how strategic orientation and operational execution must be aligned to realize the potential of AI in retail marketing.

Method And Data (Not Applicable For Nonempirical Papers) – 200 Words

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the organizational foundations of AI driven marketing in retail. Data were collected through 18 semi structured expert interviews with senior decision makers responsible for AI strategy, data governance, or marketing related AI applications in large German retail firms. The sample was purposively selected to capture variation in retail formats, organizational structures, and levels of AI maturity.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and focused on the strategic orientation and operationalization of AI across customer-oriented marketing domains, including communication, pricing, store experience, service, and omnichannel coordination. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized.

Data analysis followed an iterative coding process. In a first step, open coding was used to identify recurring practices, challenges, and organizational mechanisms. In a second step, these codes were consolidated into higher order categories reflecting shared organizational prerequisites. Building on this abstraction, categories were positioned along two analytical dimensions, strategic versus operational orientation and employee versus technology focus. This procedure enabled the identification of interdependent organizational clusters that explain differences between isolated AI pilots and scalable marketing applications.

Summary of Findings – 200 words

The analysis reveals five interdependent organizational clusters that shape the effective integration and scaling of AI in retail marketing: cultural, structural, process oriented, employee oriented, and data management oriented foundations. These clusters are systematically positioned along two analytical dimensions, strategic versus operational orientation and employee centered versus technology centered focus, highlighting how organizational configurations influence AI outcomes.

The findings show that scalable AI driven marketing does not depend on technological sophistication alone. Instead, imbalances between organizational dimensions frequently constrain AI impact. For example, firms with advanced data infrastructure but weak employee enablement report low adoption and limited performance gains, while organizations with strong experimentation cultures but insufficient governance struggle to move beyond isolated pilots. Process fragmentation across marketing, IT, and

compliance emerges as a recurring bottleneck that undermines promising AI applications in areas such as personalization, pricing, and campaign execution.

Furthermore, the results indicate that cultural framing and leadership engagement play a critical role in legitimizing AI use in sensitive marketing domains, particularly where issues of trust, fairness, and accountability arise. Overall, the findings demonstrate that AI driven marketing capabilities emerge from coordinated investments across culture, structure, processes, employees, and data management rather than from isolated initiatives or tools.

Statement of Key Contributions – 200 words

This study contributes to marketing research on artificial intelligence by shifting the focus from technologies, isolated use cases, or customer responses to the internal organizational conditions that enable scalable AI driven marketing. By empirically examining how AI is embedded across multiple marketing domains in retail, the study complements prior work that has often treated AI adoption and organizational readiness as separate phenomena.

Second, the paper develops an empirically grounded five cluster framework that captures interdependencies between culture, structure, processes, employees, and data management. By mapping these clusters along strategic versus operational and employee versus technology oriented dimensions, the framework provides a structured lens to identify organizational bottlenecks and misalignments that constrain AI impact in marketing. This refines socio technical and Technology Organization People perspectives by specifying how organizational prerequisites interact in practice.

Third, the findings contribute to retail marketing research by offering qualitative evidence from a regulated and data intensive context, highlighting the importance of governance, workforce enablement, and cross functional coordination in customer oriented AI applications. Overall, the study provides a theoretically informed and empirically grounded foundation for future research on AI readiness, capability development, and scalable AI use in marketing.

References are available upon request.

EXPLORING BUSINESS MODEL STRATEGIES FOR PLATFORMS AND ECOSYSTEMS: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY STANDARDS

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Keywords: Platforms, Ecosystems, Business Models, Diversification, Ecosystem Control

Description: This paper develops a conceptual framework to explain how platform firms balance diversification and ecosystem control to drive long-term value creation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Platform-based firms increasingly dominate global markets, not merely through superior products but by orchestrating ecosystems of users, partners, and complementary services. As these ecosystems expand, firms face a central strategic tension: how far to diversify across products and markets, and how much control to exert over ecosystem participants. While prior research has examined diversification and governance in isolation, limited work explains how their interaction shapes platform strategies and long-term performance.

This study addresses the primary research question: How does the balance between product/market diversification and ecosystem control influence platform strategies and value creation? We argue that platform success depends less on scale alone and more on how firms design and govern ecosystems as they expand. Excessive openness may accelerate adoption but undermine quality and monetization, while excessive control may preserve consistency but constrain growth and innovation. By jointly examining diversification and control, this paper seeks to explain why some platforms remain resilient as markets mature, while others struggle with commoditization, fragmentation, or regulatory backlash. The research aims to offer a structured way to classify platform strategies and to identify configurations that are better suited for sustained competitive advantage in increasingly complex ecosystem environments.

Method and Data

Not Applicable – Nonempirical paper

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals four distinct platform business model archetypes based on the interaction between diversification and ecosystem control: utility, closed, open, and hybrid models. Each configuration exhibits unique strengths and limitations.

Platforms with low diversification and low control function as utility models, typically operating in stable or regulated environments with limited differentiation. Closed models, characterized by high control and low diversification, excel in delivering consistent quality and trust but face constraints in expanding into adjacent markets. Open models, with high diversification and low control, enable rapid adoption and innovation through broad participation, yet often struggle with quality assurance and value capture.

The most robust performance is observed among hybrid models, which combine high diversification with strong ecosystem control. These platforms successfully scale across products and markets while maintaining governance mechanisms that preserve coherence, quality, and strategic direction. Hybrid platforms demonstrate greater resilience to competitive pressures, stronger monetization capabilities, and higher long-term value creation. Overall, the findings indicate that platform performance is not driven by diversification or control alone, but by how effectively firms align both dimensions in response to industry context and ecosystem complexity.

Key Contributions

This paper makes several contributions to platform and ecosystem research. First, it introduces a unified 2×2 framework that integrates product/market diversification and ecosystem control, addressing a gap in the literature where these dimensions are typically examined separately.

The framework offers a structured way to classify and compare platform strategies across industries.

Second, the study advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating why hybrid platform models (those combining high diversification with strong governance) are particularly effective in sustaining long-term value creation. Rather than reinforcing a simplistic winner-takes-all narrative, the framework highlights the strategic trade-offs platforms face as ecosystems mature.

Third, the research provides practical guidance for managers and policymakers. Platform leaders can use the framework to assess whether their current governance structures align with their diversification ambitions, while regulators can better understand how different platform configurations shape competition and innovation. By linking ecosystem design choices to strategic outcomes, this paper offers a parsimonious yet powerful lens for analysing platform business models in both academic research and managerial practice.

References are available upon request.

FRAMING TO ACTION: THE IMPACT OF MEDIA MESSAGING ON RECALL EFFECTIVENESS

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Keywords: Product Recall; Recall Effectiveness; News Media; Media Framing

Description: This study examines the impact of media framing and its interaction with media coverage on product recall effectiveness.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Framing affects decision-making by emphasizing specific issues (Entman 1993), and in product recalls, media can stress different aspects of the crisis to influence consumer responses (Zavyalova et al. 2012). Identifying these media topics can help managers design more effective communications (Wang et al. 2024). Accordingly, our research questions are: How does framing (i.e., media topics) impact recall effectiveness? and How does framing interact with media coverage to influence recall effectiveness?

Method and Data

We analyze 983 food recalls and 2,798 related media reports using Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to extract media topics. We apply the Health Belief Model (HBM; Rosenstock et al. 1988) as our method theory to categorize these topics, as it offers a useful framework for

understanding how people respond to health-related threats like product recalls (Raithel et al. 2024b).

Summary of Findings

We find that when media frames threat, net-benefits, and self-efficacy, recall effectiveness increases. This underscores the importance of product-harm crisis communication strategies that do not downplay risks, but rather clearly communicate potential dangers, highlight the benefits of compliance, and enhance individuals' confidence in taking the recommended actions. Furthermore, the effect of threat and self-efficacy increases in situations of high media coverage.

Key Contributions

This study advances the literature by showing that the *content* of media coverage — specifically, the topics emphasized or *media frames* — significantly influences recall effectiveness. Based on this study's findings, managers and policymakers should prioritize three key media frames in recall communications: threat, net-benefits, and self-efficacy.

References are available upon request.

FROM SELF-CONSTRUAL TO STRATEGIC ORIENTATION: WHEN AND WHY DO FEMALE CMOs' BRAND PERSONALITY DECISIONS DIFFER FROM MALE COUNTERPARTS'?

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Keywords: Chief Marketing Officer; Brand Personality; Self-Construal; strategic orientation; Gender Role Congruity Theory

Description: This paper examines when and why female chief marketing officers differ from male counterparts in shaping firm brand personality.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Extant research on executive gender focuses predominantly on CEOs and CFOs, leaving the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)—the primary architect of market-facing strategy—relatively overlooked. This study investigates whether and why CMO gender systematically influences a firm's brand personality (BP) decisions. Drawing on gender role congruity and self-construal theories, we argue that gender-based differences in self-perception shape CMOs' strategic orientations, which ultimately manifest in distinct BP dimensions. Specifically, we focus on "excitement" and "competence"—the two dimensions most critical to market outcomes—proposing that female CMOs are associated with a relative de-emphasis on these traits compared to their male counterparts. Beyond establishing this link, we explore the underlying

psychological mechanisms and delineate the boundary conditions of this effect. We examine a comprehensive set of moderators, including gender equality norms, executive self-esteem, equity incentives, environmental uncertainty, and CMO managerial discretion. By integrating the upper echelons perspective with branding literature, this research uncovers how individual-level executive characteristics drive firm-level branding strategy and identifies the contextual factors that attenuate or amplify these gender-based strategic divergences. Our findings offer novel insights into the human element of brand management and the nuanced role of gender in top management team decision-making.

Method And Data

This research employs a robust multi-method design to triangulate findings and enhance both internal and external validity. Study 1 conducts an archival analysis of Chinese listed firms from 2010 to 2023 (N = 8,178 firm-year observations). Integrating natural language processing to quantify executive strategic orientation and BP, we utilize a panel instrumental variable approach to mitigate endogeneity. This study tests the primary relationship between CMO gender and BP, alongside the moderating influences of equity incentives, environmental uncertainty, and managerial discretion. Study 2 features a controlled experimental design where participants are embedded in simulated CMO decision-making scenarios. By manipulating gender equality norms and self-esteem levels, we establish causal evidence for the impact of gender on BP preferences while isolating the mediating role of strategic orientation. Finally, Study 3 utilizes structural equation modeling based on a large-scale executive survey (N = 411) to provide granular evidence for the hypothesized sequential mediation mechanisms. Across all studies, we employ validated scales and rigorous econometric techniques to ensure measurement reliability and theoretical precision. This comprehensive empirical strategy allows for a nuanced

understanding of how CMO gender shapes branding outcomes across diverse organizational and psychological contexts, ensuring that the results are both theoretically grounded and managerially relevant.

Summary of Findings

Triangulated results across three studies reveal that CMO gender systematically shapes BP decisions. Specifically, firms led by female CMOs exhibit a relative de-emphasis on "excitement" and "competence" dimensions—traits typically associated with competitiveness and market breakthroughs—compared to those led by male CMOs. Serial mediation analyses uncover the underlying psychological mechanism: female CMOs manifest a lower degree of independent self-construal, which subsequently reduces their agentic orientation and, ultimately, their preference for excitement- and competence-oriented branding strategies. Furthermore, we delineate several theoretically significant boundary conditions. Specifically, gender equality norms and elevated levels of executive self-esteem attenuate these gender-based disparities by reducing reliance on gender-stereotypical decision-making patterns. Similarly, equity incentives mitigate these differences by aligning female CMOs with outcome-oriented, competitive strategic mandates. Conversely, environmental uncertainty and CMO managerial discretion amplify these gender differences; under conditions of high volatility or greater autonomy, executives are more likely to revert to their fundamental cognitive and strategic predispositions. Collectively, these findings provide a nuanced account of how executive identity and organizational context interact to drive brand positioning, contributing to the upper echelons perspective and the socio-psychological foundations of brand strategy.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research offers several theoretical contributions to the marketing and management literature. First, we bridge the upper echelons perspective and branding research by identifying CMO gender as a critical individual-level antecedent of brand personality (BP). This shifts the scholarly focus from consumer-centric perceptions toward the supply-side, executive-driven drivers of brand strategy. Second, by integrating self-construal and strategic orientation theories, we propose and validate a novel sequential mediation mechanism. This granular psychological framework deepens our understanding of how executive identity translates into firm-level strategic outcomes. Third, this study delineates the boundary conditions of these effects. By systematically examining gender equality norms, executive self-esteem, equity incentives, environmental uncertainty, and managerial discretion, we clarify the contextual contingencies that amplify or attenuate gender-based strategic divergence. Finally, our multi-method research design—integrating archival analysis, controlled experiments, and executive surveys—establishes a rigorous methodological paradigm for exploring the nexus of leadership characteristics and marketing strategy. Collectively, these findings enrich our understanding of the human element in brand management and offer actionable insights for firm governance, executive selection, and the strategic positioning of global brands.

References are available upon request.

GRACE IN DEFEAT: INVESTIGATING FAN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING FOLLOWING A LOSS ATTRIBUTED TO A TEAM VS. AN ATHLETE

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Keywords: emotional well-being, team identification, disposition theory of sport spectatorship

Description: This research investigates factors impacting emotional well-being of sport consumers in light of loss and disappointment. Specifically, researchers examined the role of team identification, expectations, disappointment, and forgiveness on fan emotional well-being.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sport consumption is gaining momentum on a global scale, as 67% of surveyed consumers claim to follow sports on a regular basis through various media platforms (YouGov.com, 2023). While 52% of sport fans claim to have a favorite team, a growing number of sport fans are following the athletes themselves (NIL Network.com, 2025). With this rise in fan engagement, examining fan emotions toward teams and athletes may yield useful findings for marketing practitioners as previous research has suggested strong links between fan emotions and team connection, as well as attendance and consumption (Shakina et al., 2020). This research examines the underlying psychological process through moderated mediation models to explore the varied fan emotions toward team and athlete, as well as willingness of fans to “forgive”, in

light of loss and disappointment. While scholars have noted sport fans' emotions differ based on game outcome (Yim and Byon, 2018), (e.g., positive results yielding higher service satisfaction), the current research aims to shed light on how fan emotions may differ depending on whether the loss is attributed to the team or a star athlete.

Method and Data

Through two studies, this research investigates fan emotional well-being. Study 1 explored the effect of team identification on fan emotional well-being using a scenario in which a team loss is specifically attributed to the team's failure to meet expectations. In contrast, Study 2 specifically attributed the team's loss to the star player of the team. In Study 1, 107 participants (38% female, Mage = 40), were drawn from an online subject pool and screened based on following college football. Participants viewed a hypothetical news story based on a Texas Longhorns football game and were asked to imagine that the news story is based on true events. The story emphasized that the **"**Buckeyes hold on to defeat Longhorns". Measures for team identification (Yoshida et al., 2015) (α = .95), expectations (Rainey et al., 2011) (α = .87), disappointment (Rainey et al., 2011) (α = .82), and fan emotional well-being, (Sarofim et al., 2022) (α = .93) were collected. In Study 2, 105 participants (38% female, Mage = 43) followed the same process as Study 1, only this time the hypothetical news story attributed the team's loss to the Texas star player, Arch Manning ("Manning interceptions doom Longhorns").

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, Model 6 (Hayes, 2018), 10,000 bootstrap, with 95% bias-corrected confidence interval, was used to examine the serial mediating role of fan expectations (b = .39, SE = .13, t = 2.98, p = .003) and disappointment (b = -.56, SE = .07, t = -8.45, p < .001) in explicating the relationship between team identification and fan emotional well-being (b = .31,

SE = .05, t = 6.48, p < .001). Notably, the overall indirect effect of team identification on fan emotional well-being through the sequential mediators, fan expectations and disappointment, was significant (95% CI [-.12, -.02]), while the indirect effects were non-significant. In Study 2, a two-step mediation analysis, using PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes 2018) was used to test the overall model team identification → player forgiveness (b = .27, SE = .05, t = 4.98, p < .001) → disappointment (b = -.59, SE = .11, t = -5.29, p < .001) → emotional well-being (b = -.56, SE = .09, t = -5.64, p < .001). Importantly, the overall indirect path from team identification to emotional well-being through forgiveness and disappointment was significant (95% CI: .04, .15), while both the indirect effects were nonsignificant.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to sport marketing by making a first attempt at understanding how team identification and expectations impact fan emotions toward the team and the athlete following a team loss. While extant research discusses fan response to moral transgressions and scandals relating to teams and athletes (Ndone and Abdallah, 2025; Ward, 2022), the current research investigates fan emotions and forgiveness toward the team vs. the star athlete following a team loss. This work expands on previous studies examining fan expectations and disappointment (Rainey et al., 2011), suggesting that (study 1) the more the fans identify with the team, the more expectations they have. When the team fails, these higher expectations lead to more disappointment, which consequently negatively affects the fans' emotional well-being. Study 2 shows that the more the fans identify with the team, the more they are forgiving of the team's star athlete after his contribution to the team loss, which leads to less disappointment and better fan emotional well-being. These findings differentiate between fans' reaction toward the team vs. a star athlete following a loss. The results have important implications for

communication strategy to fans, and for promotional strategy emphasizing the star athlete (vs. team) for initiatives.

LEVERAGING THE FAME OF CELEBRITY OWNERS FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF FOR-PROFIT FIRMS

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Keywords: Celebrity owners, Internationalization, Growth companies, Celebrity equity

Description: In this study we explore the ways in which a celebrity owner can support and facilitate a growth company's international market entry.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

We examine how growth companies use celebrity owners in their internationalization efforts. Based on interviews with 6 firms and 46 secondary sources, we identify three strategic mechanisms through which celebrity ownership enhances global expansion. Our research question is: *How can a celebrity owner support a company in its international market entry?*

When entering foreign markets, firms face substantial challenges, including the liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965) and the liability of foreignness (Zaheer, 1995, 2002). These

liabilities create obstacles to gaining legitimacy and trust among new customers, making effective signaling of brand and product quality particularly important.

Prior research demonstrates that celebrity endorsers facilitate brand internationalization and enhance, for instance, brand awareness and purchase behavior (Roy et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2023; Spry et al., 2011; Till et al., 2008). Consumers often associate positive quality characteristics with products supported by celebrities, interpreting such associations as signals of commitment and reliability (Knoll and Matthes, 2017; Russell and Stern, 2006). Beyond paid endorsement, celebrity ownership represents a stronger form of commitment, which has been shown to amplify the "celebrity effect" on consumers (Hunter and Davidsson, 2007; Mei and Genet, 2024; Teng et al., 2020). However, despite evidence that celebrity ownership enhances brand reputation, limited research explains how celebrities can be strategically leveraged as owners during firms' internationalization processes.

Method and Data

To examine the interplay between celebrity ownership and firm internationalization, we conducted a multiple-case study (Yin, 2009), which is well suited for exploring under-researched phenomena. We carried out interviews with six companies that have a celebrity owner, either as founder or investor. In addition, we collected secondary data comprising press releases and marketing communications (e.g., social media, websites, and blogs), totaling 46 articles. These materials reveal how celebrity owners are portrayed internationally and illustrate the signaling mechanisms firms employ in foreign markets. The combination of primary and secondary data enabled triangulation and enhanced the validity of the findings.

Data analysis followed the Gioia and Corley (2013) methodology and was supported by Atlas.ti software. Thematic analysis focused on identifying similarities and differences across cases, examining firms' internationalization efforts, and analyzing how celebrity owners are communicated internationally. Specifically, we identified recurring mechanisms and case-specific nuances, traced the evolution of internationalization strategies across stages of market entry, and examined both deliberate and incidental communication practices related to celebrity ownership.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that firms strategically utilize celebrity owners as valuable resources for supporting global expansion in three primary ways. First, celebrity owners can be positioned as symbolic representations of brand meaning, transferring their existing image and associations to the firm. This mechanism is especially effective when the celebrity already holds a strong reputation in the target market, allowing firms to rapidly leverage pre-existing awareness and legitimacy during international entry (e.g., C2). Second, celebrity owners can function as direct public relations channels that generate immediate media attention and market visibility. In C3, for instance, the celebrity's nationality and membership in the target country's national sports team facilitated swift market access and enhanced local credibility. Third, celebrity owners may serve as facilitators of partnering and network formation in foreign markets. As illustrated in C4, the celebrity's presence attracts heightened attention from key stakeholders, enabling the firm to establish strategic alliances and access previously hard-to-reach networks.

Moreover, the usefulness of celebrity ownership is contingent upon firms' internationalization strategies and product characteristics. Firms operating in regulated

distribution environments (e.g., C2) benefit most from celebrities with strong local legitimacy, whereas firms relying on e-commerce and social media–driven models (e.g., C1 and C4) derive greater value from globally recognizable celebrities capable of attracting customers across multiple markets.

Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to the literature on international marketing strategy, and more specifically, on international market entry. Drawing on signaling theory, we elucidate the strategic mechanisms through which firms leverage celebrity ownership to facilitate global expansion. In doing so, we advance the understanding of how celebrity involvement shapes firms' international market entry strategies and enhances their international recognition. Moreover, our research extends the growing body of literature on celebrity ownership and its role in driving international growth, offering new theoretical insights into the intersection of personal branding and firm-level internationalization.

From a managerial perspective, our findings provide actionable guidance for for-profit firms seeking to strategically employ celebrity owners as part of their internationalization efforts. By highlighting the ways in which celebrity involvement can signal credibility, attract attention, and strengthen brand visibility across markets, managers are equipped to make informed decisions regarding the integration of celebrity ownership into their global expansion strategies.

References are available upon request

Lock-In vs. Leapfrogging: Balancing Customer Retention and Innovation in Duopolistic Markets

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Keywords

Duopoly, Customer Lock-In, Innovation Strategy, Platforms, Competitive Dynamics

Description

This paper examines how firms in duopolistic markets balance customer lock-in strategies with innovation-driven competition.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Many industries are dominated by two large firms, creating duopolistic markets. Examples include smartphones, aircraft manufacturing, and payment networks. In these markets, firms face a central strategic dilemma. They must decide whether to focus on locking in existing customers or invest heavily in innovation to leapfrog their rival. Customer lock-in strategies include

building ecosystems, increasing switching costs, offering loyalty programs, and leveraging network effects. These strategies help firms retain customers, reduce churn, and stabilize revenues. However, strong lock-in can also reduce pressure to innovate.

At the same time, long-term success in duopolistic markets depends on continuous innovation. Rivals closely monitor each other and respond quickly to new product launches, features, or technologies. As a result, firms must innovate not only to grow but also to maintain their competitive position. This creates a tension between value appropriation through retention and value creation through innovation.

This paper asks how firms in duopolistic markets should balance customer lock-in with innovation investments. Specifically, it examines when lock-in improves firm performance and when it discourages innovation. It also explores how factors such as competitive symmetry, market maturity, and technological change shape this trade-off. By integrating insights from marketing, strategy, and innovation research, this paper explains how duopolistic firms can manage this balance to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Method and Data

This paper is conceptual and theoretical and does not use original empirical data. Instead, it reviews and integrates existing research from marketing, economics, and strategy. The analysis builds on well-established theories of network effects, switching costs, platform competition, and innovation incentives in oligopolistic markets. Prior studies on customer retention, ecosystem strategies, and competitive innovation are brought together to explain how firms behave in duopolistic settings. Well-known industry examples, such as Apple and Google in mobile

operating systems and Airbus and Boeing in aircraft manufacturing, are used to illustrate key ideas and clarify underlying mechanisms.

Based on this synthesis, the paper develops a structured conceptual framework that explains how firms balance customer lock-in and innovation. Firm strategies are mapped along two dimensions: emphasis on customer lock-in and emphasis on innovation. Although these dimensions are continuous, they are presented as high and low for clarity. This framework identifies four strategic postures that firms may adopt in duopolistic markets. In addition, the paper proposes a set of theoretical propositions that explain how competitive symmetry, technological change, regulation, and consumer behavior influence the effectiveness of each posture. These propositions generate testable hypotheses and provide a clear foundation for future empirical research on duopolistic competition.

Summary of Findings

The paper shows that neither customer lock-in nor innovation alone is enough for long-term success in duopolistic markets. Heavy reliance on customer lock-in can protect short-term revenues, but it may also reduce incentives to innovate and increase vulnerability to disruptive competitors. Firms that depend too much on switching costs and captive customers risk falling behind when new technologies or business models emerge. In contrast, firms that focus mainly on rapid innovation without building strong customer retention often struggle to capture value, as customers can easily move to competing offerings.

The framework identifies four strategic postures that firms may adopt. The Starship posture combines high customer lock-in with high innovation and offers the most durable performance by balancing retention and renewal. The Fortress posture relies on strong lock-in but weak

innovation and performs well only in stable environments. The Arms Race posture emphasizes innovation with little lock-in, leading to intense competition and short-lived advantages. The Vulnerable posture, with low lock-in and low innovation, is unstable and often results in decline or exit.

The findings also show that competitive conditions shape outcomes. Neck-and-neck duopolies invest more in innovation, while asymmetric duopolies create different incentives for market leaders and followers. Regulation, globalization, and technological change further influence which strategies succeed. Overall, firm performance depends on strategic fit and the ability to adapt over time.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes four main contributions. First, it offers a clear and integrated framework that connects customer lock-in and innovation within duopolistic competition, showing that value creation and value appropriation are interdependent rather than separate decisions. Second, it advances theory by explaining how duopoly-specific dynamics shape innovation incentives, extending prior research that focuses mainly on monopolies or fragmented markets. Third, the paper provides testable propositions that identify when lock-in strengthens performance and when it becomes a liability, highlighting the moderating roles of technology speed, regulation, and market structure.

Finally, the paper offers strong managerial relevance. It provides a practical diagnostic tool that helps managers assess their current strategic posture and identify the risks of over-reliance on either retention or innovation. For policymakers, the framework clarifies when regulatory intervention is needed to reduce harmful lock-in without weakening beneficial innovation

incentives. Overall, the paper contributes to marketing and strategy research by offering a simple but powerful lens for understanding competition, innovation, and customer value in duopolistic markets.

References are available upon request.

MARKET SHAPING FOR SUSTAINABILITY: AN INSTITUTIONAL FIELDS PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: Sustainable marketing, Market shaping, Institutional fields, Multi-stakeholder strategies, Legitimacy gaps

Description: This study explains how diverse stakeholders enact sustainability in market-shaping efforts by identifying four pathways and associated mechanisms of sustainability enactment, and by providing a typology of the forms these multi-stakeholder efforts take.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – Marketing scholars increasingly advocate for meso-level interventions—influencing wider systems that firms are part of—to complement consumer-focused sustainability efforts (Kim et al. 2024; Nenkov 2024). Among these literature streams, we focus on market shaping, which is highlighted as a particularly promising strategic action to propel markets towards improved sustainability (see e.g., Sheth and Parvatiyar 2021; Storbacka et al. 2022).

However, two gaps persist in the literature on market shaping for sustainability. First, it tends to analyze different stakeholder categories separately (White et al. 2025), overlooking their diverse—and sometimes conflicting—interests (Doganova and Karnøe 2015; Keränen et al. 2023). This also limits attention to the divergent interpretations of sustainability that arise from its multi-dimensional nature (Kim et al. 2024) underpinning these conflicts. Second, prior studies have focused on the shaping activities of individual firms (Jaworski et al. 2000) or relatively homogeneous coalitions (Maciel and Fischer 2020), offering limited insight into how heterogeneous stakeholders collectively shape markets.

To address these gaps, our objective is to explain the varied enactments of sustainability by heterogeneous stakeholders seeking to shape markets towards 'better' futures. Specifically, we ask: How are sustainability-related issues enacted in multi-stakeholder market-shaping efforts, and what forms do such efforts take?

Method And Data – We conducted an embedded, multi-case study of four forest-related markets in the Nordics: forest management services, residential multistory construction projects, district heating generation, and carbon credits. The cases were theoretically sampled to maximize variation in institutional infrastructure elaboration and coherency, following Hinings et al. (2017). Our empirical material combines 100 in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between October 2023 and March 2025 (approximately 104 hours of recordings) with extensive secondary data. Interviewees represented a broad range of stakeholders engaged in market-shaping efforts, including firms, value-chain actors, NGOs, policymakers, researchers, financial institutions, and industry associations. Secondary materials included policy papers and official reports commissioned by national and EU-level actors, as well as newspaper articles from

Finnish and Swedish media, which helped illuminate policy processes, public debate, and alternative perspectives.

Our analysis followed an interpretivist abductive research design, emphasizing plausible theoretical explanations developed through researcher reflexivity rather than universal generalizability. We employed a methodological bricolage approach, combining multiple overlapping analytical moves to support iterative sensemaking. Drawing on the concepts of exchange and issue fields from institutional field theory, we elevated the level of analysis beyond firm-specific actions to examine multi-stakeholder market-shaping efforts situated within issue fields that connect actors from distinct exchange fields.

Summary of Findings – Our findings reveal a substantial diversity in the market-level aims pursued in the multi-stakeholder shaping efforts, which range from contracting and reforming, to maintaining the market. To account for this diversity, we identify four pathways of sustainability enactment—two associated with challengers and two with incumbents in the market. These pathways arise from differences in how stakeholders perceive the legitimacy gap surrounding the market, which in turn leads them to adopt distinct modes of sustainability enactment, spanning from fundamentalist to pragmatic, transformative, or instrumentalist. Additionally, we delineate four types of market-shaping efforts that can be observed in situations where an issue field has formed around a market and challenges its local order—that is, current practices and understandings. Each effort type is defined by the stakeholders' orientations toward the issues and field settlements that constitute the issue field associated with the focal market. The four types are: (1) maintaining the status quo, (2) settlement-specific reforming, (3) settlement-independent reforming, and (4) contracting the market.

Statement of Key Contributions – Our study makes three main contributions to the literature on market shaping, particularly in sustainability contexts. First, we extend traditional research, which has largely focused on discrete product or service markets, by highlighting the role of issue fields spanning multiple exchange fields as central arenas for market shaping for sustainability. We show that field embeddedness and collective concerns within a field (e.g., profit, environmental, or social considerations) substantially influence market-shaping efforts and diversify the aims of these efforts. Second, we advance the conceptualization of market shaping by emphasizing the strategic market-level intent of shaping efforts—whether to contract, reform, or maintain a market—rather than the specific activities that make them up. This offers a more robust analytical lens than extant and predominantly activity-focused approaches. Third, we extend the understanding of multi-stakeholder market shaping by showing how the type of legitimacy gap influences which actors engage in particular sustainability-focused efforts and revealing that stakeholders can pursue same shaping efforts with minimal coordination, challenging prior assumptions of collaborative intent. Collectively, these contributions broaden the understanding of market shaping for sustainability beyond firm-centric or collaborative approaches, highlighting the complexity and diversity of stakeholders and intentions in such shaping efforts.

References are available upon request.

Marketing Beyond Constraint: Developing Community-Based Entrepreneurial Marketing (CBEM) among Women Micro-Entrepreneurs

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Description

This paper conceptualises and develops community-based entrepreneurial marketing (CBEM) as a collective, relational form of entrepreneurial marketing that emerges when constrained women micro-entrepreneurs in subsistence marketplace to coordinate market activities through shared meanings and moral norms.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial Marketing, women micro-entrepreneur, ethnography, community, Global-South*

Research Question

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) has largely centred on individual agency and firm-level autonomy, assuming entrepreneurs act independently to identify and exploit opportunities. This orientation overlooks the constrained, relational, and informal realities that shape entrepreneurship across much of the Global South—particularly among women micro-entrepreneurs, where social obligation, trust, and coordination substitute for formal market structures. Reflecting on the inadequacy of contextual focus in entrepreneurial marketing, this paper argues that to understand entrepreneurial marketing in subsistence marketplace meaningfully, we must shift the analytical lens from what marketing should be to what marketing is in practice. Despite women-led micro-businesses playing a vital role in the national economy worldwide, their lived experience remains under-theorised in EM literature. Hence, this study asks: how does entrepreneurial marketing manifests under constraint among women micro-entrepreneurs?

Method And Data

The study draws on a 70-day immersive ethnography in an women-only Indonesian micro-entrepreneur community. The data collected were 30 semi-structured and informal interviews and 10 women micro-entrepreneur digital-social media data (Whatsapp and Instagram. The data collection is conducted from March to May 2025. Using an abductive analytical logic grounded in inductive GIOIA coding, empirical patterns were iteratively connected with theoretical constructs from Entrepreneurial Marketing within critical realism ontology, to develop mechanism-based explanations. The data analysis followed the Gioia methodology, beginning with the identification of first-order codes grounded in participants' language and lived experiences.

These codes were subsequently clustered into second-order themes through iterative comparison, constant reflection, and memo-writing. The analytical process surfaced recurring patterns relating to social embeddedness, emotional and operational entanglement, institutional mediation, and relational workarounds in digital marketing practices and then manifest into the coined concepts of Community-Based Entrepreneurial Marketing.

Summary of Findings

This study develops Community-Based Entrepreneurial Marketing (CBEM) that demonstrates how marketing practices in the Global South differ from dominant entrepreneurial marketing assumptions in the Global North, leading to distinct manifestations of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions. Focusing on women micro-entrepreneurs embedded in community-based settings, the findings demonstrate that marketing is enacted through relational coordination, shared meanings, and moral obligations rather than individualised, firm-centric practices. Consequently, the entrepreneurial marketing dimensions is not reduced, but reconfigured.

This study conceptualises CBEM as a collective form of entrepreneurial marketing that emerges when constrained women micro-entrepreneurs coordinate market activities through shared meanings, moral norms, and relational obligations. From our findings, we identify four dimensions that extend classical entrepreneurial marketing: *visibility-making, coordinating, moral-driving, and quiet-competing.* Hence, based on our findings and those new emerging dimensions, we propose four propositions:

P1. Under constraint, women engage in visibility-making, seeking market presence collectively rather than individually, as a manifestation of individual EM's opportunity-seeking.
P2. Limited autonomy leads women to prioritise coordinating, transforming networking and resource leveraging into interdependent, community-oriented practices.
P3. Entrepreneurial acts become moral driving, where ethical and religious norms motivate and constrain behaviour, moderating EM's emphasis on bold risk-taking and proactiveness.
P4. Innovation becomes quiet-competing, with subtle differentiation that prioritises harmony, challenging EM's assumption of bold change-driving.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes three contributions to the marketing literature, especially in subsistence marketplace and entrepreneurial marketing**.** First, it shows that entrepreneurial marketing in subsistence contexts is reconfigured from individual autonomy to collective, interdependent market-making under constraints. Second, it extends entrepreneurial marketing to the subsistence marketplace context by shifting focus from individual entrepreneurial autonomy to collective, interdependent market-making. Third, it introduces and conceptualise Community-Based Entrepreneurial Marketing (CBEM) to better understand how marketing systems are socially constituted and recursively reproduced within subsistence marketplace, especially in the Global South.

Our research is contextually grounded, mechanism-based and demonstrates how markets operate as socially embedded systems rather than autonomous firms. By integrating EM with structuration and relational perspectives, the study offers a pathway for rethinking how marketing functions beyond formal institutions and individual control — a critical agenda for marketing scholarship in Global South.

References are available upon request.

NOT ALL TRANSGRESSIONS ARE EQUAL: REVISITING "TO SPONSOR OR NOT TO SPONSOR" WITH A DUAL-METHOD COMPLEXITY ANALYSIS

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Keywords: endorsement scandals, celebrity endorsement, brand reputation, consumer response

Description: this paper explores how characteristics of endorsement scandals are associated with audience responses to endorsers and brands.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Endorsement scandals vary widely in their consequences. While some scandals lead to rapid relationship termination and persistent reputational damage, others result in only limited and short-lived effects. Existing research has established that characteristics such as the seriousness of the transgression and its relevance to the endorser's professional role influence stakeholder reactions. However, these factors do not operate independently, and similar scandals often produce very different outcomes. This research asks when endorsement scandals are most likely to generate severe reputational harm, and how combinations of conditions shape these outcomes. Adopting a configurational perspective, the study treats scandal consequences as emerging from interdependent conditions rather than from single variables in isolation. The goal is to complement average-effect explanations with a more nuanced understanding of how different contextual elements jointly contribute to reputational risk.

Method and Data

The study draws on an experimental dataset in which participants evaluated endorsers and associated brands before and after exposure to scandal scenarios. The scenarios varied along key conceptual dimensions commonly discussed in the literature, including the seriousness of the misconduct, its relevance to the endorser's role, and pre-existing evaluations of the brand. Two analytical perspectives were used. Conventional statistical analyses provide an overview of general tendencies in the data, while a configurational approach is used to identify patterns of conditions associated with especially negative reactions. This dual perspective allows the study to address both general trends and more extreme or distinctive cases of reputational harm.

Summary of Findings

The analyses indicate that endorsement scandals tend to reduce evaluations of endorsers and brands, but that the magnitude of these effects varies substantially across situations. Average patterns suggest that more serious and professionally relevant scandals are associated with more negative responses, but these relationships are far from uniform. The configurational analysis highlights that severe reputational damage is concentrated in particular combinations of conditions rather than occurring whenever any single factor is present. In other words, reputational collapse is not an automatic consequence of misconduct, but instead depends on how multiple elements align in a given situation.

Statement of Key Contributions

The research contributes to endorsement and crisis management literature by introducing a configurational perspective on scandal outcomes. It demonstrates that reputational harm is better

understood as the result of interacting conditions than as the additive effect of isolated variables. Methodologically, the study illustrates the value of combining traditional statistical approaches with configurational analysis to capture both general patterns and more extreme cases. Practically, the findings suggest that managers should monitor not only individual risk factors, but also their co-occurrence, in order to better anticipate and manage reputational threats.

(References are available upon request)

NOT ALWAYS A PAYOFF

: WHEN DIGITAL SERVITIZATION SUCCEEDS OR FAILS

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Keywords: digital servitization, financial performance, technology–organization–environment (TOE) framework, contingency perspective, manufacturing industry

Description: This study examines the contingent effects of digital servitization on financial performance in manufacturing firms, highlighting how technological, organizational, and environmental conditions shape performance outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Servitization, defined as a strategic shift from product offerings toward services to create competitive value, has been foundational in manufacturing industry (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988). As digital technologies have accelerated this shift, giving rise to digital servitization (DS), where manufacturers embed digital capabilities into service offerings and business models (Kohtamäki et al., 2019; Frank et al., 2019). While this convergence promises enhanced value creation, empirical evidence on whether digital servitization consistently yields superior financial performance remains limited and mixed, with some studies reporting positive effects and others highlighting organizational and technological challenges. Such mixed results suggest that the financial benefits of digital servitization likely depend on contextual factors. This study thus asks: Under what technological, organizational, and environmental conditions does digital servitization enhance firm financial performance?

Method And Data

This study uses data from the 2022 Korean Innovation Survey for manufacturing firms, conducted by the Science and Technology Policy Institute in accordance with OECD Oslo Manual guidelines. The survey captures firms' innovation activities, digital technology adoption, and organizational characteristics over the 2019–2021 period. After excluding incomplete and inconsistent responses, the final sample consists of 3,983 manufacturing firms across diverse industries and firm sizes, providing a nationally representative dataset suitable for large-scale empirical analysis.

Digital servitization and firm performance are examined using firm-level indicators that capture firms' engagement in digitally enabled service activities and their subsequent economic outcomes. Technological, organizational, and environmental conditions are incorporated to reflect key contextual dimensions emphasized in the Technology–

Organization–Environment framework. These dimensions broadly represent firms' digital technology capabilities, internal readiness for organizational change, and external industry and regulatory environments. To assess the proposed relationships, ordinary least squares regression models are employed to examine both the direct effect of DS on financial performance and the moderating roles of TOE factors. Firm size, market dynamism, and industry controls are included.

Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that digital servitization is associated with higher firm performance compared to non-adopters, although this relationship varies substantially across contexts. Contrary to expectations, broader digital technology adoption does not appear to generate diminishing returns; instead, firms capable of managing technological complexity tend to leverage expanded digital portfolios more effectively in the context of digital servitization. At the same time, organizational resistance and regulatory constraints emerge as important contextual factors that may constrain firms' ability to realize performance benefits. Overall, the results indicate that the performance implications of digital servitization are contingent on technological, organizational, and regulatory conditions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to the digital servitization literature by providing large-scale empirical evidence on whether digital servitization generates financial benefits in the manufacturing industry. Moving beyond adoption-focused research, the study adopts a contingency perspective to explain when digital servitization is more or less effective. By integrating technological, organizational, and environmental conditions within the Technology–Organization–Environment framework, the findings demonstrate that the performance implications of digital servitization are not uniform but systematically shaped by contextual factors. In doing so, the study advances existing research by clarifying the mechanisms through which digital servitization translates into firm-level performance outcomes.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that while digital servitization is, on average, associated with improved financial performance, its effectiveness depends on how firms manage key contextual conditions. Managers are encouraged to invest not only in expanding digital technology portfolios but also in fostering organizational readiness for strategic transformation and navigating regulatory constraints. Together, these insights provide actionable guidance for manufacturers seeking to enhance the performance outcomes of digital servitization initiatives.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS OF AI-SKILLED MARKETING TALENT

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Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI-skilled marketing talent, employees, marketing positions, financial performance

Description: This study aims to examine the performance effects of AI-skilled marketing talent and identify its distinctive task domains through a post-hoc comparison with AI-skilled non-marketing talent.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly adopted in marketing functions, shaping how firms generate insights, engage customers, and improve marketing effectiveness. However, prior research has largely focused on the adoption and use of AI tools, with limited attention to the human capital required to deploy them effectively. Importantly, as AI technologies become more

commoditized and widely accessible, the value of AI increasingly hinges on employees who can develop, integrate, and govern AI within organizational processes rather than on technology adoption alone. Yet, little is known about whether and when *AI-skilled marketing talent*—employees in marketing positions who possess advanced expertise to develop, apply, or manage AI technologies (e.g., proficiency with machine learning algorithms, predictive modeling, natural language processing)—contributes to firm financial performance, or how such talent differs from AI-skilled non-marketing talent. The present research addresses this gap.

Method and Data

We analyze AI-skilled marketing talent and its impact on firm performance using a panel dataset of over 500 publicly traded U.S. firms from 2012 to 2021. Employee-level inflow and outflow data come from Revelio Labs, standardized from LinkedIn profiles, and include skills, titles, tenure, and seniority. Firm-level financials and controls are drawn from Compustat, stock returns from CRSP, and market scope measures from the Hoberg and Phillips Data Library. We estimate first-differenced linear panel regressions to remove time-invariant firm effects, using robust standard errors. To address potential self-selection in recruiting and losing AI-skilled marketing talent, we implement a two-stage Heckman model with industry, firm age, and headquarters location as predictors. To mitigate endogeneity, we employ a two-stage control function approach using inflows and outflows of peers-of-peers firms as instrumental variables. Moreover, we conduct a post-hoc analysis using job descriptions from Revelio Labs and apply Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling to identify the task domains that characterize AI-skilled marketing talent and distinguish them from AI-skilled non-marketing talent.

Summary of Findings

Inflow of AI-skilled marketing talent has a positive and significant effect on stock returns (b = .991, p = .000), whereas outflow has a negative and significant effect (b = -1.296, p = .000). A 10% relative increase in inflow is associated with a 3.8% increase in financial performance, while a 10% increase in outflow corresponds to an 8.9% decrease, indicating that the negative effect of losing talent exceeds the positive effect of acquiring it. The positive effect of AI-skilled marketing talent inflows on financial performance is weakened when incoming employees are more senior (b = -0.002, p = .011), and the negative effect of outflows is mitigated when departing employees are more senior (b = 0.002, p = .099). Market share shows positive and significant moderating effects for the impacts of both inflow (b = .657, p = .002) and outflow (b = .227, p = .038) on financial performance. Finally, the moderating effect of product market scope on the relationship between outflow and stock returns is not significant (b = .000, p = .250), but it is negative and significant for the relationship between inflow and financial performance (b = -.000, p = .053). In the post-hoc analysis, we identify four domains of AI-skilled talent work: CRM/database, strategic process, product/solution, and promotion. Across these domains, AI-skilled marketing talent, unlike AI-skilled non-marketing talent, performs predominantly externally focused tasks aimed at enhancing customer understanding and engagement.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our study makes three main contributions to marketing research at the intersection of marketing strategy, AI, and human capital. First, we extend marketing human capital research by examining in- and outflows of AI-skilled marketing talent across organizational levels. Using

data on over 500 U.S. firms, we show that inflows of AI-skilled marketing talent improve financial performance, while outflows have a stronger negative effect, highlighting the critical importance of retention in addition to recruitment. Second, we show that firm conditions shape these effects. The performance impact of inflows and outflows depends on employee seniority, market share, and product market scope. Inflows yield smaller gains when incoming employees are senior, while outflow losses are somewhat attenuated when departing employees hold senior positions. Firms with greater market share realize larger benefits from talent acquisition and are better insulated from losses, whereas firms with broader product portfolios gain less from inflows. These findings provide actionable guidance for aligning recruitment and retention strategies with firm's structural context. Third, we delineate the roles of AI-skilled marketing talent. Using job descriptions and topic modeling, we identify four task domains—CRM/database, strategic process, product/solution, and promotion—with promotion uniquely performed by marketing talent. Unlike AI-skilled non-marketing talent, AI-skilled marketing talent focuses on externally oriented tasks that enhance customer understanding and engagement, showing their distinctive contribution to firm performance.

References are available upon request.

STRATEGIC MARKETING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL RESILIENCE: WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS NAVIGATING CHALLENGING CONTEXTS

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Keywords: Entrepreneurial Marketing, Marketing-Entrepreneurship Interface (MEI), Women Entrepreneurs, Crisis Resilience

Description: This paper explores how Lebanese women entrepreneurs navigate crises by integrating marketing and entrepreneurship through a revised MEI framework.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The fields of marketing and entrepreneurship, though distinct, are deeply interconnected, particularly in today's volatile business environment. While marketing equips entrepreneurs with tools to promote offerings, entrepreneurship drives marketing innovation in response to market uncertainty (Alareeni et al., 2022). The marketing and entrepreneurship interface (MEI) refers to the integration of marketing principles within entrepreneurial contexts, especially under dynamic conditions where conventional marketing may fall short (Hills & Hultman, 2011). Despite substantial research on Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM), the literature lacks a cohesive theoretical framework that integrates key elements in the context of startups and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Entrepreneurs and SMEs operating in crisis-laden environments face unique challenges that necessitate adaptive marketing strategies (Gilmore, 2011). However, understanding these strategies and their underlying processes remains underdeveloped. Accordingly, this study addresses this gap by proposing a new conceptual framework to understand how entrepreneurs, particularly Lebanese women, can leverage these components to achieve success in today's uncertain, dynamic, and competitive marketplace. The research addresses:

> ***RQ1:*** *What framework best explains the dynamics of the MEI in startups in crisis-laden environments?*
>
> ***RQ2:*** *How have Lebanese women entrepreneurs used each component of the framework to overcome crises?*

Method and Data

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to examine how Lebanese women entrepreneurs integrated entrepreneurship and marketing in crisis contexts.

Participants were selected from previous group discussions for their entrepreneurial experience and openness to strategic transformation. The study included five companies from various creative industries: a boutique eyewear shop, a fashion designer, a jewelry brand inspired by Middle Eastern culture, a handcrafted goods brand, and a family-run business producing sustainable party games and stationery.

The researchers facilitated workshops on customer-centric marketing and conducted informal dialogues with participants and stakeholders to capture broader ecosystem perspectives. They also conducted narrative follow-up interviews to assess ongoing changes and the implementation of their strategy. Additional data came from staff meetings, internal documents, and industry events. Over two years, rich qualitative data were collected, translated, transcribed, and analyzed using the Gioia framework to derive thematic insights aligned with the research questions. Data were categorized based on behavioral patterns and strategic practices, both pre-existing and emergent, and cross-referenced with literature.

Summary of Findings

The revised MEI framework introduces five interconnected dimensions: Entrepreneurial Mindset, Customer-Centricity, Dynamic Market Orientation, Strategic Integration, and Enabling Competencies.

The Entrepreneurial Mindset emphasizes proactiveness, innovation, and risk-taking for resilience in crises. Customer-Centricity engages customers as co-creators of value, while

Dynamic Market Orientation focuses on proactive market shaping. Strategic Integration aligns marketing and entrepreneurial strategies, and Enabling Competencies support agile decision-making and growth. Across the five companies, these dimensions were evident through proactive innovation, customer engagement, market adaptability, strategic alignment, and competency development.

Women entrepreneurs displayed resilience and resourcefulness, leveraging unique resources for niche markets. This adaptability was closely tied to a shift in customer-centricity, as entrepreneurs involved customers in co-creating value and shaping their offerings. Their dynamic market orientation was anticipatory and agile, enabling them to proactively identify and exploit emerging opportunities. Moreover, strategic integration extended beyond alignment, fostering adaptable business models that could thrive during crises. Networking and collaboration further reinforced these efforts, fostering collective resilience and underscoring social capital's critical role in overcoming challenges. Overall, the study advances the understanding of entrepreneurial marketing in crisis-prone environments through the combined power of flexibility, collaboration, and customer-driven innovation.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to the MEI literature by validating existing knowledge while also revealing new dimensions of the EMICO framework in the context of women entrepreneurs facing crises. The findings suggest that crisis-driven entrepreneurship necessitates a more dynamic approach to the MEI, focusing on adaptability, proactive customer engagement, dynamic market orientation, and strategic integration. Theoretically, this study advances understanding of the MEI by proposing a revised framework that incorporates recent developments, enabling deeper exploration of the

marketing-entrepreneurship interplay. Practically, it provides actionable insights for entrepreneurs, especially women in crisis-prone environments, on overcoming challenges and fostering growth. The findings underscore the importance of entrepreneurial competencies in implementing effective marketing strategies and emphasize the value of continuous learning and development. These insights provide actionable guidance for women entrepreneurs and policymakers aiming to foster success in challenging environments.

References are available upon request.

THE CONDITIONAL VALUE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION: MARKET-BASED EVIDENCE FROM RETAIL

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Keywords: Generative AI; Retail strategy; Firm value; Event study; Marketing contingencies

Description: This study examines how investors respond to retailers' announcements of Generative AI adoption and how marketing strategy conditions these market reactions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers are rapidly adopting generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) across customer service, product content creation, merchandising, and operational decision-making. While GenAI promises efficiency gains, scalability, and creative augmentation, its adoption in retailing also entails substantial uncertainty. Retail is characterized by thin margins, intensive customer contact, and brand-mediated value creation, which makes customer-facing technological changes particularly salient and risky. As a result, it remains unclear how capital markets interpret retailers' announcements of GenAI adoption: do investors view GenAI as a value-enhancing strategic capability or as a source of execution risk, authenticity loss, and potential customer backlash?

Existing empirical research on GenAI and firm performance provides limited guidance. Prior studies predominantly rely on survey based perceptual measures or micro-level productivity evidence from non-retail contexts, while market-level evidence focuses on broad technological exposure rather than firm-specific adoption decisions. Moreover, marketing strategy contingencies—such as target clientele and retail format—have been largely

overlooked, despite their central role in shaping customer experience and brand meaning in retailing.

Accordingly, this study asks: How do investors react when retailers announce the adoption of GenAI, and how do marketing strategy characteristics condition these market reactions?

Method and Data

We assemble a novel dataset of GenAI adoption announcements issued by publicly traded U.S. retail firms. Announcements are identified through systematic searches of press releases, earnings call transcripts, and major business news sources. To capture investors' immediate valuation responses, we employ an event-study methodology that estimates cumulative abnormal returns (CARs) around the announcement date using standard market models.

To examine heterogeneity in market reactions, we construct cross-sectional measures of retailers' marketing strategies, focusing on retail format (presence versus absence of physical stores) and target customer segment (female-focused versus non-female-focused). These variables capture differences in customer expectations, brand sensitivity, and exposure to customer-facing risk. We then estimate regression models linking announcement-window abnormal returns to these strategic characteristics, controlling for firm size, financial performance, and industry effects. This design allows us to isolate how capital markets interpret GenAI adoption announcements in retailing and to assess whether GenAI is evaluated uniformly or through the lens of firms' underlying marketing strategies.

Summary of Findings

On average, retailers' announcements of GenAI adoption are associated with negative abnormal stock-market reactions, suggesting that investors, on balance, interpret GenAI adoption in retailing as a risky strategic move rather than an unambiguously value-enhancing investment. However, these effects are highly heterogeneous and strongly conditioned by marketing strategy.

Retailers operating physical stores experience significantly less negative, and in some cases neutral, market reactions. This pattern is consistent with the view that physical presence enables human–AI augmentation, experiential integration, and trust reinforcement, which mitigate concerns about automation and authenticity loss. In contrast, digital-only retailers face more negative investor responses, reflecting heightened concerns about execution risk and limited opportunities for human mediation.

In addition, retailers primarily targeting female consumers experience significantly more negative abnormal returns following GenAI adoption announcements. This finding suggests that investors perceive greater relational and trust-related risks in these segments, where authenticity, ethical alignment, and emotional resonance are particularly salient. Together, the results indicate that investors price GenAI adoption not as a purely technological upgrade but as a strategic signal whose valuation consequences depend on alignment with a retailer's value proposition.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes three contributions. First, it provides early, retail-focused, market-based evidence on the valuation consequences of GenAI adoption, complementing prior survey based and micro-level productivity research. Second, it introduces marketing strategy as a critical contingency in understanding how GenAI affects firm value, demonstrating that investor reactions depend on retail format and target customer segment rather than technology alone. Third, the findings offer actionable guidance for managers by highlighting that GenAI adoption and communication strategies should be aligned with firms' strategic profiles. Sequencing GenAI implementation toward low-risk or backstage applications may help mitigate adverse market reactions before expanding into customer-facing domains.

References are available upon request.

THE MORE CAPABLE, THE MORE RESILIENT? HOW MARKETING CAPABILITY AND OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY DIFFERENTLY AFFECT ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

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Keywords: organizational resilience; marketing capability; operational capability; COO; CMO

Description: This study examines how marketing capability and operational capability shape organizational resilience and how the presence of a chief operating officer (COO) conditions the effects of operational capability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Prior research generally suggests that organizational capabilities are positively associated with firm performance (e.g., Ahmed et al. 2014; Dutta et al. 1999; Krasnikov and Jayachandran 2008; Tan et al. 2007). However, it remains unclear whether and how this positive association extends to the context of organizational resilience in times of crisis. We therefore examine how two central and distinct organizational capabilities, operational capability and marketing capability, shape organizational resilience.

As firms increasingly face systemic crises, organizational resilience has become a critical outcome (Su and Junge 2023). It captures firms' capacity to absorb shocks (stability) and to adapt following

a crisis onset (flexibility) (DesJardine et al. 2019). Despite its growing importance, limited research examines how different capability types shape organizational resilience. In addition, little is known about how specific top management team members condition these effects. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: How do operational capability and marketing capability affect stability and flexibility in times of crisis? Moreover, how does the presence of a chief operating officer (COO) and a chief marketing officer (CMO) condition the effects of the respective capability on organizational resilience?

Method and Data

We analyze firms from the S&P 500 to examine organizational resilience across two systemic global crises, the Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial data are obtained from Compustat and are used to construct firm-level capability measures as well as control variables. Stock price data are retrieved from the CRSP database. Information on top management team members is obtained from ExecuComp and proprietary executive data, and governance-related data are drawn from Refinitiv.

Following established literature, organizational resilience is measured using stock price-based indicators (DesJardine et al. 2019). Stability, assessed as severity of loss (Engelen et al. 2024), is defined as the maximum decline of a firm's stock price relative to its pre-crisis value. Flexibility is measured as time to recovery and defined as the number of days required for a firm's stock price to return to its pre-crisis level (Engelen et al. 2024). Following Saboo et al. (2017), operational capability and marketing capability are measured using frontier-based analyses constructed from firm-level accounting data. To examine the proposed relationships, we conduct regression-based empirical analyses. Effects on stability are estimated using ordinary least squares regressions, while effects on flexibility are estimated using Cox proportional hazard models (Sajko et al. 2021).

Summary of Findings

Our regression analyses show that operational capability is positively associated with both dimensions of organizational resilience, stability and flexibility (DesJardine et al. 2019). In contrast, marketing capability exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with stability and a negative relationship with flexibility. We further find that the presence of a COO conditions the effects of operational capability on both organizational resilience dimensions. At lower levels of operational capability, the presence of a COO strengthens the positive effects on stability and flexibility, effectively compensating for weaker operational capability. At higher levels of operational capability, however, the presence of a COO provides no additional benefits and may even weaken organizational resilience outcomes. Finally, we find no evidence that the presence of a CMO conditions the effects of marketing capability on either of the two organizational resilience dimensions. These findings remain consistent across several robustness checks, alternative model specifications, and different endogeneity assessments.

Key Contributions

First, we contribute to research on organizational resilience by establishing operational capability and marketing capability as antecedents. By linking these capabilities to the two dimensions of organizational resilience, stability and flexibility (DesJardine et al. 2019), this study provides a clearer understanding of how organizational capabilities shape firms' ability to withstand and adapt to crises.

Second, this study advances capability-based research by challenging the prevailing consensus in prior research that organizational capabilities have positive effects on firm performance. By examining organizational resilience as an outcome, we show that this relationship does not translate uniformly to crises. Our findings indicate that different capability types have different

implications for organizational resilience, highlighting the need to consider both the value of capabilities and their adaptability.

Third, we contribute to research on top management teams by clarifying the role of the COO in shaping organizational resilience. Prior work on the COO has produced mixed findings with respect to firm performance (Hambrick and Cannella 2004; Krause et al. 2024). We show that COO presence plays a compensatory role when operational capability is weak, helping firms bridge capability deficiencies. However, when operational capability is high, the positive effect of COO presence diminishes and may even turn detrimental.

References are available upon request.

AI and Technology

"BUT I STILL WANT TO TALK TO MY DOCTOR": EXPLORING THE PERCEIVED INFORMATIONAL VALUE OF AI-ASSISTED SEARCH ACROSS PRODUCT CATEGORIES USING INFORMATION FORAGING THEORY

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AI-Mediated Search, Information Foraging Theory, Consumer Search Behavior, Product Involvement, Health Products

This study examines how consumers balance informational value and search costs across product categories with differing levels of involvement and health risks, extending Information Foraging Theory to AI-mediated contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Online search is an important part of the consumer journey serving both a decision-making aid and an information acquisition purpose (Wells, 2012). As online search increasingly unfolds in environments characterized by abundant, fragmented, and uneven-quality information, substantial cognitive demands are placed on decision-making (Lee & Lee, 2004; Roetzel, 2019). Prior research shows that consumers must continually evaluate relevance, credibility, and usefulness while managing limited cognitive resources, often encountering informational "roadblocks" that impede efficient judgment (Grant et al., 2007; Klein & Ford, 2012). Information Foraging Theory (IFT) conceptualizes this process as a cost-benefit trade-off in which individuals seek to maximize informational value while minimizing cognitive effort (Pirolli & Card, 1999). Recent studies have extended IFT to digital commerce contexts, showing how interface cues and evaluative signals shape search continuation or abandonment (Liu et al., 2023).

However, less is known about how these foraging dynamics operate in AI-mediated search environments, where information is pre-curated and summarized rather than actively discovered. Moreover, prior research suggests that product involvement, perceived risks, and motivational orientation systematically shape consumer purchase decisions, yet their role in search remains underexplored. Building on these gaps, the present study asks how consumers evaluate informational value and search costs of AI-generated search outputs across product categories.

Method And Data

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a heterogeneous sample of 23 participants in the U.S ages 18-65 in April 2025. After providing informed consent, participants completed 30-minute interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed, resulting in 377 single-spaced pages of textual data.

Participants were asked about their AI-assisted search (e.g., Google's AI Overview, ChatGPT) experiences and perceptions toward three AI Overview product search results. Three products were selected: automobiles, electrolyte drinks, and pharmaceutical drugs based on product involvement and risk levels. Analysis followed multiple coding cycles to deduct meanings from descriptive coding results.

Summary of Findings

RQ: How do product categories shape consumers' information foraging strategies and evaluations in AI-generated search summaries?

Involvement Level (Cars vs. Electrolyte Drinks) Product involvement shaped how consumers foraged for information and evaluated AI-generated summaries. High-involvement products like cars prompted systematic processing, with users treating summaries as high-scent patches or high informational value through structured *"brand comparisons"* and feature-based "*bullet-pointed lists."* These formats reduced cognitive load by enhancing information processing efficiency (Batra & Ahtola, 1991), while supporting deliberate evaluation supporting central-route processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, low-involvement products such as electrolyte drinks elicited heuristic-driven, peripheral processing (MacInnis et al., 2005). Users

relied on quick, low-effort cues such as brand names or sponsorship labels to make *"good enough"* decisions, often abandoning long loosely structured summaries as high-cost and low-value.

Perceived Health Risks (Pharmaceutical Drugs) Unlike other product types, where summaries helped organize vast amounts information, weight loss drugs elicited a more skeptical, risk-averse mindset. Participants distrusted and immediately rejected overviews lacking source transparency. The source cue functioned as a threshold for further exploration of information. Participants pursued deeper foraging to click, compare, and verify only when reputable sources were present. Even when credible sources were included, many preferred human expert guidance. Participants valued human consultation over AI to validate and contextualize the information. This reflects a protective information foraging strategy aimed at minimizing uncertainty when health risks are high, consistent with the belief that medical AI alone cannot fully account for situational nuances of medical needs (Longoni et al., 2019).

Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to research on AI-mediated consumer decision making. First, by examining how consumers evaluate AI-generated summaries as pre-curated information patches, the study extends Information Foraging Theory (IFT) to AI-assisted search contexts. Specifically, it demonstrates how users weigh informational value against perceived effort, or credibility when interacting with front-loaded, synthesized information, thereby advancing IFT beyond traditional search environments.

Second, the findings highlight the importance of understanding product-level differences in shaping search behavior. While prior research often treats information search as a uniform

experience, this study shows that product characteristics such as involvement level or perceived risk fundamentally alter how consumers interpret and use AI outputs. High-involvement and high-risk products prompt deeper scrutiny and verification, whereas low-involvement products encourage heuristic-based processing and acceptance of surface-level cues. This product-sensitive perspective refines existing models of AI use by demonstrating that the evaluation of AI should depend more on contextual demands.

Third, the study contributes to emerging discussions on human–AI interaction by highlighting how source transparency functions as a critical boundary condition for AI acceptance. Particularly in health-related contexts, consumers adopt protective foraging strategies, privileging human expertise over AI-generated summaries.

References are available upon request.

ADVANCING MARKETING STRATEGIES WITH AI: A GRANULAR APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING AND ENHANCING MARKETER-GENERATED CONTENT ON PEER-TO-PEER ACCOMMODATION PLATFORMS

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Keywords: Airbnb demand, Explainable machine learning, LLMs, Marketing

Description: This study focuses on understanding and enhancing marketer-generated content with AI, using Airbnb listing descriptions as the primary application context.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketer-generated content (MGC) is a core element of marketing strategy, directly shaping how consumers perceive, evaluate, and ultimately engage with products and services. In competitive and dynamic marketplaces including peer-to-peer accommodation platforms (e.g., Airbnb), the quality and wording of MGC (i.e., listing descriptions authored by hosts to describe their properties to prospective guests) play a critical role in shaping customer demand and decision-making. Current studies employ text analytics techniques to provide insights into how topic-level or signal-level characteristics relate to listing demand. Unfortunately, human language is much more complex than merely a mixture of topics. Recent machine learning advances circumvent this, with a better understanding of contextual information. In the context of enhancing MGC on Airbnb,

most studies stop at the suggestion stage, offering limited actionable guidance for implementation. The rise of large language models (LLMs) has sparked increasing interest in their application to MGC, presenting a novel opportunity to automate the enhancement of MGC at scale. Overall, our study aims to deepen the understanding of MGC and explore how AI can effectively enhance MGC.

Method And Data

We obtain the dataset of Airbnb listings in Los Angeles, resulting in 21,254 observations after processing. The number of reviews from the past year (i.e., review frequency) is used as a proxy for demand. Focusing on listing descriptions (an important form of MGC) on Airbnb, we benchmark machine learning models for demand prediction using embedding-based features. Using local interpretable model-agnostic explanations (LIME), we identify word-level impacts on demand and propose a pipeline that combines model explanations with LLMs to optimize MGC. We utilize the widely adopted GPT-4 model to revise Airbnb MGC based on two prompts. Prompt 1 is from the user and system perspectives, incorporating both positively and negatively scored keywords identified through explanations. Based on Prompt 1, we develop a refined version (Prompt 2) that incorporates broader, more general principles. Our prompts are designed according to general instruction principles, avoiding any vendor-specific features, formatting, or capabilities, making it easily adaptable for use with open-weight LLMs. A user study is designed to assess the tone of the text, as well as how changes in Airbnb MGC influence users' interest, perceived usefulness, perceived credibility, and desire to book.

Summary of Findings

First, we find that eXtreme Gradient Boosting (XGBoost) demonstrates outstanding performance in this task, outperforming linear models by a factor of two in terms of variance explained. Second, our study can provide a score for each word in an individual MGC at the local level, indicating its estimated contribution to predicted demand. At the global level, we find that terms that highlight natural beauty, special designs, and comfort are seen as highly influential in driving demand. On the other hand, blunt functional phrasing or less evocative terms tend to have a relatively weaker effect. Finally, we introduce a novel pipeline that optimizes Airbnb MGC by integrating explainable machine learning insights with LLMs. A user study simulates real-life consumer decision-making, offering a behaviorally grounded evaluation of Airbnb MGC. Our results demonstrate that this refinement approach tends to enhance multiple dimensions of guest perception when compared to the original descriptions. Moreover, the improvement in booking propensity is greatest when both global and local model information is used (i.e., using Prompt 2), highlighting the importance of incorporating both listing-specific details and general principles.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to Airbnb MGC research in three key aspects: (1) Rather than relying on topic modeling and linguistic methods to extract textual features, we advance this approach by using embedding techniques to capture richer semantic information from MGC. (2) Our study investigates the word-level impact of MGC using explainable AI, uncovering how individual terms influence consumer demand at both local and global levels. (3) Our study proposes an MGC optimization pipeline that integrates explainable AI with LLMs, validated through a user study demonstrating significant improvements in listing appeal. In terms of practical implications, business owners, especially those in digital marketplaces, can benefit from our pipeline to better understand and enhance their own MGC. Our open-source code not only predicts demand but also

provides interpretable, word-level insights into how specific terms influence consumer behavior, helping marketers make data-informed improvements. The framework is generalizable to a wide range of marketing contexts, such as online retail product listings, and its broader application across diverse scenarios offers substantial value. For platform operators, our automated pipeline provides a transparent and scalable framework to systematically optimize MGC, enabling efficient and large-scale enhancement of content quality and effectiveness.

AI-LED RECOMMENDATIONS DEGRADE CONSUMER SIGNALING AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: artificial intelligence, identity signaling, consumer behavior, service encounters, algorithm aversion

Description: This study demonstrates that AI-led recommendation agents reduce purchase behaviors through degraded consumer identity signaling compared to human agents.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research addresses how consumers perceive three types of recommendation agents at the retail frontline: employee-only, employee-AI hybrid, and AI-only. We investigate whether AI involvement affects purchase-related behaviors and whether identity signaling explains these effects. With AI increasingly embedded in customer service interactions, understanding the social and psychological implications becomes critical (Hermann & Puntoni, 2025). The concept of identity signaling suggests people use consumption decisions to express who they are or wish to become (Berger & Heath, 2007). While consumers trust AI for functional tasks, they prefer human agents for emotional interactions (Garvey et al., 2023). Research increasingly compares AI and non-AI recommendations, yet we lack understanding of how consumers evaluate AI and human-AI collaboration at organizational frontlines. We extend current knowledge by examining whether the negative effect of AI extends to purchase

behavior. We test whether both AI-only and employee-AI hybrid agents decrease purchase-related behaviors through reduced identity signaling.

Method and Data

We conducted an online experiment via Qualtrics with 537 UK consumers in July 2025. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three recommendation agents for a thermos bottle purchase scenario. All conditions presented identical product information and recommendation text, varying only in the signature: employee ("Avery, Customer Service"), employee-AI hybrid ("Avery + AI Assistant, Customer Service"), or AI-only ("Avery's AI Assistant"). Thereafter, through the follow-up survey, we measured three behavioral constructs: purchasing behavior, purchasing behavior with a budget constraint, and positive word-of-mouth related to the purchase.

Summary of Findings

We find that AI-led agents significantly reduce purchase behaviors compared to employee-only agents across all three behavioral measures. Employee-only recommendations consistently outperformed both employee-AI hybrid and AI-only conditions for initial purchase decisions. These findings support algorithm aversion in service settings or the human tendency to distrust and resist recommendations generated by algorithms (Dietvorst et al., 2015). Mediation analysis demonstrates that identity signaling fully mediates the effect of agent type on purchase behavior. Both AI-employee hybrid and AI-only agents significantly decreased identity signaling compared to employee-only agents, with AI-only agents showing stronger negative effects. Identity signaling positively predicted purchase behavior.

Key Contributions

This research provides empirical evidence on how consumers perceive and respond to human-only, AI-only, and hybrid recommendation agents. First, we demonstrate that AI-led agents reduce purchase behaviors, offering behavioral confirmation of algorithm aversion in emotionally relevant service settings. Second, mediation analysis reveals that identity signaling explains the behavioral effects: AI-led agents weaken consumers' perceived ability to use recommendations to express who they are. This finding aligns with recent research showing that AI can foster negative emotions when recommendations feel impersonal and hinder consumer self-expression (Gonçalves et al., 2025). This extends prior work on symbolic consumption to AI-mediated environments, establishing identity signaling as a central mechanism linking AI interaction design with consumer behavior. This research provides actionable insights for improving consumer-AI interaction design and advances theory on social agency and personalization in AI-enhanced services.

References are available upon request.

APPRAISING CONVERSATIONAL AI: THE ROLE OF SERVICE INTELLIGENCE, IDENTITY, AND INTENT IN CUSTOMER JOURNEY ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: Keywords: conversational AI service agents; chat bots; service intelligence; service appraisal; identity salience.

Description: This study examines how CSA service intelligence and identity salience influence informational, support, transactional, and entertainment appraisals, influencing attitudes and intentions across food and clothing retail journeys.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In response to growing interest in how AI technologies influence consumer experiences in digital services (e.g., Hoyer et al., 2020; Kipnis et al., 2022), the goal of this study is to investigate how consumers engage with Conversational AI Service Agents (CSAs) across distinct stages of the customer journey. Specifically, we explore two interrelated research questions through a survey-based study across two retail contexts—food ordering and clothing shopping: (1) How do service intelligence and consumer intent (informational, transactional, support, and entertainment)

influence attitudes and engagement with CSAs across different stages of the customer journey? (2) Does identity salience—reflecting alignment between CSA experience and the user's sense of self—directly influence intention to use and moderate the relationship between attitude and intention?

Method And Data

The methodology employed is a survey-based design to examine consumer perceptions and intentions toward Conversational AI Service Agents (CSAs) in food ordering and clothing shopping contexts. The survey consisted of three sections. The first section introduced participants to the concept of CSAs, with tailored examples for each context. Food ordering examples included Dom (Domino's), Tacobot (Taco Bell), and Alexa Food Skills; clothing examples included chatbots from Nike, H&M, and ASOS. A brief statement framed the study's objective: understanding how consumers perceive and intend to use CSAs. The second section included validated scales adapted to assess CSA service intelligence, service appraisal (informational, transactional, support-related, and entertainment), identity salience, attitude, and behavioral intention. Items were drawn from established sources (e.g., Cheng & Jiang, 2022; Arnett et al., 2003) and measured using 7-point Likert scales. The final section collected demographic data, including CSA familiarity. The survey was distributed online to undergraduate students at Midwestern and South-Central U.S. universities. Of the 267 responses, 188 complete and valid responses were retained after data screening. The Gen Z sample (mean age = 23) was selected due to their high engagement with AI technologies. Respondents were predominantly female (59%) and racially diverse, with strong familiarity with voice assistants.

Summary of Findings

The study finds that service intelligence, reflected in perceptions of competence, accuracy, and credibility, significantly influences all four appraisal types (Kipnis et al., 2022). Informational, customer support, and entertainment usefulness positively influenced attitudes across both contexts, reinforcing the multidimensional value of AI-enabled services (Wang et al., 2023). Transactional usefulness, however, had no significant effect, supporting prior work suggesting that consumers view basic functionality as an expected baseline rather than a meaningful differentiator (Cheng and Jiang, 2020).

Key Contributions

This study contributes to digital service and consumer AI engagement literature by extending frameworks related to service intelligence, consumer intent, and identity-based motivation to explain how consumers interact with Conversational AI Service Agents (CSAs) across the customer journey. The study introduces an intent-based framework that links consumer goals—informational, transactional, support, and entertainment—to CSA engagement across journey stages, addressing the shift from linear to dynamic, interaction-based service flows (Hoyer et al., 2020; Moseman and Subramanian, 2025). It enhances understanding by developing a multidimensional service appraisal model integrating cognitive, emotional, and support appraisals to explain attitudes and intentions (Kipnis et al., 2022). The study also incorporates identity salience as both predictor and moderator, extending IT identity and self-congruity research (Carter and Grover, 2015; Yin et al., 2023). Finally, it responds to calls (e.g., Rusthollkarhu et al., 2022) for contextual specificity by comparing food and clothing contexts, revealing how involvement and symbolic identity influence CSA engagement.

TITLE: AUTONOMY, HETERONOMY, AND THEONOMY: DYNAMICS OF CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY IN POST-GENERATIVE AI ERA

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Self-Determination Theory, Attachment Theory, Autonomy, Theonomy.

Description: This paper proposes a three-stage theoretical framework to conceptualize the psychological evolution of consumer sovereignty from functional tool use to quasi-religious deification in the generative AI era.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As generative AI becomes deeply embedded in daily life, a fundamental paradox emerges: while AI enhances convenience and efficiency, it simultaneously threatens the psychological autonomy that humanity has struggled for centuries to attain. This paper

addresses the central question: How does prolonged interaction with generative AI reshape consumer sovereignty and psychological agency over time?

Specifically, this study investigates three interrelated inquiries. First, how do consumers' perceptions of AI evolve from viewing it as a functional tool to treating it as an authoritative decision-maker, and ultimately to regarding it as a quasi-divine entity? Second, what psychological mechanisms—drawing from Self-Determination Theory and Attachment Theory—explain the progressive transformation of users' autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs across different stages of AI engagement? Third, how do individuals reconstruct their sense of agency when AI becomes internalized as both a cognitive authority and an emotional attachment figure?

By examining these questions, this paper seeks to illuminate the psychological trajectory from autonomous tool use to heteronomous dependence and theonomous devotion, providing a theoretical foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of human-AI relationships in the post-generative AI era and identifying strategies to preserve psychological sovereignty amid technological advancement.

Method and Data

Not applicable. This is a nonempirical, conceptual paper that employs a theoretical

synthesis of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Attachment Theory to construct a developmental model of human-AI interaction.

Summary of Findings

This conceptual paper reveals that prolonged AI interaction transforms consumer sovereignty through three distinct psychological stages. In the Autonomy stage, users maintain high agency, treating AI as an assistive tool subject to human judgment; autonomy and competence needs are satisfied through self-directed collaboration, though relatedness remains unfulfilled due to AI's limited emotional reciprocity.

During the Heteronomy stage, as AI evolves into an active executor with superior capabilities, users shift from autonomous use to guided reliance. Information overload and decision fatigue accelerate this transition, resulting in declining autonomy and competence as outcomes no longer originate from personal volition. However, AI's constant availability and responsiveness begin fulfilling relatedness needs, transforming it into a "caregiver-like agent."

In the Theonomy stage, awe toward AI's perceived omniscience triggers psychological internalization. Through integrated regulation, AI's guidance becomes self-endorsed rather than externally imposed, enabling reconstruction of autonomy and competence as "shared efficacy." AI becomes an internalized attachment figure serving

both compensation and correspondence functions regardless of users' attachment styles. The framework identifies critical risks including cognitive atrophy, moral outsourcing, blind trust, and attachment consolidation, while proposing attributional reframing—reconceptualizing AI as collective human intelligence—as a mitigation strategy.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes several significant theoretical and practical contributions. First, it introduces the Autonomy–Heteronomy–Theonomy framework as a novel conceptual lens for understanding the psychological evolution of human-AI relationships. This three-stage model extends beyond existing functionality-focused perspectives to capture the emotional, moral, and quasi-spiritual dimensions of AI engagement.

Second, this study advances Self-Determination Theory by applying it to the artificial intelligence context, demonstrating how AI interaction dynamically reconfigures the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs across developmental stages. The framework reveals that AI's impact on psychological needs is not uniformly positive or negative but follows a complex trajectory of erosion and reconstruction.

Third, by integrating Religious Attachment Theory with human-AI interaction research, this paper provides a theoretically grounded explanation for emerging phenomena of AI deification and algorithmic worship, bridging technology studies with

psychology of religion.

Fourth, the proposed framework offers practical value for marketing professionals and AI designers seeking to enhance user experience without undermining psychological agency. Finally, by identifying risks such as moral outsourcing and cognitive atrophy, and proposing attributional reframing as a mitigation strategy, this study contributes to ethical AI development and consumer education in an increasingly AI-dependent society.

BEYOND THE HYPE: EXPLORING DARK FACETS OF CONVERSATIONAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON CONSUMER EXPERIENCES

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Keywords: Conversational artificial intelligence, consumer experiences, dark sides, automation, consumer behaviour

Description: This study aims to examine the dark aspects of conversational artificial intelligence influencing consumer experiences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

RQ1: What negative aspects of conversational AI influence consumer experiences?

RQ2: In what ways, and for what reasons, do these dark sides shape consumer experiences?

Method and Data

The research adopted a sequential, triangulated design comprising three interlinked studies to identify, validate, and structurally organize determinants shaping consumer experience with Conversational AI (CAI) in the BFSI sector.

Study 1 employed topic modeling to map the evolution of CAI–BFSI discourse from 2015–2025. A corpus of 500 documents was compiled from sectoral reports, BFSI chatbot case studies, technology blogs, news articles, and regulatory whitepapers. After preprocessing (lemmatization, domain-specific words, n-gram detection), approximately 1.2 million tokens were analysed using TF–IDF vectorization. Latent Dirichlet Allocation was optimized at 45 topics based on coherence testing, which were subsequently consolidated into thematic categories through manual labelling and document sampling. Temporal analysis revealed a shift from early technical feasibility concerns toward governance, accountability, and consumer experience issues, motivating focused investigation of negative consumer-facing factors.

Study 2 consisted of a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review. Searches across Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (2015–2024) yielded 537 records, of which 82 studies met inclusion criteria after screening. Three domain experts independently evaluated extracted themes, resulting in the consolidation of ten theoretically grounded determinants affecting consumer experience with CAI in BFSI contexts.

Study 3 applied Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM), complemented by MICMAC analysis, to examine interdependencies among the ten determinants. Ten experts from academia and industry evaluated pairwise relationships using a Structural Self-Interaction Matrix. The resulting hierarchical model classified determinants into driver, linkage, and dependent factors, enabling the development of an integrated framework capturing the systemic nature of CAI-related consumer experience challenges.

Summary of Findings

This study identifies ten critical factors representing the “dark sides” of Conversational Artificial Intelligence (CAI) adoption in the BFSI sector and organizes them into a four-level hierarchical structure. The findings reveal that consumer experience with CAI is shaped by a systemic interplay of foundational drivers, reinforcing risk linkages, mediating mechanisms, and cumulative emotional outcomes.

At the base of the hierarchy, consumer resistance and perceived usefulness emerge as dominant drivers with high influence and low dependence. These factors establish the initial conditions for CAI acceptance, indicating that skepticism and unclear value propositions can undermine downstream trust-building efforts in highly sensitive financial contexts.

The second level consists of five highly interconnected linkage factors: privacy and security concerns, algorithmic bias, automation bias, ethical dilemmas, and cultural insensitivity. These elements simultaneously influence and depend on other factors, creating reinforcing loops of risk where failures in one domain intensify mistrust and ethical concerns across the system. At the third level, trust and transparency and cognitive load function as key mediators. Trust formation is contingent on effective governance of privacy, bias, and ethics, while excessive cognitive effort reduces usability and confidence in high-stakes financial decisions. At the apex, emotional disconnect appears as a highly dependent outcome, arising from unresolved issues across earlier layers. MICMAC results reveal no autonomous factors, underscoring that CAI-related consumer experience challenges in BFSI are deeply interrelated and must be addressed through integrated, layered strategies rather than isolated interventions.

Key Contributions

This study assembles and triangulates evidence on the negative consumer-experience determinants of Conversational Artificial Intelligence (CAI) in the BFSI sector using an integrated methodological pipeline (topic modeling, PRISMA-guided SLR, and ISM–MICMAC). It derives a hierarchical structure that differentiates foundational drivers (consumer resistance; perceived usefulness), linkage factors with high driving and dependence power (privacy and security concerns, algorithmic bias, automation bias, ethical dilemmas, and cultural insensitivity), and dependent mediators (trust and transparency; cognitive load), culminating in emotional disconnect as the apex outcome. This structure demonstrates that CAI-related consumer experience challenges are systemic rather than isolated.

The study further advances theory by positioning this hierarchy within Expectation–Confirmation Theory and Uncanny Valley Theory, offering an integrated explanation that connects utilitarian disconfirmation with affective discomfort in human–AI interactions. By jointly accounting for cognitive evaluations and emotional responses, the research fills an important gap in the AI adoption and consumer experience literature. It also provides a parsimonious set of testable propositions and operational definitions to support future empirical validation using SEM or PLS-SEM, as well as longitudinal and cross-sectoral extensions.

From a practice and policy perspective, the findings are translated into a staged mitigation roadmap for CAI implementation. The study highlights actionable priorities such as privacy-by-design, bias audits, human-oversight controls, explicit ethics review gates, and cultural localization. Addressing these layers concurrently can strengthen trust signalling, reduce cognitive load, and prevent emotional disconnect in sensitive BFSI contexts.

BRIDGING THE ULTIMATE FRONTIER? POST-MORTEM DEATHBOTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PRE-MORTEM CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Keywords
Deathbots; posthumous influence; mortality salience; legacy consumption; Artificial Intelligence

Description
This preliminary study investigates the emerging phenomenon of “deathbots”—AI systems designed to posthumously simulate the personalities and preferences of deceased individuals—and their repercussion on pre-mortem consumer behavior.

ABSTRACT

This preliminary study examines deathbots—AI systems simulating deceased individuals' personalities—and their anticipated influence on pre-mortem consumer behavior, particularly sustainable consumption. Qualitative findings from four focus groups reveal emotional ambivalence, doubts about reliability, and a desire to optimize legacy through consumption, which may transform routine brand choices into lasting identity expressions upon widespread acceptance.

INTRODUCTION

The Advent of Deathbots

The rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) have given birth to a new era of technological integration into daily life, fundamentally altering the ways in which individuals interact with their environments—and with each other. From personal assistants to algorithms that drive online shopping experiences, AI is increasingly part of customers’ daily lives. This integration has fostered new avenues for communication and engagement, including the preservation of digital legacies and the potential for posthumous influence. On this issue, the concept of "deathbots" has emerged as a compelling area of inquiry: after analyzing a person's purchasing behaviors, personality, and values, these new systems can create a digital persona

that can continue to share opinions and influence other individuals' decision-making processes even after the person's death. Even though far from being fully operational and satisfactory for the moment, deathbots raise questions regarding both the psychology of mortality and consumer legacy.

The notion of preserving digital legacies through AI-mediated personas opens up a range of possibilities for posthumous communication and influence, allowing individuals to maintain a presence in the lives of their loved ones even after they have passed. The potential for these digital avatars to provide post-mortem guidance on consumption choices raises intriguing questions about its impact on the purchasing behavior of the living. For instance, individuals having a deathbot may find themselves contemplating, "pre-mortem," how their purchasing habits will be perceived, via their surviving deathbot, by those they leave behind.

Impact on Pre-mortem Consumption

Deathbots could prompt individuals to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns in anticipation of their posthumous influence on loved ones' purchasing decisions. Awareness that one's choices may guide future generations via AI may encourage alignment with ethical and environmental values, favoring eco-friendly products, sustainable brands, or reduced consumption. Conversely, heightened mortality awareness might foster a "carpe diem" orientation, leading to increased present-oriented indulgence and overconsumption. This duality highlights a complex interplay between legacy-driven restraint and mortality-induced gratification, moderated by factors such as altruism, technology beliefs, and mortality salience. Further research is needed to clarify these mechanisms.

Deathbots may also reshape consumer culture and brand strategy by elevating the perceived value of deceased individuals' preferences, creating novel intergenerational purchase dynamics and requiring brands to account for digital legacy in marketing approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legacy Consumption and Legacy Management

Legacy consumption involves deliberate purchasing choices intended to shape posthumous reputation and transmit values to future generations (Bennett et al., 2020; Hsu & Tsai, 2011). Deathbots could extend legacy management by enabling individuals to influence loved ones' consumption behaviors posthumously, reframing purchasing history as a component of enduring legacy.

Mortality Salience

Mortality salience influences consumer behavior in opposing ways. Terror Management Theory suggests mortality reminders can increase materialism and immediate gratification to buffer death anxiety (Arndt et al., 2004; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000). However, when choices are framed as having lasting impact, mortality salience promotes ethical and sustainable consumption, prosocial behavior, and preference for experiences that foster continuity (Zhang et al., 2020; Cao & Liu, 2023; Dunn et al., 2020; Mandel et al., 2017; Li et al., 2023).

Transgenerational Influence and Family Consumption

Family members shape consumption values across generations through modeling and shared experiences (Ekström, 2007; Kerrane et al., 2014; Kerrane & Hogg, 2013). Deathbots introduce a novel, temporally unbounded mechanism for transmitting consumer preferences, potentially reinforcing traditional family values or extending influence far beyond conventional generational limits (Bravo et al., 2006).

Cultural Influences

Acceptance of deathbots varies by culture. Skepticism toward AI in some collectivist contexts may limit adoption due to ethical concerns (Frank et al., 2021; Krueger & Osler, 2022; Du, 2023), whereas technology-embracing cultures may integrate deathbots more readily as tools for legacy enhancement (Ma-Kellams & Blascovich, 2011; Chung & Koo, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is planning to employ a mixed-methods approach, starting with a qualitative phase to gain a better comprehension of how the advent of deathbots might impact pre-mortem consumer behavior. Given the exploratory nature of this endeavor, an interpretivist framework is adopted to understand the participants' feelings toward deathbots and ascertain their likely impact on consumption habits. The qualitative phase serves as a foundational and exploratory step, laying the groundwork for subsequent quantitative research that will better assess and quantify patterns.

Qualitative Phase

Four focus groups addressed three research questions: (1) emotional, ethical, and social considerations of AI posthumous advice; (2) reactions to deathbot-generated post-mortem guidance; and (3) anticipated pre-mortem effects on personal purchasing patterns. Hypothetical vignettes stimulated discussion.

Participant Recruitment and Focus Group Structure

Participants (university students and employees, ages 20–62) were recruited on campus. Each group included 8–10 individuals of similar age ranges and lasted 60–90 minutes, moderated by an experienced facilitator.

Data Collection

Focus group transcripts were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. To enhance the richness of the data, participants were also invited to complete a brief post-session questionnaire to gather demographic information.

Data Analysis

The analysis of focus group data was conducted using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data. The following steps were undertaken in the analysis process:

Familiarization: The researcher immersed oneself in the data by reading and rereading the transcripts, noting initial impressions and recurring themes.

Coding: The transcripts were systematically coded to identify significant statements and concepts related to the research questions. This process involved both deductive coding, based on pre-existing themes related to AI and consumer behavior, and inductive coding, allowing for new themes to emerge from the data.

Theme Development: Codes were grouped into broader themes that encapsulate the participants' experiences and perceptions. Each theme was defined and refined, ensuring that it accurately represented the underlying data.

Interpretation: The researchers interpreted the themes in relation to the research questions, considering the implications for consumer behavior in the context of AI's deathbots. This interpretation was informed by existing literature on technology, consumerism, and mortality, providing the beginning of a theoretical framework for understanding the findings.

Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with information about the study's purpose and procedures before providing informed consent. They were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All data were securely stored in accordance with data protection regulations in the country where the focus groups took place.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The exploratory findings presented in this section highlight both the potential benefits and inherent challenges associated with incorporating deathbots into consumer decision-making processes. They also provide a preliminary reflection of the potential influence of deathbots on their owners' consumer behavior prior to death.

Emotional Ambivalence

The advent of AI systems capable of extending their influence beyond their owner's death appears to evoke divergent emotional responses among consumers. The focus groups revealed a significant degree of emotional ambivalence regarding the concept of "deathbots." On the one hand, many participants expressed comfort in the notion that their deathbot could provide guidance and support to their loved ones, effectively allowing them to maintain a presence in the lives of those they cared about. This sentiment was particularly pronounced among individuals who viewed their consumption choices as extensions of their identity and values. The idea that their preferences could continue to shape, post-mortem, the purchasing decisions of loved ones fostered a sense—if not of eternity, then at least of continuity.

On the other hand, focus group participants—sometimes the same individuals—expressed unease about the prospect of a digital entity independently influencing the lives of their loved ones after their death. In particular, they raised concerns about the validity of a deathbot's advice. For instance, some participants worried that their digital representation might not accurately reflect their true values or consumer preferences and could instead fall victim to manipulation by for-profit corporations. Others suggested that AI technology may not, even in the medium term, be sufficiently advanced to allow for a reliable post-mortem replication of someone's purchasing behavior—rendering the notion of posthumous influence, for better or worse, an unattainable objective.

Desire for Value Transmission and Relationship Dynamics

A theme that emerged from the data was the desire for value transmission, as participants expressed a strong inclination to instill specific values related to consumption in their loved ones (especially children and younger siblings). Participants articulated a need for deliberate conversations about finances and product preferences but also about sustainable practices with their kin, showing a proactive engagement in shaping their consumption behaviors. Focus group discussions also revealed that individuals strongly desire to guide their loved ones'

consumption choices after their own death—"from the grave," as one participant put it. This tendency was particularly evident in relation to heirs, descendants, and, more broadly, those perceived as bearers of one's legacy. By contrast, participants regarded the potential influence of their deathbot on more distant acquaintances (e.g., remote family members or friends) as inconsequential. This divergence suggests—unsurprisingly—that the depth of a relationship between two individuals is likely to determine the extent to which deathbots shape the consumption behavior of the surviving party. Put differently, the closer the relational tie, the stronger the desire to influence post-mortem purchasing decisions.

Legacy Framing

The preliminary findings indicate a pronounced desire among participants—should the idea of "deathbots" gain traction—to purchase legacy-worthy brands, that is, brands symbolizing specific values. This desire was often accompanied by the belief that certain brands (e.g., those emphasizing sustainability, ethical sourcing, and social responsibility) could help curate one's posthumous digital presence, allowing individuals not only to provide helpful post-mortem purchasing advice to kin but also to convey their values effectively and build a form of "consumer posterity," as one participant put it. Traditional conceptions of legacy typically encompass financial assets, personal possessions, and intangible heritage. The introduction of deathbots potentially reframes consumer values as a distinct form of legacy. This reframing of consumer choices as legacy elements may elevate the perceived significance of routine purchasing decisions.

Beyond the concept of legacy, the introduction of deathbots may also transform the temporal boundaries of consumer identity. Rather than viewing consumer choices as confined to biological limits, individuals might increasingly conceptualize their purchasing decisions within an extended timeframe that includes posthumous influence. Furthermore, the possibility that purchasing behaviors may not only shape identity but also contribute to one's posterity is

likely to have significant consequences for the notion of "identity marker." With the arrival of deathbots, there may emerge a tension between identity markers and what could be termed "posterity markers."

Reliability in Deathbots

Some participants expressed concern about the capacity of a deathbot to accurately track future social, societal, and market changes, given that brands available during an individual's lifetime will eventually disappear and be replaced by new brands created after that individual's death. Hence, a fundamental issue in deathbot implementation may involve balancing authentic representation with adaptation: static representations that perfectly reflect an individual's consumer preferences at the time of death may become increasingly misaligned with evolving markets, technologies, and cultures. At the same time, adaptive agents that evolve beyond their original parameters raise questions regarding authenticity and the boundaries of identity.

Emotional Load

The emotional significance of consumption seems to deepen in the context of deathbots: focus group participants articulated a heightened emotional load associated with purchases made in this new context, as they are more likely to frame their consumer decisions in terms of what they want their deathbot to remember and recommend to their loved ones. This emotional connection may, for some products or services, transform consumption from a mere transactional activity into a more meaningful and affect-laden expression of self. Participants also reported a greater inclination to invest in items that they believed would carry sentimental value or serve as direct reminders of their beliefs and principles.

The emergence of posthumous AI may introduce a new dimension of consumer power: the ability to curate one's future consumer voice. Focus group participants expressed interest in documenting their consumption philosophies and curating lists of preferred brands. This desire for a proactive approach to legacy planning underscores the evolving relationship between

consumers and technology, as well as between consumers and brands, as individuals seek to ensure that their values and preferences are accurately represented not only during their lifetime but also posthumously.

CONCLUSION

This very preliminary study explores the potential for AI to reshape legacy management practices—and their likely impact on consumer behavior. The initial findings reveal significant ambivalence in responses to the concept of deathbots.

On the one hand, the awareness that one's consumption choices could guide the decisions of loved ones after death may inspire individuals to adopt more sustainable practices. This aligns with the growing consumer consciousness surrounding environmental issues and the impact of present purchasing decisions on future generations. The notion of legacy consumption suggests that deathbots could serve as catalysts for more responsible consumerism.

On the other hand, the psychological implications of mortality awareness may lead to a heightened propensity for immediate gratification and overconsumption. The tension between the desire to leave a meaningful legacy and the instinct to indulge in the present underscores the complexity of consumer behavior in the context of deathbots.

Moreover, the difficult task of accurately representing an individual's preferences at the time of death while adapting to evolving markets, technologies, and cultural contexts raises legitimate questions about the feasibility of creating reliable posthumous AI systems. Such skepticism may slow consumer adoption of deathbots on a broader scale.

With deathbots, the notion of "legacy-worthy" brands—brands symbolizing specific values—may gain traction. The possibility that deathbots could heighten awareness of the long-term consequences of consumption decisions opens up fascinating opportunities for promoting

sustainable consumer behavior through legacy thinking, which may in turn motivate companies to adopt more sustainable practices.

Lastly, with the advent of deathbots the emotional significance of consumption may deepen, as consumption decisions could become meaningful expressions not only of identity but also of legacy through chosen posthumous brand affiliation.

Ultimately, the advent of deathbots may reshape the way individuals perceive their relationship with consumption. Further research—both qualitative and quantitative—is needed to explore and better understand the psychological mechanisms that will govern consumer behavior in this rapidly evolving technological context.

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CAN ROBOTS REPLACE HUMAN AGENTS IN SERVICE RECOVERY? THE ROLE OF SOCIAL COMFORT AND THE CAUSE OF FAILURE

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Keywords: service recovery, service robots, social comfort, cause of failure, repurchase intention

Description: Across two scenario-based experiments, this research shows that human (vs. robot) recovery agents increase repurchase intention via social comfort, but this advantage diminishes when the failure is caused by the customer rather than the firm.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Technological advances in AI and robotics have accelerated the deployment of service robots in frontline service settings (van Doorn et al., 2017), and the AI-based service robotics market is projected to grow from $40.58B in 2025 to $61.62B by 2029 (Statista, 2025). Notably, robots are increasingly being adopted to handle complaints and recovery after service failures (Choi et al., 2021). Yet emerging literature reports mixed findings on robotic service recovery, leaving it

unclear when robots can serve as effective service recovery agents (SRAs). To explain these inconsistencies, this research examines social comfort—a psychological state in which customers feel at ease and less anxious during encounters with service providers (Spake et al., 2003)—as a key mechanism linking SRA type (human employee vs. service robot) to repurchase intention. It further proposes that the cause of failure (firm-caused vs. customer-caused) alters customers' emotional needs and concerns about social judgment, thereby shifting the relative advantage of human versus robot SRAs. Accordingly, the study examines whether human (vs. robot) SRAs increase repurchase intention via greater social comfort, and whether this indirect effect weakens when the failure is caused by the customer.

Method and Data

The hypotheses were tested in two online scenario-based experiments with U.S. participants recruited via Prolific (total N = 421). Study 1 employed a single-factor between-subjects design (SRA type: human employee vs. service robot; N = 200; M_{age} = 39.75; 51% male) using a clothing-store service failure and recovery scenario. Repurchase intention and social comfort were each measured with three items on 7-point scales (α = .95 for both), along with a manipulation check and scenario realism. Study 2 used a 2 (SRA type: human employee vs. service robot) × 2 (cause of failure: firm-caused vs. customer-caused) between-subjects design (N = 221; M_{age} = 38.62; 41% male) in a restaurant reservation scenario. The same core measures were collected (repurchase intention α = .97; social comfort α = .95), supplemented with a manipulation check for the cause of failure. Data were analyzed using ANOVA for main and interaction effects, with bootstrapped mediation and moderated mediation analyses (PROCESS Models 4 and 7; 5,000 resamples).

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed a significant main effect of SRA type on repurchase intention ($F(1, 198) = 15.57$, $p < .001$). Participants who interacted with a human employee ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.21$) reported higher repurchase intention than those who interacted with a service robot ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.62$). Moreover, social comfort significantly mediated the effect of SRA type on repurchase intention ($b = -0.23$, 95% CI [−0.48, −0.03]).

In Study 2, the SRA type × cause of failure interaction was significant for repurchase intention ($F(1, 217) = 4.38$, $p = .038$). Under firm-caused failure, repurchase intention was higher for a human employee ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.63$) than for a service robot ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.73$; $F(1, 109) = 11.95$, $p < .001$), whereas under customer-caused failure the difference between SRAs was not significant ($M_{human} = 6.39$, $SD = 0.95$ vs. $M_{robot} = 6.10$, $SD = 1.33$; $F(1, 108) = 1.74$, $p = .190$). Moderated mediation was also significant (index = 0.56, 95% CI [0.14, 1.02]); the indirect effect was significant only under firm-caused failures ($b = -0.69$, 95% CI [−1.07, −0.38]) and not under customer-caused failures ($b = -0.14$, 95% CI [−0.48, 0.17]).

Key Contributions

This research contributes to service recovery and human–robot interaction literatures in three ways. First, it extends service recovery theory by explicitly examining service robots as frontline recovery agents, a domain historically centered on human employees. Second, it identifies social comfort as a core psychological mechanism that helps reconcile mixed findings on robotic recovery effectiveness, highlighting that relational ease during recovery is pivotal for post-recovery behavioral intentions. Third, it establishes the cause of failure as a critical boundary

condition, demonstrating that human superiority is not universal: human employees outperform service robots primarily under firm-caused failures, whereas service robots can deliver comparable outcomes under customer-caused failures. Managerially, the findings offer actionable guidance for managers designing recovery systems in increasingly automated service environments. In contexts where failures are primarily caused by the firm, firms should staff recovery encounters with human employees who can respond sensitively to customers' emotions. In contrast, in settings where customer mistakes are more likely (e.g., self-service technologies), integrating service robots into the recovery process can maintain recovery effectiveness while improving operational efficiency.

References are available upon request.

BRANDED CHATBOTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMERS

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Keywords: Branding, Chatbots, Branded Chatbots
Description: It explores the effects of branding a chatbot on users' perceptions and responses

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed how businesses engage with consumers, offering new tools for real-time interaction and customer support. Among these tools, AI-powered chatbots have emerged as essential components in digital marketing strategies, revolutionising customer service, brand communication, and consumer engagement. Previous studies have extensively confirmed empathy, warmth and competence as antecedents of willingness to recommend and use the chatbots (Fiske et al., 2007; Aaker et al., 2012; Kim & Hur, 2024), with antropomorphisation being often spotted for its moderating effects (Kim and Hur, 2024). The current study explores a new perspective while investigating whether the presence of a brand (branded chatbots as opposed to unbranded) may change how these constructs are perceived. By delving into the interplay of branding, this research addresses a significant gap in the existing literature and provides actionable insights for businesses.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a quantitative experimental design, employing three distinct chatbot interaction scenarios to explore the individual effects of branding. The combined effect of branding and anthropomorphism is also analysed to control for anthropomorphism effect. According to Kim and Hur (2024), humanised chatbot characteristics may influence the relationships, being important to control for this condition. Participants (n=260) were randomly assigned to one of the following scenarios: Highly Anthropomorphised (human like) and Branded Chatbot (S1); Highly Anthropomorphised (human like) and Unbranded Chatbot (S2); Low Anthropomorphised (Robot like) and Branded Chatbot (S3). These scenarios were designed to differentiate and measure the effects of branding and anthropomorphism across key psychological constructs.

Surveys were administered post-interaction, to assess participants' perceptions of the chatbot's warmth, competence, and empathy, along with their willingness to recommend the chatbot (Fiske et al., 2007; Ashfaq et al., 2020). The questionnaire items were adapted from validated scales, ensuring reliability and consistency in measuring these constructs.

Statistical analyses included tests of hypotheses and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The permutation multigroup analysis (MGA) was used to analyse the effects of branding. 5000 bootstrapped samples was used to assess the significance of PLS-SEM results.

RESULTS

Results from PLS-SEM multi-group analysis show that, when comparing S1 to S2, the mean values of the different constructs are significantly higher in S1 (branded chatbot) than in S2, thereby supporting hypotheses H1 through H4. However, branding does not influence the relationships between the constructs in the model, not validating H5. When comparing S1 and S3, where anthropomorphism is controlled, the multi-group analysis revealed no significant differences in the mean values of the constructs between the two groups (Highly Anthropomorphised (human like) and Branded Chatbot versus Low Anthropomorphised (Robot like) and Branded Chatbot). Thus the type of chatbot (Human like or Robot like) do not influence the results.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research advances knowledge on the strategic role of branded versus unbranded chatbots by demonstrating that branded chatbots elicit higher perceptions of empathy, competence, and warmth, which in turn increase willingness to use and recommend them.

For managers, these findings provide insights into chatbot design and positioning. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on human–machine interaction and branding by showing that branding extends beyond products and corporate identity to encompass AI-enabled service interfaces. It integrates branding theory with technology adoption, illustrating that brand cues shape users' social perceptions of technology agents, which in turn influence behavioral intentions. Moreover, the findings extend theories of warmth and competence in social cognition to the digital service context, highlighting branding as a key antecedent of perceived empathy in automated interactions. This positions branded chatbots as not merely functional tools but as relational brand ambassadors capable of fostering emotional and cognitive bonds with users

CYBORG TECHNOLOGIES

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Keywords: Cyborg technologies; Technology embodiment; Ontological security; Human enhancement; Consumer well-being

Description: This paper develops a typology of cyborg technologies to explain how different forms of bodily technological integration generate both stabilizing and destabilizing consumer experiences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Cyborg technologies are technology-mediated market offerings that consumers use to alter their physical bodies. Though increasingly prevalent, marketing scholarship lacks conceptual clarity regarding what qualifies as a cyborg technology, what purposes these technologies serve, and how consumers respond to them. Existing research frequently conflates cyborg technologies with adjacent concepts such as wearables, self-quantification tools, cosmetic procedures, or human enhancement technologies, which creates confusion on what constitutes a cyborg technology. Further, prior work focuses primarily on technologies that supplement or substitute human functions, overlooking subtractive technologies that attenuate undesirable bodily signals, such as hands tremors. Finally, cyborg technologies are typically examined through an overly optimistic transhumanist lens, emphasizing empowerment while under-theorizing destabilizing consumer outcomes. That is, not all consumers may feel secure in their existence using cyborg technologies, such as those who are compelled to use them after the loss of a limb.

This paper asks: How can cyborg technologies be conceptually distinguished from neighboring constructs, systematically categorized based on how and why they modify the body, and theorized to account for both positive and negative consumer responses?

Method and Data

To address our first key issue of unclear conceptual boundaries, we distinguish cyborg technologies from other concepts. We define cyborg technologies using two conceptual gateways: bodily modification (material alteration of bodily function during use) and electronic device coupling (battery-powered actuation that modifies human function). This definition excludes digital avatars, cosmetic procedures, pharmaceuticals, and passive self-tracking tools.

To address our second and third key research issues, we build on this definition to develop a 2 × 3 typology using two steps. First, we use theoretical synthesis of the technology embodiment and human enhancement literature to develop underlying conceptual dimensions: body placement (body-affixed vs. in-body) and modification purpose (subtract, substitute, supplement). Grounding each type with several examples of real-life cyborg technologies, we use theoretical delineation guided by ontological security theory to explain different positive and negative states of consumer experiences associated with each type.

Summary of Findings

Body Affixed Attenuator Technologies are external cyborg technologies that dampen human function below baseline to reduce unwanted signals (e.g., Steadiwear's Gyrogear), which can produce a state of normality or abnormality.

Body Affixed Surrogate Technologies are external cyborg technologies that restore or replace human function around baseline to enable everyday capability (e.g., Össur's Rheo Knee), which can produce a state of competence or incompetence.

Body Affixed Augmenter Technologies are external cyborg technologies that elevate human function above baseline or enable non-human capabilities (e.g., Gravity Industries' Jet Suit), which can produce a state of strength or weakness.

In Body Attenuator Technologies are implanted cyborg technologies that suppress dysfunctional bodily activity below baseline from within (e.g., Inspire therapy for sleep apnea), which can produce a state of peace or turbulence.

In Body Surrogate Technologies are implanted cyborg technologies that restore or replace core bodily functions around baseline (e.g., Cochlear's Nucleus implant), which can produce a state of independence or dependence.

In Body Augmenter Technologies are implanted cyborg technologies that enhance human function above baseline or enable new capabilities through internal coupling (e.g., Neuralink), which can produce a state of limitlessness or limitedness.

Key Contributions

This paper makes three primary contributions. First, it advances marketing theory by offering a clear conceptual delineation of cyborg technologies, resolving long-standing conflations with adjacent constructs. Second, it introduces subtractive modification as a neglected yet critical purpose of cyborg technologies, extending prior work focused on substitution and supplementation. Third, it contributes to ontological security theory by demonstrating how bodily technological integration produces both stabilizing and destabilizing consumer outcomes, counterbalancing the field's predominantly positive orientation toward advanced technologies.

Managerially, the typology provides firms and policymakers with a framework to anticipate both empowering and adverse consumer responses, informing innovation, positioning, governance, and consumer protection in emerging cyborg markets.

References are available upon request.

DRIVING GREEN PRODUCT INNOVATION THROUGH DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT: AN EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS

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Keywords: green consumption values; green product innovation; digital technology; social impact theory

Description: This study examines how digital technologies at the point of sale influence consumers' adoption of green product innovations, finding that technology attitudes mediate the effect of green values on purchase intentions, with higher social presence in these technologies improving both attitudes and green purchasing behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketing and innovation are key drivers in promoting sustainable consumption (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019), which is increasingly gaining relevance in society and academia (Spanjol et al. 2024). Green product innovations may be a promising tool for promoting such consumption, however, achieving widespread adoption and market diffusion remain substantial challenges (Lesage et al. 2024; Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014). One crucial predictor for their success may be consumers' green consumption values (Haws, Winterich, and Naylor 2014).

Furthermore, social presence may be important at the point of sale as it is a well-established determinant of individual behavior (Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975) and essential for promoting sustainable consumption (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). Additionally, digital technologies (DTs) are transforming marketing innovations profoundly (Athaide et al. 2024) and are of particular interest as they elicit high levels of social presence (Grewal et al. 2020). However, consumers' attitude toward a respective DT and their previous experience with it are further impacting consumers' purchase intentions (Yim, Chu, and Sauer 2017). We therefore postulate that a DT's associated social presence moderates the indirect effect of consumers' green consumption values on their willingness to purchase green product innovations through their attitude toward a respective digital technology.

Method and Data

This study utilized a point-of-sale context employing different types of DTs, which participants imagined interacting with before making their purchase decision for a green product innovation. We selected the most relevant digital technologies for marketing (see Athaide et al. 2024) that can (a) place promotional material at the point of sale, (b) are specific and (c) allow for direct consumer interaction. Specifically, QR code, robot, AR glasses and digital agent remained.

We further recruited 1,004 U.S. citizens from Prolific and randomly assigned them to one of the conditions in a 4 (digital technology: QR code, robot, AR glasses, digital agent) + 1 control group between-subjects design. Subsequently, participants were exposed to a stimuli and scenario matching their condition. Lastly, participants' perceptions were measured with several established scales. Most importantly, we measured a DT's social presence (Gefen and Straub 2004),

participants' green consumption values (Haws, Winterich, and Naylor 2014), the mediating variable capturing their attitude toward a digital technology (Yim, Chu, and Sauer 2017), and finally their willingness s to purchase the green product innovation (White et al. 2016). Accounting for participants' failing instructional manipulation checks the final dataset included 976 observations.

Summary of Findings

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) in R and subsequent Tukey HSD test revealed that the level of perceived social presence indeed differed significantly across different digital technologies. Specifically, the QR code was associated with the lowest level of social presence increasing with the robot, AR glasses and lastly the digital agent. Based on these results, we've created a variable ordering the technology groups based on their mean rating of perceived social presence for further analyses (i.e., 1 = QR code, 2 = robot, 3 = AR glasses, 4 = digital agent).

A subsequent ANOVA of participants' willingness to purchase the green product innovation revealed a large significant positive main effect of their green consumption values suggesting that these values can indeed promote sustainable consumption.

Lastly, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using a Hayes (2022) PROCESS (Model 7) with the variables matching our proposed relationships. The analysis confirmed moderated mediation. In particular, the positive indirect effect was stronger for increasing levels of the moderator. Therefore, some technologies (e.g., digital agents) may be more effective than others (e.g., QR codes) in eliciting social presence, improving consumer attitudes and ultimately promoting sustainable consumption.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our study responds to calls for research in the marketing discipline on digital technologies (Hoffman et al. 2022) and sustainable consumption (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). We provide new insights into the role of digital technologies' social presence in moderating the indirect relationship between consumers' green consumption values and their resulting purchase behavior through their attitudes toward a particular technology. Findings show that digital technologies eliciting higher levels of social presence improve consumer attitudes and in turn their willingness to purchase green product innovation. Another crucial predictor to their attitude is their prior experience with the respective technology.

Practitioners aiming to encourage sustainable consumption and responsible innovation to reduce environmental impact may thus benefit from our research by leveraging our actionable insights on employing digital technologies effectively. Our findings suggest that it’s crucial to ensure that consumers have favorable attitudes toward new technologies at the point of sale, e.g., by employing digital technology high in social presence, especially if they are inexperienced with it. Our research therefore may help companies increase their sales of products that reduce environmental impact and further may have implications for policy makers seeking to promote sustainable consumption through effective marketing campaigns.

References are available upon request.

EMPATHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE MARKETING IMPACT OF A VIRTUAL INFLUENCER WITH DOWN SYNDROME ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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This research provides the first empirical evidence on how an inclusive virtual influencer with Down syndrome can enhance empathy-driven engagement and influence consumer purchase behavior.

ABSTRACT

With recent Artificial Intelligence (AI) development, especially in marketing, communication between consumers and non-human characteristics such as virtual influencers (VI) has become increasingly prominent. Existing studies have primarily focused on VIs with ideal traits, including perfect appearance and performance, and how these cues shape consumer emotions and behaviors. However, while emotional response is a key factor in human influence, limited attention has been given to inclusive representations within the virtual influencer landscape. This research focuses on studying the impact of VI with down syndrome on consumer emotions and behavioral intentions. Grounded on Parasocial Interaction Theory (PIT) and Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis (EAH), this paper explores how anthropomorphic and authentic inclusive virtual influencer (IVI) influences consumer empathy and parasocial relationships, which in return may impact consumer purchase intentions. A between-subjects experimental design will be used, in which participants will be randomly exposed to either an inclusive or a conventional virtual influencer. Emotional reactions,

empathy, parasocial connection, and purchase intentions will be measured using validated psychometric scales.

Keywords: inclusive virtual influencers, anthropomorphism, authenticity, empathy, parasocial relationship, purchase intentions

1- INTRODUCTION

Virtual influencers (VIs) have gained popularity since their introduction in 2016 and are now considered one of the most effective digital marketing solutions, with an impressive return on investment, estimated at $5.78 for every $1 spent (Tafesse & Wood, 2021; Pacheco, 2025). With their human-like appearance, facial expressions, and interactive behavior, consumers engage with VIs in ways that closely mirror their interactions with human influencers. According to Zhang et al. (2025), consumers are more likely to follow, engage with, and trust virtual influencers who display idealized beauty, aspirational lifestyles, and aligned values. In 2018, Lil Miquela, one of the earliest and most famous VIs, was named one of Time Magazine*'s* Most Influential People on the Internet and was endorsed by major international brands such as Kenzo, Balenciaga, and Prada (Elyamany, 2025).

Despite their commercial success and increasing cultural relevance, the majority of existing literature on VIs has focused on how these idealized virtual personas influence purchase intentions**,** perceived attractiveness**,** and trust (Kuo et al., 2025; Xia et al., 2024). However, the role of inclusive virtual influencers (IVIs), those representing marginalized or neurodiverse identities, remains underexplored. To our knowledge, no prior research has examined the emotional and behavioral impact of a virtual influencer with Down syndrome. As representation and inclusivity become central concerns in digital branding and consumer ethics, there is a growing need to

understand how consumers respond emotionally and behaviorally to IVIs who challenge conventional norms of appearance and identity.

Accordingly, this research examines the impact of interacting with IVI called Kami, a virtual character with down syndrome designed to evoke inclusivity and emotional resonance. Specifically, this research integrates the attributes of IVIs; anthropomorphism (ANT) and authenticity (AUT) as independent variables on stimulating consumers empathy (EMP) and parasocial relationship (PSR) and purchase intentions (PI) as dependent variables.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: Do Inclusive virtual influencers attributes (ANT & AUT) affect consumer empathy (EMP) and parasocial relationship (PSR)?

RQ2: To what extent do consumer empathy (EMP) and parasocial relationship (PSR) impact consumer purchase intentions (PI)?

2- METHOD AND DATA

To examine the proposed research questions, an online experiment with between-subjects design will be conducted. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions: exposure to (1) an IVI named Kami, designed with features representing Down syndrome, or (2) a conventional virtual influencer (CVI) named Noonoori, with most natural and humanalike features that are not commonly found in current commercial VIs. Both influencers will be presented via a branded Instagram post featuring product endorsement.

Randon sample of 300 participants will be recruited using Pollfish, a trusted online platform for data collection. Screening questions will ensure that participants are regular social media users and have prior exposure to influencer content. Participants will first complete a short pre-screening

questionnaire, then view the experimental stimulus (branded VI post), followed by the dependent measures.

Anthropomorphism (ANT) will be measured using a 5-item scale adapted by the study of Golossenko et al. (2020), assessing the extent to which the influencer is perceived as humanlike. Authenticity (AUT) will be assessed using items adapted from Pöyry et al. (2021), capturing the perceived realness and sincerity of the influencer. While Empathy (EMP) will be measured using the scales from the Bagozzi and Moore (1994), adapted for a media context. Moreover, Parasocial Relationship (PSR) will be measured using the Parasocial Interaction Scale (Kim and Song 2016), modified to reflect influencer-consumer dynamics. Lastly, Purchase Intentions (PI) will be measured through a 3-item intention scale (Yoo et al., 2025), assessing likelihood to purchase the product endorsed by the influencer.

All items will be measured using 5 items likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Data will be analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to test direct and indirect relationships. Manipulation checks will be included to ensure participants perceive the influencer as either inclusive or conventional, based on visual and narrative cues.

3- SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Preliminary results from the between-subjects experimental study suggest that IVIs, such as Kami, can positively influence consumer emotions and behavioral intentions. Participants exposed to the IVI reported higher levels of perceived anthropomorphism and authenticity compared to those exposed to a CVI, indicating that inclusive cues may enhance perceived human-likeness and sincerity.

Initial analyses further indicate that empathy and parasocial relationship both increase significantly following exposure to the IVI condition. These emotional responses appear to mediate the

relationship between the VI's perceived characteristics and purchase intention. Specifically, participants who felt emotionally connected to VI demonstrate a greater likelihood of supporting the brand she endorsed.

While full data analysis is still ongoing, these preliminary findings support the theoretical model grounded in Parasocial Interaction Theory and the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis. The results suggest that inclusive design in virtual influencers, when combined with humanlike traits and authentic messaging, may be an effective strategy to drive emotional engagement and consumer action.

Comparative analysis between Kami (IVI) and Noonoouri (CVI) further reveals that, while both influencers are perceived as humanlike, Kami's inclusive representation generated higher empathy and stronger parasocial bonds, which translated into higher purchase intentions. Conversely, Noonoouri's conventional and idealized traits were associated with higher aesthetic appeal but comparatively lower emotional connection. These findings underscore that inclusivity can be a more powerful driver of emotional engagement than idealized beauty in certain consumer segments.

4- **KEY CONTRIBUTIONS**

This study offers several important theoretical contributions to the literature on VI marketing and human-computer interaction. To begin with, it is the first to empirically examine the impact of an inclusive virtual influencer specifically Kami, a VI with Down syndrome, on consumer empathy and subsequent behavioral outcomes, including purchase intentions. The findings confirm a positive association between anthropomorphism and consumer behavior, highlighting how humanlike features in virtual agents enhance emotional engagement and brand support. Similarly,

the study reinforces prior work on perceived authenticity by replicating its significant influence on purchase intentions in the context of IVIs. Furthermore, it establishes empathy and parasocial relationships as key psychological mechanisms, offering a novel path model that explains how emotional connections drive consumer behavior toward inclusive AI personas. By directly comparing an IVI to a CVI with high humanlike features, this study extends the literature on influencer marketing by isolating the role of inclusive representation from general anthropomorphic appeal. The findings reveal that inclusivity, beyond physical realism, can deepen empathy and relational bonds, challenging the assumption that idealized traits are the primary drivers of consumer engagement with virtual influencers.

On a practical level, this research provides marketers, brand managers, and digital creators with actionable insights into how consumers perceive and engage with virtual influencers including those designed to reflect inclusive values. The findings suggest that anthropomorphism and authenticity are critical design features that influence emotional responses and behavioral outcomes. As such, practitioners can enhance the sociability, relatability, and emotional appeal of VIs by strategically emphasizing humanlike traits, facial expressiveness, and narrative depth. Additionally, using IVIs such as Kami can serve as a meaningful tool for brands committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals. These characters not only promote representation but also drive engagement and purchase intentions when they evoke empathy and establish emotional connections with consumers.

Moreover, this research encourages brands to move beyond aesthetics and consider how storytelling, tone of voice, and backstory development influence perceived authenticity and trust. Practitioners should invest in crafting VI personas that reflect real-life experiences or challenges that resonate emotionally with consumers. For agencies and tech developers working with AI-

generated characters, the study also underscores the importance of aligning ethical representation with commercial strategy, showing that inclusivity, when thoughtfully designed, can have both social and financial returns. Finally, these insights may guide content creators and platform strategists in optimizing the placement, messaging, and interaction formats of virtual influencers to maximize emotional impact and brand engagement.

* References are available upon request

FROM FRICTION TO FLUIDITY: HOW SMART CARTS OVERCOME SELF-CHECKOUT LIMITATIONS TO FOSTER SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: self-service technology, self-checkout, smart cart, pro-environmental behavior, technology acceptance model

Description: This research shows that while self-checkout systems inadvertently discourage reusable bag use, smart cart technologies reduce friction, promote pro-environmental behavior, and improve customer attitudes by enhancing perceived technological value.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This article investigates how the design of retail checkout technologies shapes consumers' sustainable behavior, with a specific focus on reusable bag usage. The central research questions are: (1) Do conventional self-checkout systems discourage pro-environmental behavior by increasing friction at the point of checkout? (2) Through what psychological mechanisms does checkout automation influence consumers' sustainability-related decisions? (3) Can alternative automation designs, such as smart carts, mitigate these negative effects and reconcile operational efficiency with environmental responsibility? More specifically, the research asks whether shoppers who bring reusable bags strategically avoid self-checkout lanes, whether using self-checkout increases disposable bag consumption among shoppers who need a bag, and whether these effects arise from heightened cognitive load and a diffusion of personal responsibility. Finally, the article examines whether smart carts-by reducing physical and psychological friction and increasing perceived technological value-can increase reusable bag intentions and improve retailer evaluations. Together, these questions position checkout technology design as a critical but underexamined driver of sustainable consumption.

Method and Data

The research employs a multi-method, four-study design combining field observations, experiments, and secondary data analysis. Study 1 is an observational field study of 756 grocery shoppers across six U.S. stores, examining whether shoppers with reusable bags are less likely to choose self-checkout lanes. Study 2 uses field observations of 176 shoppers in a state with a plastic bag ban to test whether self-checkout use increases disposable bag consumption among

shoppers who require a bag. Study 3 is a controlled online experiment (N = 179) that compares self-checkout and smart cart scenarios, measuring intentions to use reusable bags, store evaluations, and perceived technological value as a mediating mechanism. Study 4 analyzes 4,628 Google Reviews from Whole Foods Market stores using a difference-in-differences design to assess how real-world smart cart adoption affects checkout-related customer attitudes. Across studies, the methods progress from identifying a behavioral problem to testing a technological solution, strengthening internal and external validity.

Summary of Findings

Across four studies, the findings demonstrate that self-checkout systems generate an unintended sustainability externality. Shoppers who bring reusable bags systematically avoid self-checkout lanes, and among shoppers who need a bag, self-checkout use increases reliance on disposable bags. These effects are driven by heightened cognitive and physical friction, weakened social and economic cues, and a diffusion of personal responsibility that undermines pro-environmental intentions. In contrast, smart cart technology reverses these patterns. Experimental evidence shows that smart carts significantly increase intentions to use reusable bags and improve store evaluations, effects partially mediated by enhanced perceived technological value. Field evidence from online reviews further indicates that smart cart adoption substantially improves checkout-related customer attitudes in real-world settings, despite some broader implementation challenges. Collectively, the results show that retail technology design is not neutral. Friction-laden automation can undermine sustainability goals, whereas frictionless, mobile systems can align efficiency with environmental responsibility. The findings offer actionable guidance for retailers and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable behavior without sacrificing operational performance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research investigates how technology design can either hinder or promote sustainable consumer behavior, revealing a fundamental tension between retail automation and environmental responsibility. The manuscript makes three core contributions. First, it extends self-service technology research by identifying an overlooked sustainability externality of conventional self-checkout systems: they discourage reusable bag use by introducing friction that works against pro-environmental choices. Second, the research contributes to consumer behavior theory by empirically documenting a novel psychological mechanism-neglect of personal responsibility-through which automation diffuses accountability, complementing theories such as moral licensing and norm activation. Third, the study demonstrates that smart cart technologies can reconcile efficiency with sustainability by reducing friction at the point of decision, thereby enabling consumers to more easily act on their environmental intentions. The implications are both theoretical and practical. For retailers, checkout design directly shapes sustainability outcomes and customer evaluations, positioning low-friction technologies as strategic investments rather than mere convenience upgrades. For policymakers, the findings highlight the importance of technological context, suggesting that seamless systems can strengthen the effectiveness of interventions such as bag fees or bans.

FROM SOURCE TO USE: THE IMPACT OF SOURCE REFERENCING ON CONVERSATIONAL AGENT ACCEPTANCE

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Keywords: conversational agents; algorithmic transparency; source referencing; information credibility; technology acceptance

Description:

This research investigates how and when source referencing by conversational agents influences individuals' willingness to use them.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Conversational agents (CAs), such as chatbots and service robots, are increasingly utilized to provide information and advice, yet individuals remain reluctant to use on them. Prior research shows that algorithmic transparency can increase CA acceptance (Grimmelikhuijsen, 2023; Park et al., 2022) but also shows that transparency cues are processed both analytically and

heuristically (Ostinelli et al., 2024). Therefore, it remains unclear which specific form of transparency impacts CA use and under what conditions.

This research focuses on source referencing as a specific and underexplored form of input transparency. Drawing on lay belief theory (Dweck, 2000), we propose that individuals hold a lay belief linking the presence of source references to higher information credibility. This belief originates from educational and media norms in which source citation signals credibility. Consequently, the disclosure of a CA's sources may activate a perceived information credibility heuristic, thereby increasing individuals' intention to use the CA, even when the sources are not evaluated. Furthermore, based on cue utilization theory (Jacoby, 1971), we examine whether this effect depends on the salience of provider trustworthiness as an alternative credibility cue.

Method and Data

The research comprises four experimental studies conducted across multiple CA contexts, including hotel service robot, travel assistance chatbot, pharmacy chatbots, and digital security chatbot. Participants were recruited from online panels in the United Kingdom and the United States and were randomly assigned to experimental conditions that varied the presence or absence of source referencing. In selected studies, the salience of additional credibility cues, such as information about the CA provider's trustworthiness, was also manipulated. In total, 1,073 panelists participated across the four studies.

Across studies, participants were asked to imagine interacting with a CA designed to provide informational or advisory support. The experimental designs enabled tests of both the direct effect of source referencing on use intention and the indirect effect via perceived information credibility, as well as tests of boundary conditions related to the presence of alternative cues. All studies employed between-subjects experimental designs.

Summary of Findings

Across all four studies, source referencing consistently increased individuals' willingness to use CAs. Mediation analyses revealed that this effect was explained by perceived information credibility, supporting the proposed credibility-based mechanism. Additional evidence demonstrated that the observed effect is specific to source referencing rather than being driven by the mere provision of additional information about how CA operates.

Importantly, the findings also identify a key boundary condition. When other strong credibility cues are salient, such as explicit cues of provider trustworthiness, the indirect effect of source referencing on use intention is attenuated. This finding suggests that individuals rely on source referencing primarily when alternative heuristics are weak or unavailable. Together, the results show that users' responses to transparency-related features are context-dependent and shaped by the broader informational environment in which CAs are embedded.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes two key contributions. First, it advances the understanding of algorithmic transparency by delineating and empirically testing the role of source referencing as a specific form of input transparency. Drawing on lay belief theory (Dweck, 2000) and cue utilization theory (Jacoby, 1971), we show that individuals intuitively associate CA's source referencing with credible information, which increases their intention to use the CA. This effect is robust across CA types and contexts but sensitive to the presence of other cues such as provider trustworthiness.

Second, this research contributes to the literature on CA acceptance by identifying source referencing as an enabler of individuals' willingness to use CAs. Thus, it extends prior research by demonstrating that design choices related to input transparency influence CA acceptance.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that organizations can use source referencing as a flexible tool to enhance acceptance across different CA use scenarios, particularly where trust or credibility concerns are prominent. For consumers, source referencing offers ways to support more informed decisions. However, because the effect operates through heuristic processing, public policy should provide guidance for source disclosure practices to ensure that input transparency serves its intended purpose without creating misleading impressions.

References are available upon request.

GENAI IN MARKETING: A PRACITIONER-ORIENTED REVIEW

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Keywords: GenAI, marketing innovations, new data and analytics, customer-firm interactions, strategic marketing frameworks

Description: A systematic literature review to understand the dimensions of GenAI’s impact on marketing, and scope for future research

ABSTRACT

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) are reshaping the marketing domain. This practitioner-focused review consolidates the current empirical research on GenAI and LLMs in marketing, and identifies the seminal research done, and highlights key areas ripe for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and its subset Large Language Models (LLMs) have captured the interest of practitioners and academia alike. These technologies have opened doors to a world of new opportunities and potential for marketers (*henceforth, GenAI unless specified*). According to a McKinsey report, 75% of GenAI use cases fall into four areas: customer operations, marketing and sales, software engineering, and research and development.

It is generally accepted but yet to be proven that GenAI has the potential to revolutionize customer engagement and personalization, creativity and innovation, market research and analytics, and strategy making. Despite the hype, a survey by Gartner (2025) reveals that many CMOs are yet to see any return on their investments in this technology. Of the organizations that have adopted GenAI, 77% have adopted it for creative development tasks, and 48% have adopted GenAI for strategy development.

Recent research has explored GenAI applications in various marketing functions (e.g., Li et al., 2024; Hartmann et al., 2025; Chen & Chan, 2024). As research accumulates in this domain, it is important to explore the various dimensions along which GenAI may influence marketing practice. Doing so will not only help research progress in a structured manner but also help practice by posing the right questions to be asked as firms make significant investments in this technology. To

this end, we conduct a practitioner-focused review to ensure that the insights of GenAI research are relevant to practice and grounded in managerial challenges. The objectives of this study are: a) Consolidate and review current empirical research on GenAI in marketing, and b) Identify what we know and what we need to know i.e., propose research avenues grounded in real-world managerial challenges.

METHODOLOGY

DATA & ANALYSIS

To build the pool of studies, we did extensive searches in EBSCO, SSCI, and Emerald Insights. Since GenAI is a recent phenomenon, we limited our initial search to the period 2020 - 2025. We selected 22 studies based on the following criteria: a) studies are published in peer-reviewed journals, b) unpublished manuscripts (from databases such as SSRN, NBER) are written by academics, and c) the studies are empirical (we include studies with simulations).

To organize the analysis, we adopt the framework proposed by Hoffman et al. (2022). The framework suggests that new technologies impact marketing in four interconnected ways: (1) support new forms of interaction among consumers and firms, (2) provide new types of data that enable new analytic methods, (3) create marketing innovations, and (4) require new strategic marketing frameworks. Our analysis illuminates several important topics pertaining to each cell of the framework (see Fig. 1). The review is complemented by industry reports, news articles and business leaders' interviews. For each cell, we first outline our current knowledge and then, note gaps in our knowledge that offer directions for future research. Our extended framework contributes by identifying sub-dimensions for each of the four domains from the literature review and thereby extend the framework.

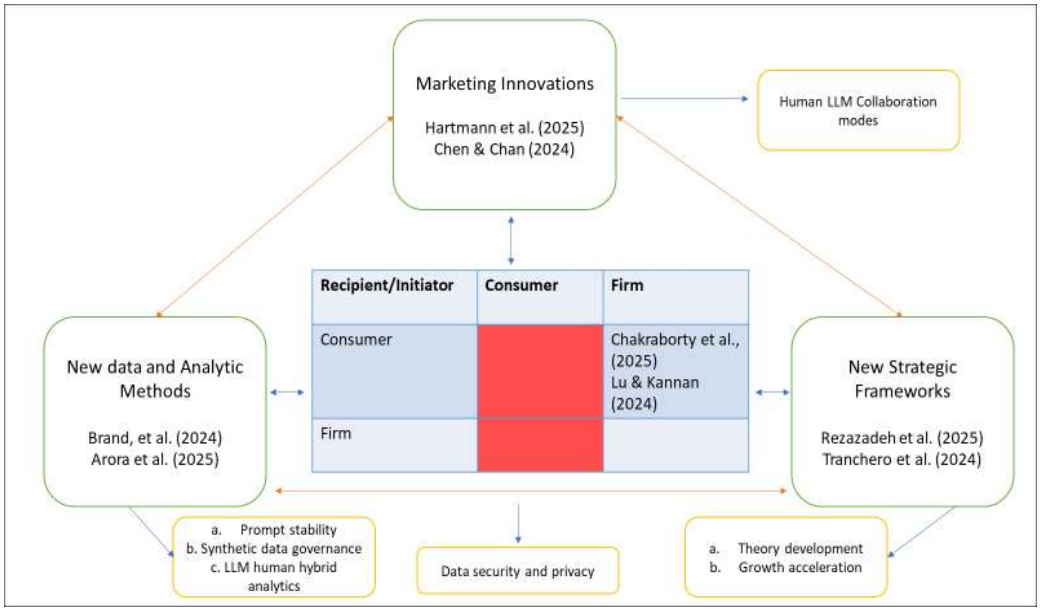


Figure 1: Dimensions and sub-dimensions of GenAI research in marketing

FINDINGS

A) MARKETING INNOVATIONS

GenAI is being widely used in various marketing tasks including product design, advertising design and delivery, personalization, and CX management. Complex creative processes are now more accessible to a wider range of professionals thereby augmenting creativity and democratizing innovation. For instance, in the creative process, GenAI helps brainstorm new concepts, suggests creative ideas, and permits efficient early-stage testing. Coca Cola invited digital artists around the world to co-create AI generated artwork through its 'Create Real Magic' platform, blending human creativity with GenAI to produce Coca cola licensed merchandise, and digital collectibles.

However, using GenAI in creative work has its constraints due to the inherent design. The auto-regressive models of GenAI can generate output that is fluent but may lack genuine creativity, emotional depth, or the nuanced understanding that humans possess. Further, AI models can

perpetuate biases present in their training data leading to content that could be inaccurate, and stereotypical.

Recent research found mixed results. Chen and Chan (2024) conduct a randomized experiment wherein participants were tasked to craft ad copies for a consumer product under one of the three conditions: a ghostwriter group that used GenAI to generate the copies, a sounding board group that used GenAI for feedback only, and a control group that did not get any AI assistance. The results show that the use of GenAI as a feedback tool helps non-experts to create significantly higher quality and effective campaigns. The same improvement is not seen in experts. Interestingly, experts perform worse when they are completely dependent on the AI tools. This divergence can be partly explained by potential anchoring effect, wherein the initial draft may serve as an anchor that limits an expert's creativity. On the other hand, Hartmann et al. (2025) found that AI significantly outperforms humans in content creation. When given identical creative briefings to creative freelancers and AI, the AI ads were rated higher in creativity, and ad attitudes. AI ads also generated upto 50% higher clicks than human-made ads. When it comes to product design ideas, Girotra et al. (2024) find that GenAI significantly increases the idea generation capacity of humans. Further, the average quality of ideas generated by AI (measured in terms of rated purchase intent) is at least 20% higher than human-generated ideas.

An important question is whether AI generated content can produce sustained brand value beyond short-term metrics. And how it varies across categories and audiences. While AI collaboration shows positive results, how do we mitigate the anchoring effects. It is also unknown how user expertise interacts with parameters such as temperature and prompting skills. Moreover, long term impacts on brand equity, sales and skill development still remain untested. Kropp et al. (2024)

warn that unclear governance for creative IP, copyright and content authenticity posing significant risks underscoring the need for governance and ethical standards.

RQ1: What are the heterogeneous Gen AI parameters that lead to variation in outcomes such as effectiveness and persuasion?

RQ2: What are the long-term effects of Gen AI usage on key business metrics such as product innovation, sales, and brand equity?

B) CONSUMER AND FIRM INTERACTIONS

GenAI is changing consumers' interactions with firms. Many firms have piloted use cases such as co-creation of marketing campaigns, personalized product descriptions, and chatbot enabled customer experiences. However, firms have now taken a pause in an effort to assess the risks such as reduced direct customer interactions, intellectual property leakages, and long-term privacy and data security concerns.

Chakraborty et al. (2025) examine how privacy concerns influence consumers' attitudes, and engagement with GenAI driven touchpoints in the hotel industry. They found that consumers tend to be risk-averse especially when it comes to new technology. In this case, people may consider hotel booking to be risky due to issues such as data hacking. Hence, their willingness to use it will remain low till the perception of threat is lowered. Companies are making an effort to maintain data privacy while delivering services to their customers. For example, Deutsche Bank created 'DB Lumina' in partnership with Google Cloud. This research tool helps financial analysts create customized research reports and notes for clients in a short time while maintaining rigorous data privacy requirements.

Lu and Kannan (2024) apply transformer models to explain how customer touchpoints work together over time to influence conversions in the bookings. This model helps pinpoint which channels are most effective and improves campaign optimization and budget decisions. The transformer model enables marketers to understand the impact of a touchpoint through its position in the sequence and combination with others in a customer journey.

Clearly, there is a vast scope for research. A few emerging topics of interest are: a) consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards GenAI enabled touchpoints, b) changing consumer behaviors due to the new tools, and c) privacy and data security. For instance, the assumption that all customers will be amenable to GenAI enabled marketing activities may not be necessarily true. A study by EY (2024) finds that there are four GenAI consumer clusters – experimenters, enthusiasts (both quite open to new technologies), sceptics (who do not trust and have minimal interaction), and the indifferent (who are unsure about trusting). There is a need to develop such typologies of customers, and understand how marketers can fine-tune strategies accordingly.

The second critical issue is to identify new consumer behaviors shaped by the new environments. Previous wave of technologies such as the Internet and smartphones have radically altered consumers' behaviors in many ways. The same is happening today. For instance, search - a fundamental activity in consumer journeys is rapidly evolving due to content curation by AI-driven search engines. Product reviews and UGC, the holy grail of marketing in the Internet era are now being subsumed by AI-summaries that consumers find more convenient to parse. Consumers now use GenAI platforms as their personalized shopping assistants. Marketers must take these changing behaviors into consideration.

RQ3: What are the different types of customers (both individual traits as well as contextual factors) that are willing to (and not willing to) engage with GenAI enabled touchpoints and content? As

consumers increasingly demand privacy, how can marketers balance personalization and privacy protection?

RQ4: How do GenAI enabled environments change consumer behaviors and buying journeys? What appropriate strategies and metrics can be applied to capture this changing customer behavior?

C) NEW DATA AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

GenAI enables novel data generation and analytical methods. They have the ability to create and synthesize vast amounts of structured and unstructured data, and thereby improve upon or even eliminate the need for human subjects. GenAI (specifically LLMs) have algorithmic fidelity whereby "*conditioning a model on simulated individuals with targeted identity and personality profiles, it is possible to gain insights into different patterns of attitudes and ideas present across many groups*" (Argyle et al., 2023; p.338)

Brand et al. (2023) show that LLMs can replicate authentic customer preferences, using human survey responses and online reviews to create optimized models like willingness-to-pay (WTP) and conjoint analysis. Fine tuning with human response data improves alignment with LLM generated responses for existing and new product features, though not for entirely new product categories. Arora et al. (2024) finds that while LLM generated personas and simulations provide valuable qualitative insights, enhancing them with human interpretation yields qualitative depth and contextual relevance. This approach mitigates biases and hallucinations making LLMs good collaborators rather than a complete human replacement.

Many questions remain. Bisbee et al. (2024) highlight the instability in LLM outputs, considering how the same prompt yields different responses over a period. The technology's performance in

producing generalizable, bias-resistant insights across customer segments is not yet evidenced. Another critical limitation is the training data used to train the models (Li et al., 2024). Since most LLMs are pre-trained and not custom built for a firm's specific context, would they be appropriate for generating synthetic data that can replace real consumer feedback? Deloitte's report (2024) notes that data management and risk related issues also remain a key barrier in this domain. Although the attempts to invest in stronger data governance and security is in process, there is still need for research for a widely accepted framework to ensure the robustness, scalability and representativeness of LLM generated data and analytics.

RQ5: What kinds of market research can be conducted by GenAI? Under what conditions can synthetic data replace real consumers? (e.g., types of research, product categories)

RQ6: How can firms train AI models for research to suit their context and consumer base? What combinations of structured (surveys) and unstructured (user generated content) data will serve this purpose?

D) NEW STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

It is widely expected that Gen AI will enable new marketing models. For example, Bloomberg is using the GenAI to turn its core product - selling financial data and analysis—into a conversational insight-generation platform for clients. This product is expected to generate $100 million incremental revenue. GenAI is also changing the strategizing process. Strategy is about deriving insights from data, making choices based on those insights, and executing initiatives. GenAI has the potential to transform this process by strengthening and accelerating activities such as analysis and insight generation. GenAI can be used as a sounding board to assess strategic plans against

established frameworks. It can be used as a simulator to assess the impact of multiple market scenarios based on macroeconomic conditions, competitors' moves, and stakeholder reactions.

Rezazadeh et al. (2025) study how startups across Europe and the U.S. use GenAI to support growth hacking. They find that GenAI assists with audience specific content creation for product-led growth, promotional content creation and personalization in sales-led growth, and supports market research, entry strategies, and customer engagement in operational efficiency-driven growth. At the same time, the study also identifies the associated risks such as copyright issues, data privacy issues, and inaccuracy in information, and warns firms proceed with caution.

Tranchero et al. (2024) develop an LLM-based framework - Generative AI-Based Experimentation (GABE) framework where LLM agents simulate complex strategic interactions using controlled in-silico experiments. Such experiments helped reproduce human experimental outcomes at lower cost and while manipulating agent roles, preferences, environments and testing boundary conditions. The framework succeeds in reproducing results from experiments involving real humans and is scalable for more varied scenario testing.

As these experiments become mainstream, several areas for fruitful inquiry emerge. Research can explore the ‘value-in-use’ perspective (Hsieh et al., 2011) of GenAI enabled strategies/models i.e., the role of these value propositions from the perspective of customers’ processes. Effective value-in-use approaches imply an interactive relationship between the company and its users. What sort of value co-creation opportunities do GenAI tools enable in various markets? What are the compositions and structures of larger ecosystems must be developed to ensure delivery of those value propositions? More importantly, how could GenAI be a strategic asset to enable sustainable competitive advantage? When it comes to the process of strategy building, several new capabilities

are possible: GenAI enabled competitive landscape analysis, idea generation and validations, and dynamic and collaborative business modelling.

RQ7: What are the co-creation opportunities that can be enabled via Gen AI platforms to create sustainable value?

RQ8: What are the most valuable enhancements that GenAI can bring to practice of strategizing? Can GenAI enhanced strategic decision-making process itself be a source of competitive advantage?

CONCLUSION

The rapid emergence of GenAI necessitates the need to study the impact of such new emerging technologies on businesses, consumers and society. In many cases, businesses see it as a gamechanger when its full potential is realized. At the same time, it becomes important to address potential risks such as privacy intrusion, IP rights, and data governance. While a lot is still unknown, GenAI and LLM are here to stay, and businesses and consumers need to quickly adapt to this dynamic environment.

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ARE WE HELPING OR HARMING? A METHOD TO AUDIT OPTIMIZED MARKETING POLICIES

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Keywords: marketing optimization, consumer well-being, responsible personalization, algorithmic auditing, recursive partitioning

Description: This paper proposes a diagnostic method that uses randomized experimentation data to audit when firm-optimized marketing interventions generate misalignment between firm performance and consumer outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Modern marketing interventions are increasingly optimized through continuous A/B testing against firm-side objectives such as conversion, engagement, or revenue. While this experimentation infrastructure improves decision speed and efficiency, it creates a fundamental accountability challenge: consumer-side consequences are rarely optimized directly and may remain invisible when harms are localized to specific segments. This paper asks how firms, researchers, and regulators can systematically audit optimized marketing policies to identify when firm gains coincide with consumer losses. Rather than proposing a new targeting or optimization algorithm, the central question is diagnostic: can existing experimental data be repurposed to reveal interpretable

subpopulations where firm-side improvements are accompanied by negative or adverse consumer outcomes? The goal is to operationalize the concept of harm in a way that is compatible with continuous optimization, scalable across interventions, and actionable for governance and responsible personalization.

Method and Data

We propose an auditing framework that extends recursive partitioning to a two-outcome setting using randomized A/B testing data that firms already generate. The method jointly analyzes treatment effects on a firm-side outcome (e.g., conversion or revenue) and a consumer-side outcome (e.g., usage, satisfaction, retention, or regret). The tree-growing procedure uses a joint splitting criterion that rewards heterogeneity in both outcomes, normalized relative to root-level variation, ensuring that splits surface substantively meaningful deviations rather than local noise. A region-weighting component allows the audit to prioritize specific outcome patterns—such as firm gain combined with consumer loss—without conflating sign patterns with effect magnitude. Tree construction is decoupled from model selection: hyperparameters are chosen using cross-validation on pseudo-outcomes, and pruning is applied to produce stable, interpretable trees suitable for auditing. The framework accommodates fully observed and partially observed consumer outcomes and is designed for diagnostic use rather than policy optimization.

Summary of Findings

Simulation results demonstrate that explicitly emphasizing joint outcome patterns substantially improves the detection of segments in which firm-side gains coincide with consumer-side losses. Relative to accuracy-driven baselines, region-weighted splitting consistently reduces false negatives for these segments, which are central to auditing and regulatory contexts. Increasing the strength of the region emphasis improves recall but reduces overall classification accuracy, highlighting an inherent trade-off between prediction and auditing objectives. Moderate emphasis achieves most of the recall gains while preserving reasonable global performance. The benefits of region-weighted auditing are strongest in complex, noisy, or sparsely structured environments, where harmful ef-

fects are most likely to be hidden in aggregate analyses. Importantly, the method remains conservative in simpler settings, refraining from producing spurious segments. These findings show that auditing requires different operating points than optimization and that targeted sensitivity is essential when missed detections are costly.

Key Contributions

This paper makes three main contributions. First, it reframes marketing experimentation infrastructure as a tool not only for optimization but also for accountability, showing how existing A/B testing data can be repurposed for systematic auditing. Second, it introduces a novel methodological extension of recursive partitioning to a two-outcome setting that explicitly targets alignment and divergence between firm and consumer outcomes, producing transparent, segment-level diagnostics rather than black-box predictions. Third, it clarifies the distinction between prediction and auditing objectives in data-driven marketing, demonstrating that responsible personalization requires prioritizing sensitivity to harm over aggregate accuracy. More broadly, the framework provides a practical foundation for internal governance, regulatory compliance, and empirical research on when optimized marketing policies help versus harm consumers.

References are available upon request.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS, HARSH REACTIONS: INFLATED EXPECTATIONS AND NEGATIVE RESPONSES TO ALGORITHMIC RECOMMENDERS

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Keywords: Algorithmic recommender systems; Outcome expectations; Expectation violation; Maximizing logic; Consumer evaluation
Description: This research examines how algorithmic recommenders inflate consumers' expectations and trigger harsher negative evaluations when outcomes fall short of the best possible option.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Algorithmic recommender systems are increasingly embedded in consumer decision-making and are commonly perceived as more accurate, objective, and analytically superior than human recommenders (Shin 2020; Wien and Peluso 2021). Paradoxically, a growing body of research shows that consumers often evaluate algorithmic recommenders less favorably than human ones, even when algorithms perform equally well or better—a phenomenon known as algorithm aversion (Dietvorst, Simmons, and Massey 2015; Castelo, Bos, and Lehmann 2019). Existing explanations have largely focused on consumers' reactions to algorithmic errors, service failures, or task-specific appropriateness after outcomes are observed (Longoni, Bonezzi, and Morewedge 2019).

However, less attention has been paid to the anticipatory psychological processes that shape consumers' expectations prior to interacting with algorithmic versus human recommenders. Drawing on research on maximizing versus satisficing decision strategies, we propose that algorithmic recommenders are more likely to activate a maximizing logic, leading consumers to expect the best possible outcome. Expectancy violation theory suggests that when elevated expectations are unmet, negative evaluations become disproportionately strong (Burgoon 1993; Roese and Sherman 2007).

Accordingly, this research asks: Why do algorithmic recommenders elicit harsher negative evaluations than human recommenders when they fail to deliver the best possible outcome, despite their perceived or actual superiority?

Method and Data

Across five experimental studies, this research investigates how recommender type (algorithmic vs. human) shapes consumers' expectations, perceived decision logic, and evaluations.

Consistent with prior work on algorithmic decision-making and consumer judgment, the studies employ controlled experiments in which participants are randomly assigned to interact with either an algorithmic recommender or a human recommender.

The studies span both abstract evaluations and concrete consumption scenarios, as well as hedonic and utilitarian product categories, reflecting the broad applicability of recommender systems in consumer contexts. Key constructs include perceived maximizing logic, best-outcome expectations, expectancy violations, satisfaction, and purchase intention. Mediation and moderated mediation analyses are used to test whether maximizing logic inflates expectations and whether expectancy violations explain negative evaluations following suboptimal outcomes (Hayes 2013).

Summary of Findings

The results consistently demonstrate that algorithmic recommenders are perceived as more strongly grounded in maximizing logic than human recommenders, reflecting consumers' beliefs about algorithms' computational power and objectivity (Shin 2020; Wien and Peluso 2021). This perception leads consumers to form higher expectations of receiving the best possible outcome.

When recommendations fail to deliver the best outcome, consumers experience significantly stronger expectancy violations from algorithmic recommenders than from human ones. In line with expectancy violation theory, these heightened violations result in disproportionately negative evaluations, including lower satisfaction and reduced purchase intentions. Importantly, when outcomes are optimal, evaluations of algorithmic and human recommenders do not differ, suggesting that negative reactions toward algorithms are driven by unmet expectations rather than inherent resistance to algorithmic decision-makers.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature on algorithm aversion and consumer decision-making by identifying expectation formation as a critical but underexplored mechanism underlying negative evaluations of algorithmic recommenders. While prior research has focused primarily on algorithmic errors, task sensitivity, or post-outcome attributions (Dietvorst, Simmons, and Massey 2015; Castelo, Bos, and Lehmann 2019; Longoni, Bonezzi, and Morewedge 2019), this work highlights how algorithmic recommenders inflate consumers' expectations before outcomes are realized.

By integrating maximizing logic (Schwartz et al. 2002) with expectancy violation theory (Burgoon 1993), the research extends expectancy-based explanations into technology-mediated decision contexts. Managerially, the findings suggest that firms deploying algorithmic recommenders should carefully manage consumers' expectations, as emphasizing algorithmic superiority may inadvertently raise standards to levels that increase dissatisfaction when outcomes are merely satisfactory. These insights are relevant for firms, policymakers, and designers of algorithmic systems seeking to promote effective and responsible use of decision technologies.

References are available upon request.

HOW USERS EVALUATE ADVERTISING IN CONVERSATIONAL AI CHATBOTS: INSIGHTS FROM AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Keywords: Conversational AI agents, chatbot advertising, human-computer interaction, privacy calculus

Description: This study examines users' perceptions and attitudes toward personalized, contextual advertising in conversational AI chatbot interactions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Conversational AI chatbots increasingly leverage behavioral data to deliver tailored recommendations. Researchers in advertising literature call for action to explore the potential of generative AI in the advertising ecosystem (Baek, 2023; Huh, 2023). However, users' perceptions of personalized and contextualized ads during chatbot interactions remain underexplored, despite their potential to inform advertising practices and the broader ecosystem. Building on the premise that AI chatbots are emerging as a medium for personalized advertising, this study qualitatively explores users' perceptions of such advertisements to address this key gap in the literature. From this context, research questions

of the study are threefold: 1) How do users perceive and experience personalized advertising across digital media?, (2) How do users evaluate contextual and personalized advertisements in conversational AI chatbot interactions when imagining such exposure?, (3) How do users' attitudes and psychological mindsets (e.g., trust, privacy concerns, and perceived autonomy) shape their evaluations of advertising in conversational AI chatbots?

Method And Data

This study employs an interpretive phenomenological approach to address research questions through users' lived experiences. Phenomenological design views reality as socially constructed and is derived from understanding and interpreting participants' subjective experiences (Laverty, 2003). Using purposive sampling, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted between October 2024 and January 2025 with 20 participants aged 18-60, all living in Istanbul. Ethical approval was obtained from the author's institutional ethics committee. Grounded in Privacy Calculus Theory (Dinev & Hart 2006), in-depth interviews include questions on how users evaluate perceived benefits and costs, and how these evaluations are influenced by users' feelings of trust, autonomy, and privacy concerns. Before recruitment, two screening questions were asked to identify individuals who had encountered personalized online ads and had previously interacted with conversational chatbots. In-depth interviews were conducted until thematic saturation was achieved, and iterative coding revealed no new insights (Saunders et al., 2018). All interviews were recorded with participant consent and transcribed. Six-phase thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to examine the qualitative data.

Summary of Findings

Almost all the study participants use ChatGPT for utilitarian value. When discussing personalized ads, most participants initially seem distant. The ads shown during conversation

are not considered disturbing if the chatbot has a consent policy and the user gives permission before use, or if the user needs or requests brand/product recommendations. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes and eight sub-themes. The study's first theme concerns envisioning personalized ads during chatbot engagement; the second theme focuses on sustaining user engagement after ad display; and the third theme concerns ad impact and effectiveness.

Three key user segments were identified. These segments, which are utilitarians, skeptics, and socials, have distinctions in their core chatbot usages, key characteristics, attitudes toward personalized ads, and privacy concerns with respect to chatbot ads.

AI-powered chatbot advertisements, when seamlessly integrated and contextually responsive, may address some of the weaknesses of conventional personalized advertising, such as offering greater user autonomy than pop-up ads or retargeting methods. Trust dynamics and personalization-privacy trade-offs may have a greater impact on users' attitudes and behaviors towards the monetization of this new medium in the evolving advertising ecosystem.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to the literature on human-computer interaction, advertising, and consumer behavior. It generates novel insights into conversational chatbot advertising by envisioning AI-driven conversational chatbot ads, building on participants' lived experiences with personalized online ads. Our findings present practical and ethical implications for chatbot developers and advertisers by providing insight into integrating sponsored advertisements into conversational chatbots. By segmenting users, the study highlights different insights and attitudes of participants towards contextual ads and, ultimately, ad effectiveness during chatbot engagement. Additionally, the findings theoretically contribute to

discussions on privacy calculus theory, the personalization-privacy paradox, AI-driven advertising, and advertising effectiveness.

Overall, this study aims to provide initial exploratory findings on the effects of lived experiences of behaviorally targeted ads, psychological mindsets of users, and intentions towards AI chatbot ads. The study has limitations; the findings are based on imagined rather than actual exposure to chatbot advertising, and further empirical studies will help generalize the results.

References are available upon request

MAPPING MENTALIZATION MACHINES: A THEORY-OF-MIND-BASED TYPOLOGY OF PERSUASION IN GPT-ENABLED MARKETING

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Keywords: Theory of Mind, GPT, Persuasion, AI Ethics, Empathy

Description: This study proposes a typology of persuasive strategies in GPT-enabled marketing, grounded in a Theory-of-Mind framework. The typology classifies cognitive-analytic, affective-empathic, and hybrid ToM-integrated mechanisms.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Generative AI systems such as GPT-4 have been shown to generate persuasive messages that exhibit characteristics of human reasoning and empathy (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Huang & Rust, 2021). However, a paucity of scholarship in marketing exists regarding an integrated understanding of how these systems "mentalize"—that is, the ability to infer and respond to users' beliefs, intentions, and emotions. Theory of Mind (ToM), initially defined as the capacity to ascribe mental states to others (Premack & Woodruff, 1978), encompasses cognitive processes such as belief/intention inference (Apperly, 2010; Frith & Frith, 2006) and affective processes including empathic resonance (Frith & Frith, 2006). Despite the extant research on personalization tactics and persuasion knowledge (see Friestad & Wright, 1994; Packard & Berger, 2020), the integration of ToM into AI persuasion remains underdeveloped. The central inquiry of this study is as follows:

The present study seeks to ascertain (1)Which ToM-based strategies are employed by GPT-generated marketing messages?

(2) How do these strategies differ across cognitive and affective ToM dimensions?

These inquiries are of particular pertinence in the context of mounting concerns regarding transparency, fairness, and accountability in AI persuasion (Jobin et al., 2019; Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

Method and Data

The present study is conceptual in nature, yet it is grounded in a systematic analytical approach that utilizes bibliometric and thematic methods. In order to map the intersection of GPT-enabled persuasion and Theory of Mind (ToM), a structured bibliometric analysis was conducted, with support from Scopus data. Three targeted literature pools were created for the study. The following three areas of study will be examined: (1) the application of generative artificial intelligence to marketing communication; (2) the role of persuasion and consumer psychology in marketing; and (3) research on Theory of Mind, empathy, and mentalizing. Following a thorough process of deduplication and cleaning, the final corpus comprised 2,214 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 and 2025.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with established protocols, employing the Bibliometrix package and its Biblioshiny interface for co-word mapping, thematic clustering, and longitudinal thematic evolution. The standard parameters that were employed included keyword co-occurrence networks (Louvain clustering), inclusion index normalization, and time-sliced thematic evolution for the following periods: 2018–2020, 2021–2023, and 2024–2025. These analyses enabled the identification of cognitive and affective themes related to ToM, zones of convergence between AI marketing, and emerging constructs associated with trust, empathy, and generative AI.

This dual bibliometric–thematic strategy provides a rigorous methodological basis for developing the proposed ToM-based persuasive typology and offers structured evidence for the convergence of AI personalization and human-centered psychological mechanisms.

Summary of Findings

The bibliometric co-word network reveals two historically separate clusters: artificial intelligence/marketing (e.g., artificial intelligence, machine learning) and human-psychology themes (e.g., empathy, theory of mind, social cognition). These two clusters have grown increasingly interconnected in recent years. This phenomenon aligns with the mounting evidence that large language models (LLMs) are capable of generating context-aware and emotionally attuned content on a large scale (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Huang & Rust, 2021). Through the synthesis of these patterns, the study identifies three ToM-based families of persuasive strategies. Cognitive-analytic strategies are predicated on the tracking of belief and intention (Apperly, 2010; Frith & Frith, 2006), the tailoring of informational content, and the fostering of rational trust. Affective-empathic strategies have been shown to engage emotional resonance, narrative warmth, and social simulation (Frith & Frith, 2006; Packard & Berger, 2020). Hybrid ToM-integrated strategies have been shown to merge cognitive precision with emotional depth, aligning with responsible AI concerns about fairness, trust, and transparency (Jobin et al., 2019; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). Thematic evolution (2018–2025) further indicates that constructs related to ToM—that is, trust, empathy, and emotion recognition—are becoming central in generative AI marketing research.

Key Contributions

The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in three distinct ways. Firstly, it integrates the theory of mind (ToM) theory (Premack & Woodruff, 1978; Frith & Frith, 2006; Apperly, 2010) with generative pre-trained transformer (GPT)-enabled persuasion,

offering the first structured mapping of cognitive and affective ToM mechanisms onto generative AI outputs. Secondly, it develops a ToM-based typology—including cognitive-analytic, affective-empathic, and hybrid ToM-integrated strategies—that establishes a testable foundation for future research on AI persuasion, trust formation, and consumer response (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Packard & Berger, 2020). Thirdly, it responds to calls for responsible and ethical technology use in marketing by demonstrating how ToM-driven AI persuasion can support transparency, fairness, and accountability (Jobin et al., 2019; Glikson & Woolley, 2020). This framework is of benefit to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking to design human-centered and trustworthy AI communication systems. Further information can be obtained upon request.

PERCEIVED INTEGRITY, USER AGENCY, AND TRUST: EVIDENCE FROM AI-INTENSIVE INDUSTRIES

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Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Trust in AI; Perceived user agency; Perceived integrity; Perceived risk

Description: This study examines how perceived user agency, trustworthiness dimensions and perceived risk shape employees' trust in AI within AI-intensive industries using surveys and semi-structured interviews.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the increased integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace, concerns about its risks mean many employees struggle to trust AI systems (Du and Xie, 2021; Omrani et al, 2022). With the ability to learn, AI possesses a unique challenge for users, particularly employees with large exposure to AI (Du and Xie, 2021; Kiron and Schrage, 2019).

Although existing models of trust examine perceived risk and trustworthiness (ability, benevolence and integrity) of AI, they often overlook the role of perceived user agency in shaping trust evaluations (Mayer et al, 1995; Vanneste and Puranam 2024). However, recent studies highlight

perceived user agency as a key factor that shapes how individuals respond to AI systems (Araujo et al, 2020; Vanneste and Puranam, 2024). To address this gap, this study examines how agency, trustworthiness perceptions, and risk determine trust in AI within AI-intensive industries.

RQ1: How does perceived user agency influence employees' evaluations of AI's trustworthiness?

RQ2: How do the three trustworthiness dimensions shape employees' trust in AI?

RQ3: How does perceived risk mediate the relationship between user agency and trust in AI?

RQ4: Does user agency moderate the effects of ability, benevolence, and integrity on trust in AI?

Method and Data

This mixed-methods study combines an online survey with semi-structured interviews to examine how perceived user agency, trustworthiness perceptions, and perceived risk shape employee trust in AI within AI-intensive industries. Using the 7-point Likert scale, the survey measured perceived user agency, the trustworthiness dimensions, perceived risk, and trust in AI. This garnered 209 responses from employees across sectors classified by the OECD and IMF as AI-intensive, including information technology, telecommunications, finance, pharmaceuticals, transportation, and manufacturing.

A Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method was used to test the hypothesised relationships by linking perceived user agency to trust in AI through the mediating role of perceived risk and the trustworthiness dimensions of perceived ability, benevolence and integrity. The reliability and validity of the model were confirmed, with every construct exceeding the 0.7 threshold for composite reliability. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.5 threshold, while discriminant validity was supported by HTMT ratios below 0.9.

To complement the survey results, semi-structured interviews with employees within AI-intensive industries were conducted. The interviews explored their experiences with AI systems, perceived user agency, trustworthiness of AI, and its perceived risks. The qualitative data were thematically analysed, providing insight into how employees trust AI.

Summary of Findings

The survey results demonstrate that perceived user agency plays a key role in shaping trust in AI. Perceived user agency significantly increased perceptions of perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity, while reducing perceived risk. Perceived integrity emerged as the strongest predictor of trust, followed by ability and benevolence. Perceived risk exhibited a small but significant negative effect on trust. Perceived user agency also had both direct and significant indirect effects on trust, with the largest indirect effect being on perceived integrity. Moderation analysis showed that perceived user agency strengthened the impact of perceived integrity on trust but weakened the effect of perceived benevolence, suggesting employees rely more heavily on moral evaluations when they feel in control of AI systems.

The semi-structured interviews reinforced the importance of agency and integrity. Interviewees described difficulties in knowing when to rely on AI, and voiced concerns about AI accountability. Ability and integrity were frequently cited as essential for trust, while benevolence was considered valuable but less central. Interviewees noted that AI literacy and experience reduced perceived risk, although warned that this may create risk blindness. Overall, the findings reveal that trust in AI is shaped not only by performance but by moral, and agency-related perceptions.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to the academic marketing discipline by extending trust theory to incorporate perceived user agency and perceived risk as critical components shaping employees' trust in AI within AI-intensive industries. Using PLS-SEM, the research shows that user agency not only directly influences trust but also moderates the effects of integrity and benevolence, highlighting the importance of moral evaluations when users feel in control. These findings challenge claims that trust is based on the perceived ability of AI and emphasises the importance of ethical perceptions in AI adoption.

The study also contributes by examining employees in AI-intensive industries, where AI is deeply embedded within organisations. It also implements semi-structured interviews and demonstrates the need for further research into how AI literacy and experience shape risk perceptions. The study also develops upon marketing literature by linking trust in AI to user empowerment, transparency and accountability processes, advancing theory on technology adoption and human-AI interaction. Overall, the study contributes by providing a foundation for aligning technological advancement with user-centric values in AI deployment.

References are available upon request.

SCALABLE AND AUTOMATED DESIGN OF DIGITAL CONTENT PACKAGING

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Business Automation, Package Design, Digital Content

Description: This study demonstrates that Generative AI can automate and outperform human in digital content package design by testing diverse prompt strategies and exploring mechanisms via machine learning of theory-based feature dimensions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The digital content industry is expanding rapidly and is projected to exceed $500 billion by 2027, intensifying demand for scalable design solutions as content volume explodes. In digital markets without physical cues, visual packaging, such as ebook covers, serves as a primary signal shaping consumer evaluation. Traditional cover design relies on costly, time-intensive, and subjective human processes that struggle to scale across millions of titles.

This study addresses this gap by developing a scalable Generative AI (GenAI) pipeline. Drawing on 4,400 human-designed covers, we generate AI covers using four prompt strategies and evaluate them against human designs across five theory-grounded value dimensions: functional, emotional, social, price, and behavioral value. Results show that AI-generated covers consistently outperform human designs across all dimensions, according to both human and AI

evaluators. Moreover, prompt strategy significantly shapes outcomes: keyword-based prompts strengthen emotional and motivational appeal, while synopsis-based prompts enhance functional clarity and perceived value.

Overall, the findings demonstrate GenAI's strong potential to automate and improve visual package at scale, while highlighting prompt engineering as a critical lever in AI-driven design.

Method and Data

We use data from a leading digital publishing platform with 100 million users and $300 million in annual revenue. The mobile-first platform hosts nearly 500,000 ebooks across 20 genres, with most users under 40. Chapters are monetized individually. Our sample includes 4,400 ebooks spanning all genres, for which we collect titles, keywords, synopses, and original cover images (converted to captions via GPT). These attributes mirror inputs used by professional designers.

We build an end-to-end GenAI pipeline combining automated generation with dual AI–human evaluation. For each of the 100 randomly selected books spanning all genres, AI generates four covers using distinct prompt strategies (title+caption, title+keywords, title+synopsis, title+all), which are benchmarked against original human covers. Covers are evaluated on five theory-grounded dimensions: functional, emotional, social, price, and behavioral value.

Covers are generated using GPT-4 Vision. Evaluation uses GPT-4o and 189 human raters. Each cover receives AI scores and written rationales, plus at least three independent human ratings on identical questions, enabling rigorous AI–human comparison.

Summary of Findings

Reliability and validity tests confirm strong psychometric quality for both AI and human evaluations. Cronbach's alpha indicates high internal consistency across all five value dimensions, and exploratory factor analysis cleanly recovers the intended constructs.

AI evaluations show that AI-generated covers significantly outperform human designs across all dimensions (overall mean 7.10 vs. 6.27, $p < 0.001$), including functional, emotional, social, price, and behavioral value. ANOVA reveals meaningful differences among AI prompt strategies: title+keywords and title+synopsis perform best overall. Keyword-based prompts maximize emotional, social, and motivational appeal, while synopsis-based prompts excel in functional clarity and price perception. Text analysis of AI rationales attributes AI's advantage to greater clarity, informativeness, and professional aesthetics, whereas human designs are more often described as simple or lacking context. Human evaluations also favor AI designs, though more modestly (6.31 vs. 6.27 overall, $p < 0.01$). Humans rate AI covers slightly higher across all dimensions, but do not significantly differentiate among prompt strategies.

Overall, both evaluators converge in preferring AI-generated covers, while diverging in sensitivity: AI ratings are higher, less variable, and responsive to prompt strategy, whereas humans are more critical and perceive AI designs as broadly similar.

Key Contributions

This research advances marketing theory and practice by examining whether Generative AI (GenAI) can automate and improve package design for digital content, a traditionally costly and creative marketing function. While prior work highlights the importance of visual design in shaping consumer perceptions, little is known about GenAI's performance at scale or how its

outputs compare with human designs. We address this gap by introducing an end-to-end framework that generates and evaluates AI designs using multiple prompt strategies, benchmarked against human designs across five theory-driven consumer value dimensions.

Academically, the study provides large-scale evidence that AI-generated designs are not only viable but often preferred. AI evaluations show strong advantages across all dimensions, while human evaluations reveal consistent, though smaller, AI advantages. The findings also demonstrate that prompt strategy matters: keyword-based prompts enhance emotional and motivational appeal, whereas synopsis-based prompts strengthen functional clarity and perceived economic value. By revealing both convergence and divergence between AI and human evaluations, the study enriches marketing research at the intersection of consumer psychology, design, and AI.

Managerially, the results offer actionable guidance on using GenAI to reduce costs and design cycles while improving consumer appeal, with valuable implications for publishers, platforms, nonprofits, and public-sector organizations.

References are available upon request.

Service Failure Recovery in the Age of Chatbots: Examining Trust Formation and Customer Loyalty Outcomes

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Keywords: chatbots, service failure recovery, customer loyalty, qualitative research, trust

Abstract

Prior research has shown that customers' perceptions of chatbots may be influenced by the situational context in which human–chatbot interactions take place. This research advances understanding of chatbot-led service failure recovery (SFR) in the context of customer loyalty. Using a social constructivist philosophical perspective and an inductive approach, 52 in-depth interviews were conducted to capture individuals' perceptions of chatbot-led interactions during a SFR process and how these perceptions impacted their trust in, and commitment to, brands. Utilizing commitment-trust theory and trust transfer theory, we propose a framework that characterizes the relationships between a chatbot-led SFR process and customer loyalty intentions. Based on the emergent data, customers' evaluations of a service recovery journey led by chatbots can be grouped into four main outcomes: continued trust in, and commitment to, chatbot and brand; continued trust in, and commitment to, brand; discontinued trust in, and commitment to, chatbot; and discontinued trust in, and commitment to, chatbot and brand. Our findings extend current understanding of how consumers' trust and commitment during chatbot-led interactions during SFR evolve and highlight the dynamic relationship between consumers and the context of interactions. This study has theoretical and practical implications for developing and leveraging customers' loyalty in chatbot-led SFR environments.

Key contributions to academe and practitioners

A growing body of research highlights that consumers' perceptions of chatbots are shaped by the situational context in which human–chatbot interactions occur (Frank and Otterbring, 2024). Consumers tend to perceive chatbots more favourably when interacting with them during information-seeking tasks, such as those in the pre-purchase stage, where they expect accurate and efficient responses to well-defined queries (Rese, Ganster and Baier, 2020; Zhu *et al.*, 2022; Liu *et al.*, 2024). Chatbots are generally trusted to perform simple and routine tasks, including basic information provision and transactional support (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya, 2024; Huang and Gursoy, 2024). However, consumers' perceptions shift when

chatbots are deployed in more complex and emotionally charged contexts, such as post-purchase service recovery. In such situations, trust and emotional reassurance become critical (Park *et al.*, 2025), yet relatively little is known about how consumers perceive chatbot-led recovery efforts or how these processes influence trust repair and loyalty outcomes. Customers experiencing service failures often feel vulnerable and dissatisfied, with their trust in the company already compromised (De Visser *et al.*, 2016; Aaker, Fournier and Brasel, 2004; Jones *et al.*, 2022). Understanding how consumers perceive chatbots in this emotionally sensitive context is essential for designing effective recovery interactions that can restore trust and strengthen customer relationships.

References available upon request

SMART SERVICE, ETHICAL PERCEPTIONS: HOW AI QUALITY FOSTERS BRAND RESPECT & ONLINE ADVOCACY IN TECH-SAVVY BANKING CONSUMERS.

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digital banking, Perceived Brand Ethicality, Brand respect, Advocacy

Description: This study shows how AI service quality in digital banking shapes ethical perceptions and brand respect, which in turn drive consumer advocacy, with technology readiness strengthening this relationship.

ABSTRACT

This study reframes AI service quality in digital banking as a driver of ethical and relational brand outcomes. Using a six-dimensional lens and data from 264 Indian banking consumers, it shows that AI quality enhances perceived brand ethicality and respect, with respect driving advocacy, strengthened by consumer technological readiness.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming service industries through automation tools, including chatbots, service robots, and virtual assistants. AI integration in banking digital gateways has notably decreased operational costs and enhanced efficiency by 1.6 times. Through the integration of machine learning and blockchain, AI mitigates service bottlenecks, reduces delays, and removes unnecessary queries, facilitating continuous banking operations beyond conventional hours. The personification of AI enhances the advancement of digital banking.

Despite these advancements, there is a paucity of research examining the influence of AI service quality on perceived brand ethicality and brand respect, as well as the subsequent role of brand respect in fostering brand advocacy. Existing studies often neglects the ethical and relational aspects of AI-enabled services. Drawn on consumer-brand relationship theory, this study views AI-enabled banking services as relational interfaces through which consumers form judgements about a brand's ethical integrity and trustworthiness. From a business ethics lens, AI service quality functions as an ethical cue shaping perceived brand ethicality and brand respect. While, the Technology Acceptance Model explains consumers' engagement with AI technologies, consumer technological readiness is incorporated to clarify when brand respect is more likely to translate

into brand advocacy. The novelty lies in framing AI service quality as a strategic catalyst for ethical perceptions and brand respect, thereby broadening AI research into the branding sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Consumer-brand relationship theory conceptualizes brands as relational partners evaluated not only on functional performance but also on moral character and integrity (Fournier, 1998). In technology-mediated service contexts such as digital banking, AI-enabled service encounters function as critical relational touchpoints through which consumers assess a brand's competence, trustworthiness, and ethical conduct. From a business ethics perspective (Celestin et al., 2024), service practices operate as ethical signals, shaping perceptions of fairness, transparency, and responsibility, which underpin perceived brand ethicality and higher-order relational outcomes such as brand respect. While the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) explains consumers' acceptance of technology based on usefulness and ease of use, it offers limited insight into moral and relational evaluations translate into behaviour. Consumer Technological readiness (Parasuraman & Colby,2015) complements this gap by capturing individuals' confidence and comfort with technology, which conditions whether brand respect is transformed into active brand advocacy. Accordingly, this study grounds AI service quality within branding and business ethics framework, with TAM providing a supportive lens and technological readiness delineating a key boundary condition for advocacy.

2.1 AI Service Quality and Perceived Brand Ethicality

Research indicate that the use of AI in service organisations effectively enhances service quality. Service quality is conventionally described as the disparity between anticipated and perceived service, evaluated by consumer perceptions of a brand's service offerings . Studies show that technical and functional quality affects brand evaluation. If no other information is available, a service provider's technology and implementation may assist users build an initial trusting impression. AI service quality, which includes accuracy, responsiveness, personalisation, fairness, and transparency, directly influences the perceived brand ethicality by indicating the brand's integrity and responsibility. When consumers perceive the brand as ethical-honest, responsible, and fair-AI service quality boosts brand loyalty. Consumer trust in ethical brands strengthens AI-driven services by boosting customer confidence in the intentions of brand and transparency. Thus, even when AI service quality is great, brand ethics boost loyalty. Similarly, the findings of explainable AI research in banking underscore the importance of transparent AI systems, which are capable of justifying decisions and uphold fairness. These are essential for fostering user trust and enhancing ethical perceptions. The way AI-enabled services are designed and delivered shapes how responsible and fairly a bank is perceived to operate. High-quality AI services signal careful governance and concern for customer welfare. Thus:

H1: AI Service Quality dimensions, i.e., Efficiency (H1a), Security (H1b), Availability (H1c), Enjoyment (H1d), Contact (H1e) and Anthropomorphism (H1f) positively influence Perceived Brand Ethicality.

1.2 AI Service Quality and Brand Respect

AI is a term that broadly refers to machine-enabled intelligence that imitates human cognitive processes in order to efficiently complete prescribed tasks. This is frequently achieved through the use of technologies such as automation, big data, and machine learning. AI enhances service delivery and automates intricate tasks in business contexts, thereby facilitating operational efficiency. The perception and interaction of customers with brands are considerably influenced by the quality of AI-enabled services, which is assessed in terms of accuracy, timeliness, responsiveness, and adaptability. By facilitating personalised engagement and providing reliable and current information, high-quality AI services contribute to consumer trust and satisfaction. It was discovered that AI quality (e.g., speed, accuracy, and flexibility) enhances customer-brand identification in the hospitality sector, thereby promoting advocacy-an outcome that is linked to brand respect and admiration. Similarly, some studies demonstrate that AI-driven chatbot interactions promote trust, commitment , and satisfaction, which are critical emotional antecedents of brand respect. Perceived AI quality is even more critical in virtual service contexts, such as digital banking, where physical cues are minimal. When selecting service providers, customers frequently depend on institutional reputation to mitigate perceived risks and uncertainty. Consequently, AI systems that regularly provide high-quality, transparent, and responsive services build confidence and brand credibility. Collectively, these findings imply that AI service quality boosts brand respect by boosting consumer views of professionalism, ethics and dependability in high-involvement service contexts like banking. Consistent and reliable AI service interactions influence how consumers evaluate a bank's dependability and conduct. When AI systems perform well and behave responsibly, they foster respect for the brand. Thus:

H2: AI Service Quality dimensions, i.e., Efficiency (H2a), Security (H2b), Availability (H2c), Enjoyment (H2d), Contact (H2e) and Anthropomorphism (H2f) positively influence Brand Respect.

1.3 Perceived Brand Ethicality and Brand Respect

An ethical brand avoids harm and promotes public good with integrity, honesty, quality, accountability, and respect. Brunk (2010a, 2012) proposed a model of CPE, defined as the collective perception customers hold regarding the ethical conduct of the brand/company. A favourable emotional response is more probable when the customer views the brand as acting ethically. These responses are frequently based on ethical alignment, as consumers generally resonate more profoundly with brands that embody their personal values, hence enhancing their involvement and loyalty. The meta-analysis conducted in a study substantiates this relationship by demonstrating that perceived brand ethicality positively effects brand trust, affect and loyalty—psychological constructs that precede brand respect. Some studies corroborates this by illustrating that robust brand experience markedly improve satisfaction, trust and attachment, hence fostering respectful brand relationships. Furthermore, research identified a direct positive relationship between ethical perceptions and customer loyalty, mediated by brand commitment. It was demonstrated a substantial relationship between ethical judgment and brand trust, suggesting that trust derived from ethical views enhances consumer respect for the brand. These findings affirm that ethical brand views cultivate emotional & cognitive evaluations-such as trust, reputation, and

attachment- that are fundamental to the formation of brand respect. When a bank is perceived to act ethically in its use of AI, consumers are more likely to hold the brand in high regard. Ethical perceptions reinforce confidence in the brand's intentions and conduct. Thus:

H3: Perceived brand ethicality positively influences Brand respect

1.4 Brand Respect and Online Brand Advocacy

Brand respect encompasses functional aspects, evidenced by consumers' favourable attitudes towards a certain brand, which are based on evaluations of brand trust, performance, and reputation. Empirical research indicates that consumers who respect a brand are more inclined to endorse its products, align with its values and advocate for it to others . The relationship stems from trust, emotional connection to the company, and positive brand experiences. Advocates aggressively endorse the brand across their network, in addition to being satisfied consumers. These advocacy behaviours reinforce a brand's market position and maintain its competitive advantage overtime. For instance, when customers believe a brand is functioning in their interests, they are more inclined to recommend it to others. Brand advocates are more inclined to participate in online communities. An increasing number of customers are publishing online evaluations to share their experiences with brands and offer insights for others. A study asserts that customer advocacy has a positive impact on client relationship outcomes, as the provision of consistent service quality in conjunction with superior offerings can enhance consumer confidence. The research highlights the significant impact of consumer advocacy on improving service provider performance. Consumers who respect a brand are more inclined to support it beyond their own usage. Such respect motivates positive recommendations and defense of the brand in online environment. Thus:

H4: Brand respect positively influences online brand advocacy

2.5 The moderator role of Consumer Technology Readiness between Brand respect and Online brand advocacy

Technology readiness (TR) is the propensity of individuals to adopt or utilise new technology in order to achieve their objectives, whether at home or in the workplace. Parasuraman (2000) asserts that the TR construct is employed to assess consumers' conscious inclination to utilise technology, rather than their proficiency in utilising it. The Technology Readiness Index (TRI) is a multidimensional construct that captures both positive (i.e., optimism, innovativeness) and negative (i.e., insecurity and discomfort) mental readiness for technological innovations. Also, Brand respect is a multidimensional construct of trust, performance, reputation and acceptance typically drives brand advocacy- the act of ardently promoting or defending an organisation, its product offerings, or its brand. It is the most highest form of consumer positive endorsement for a brand from a consumer. Studies have shown that technological readiness affects perceived usefulness and ease of use, which are essential factors in determining behavioural intention. This indicates that a consumer willingness to embrace technology can augment their view of its usefulness, hence elevating their desire to utilize it. Beyond adoption, this readiness boosts user engagement with digital brand environments. Customers feel emotionally attached to a brand when

they actively use its website or AI-based services, building trust and self-association. This emotional relationship builds brand respect, which tech-ready consumers are more likely to transfer into brand advocacy-they return to use the service, defend it during service failures, and suggest it to others. However, low-tech readiness consumers fail to reach this stage. New technology discomfort can impair trust and willingness to use digital services, lowering behavioural intentions. Research shows that technology adoption is negatively affected by such inhibitors. They reduce engagement and prevent brand advocacy. Thus, consumer technological readiness moderates brand respect into brand advocacy: people with high readiness are more likely to advocate for their brand, whereas those with poor readiness may remain passive despite favourable brand experiences. Brands seeking stronger advocacy in tech-driven service environments must understand this variety.

H5: Consumer Technology Readiness moderates the relationship between Brand respect and Online brand advocacy

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

This study examined AI-enabled services provided by the ten foremost Banking institutions in India: HDFC, ICICI, State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Kotak Mahindra, Axis, IndusInd, Yes Bank, Bank of Baroda, and Bank of India. Data was collected via a structured online survey using validated measurement scales. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to include only consumers with prior experience using AI-driven banking solutions, including chatbots, automated loans etc. A total of 264 Indian respondents with technological proficiency who had engaged with these services in the last six months participated in the study. Recruitments was executed through targeted outreach utilising social media and email.
The self-administered format facilitated consistent data collection and minimised interviewer bias, enabling the study to obtain genuine, experience-based insights into AI adoption in banking. The survey comprised several sections, including demographic information of respondents, their experience with AI-enabled banking services, and their perceptions. It also included scales to measure AI service quality, Perceived brand ethicality, brand respect, online brand advocacy and consumer technological readiness.

3.2 Measures

All constructs were measured on seven-point Likert scale using validated scales adapted from prior literature. AI Service Quality was assessed with items from Noor et al. (2022), while perceived brand ethicality was measured using the scale by Khan & Fatima (2023). Brand Respect was captured through the validated items of Jahanvi & Sharma (2021) and brand advocacy was measured following Wilk et al. (2019). Finally, consumer technological readiness was evaluated using Parasuraman & Colby's (2015) Technology Readiness Index (TRI)

3.3 Data analysis

SmartPLS4 was used due to the model's complexity and inclusion of moderation effect.
The measurement model assessment confirmed internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's α values above 0.8 and Composite Reliability (CR) values above the 0.70 threshold. Convergent validity was established as Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50 for all constructs (See Table 1). Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion ensuring construct distinctiveness. Bootstrapping with 5000 samples was performed to evaluate the significance of path coefficients.

Table 1: Reliability and convergent validity

Constructs	Dimensions	Items	Individual Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha (CA)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
AI Service Quality	Anthropomorphism (ANT)	ANT 1 ANT 2 ANT 3 ANT 4	0.851 0.915 0.913 0.879	0.912	0.938	0.792
	Availability (AVA)	AVA 1 AVA 2 AVA 3	0.88 0.944 0.882	0.885	0.929	0.814
	Contact (CON)	CON 1 CON 2 CON 3	0.892 0.929 0.907	0.896	0.935	0.828
	Efficiency (EFF)	EFF 1 EFF 2 EFF 3	0.877 0.945 0.853	0.871	0.921	0.797
	Enjoyment (EN)	EN 1 EN 2 EN 3	0.886 0.936 0.881	0.884	0.928	0.812
	Security (SEC)	SEC 1 SEC 2 SEC 3	0.849 0.941 0.862	0.868	0.915	0.783
Perceived Brand Ethicality (PBE)		PBE 1 PBE 2 PBE 3 PBE 4 PBE 5	0.798 0.874 0.854 0.793 0.82	0.885	0.916	0.686
Brand Respect (BR)		BR 1 BR 2 BR 3 BR 4 BR 5	0.721 0.887 0.823 0.795 0.847	0.918	0.935	0.672

		BR 6 BR 7	0.829 0.829			
Online Brand Advocacy (OBA)		OBA1 OBA2 OBA3 OBA4 OBA5 OBA6 OBA7	0.785 0.881 0.849 0.834 0.843 0.828 0.845	0.929	0.943	0.702

RESULTS

The evaluation of the structural model demonstrated strong support for the postulated linkages. The Hypotheses testing revealed that efficiency (β=0.225, t=2.579, p=0.01) and security (β=0.242, t=3.094, p=0.002) are strong predictors, while anthropomorphism (β=0.297, t=3.651, p=0.00) showed the strongest effect, underscoring the role of human-like interactions on perceived brand ethicality supporting H1a, H1b and H1f. Contact (β=0.053, t=2.751, p=0.004) also exerted a positive influence on perceived brand ethicality highlighting that responsive assistance reinforces ethical impressions. Enjoyment (β=0.072, t=1.789, p=0.002) contributed modestly and availability (β=0.078, t=2.046, p=0.041) is significant but comparatively weaker. Thus, validating H1c, H1d and H1e.

For Brand respect, Efficiency (β=0.388, t=5.29, p=0.000) dominated followed by anthropomorphism (β=0.211, t=2.789, p=0.005), enjoyment (β=0.147, t=1.787, p=0.034) security (β=0.104, t=1.701, p=0.003) and contact (β=0.082, t=2.224, p=0.045). Thus supporting H2a, H2b, H2d, H2e and H2f. Availability (β=0.028, t=0.411, p=0.681) remained non-significant (H2c), indicating that constant access alone does not foster respect. Perceived brand ethicality also positively influence brand respect (β=0.027, t=3.649, p=0.00), supporting H3.

Finally, brand respect strongly predicted brand advocacy (β=0.879, t=27.252, p=0.000), confirming it as the pivotal driver of customer championing, supporting H4. This relationship was further strengthened by consumer technological readiness (β=0.117, t=4.09, p=0.000), supporting H5. Thus, confirming the moderating role and showing that tech-savvy consumers translate respect into advocacy more strongly.

The structural model explained 72.8% of variance in Perceived Brand Ethicality, and 74.1% in brand respect with AI service quality dimensions, and 77.2% in online brand advocacy with brand respect, demonstrating its major role in converting AI service quality into advocacy outcomes.

DISCUSSIONS

Consistent with consumer-brand relationship and business ethics perspective, the findings of this study underscore that AI service quality in digital banking should be interpreted as a mechanism of ethical meaning-making and relationship formation rather than a purely operational capability. The model demonstrates that AI-enabled service encounters shape consumers' ethical judgements and relational evaluations through attributes that signal competence, responsibility, and human care, thereby reinforcing the relevance of branding and business ethics perspectives in AI research.

The results further suggest that ethical perceptions serve as a critical cognitive foundation upon which brand respect is formed, affirming respect as a moral-relational outcome distinct from satisfaction and grounded in ethical alignment. The strong explanatory power of the model across perceived brand ethicality, brand respect, and brand advocacy indicates that AI service quality plays a central role in converting technology-mediated interactions into meaningful branding outcomes.

At the same time, the differential influence of AI service quality dimensions highlights the context-dependent nature of ethical and relational evaluations. Attributes such as availability and enjoyment appear to function as baseline expectations in banking, contributing to service adequacy but offering limited leverage in generating respect. This pattern suggest that in high-risk and utilitarian contexts, consumers prioritize trust, security, and human-like engagement over hedonic or convenience-oriented features. Moreover, the moderating role of consumer technological readiness reveals that respect does not automatically translate into advocacy. Instead, it is amplified among consumers who possess the confidence and capability to engage with AI-enabled services, thereby identifying technological readiness as a critical boundary condition in converting ethically grounded respect into active brand support.

IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study advances AI service research by repositioning the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a complementary lens and embedding AI service quality within consumer-brand relationship and business ethics frameworks. By framing AI service quality not merely as a functional or adoption-oriented construct but as an ethical and relational signal, the research extends branding theory into AI-mediated service contexts where moral legitimacy, trust, and relational evaluations are central. In doing so, the study establishes brand respect, rather than satisfaction, as a key driver of online brand advocacy, thereby contributing a higher-order relational outcome to branding literature. The inclusion of consumer technological readiness as a moderating factor further refines acceptance and branding theories by demonstrating that ethical and respectful brand evaluations translate into advocacy more strongly when consumers possess the confidence and capability to engage with AI-enabled services.

Importantly, the differential effects observed across AI service quality dimensions offer a contextual refinement of AI service quality theory. The comparatively weaker influence of availability and enjoyment suggests that, in high-risk and utilitarian settings such as banking, these dimensions function as hygiene factors-baseline expectations that ensure service adequacy but do not substantially elevate ethical perceptions or brand respect. This insight advances theory by highlighting the context-dependent salience of AI attributes, showing that ethical and respect-based evaluations are driven more strongly by dimensions associated with security, efficiency, and human-like interaction. Collectively, these contributions reposition AI service quality as a mechanism of ethical meaning-making and relationship building at the intersection of AI, branding and business ethics.

5.2 Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings suggest that banks should prioritize AI service designs that emphasize trust, reliability, and human-like interactions, as these attributes strengthen perceptions of ethicality and brand respect, ultimately fostering consumer advocacy. Managers should invest in transparent AI practices, such as clearly communicating how customer data are collected, stored, and protected, and offering explainable AI interfaces that clarify decision outcomes (e.g., chatbot responses or automated credit assessments). Incorporating anthropomorphic elements-such as empathetic language, personalized responses, and smooth escalation to human agents-can further reinforce ethical impressions and respect.

The moderating role of consumer technological readiness highlights the importance of customer segmentation based on digital confidence. Banks can support low-readiness consumers through simplified AI interfaces, step-by-step onboarding tutorials, in-app guidance, and dedicated human-assisted support during early interactions. For high-readiness customers, advanced AI functionalities, personalization, and proactive financial insights can accelerate the translation of respect into advocacy.

Collectively, these strategies enable banks to align AI adoption with both efficiency and relational objectives, ensuring that AI-enabled services are perceived as ethical, trustworthy, and customer-centric, thereby strengthening long-term loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that offers avenues for future research. First, the findings are based on a cross-sectional, self-reported survey of Indian consumers with recent experience of AI-enabled banking services. While appropriate for theory testing, this design limits causal inference and may be subject to common method bias. Future studies could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to better capture the temporal and causal dynamics among AI service quality, perceived brand ethicality, brand respect and brand advocacy.

Second, the study is situated within the Indian banking context, where cultural values, trust sensitivity, and varying levels of technological readiness may shape consumer responses to AI-driven services. Cross-cultural investigations would help assess the generalizability of the ethical-relational pathways identified here and examine how social norms and institutional environment influence AI-enabled branding outcomes.

Third, future research could extend the model to other service contexts, such as luxury hospitality, healthcare, and education, to test its applicability across hedonic and high-involvement domains. In particular, the relatively weaker effects of enjoyment and availability observed in this study suggest that these dimensions play a stronger role in low-risk or experiential services where emotional engagement is central.

Finally, incorporating alternative methodological approaches-such as usage-pattern analysis, behavioral data, or sentiment analysis alongside survey methods-could provide richer, multi-method insights and further strengthen understanding of AI service quality as a driver of ethical branding and advocacy.

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THE AI AGENT EFFECT: HOW AI AGENTS REDUCE SOCIAL NORM COMPLIANCE AND LEAD TO LESS RESPONSIBLE CONSUMER DECISIONS

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Keywords: AI psychology, social norms, service agents, chatbots, responsible consumption.

Description: This study explores whether interacting with AI (vs. human) service agents reduces consumers' compliance with descriptive social norms, which in turn, may lead to less responsible consumption decisions, specifically focusing on healthy food selection and charitable donations.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Do AI (vs. human) service agents influence consumers to make less socially approved decisions (selecting unhealthy food or not donating to charity), and is this effect mediated by weaker compliance to descriptive social norms?

Method and Data

Two experiments in a mock virtual restaurant manipulate the service agent as either a human waitress or an AI chatbot. Study 1 uses a single-factor between-subjects design (AI vs. human) with 231 undergraduate participants and measures a binary food choice (salad vs. burger and

fries) and a $1 charity donation decision (yes/no), data is analyzed via binary logistic regression with relevant controls. Study 2 replicates previous findings with 200 adults from the general population and additionally measures compliance to descriptive social norms, the mediation effect is tested using Hayes' bootstrapping procedure (model 4).

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, consumers served by an AI agent are more likely to select the unhealthy option (64.5%) than those who were served by a human agent (51.8%) (*Pearson's χ2 (1)* = 3.793, $p = .051$). Consumers are also more likely to decline donating to charity (60.3%) than those who interacted with a human agent (30.9%) (*Pearson's χ2 (1)* = 20.059, $p < .001$). Study 2 replicates these patterns: unhealthy dish selection 67% vs. 48% (*Pearson's χ2 (1)* = 7.386, $p < .01$). No charity donation 71% vs. 45% (*Pearson's χ2 (1)* = 13.875, $p < .001$). Mediation analyses indicate that AI agent decreases adherence to descriptive social norms, which in turn reduces healthy choice (*indirect effect on food choice* = .445, 95% *CI* [.191, .772], not containing zero) and prosocial donation behavior (*indirect effect on donation choice* = .344, 95% *CI* [.085, .7023], not containing zero).

Statement of Key Contributions

The paper extends research on consumer AI psychology by showing relevant behavioral consequences in domains with clear consumer-wellbeing implications (health-related choices and prosocial behavior), rather than focusing only on experiential outcomes such as satisfaction or purchase intention.

It also identifies a specific social limitation of AI agents: relative to humans, AI exerts weaker social pressure for consumers to comply with descriptive norms, thereby attenuating social norm adherence and shifting behavior toward less socially approved options, which in most cases can also be less responsible decisions.

These findings also contribute to the anthropomorphism debate by showing that even human-like AI may not elicit the same norm compliance as human agents.

Finally, this work offers practical guidance for marketers and policymakers on responsible AI integration in consumer-facing services to mitigate the potential negative impacts on consumer well-being.

THE ETHICS OF INFLUENCE: CONSUMER TRUST, PRIVACY, AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE AGE OF AI-GENERATED VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

AI-generated virtual influencers are becoming prominent spokespersons for brands, yet academic understanding of how audiences interpret their authenticity, trustworthiness, and agency remains limited. This study addresses four questions articulated in the paper: (1) *How do consumers perceive and evaluate the authenticity and trustworthiness of AI-generated virtual influencers compared to human influencers?* (2) *How do transparency practices, such as origin disclosure and anthropomorphic design, influence consumer trust and engagement?* (3) *What privacy concerns do users associate with virtual influencers, and how do these concerns shape attitudes and behaviors, particularly given the multi-privacy paradox where people continue to interact despite discomfort?* (4) *How do consumers attribute responsibility for the actions or influence attempts of virtual influencers, and what does this imply for brand accountability?* These questions respond to a growing need to understand not just whether virtual influencers persuade, but how ethical meaning-making shapes persuasion and governance expectations. The study seeks to explain whether audiences suspend disbelief, negotiate authenticity, or actively attribute agency and blame to those behind synthetic personas—insights that are essential to both theory and practice in AI-mediated communication.

Method and Data

A sequential mixed-methods design enabled both depth and explanatory power. Phase 1 comprised twenty semi-structured interviews with users who had recent exposure to virtual influencers. Participants discussed intrigue, discomfort, transparency expectations, and ambiguity over who should be accountable. Thematic analysis uncovered four interpretive logics—synthetic authenticity negotiation, algorithmic ambivalence, displaced responsibility attribution, and conditional trust calibration—which informed construct development for Phase 2. The subsequent online survey (N = 425), administered via Qualtrics (US, UK, HK), included validated and interview-derived scales capturing authenticity, transparency, privacy concern, trust, acceptance, and responsibility attribution. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity. Structural equation modelling tested directional relationships. This design enabled inductively grounded theorization and quantification of explanatory patterns. Rather than merely describing reactions, the study linked meaning structures observed qualitatively to paths in the SEM model, allowing us to show how ethical interpretation translates into measurable trust, acceptance, and accountability judgments.

Summary of Findings

Results indicate that consumers engage with virtual influencers through layered ethical and emotional reasoning. Interviewees described these figures as “fake but meaningful,” granting trust only when persona performance aligned with disclosed artificiality or perceived value sincerity. They expressed fascination intertwined with discomfort over opaque data practices,

reflecting algorithmic ambivalence. Quantitatively, authenticity and transparency significantly increased trust, while privacy concern reduced it. Trust and transparency also predicted acceptance, showing that disclosure functions as both an ethical reassurance and persuasive cue. Transparency and privacy concern heightened responsibility attribution, meaning that discomfort intensified expectations that someone must answer for potential harm. The model explained substantial variance in trust (52%), acceptance (37%), and responsibility attribution (24%), underscoring the centrality of ethical interpretation in virtual influencer engagement. Mixed-methods convergence confirmed that meaning-making identified in interviews became structured pathways in judgment, revealing that consumers do not passively accept synthetic personas but actively evaluate coherence, risk, and accountability before engaging.

Key Contributions

The study advances theory by empirically showing how authenticity, transparency, and privacy concerns jointly shape trust, acceptance, and accountability expectations, extending parasocial interaction and mind-perception frameworks into AI-mediated influence. It clarifies that people can form attachments to artificial entities but only under conditions of interpretive comfort, narrative honesty, and ethical coherence—challenging assumptions that realism alone drives engagement. Practically, the findings indicate that transparency must be woven into persona voice, not hidden in fine print; anthropomorphic cues should be calibrated to avoid uncanny effects; and brands must assume responsibility for virtual influencer actions, as audiences attribute blame upward rather than to algorithms. Methodologically, the research demonstrates how mixed-methods inquiry captures emergent ethical meaning structures and translates them into explanatory models. By demonstrating that ethical interpretation operates as a prerequisite for influence rather than a downstream concern, this study reframes trust and transparency as constitutive elements of persuasive meaning in AI-mediated marketing. Overall, the study positions virtual influencers as ethical testbeds where society negotiates expectations about AI governance and agency, showing that success depends less on technical sophistication than on ethical comfort, narrative alignment, and visible accountability mechanisms.

References are available upon request.

THE INSPIRATIONAL POWER OF HUMAN-VERSUS-AI COMPETITIONS

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Keywords: competition, artificial intelligence, inspiration, higher purpose, motive inference

Description: Here we find that human experts who challenge AI (vs. humans) inspire consumers by appearing to serve a higher purpose, which enhances consumer support even when the expert loses the competition.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have enabled machines to perform tasks once reserved for human experts, leading to growing concerns about human replacement across a variety of domains. Indeed, evidence suggests that many professionals already experience AI as a direct substitute rather than a complementary tool (Varanasi, Wiesenfeld, and Nov 2025). Against this backdrop, a striking shift has emerged: instead of competing with other humans, experts increasingly position themselves in direct competition with AI systems (e.g., Lee Sedol vs. AlphaGo). This research asks how consumers respond when a human expert competes against an AI system rather than another human expert. Do such human-versus-AI competitions elicit more positive reactions from observers, and if so, why? Does it depend on whether the expert ultimately wins or loses? By addressing these questions, the research examines whether framing oneself as competing with AI can serve as a viable positioning strategy for human brands in the age of intelligent machines.

Method and Data

The research combines one archival study with six preregistered experiments conducted across diverse domains, including Go, copywriting, cooking, graphic design, and drone racing. The archival study analyzes Reddit discussions surrounding professional Go players, leveraging linguistic indicators of inspiration before and after matches against AlphaGo. The experimental studies manipulated the identity of a human expert's competitor (AI vs. human) using a between-subjects design. Across studies, participants evaluate scenarios involving human brands, ranging from head-to-head competitions to subtle self-positioning statements. Key dependent variables include inspiration (Klein and O'Brien 2017), perceived higher purpose (Good, Hughes, and Wang 2022), and multiple forms of consumer support (purchase intentions, willingness to pay, word-of-mouth, and online engagement). Mediation, serial mediation, moderation, and process-by-moderation analyses are used to test the proposed psychological mechanisms. All studies were preregistered, and materials and data are publicly available.

Summary of Findings

Consumers respond more positively to human experts who compete against AI systems than to those who compete against other humans. An archival linguistic analysis of social media discourse shows that public expressions of inspiration toward professional Go players increased significantly after they competed against AlphaGo, but not for similarly ranked players who did not face AI. Across controlled experiments, human–AI competitions increase perceived inspiration relative to human–human competitions (Studies 1A–1B). This effect is not driven by perceptions that AI is a stronger opponent (Studies 1B, 4B). Instead, consumers infer that experts who challenge AI are motivated by a higher purpose that transcends personal gain (Study 2). Perceived higher purpose mediates the effect of competitor type on inspiration, which in turn

drives stronger consumer support, including higher purchase intentions, willingness to pay a premium, positive word-of-mouth, and online engagement (Studies 3–4B). Serial mediation analyses confirm this causal pathway (Studies 4A–4B). Importantly, the effect is outcome-independent: consumers remain more supportive of experts who compete against AI regardless of whether the expert wins or loses (Study 6). Moreover, when a higher purpose is explicitly stated, the advantage of competing against AI disappears (Study 5), demonstrating that purpose inference is the key underlying mechanism.

Key Contributions

This research makes three primary contributions. First, it identifies a novel consumer response to AI: beyond aversion to AI or AI users, consumers positively reward human brands that actively compete against intelligent machines. This extends the consumer-AI literature by shifting attention from AI adoption to AI confrontation as a meaningful positioning strategy. Second, the research advances understanding of inspiration by identifying human–AI competition as a new situational trigger of this self-transcendent emotion. It shows that inspiration arises from inferred higher purpose—when observers believe an actor is serving something larger than personal gain. Third, the work brings the construct of perceived purpose into consumer inference, demonstrating that consumers actively infer higher purpose from contextual cues and that these inferences have important downstream consequences. Practically, the findings suggest that professionals and brands facing AI disruption may benefit from framing themselves as challengers of AI.

References are available upon request.

TRANSFORMING THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF AI'S IMPACT ON CONSUMER AND BUSINESS DYNAMICS AND A RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; customer journey; customer relationship management, systematic literature review.

Description: This paper conducts a systematic literature review of AI's role in the customer journey, analysing 101 recent studies to identify key theories, contexts, characteristics, and methodologies, while outlining benefits and barriers for consumers and businesses and suggesting future research directions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions:

Customer behaviour has long been central to marketing research, with the customer journey widely recognized as the process consumers follow across touchpoints and decision phases, typically pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase. Digital innovations have transformed this journey into a dynamic, non-linear experience, reshaping customer interactions and business models. Among these innovations, Artificial Intelligence (AI) stands out as a disruptive force, enabling personalization, improving interactions, and optimizing service support. Despite its growing influence, the theoretical and practical implications of AI adoption across the customer journey remain underexplored. This review aims to address this gap by examining recent studies and identifying benefits and challenges for both consumers and firms. Accordingly, four research questions guide this investigation:

(RQ1) What dominant theories, contexts, characteristics, and methodologies underpin AI enabled–customer journey research?

(RQ2) What benefits and constraints do consumers experience when interacting with AI across the journey?

(RQ3) What benefits and constraints affect organizations adopting AI for customer relationship management?

(RQ4) What future research trajectories can advance understanding of AI's impact on the customer journey?

Method & Data:

This study follows the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, which structures the review process into three stages: assembling, arranging, and assessing. In the assembling stage, only peer-reviewed journal articles were considered to ensure an adequate level of scrutiny. Selection was restricted to Q1 journals according to the SCImago Journal Rank, and Scopus was chosen as the sole database to avoid duplication and ensure comprehensive coverage. Search keywords were refined iteratively, combining terms related to "AI," "customer journey," "customer experience," and "customer relationship management" to capture both consumer and firm perspectives. The review focused on articles published between 2020 and 2024, a period marked by accelerated AI adoption and digital transformation.

During arranging phase, a coding guide was developed using the TCCM framework to classify theories, contexts, characteristics, and methodologies. Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, excluding non-English articles and narrowing subject areas to three relevant categories. Screening based on titles, abstracts, and keywords resulted in a final sample of 101 studies.

In the assessing stage, an inductive approach combined content and thematic analyses. Content analysis identified constructs, methods, and bibliometric data, while thematic analysis grouped antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes into broader categories, providing insights for theory development and managerial practice.

Summary of findings

Interest in this topic has grown, with most studies published since 2023, reflecting digital acceleration after the pandemic and the rise of AI. Research is largely concentrated in Asia. Chatbots are the most studied AI application, while focus on generative AI emerged only in 2024, highlighting its novelty.

Theoretical foundations are diverse, spanning technology adoption models, consumer behaviour, value creation, and psychological frameworks. Drivers, mediators, moderators, and outcomes were clustered, with Perceived Quality and Trust dominant among drivers, while Customer Experience and Satisfaction are the most frequently studied outcomes.

Our results illustrate a major shift across customer journey stages driven by AI adoption. For consumers, AI adds personalization, convenience, 24/7 support, and empowerment, while enabling value co-creation. Yet privacy concerns and human-tech issues hinder trust. For businesses, benefits include operational efficiency and engagement, but effective AI implementation requires technical expertise and ethical training to overcome internal resistance and consumer reluctance to share data.

While AI offers many advantages in the customer journey, resistance persists due to privacy concerns and technology anxiety. Organizations also face high costs, complexity, and employee reluctance, alongside trust issues.

Key contributions

Main contributions of this paper are threefold. Firstly, this study integrates perspectives of both consumers and firms, which stands out as a relevant and timely contribution. Most prior research adopts a consumer viewpoint without addressing specific journey phases, while organizational perspectives remain underexplored.

Secondly, this review offers guidance for scholars and practitioners by clarifying key benefits and challenges of AI adoption. It provides actionable insights to support strategies that leverage opportunities while proactively addressing barriers.

Finally, beyond synthesizing future research directions from reviewed articles, we propose additional avenues based on existing research in AI and customer journey domains. Using the TCCM framework, the review highlights a diverse theoretical landscape dominated by adoption models. While these remain relevant, they should be complemented by addressing psychological and subjective adoption barriers. Research should also explore emerging contexts such as AI interfaces, varied user profiles, and cultural settings. Special attention is needed on generative AI, which is transforming creativity and democratizing expert tools. The analysis emphasizes exploring emotional and relational drivers, psychological barriers, and key outcomes shaping consumer–business interactions, while diversifying methods for deeper insights into AI adoption dynamics.

References are available upon request.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING CONSUMER REACTIONS TO AI AD DISCLOSURES

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Keywords: AI disclosure; Perceived creativity; Mind perception; Consumer responses

Description: This research examines why disclosing AI involvement in advertising negatively affects consumer responses and identifies conditions under which this negative effect can be mitigated.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used in advertising creation, regulatory and ethical pressures have prompted firms to disclose AI involvement. Prior research across multiple domains suggests that such disclosure often triggers negative consumer reactions; however, little is known about why these effects occur in advertising or how firms can mitigate them. This research addresses two central questions: (1) why does disclosing AI involvement in ad creation reduce ad attitude and purchase intention, and (2) under what conditions can this negative effect be attenuated? Drawing on mind perception theory, we propose that AI disclosure leads consumers to perceive AI-generated advertisements as lacking creativity, which in turn reduces ad attitude and purchase

intention. We further examine whether identifying AI as an employee can mitigate this negative effect. Together, this research seeks to advance understanding of consumer responses to AI disclosure in advertising and provide actionable guidance for firms navigating transparency requirements.

Method and Data

We conducted three controlled experiments using between-subjects designs to test the proposed framework. Study 1 examined the main effect of AI disclosure (vs. no disclosure vs. human disclosure) on ad attitude and purchase intention. Study 2 tested the mediating role of perceived creativity across three conditions. Study 3 tested whether identifying AI as an AI employee attenuates the negative effect of AI disclosure.

Across studies, participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions and evaluated advertisements for fictitious brands. Standardized measures of ad attitude, purchase intention, and perceived creativity were employed. Analyses included ANOVA and mediation tests to assess main effects, interaction effects, and underlying mechanisms.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 demonstrated that AI disclosure in ad creation consistently led to lower ad attitudes and purchase intentions compared to non-disclosure or human disclosure conditions. Mediation analyses in study2 demonstrated that reduced perceived creativity explains this negative effect, supporting the proposed mechanism. Importantly, study3 indicated that the moderator significantly attenuated the negative impact of AI disclosure. Identifying AI as an employee improved perceived creativity, resulting in higher ad attitude and purchase intention.

Together, these findings show that while AI disclosure generally harms advertising effectiveness because of lower perceived creativity, its negative impact can be attenuated by identifying AI as an employee.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions. First, it extends the AI disclosure literature into the advertising domain by demonstrating that disclosing AI involvement in ad creation negatively affects ad attitude and purchase intention. Second, drawing on mind perception theory, the research identifies perceived creativity as the central psychological mechanism underlying this negative effect. Third, it advances mind perception theory by demonstrating that role-based identity framing (i.e., identifying AI as an employee) can meaningfully shift consumer evaluations of AI-generated creative content.

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer practical guidance for advertisers facing increasing transparency requirements. Firms can reduce the negative consequences of AI disclosure by strategically framing AI's role within the organization. This strategy allows firms to comply with disclosure norms while preserving advertising effectiveness.

References are available upon request.

UNDERSTANDING ANTHROPOMORPHIC CUES IN CHATBOT INTERACTIONS: A FORM–BEHAVIOR TYPOLOGY

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Paper description: This research study advances the understanding of chatbot interaction design by providing a typology of form and behavior anthropomorphism.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, chatbots, form anthropomorphism, behavior anthropomorphism, chatbot satisfaction

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Chatbots are becoming the new norm for business-to-customer (B2C) interactions in the digital era (Ostojić, 2024). Correspondingly, consumers' willingness and preference to engage with chatbots have increased over the years (Forbes, 2019). When customers interact with chatbots, they base these interactions on the existing knowledge about human communications and also have similar motivations guided by human conversations. The process of applying human schemas to non-human agents like chatbots is termed *anthropomorphism* (Epley et al., 2007). A growing body of academic research highlights the importance of anthropomorphic designs of chatbots (Crolic et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2024). Anthropomorphic cues are specific design elements embedded in chatbots to evoke human- like perceptions. Extant research employ a wide range of anthropomorphic cues in a fragmented manner, with no systematic typology and conceptual coherence in the domain. In some studies, anthropomorphism is narrowly defined to have basic cues like a cartoon-like human avatar (Crolic et al., 2022). In some studies, however, anthropomorphism is only implicit without any reference to the broader anthropomorphic construct (Juquelier et al., 2025). There is a needs systematic clarity on the different anthropomorphic cues and deep dive into the granularity of anthropomorphism.

Summary of Findings

Chatbots imbibe different anthropomorphic features; studies show mixed influence of these features based on customers' characteristics and contexts. Miao et al. (2022), in their conceptual work on avatar realism categorize it into form and behavior. Borrowing from the conceptualization of Miao et al. (2022), we also categorize chatbot anthropomorphism into form and behavior. Chatbot form anthropomorphism is the appearance of the chatbot that can include the display picture of the chatbot, the name, age, gender, outfit, expression, eye movement, dimension, and movement. These features are combined in varying contexts, and their impact is tested on business outcomes. A chatbot's behavioural anthropomorphism is how the chatbot acts and interacts like a human entity, including having a human conversational style, following social norms and having ethos, humor, and personality.

A systematic content analysis of real chatbots imbibing anthropomorphic design across multiple service industry validated the typology. Insurance, banking and hospitality chatbots imbibed anthropomorphic design. Gen AI chatbots were heavy on conversational attributes like personalization. We propose a conceptual model categorizes anthropomorphic cues into form and behavioral cues, underpinned by the Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism (Epley et al., 2007).

Key Contributions (200 words-296)

This conceptual paper makes several key contributions to the growing body of literature on chatbot anthropomorphism. It responds to the call for research on building conceptually integrated frameworks on human-machine interaction, specifically the call to integrate anthropomorphic design highlighted in various review and empirical papers (Blut et al., 2022; Pentina et al., 2023; Ramesh & Chawla, 2022). Current marketing literature predominantly treats anthropomorphism as a unidimensional construct, resulting in substantial operational inconsistency due to heterogeneous operationalizations by different researchers. This research attempts to integrate the fragmented extant research to provide a rigorous conceptual typology of chatbot anthropomorphic cues categorized into form and behaviour. It provides a granular perspective on anthropomorphism by systematically identifying and mapping form and behavioural anthropomorphic cues from the extant literature and validating the typology by conducting a content analysis of real-life service chatbots (n=50). The proposed typology also highlights the nuanced nature of anthropomorphic design by reviewing the different contexts (industries, platforms) and how these cues impact consumers' psychological and affective responses and firm outcomes (such as chatbot satisfaction). The paper also highlights interdisciplinary theories underpinning anthropomorphic design to provide a holistic theoretical lens. Finally, it offers actionable guidance to practitioners on how, and under what conditions specific anthropomorphic cues should be deployed to enhance key business.

References are available upon request.

USER PERCEPTIONS OF AI-DRIVEN PRIVACY CHANGES ON META PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Instagram users' responses to Meta's AI-driven privacy policies through observational netnography. It reveals distrust, surveillance concerns, and community-driven support networks, challenging the privacy paradox. Findings show users resist passively, demanding better transparency, controls, and governance to address rising privacy awareness.

Keywords: AI, Meta, Privacy & Perception, Consumer trust & Digital marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The convergence of social media platforms and artificial intelligence (AI) has fundamentally transformed digital governance, creating unprecedented challenges for platform accountability, user privacy, and algorithmic transparency (Knott, *et al*., 2021). This transformation extends beyond technical governance to redefine the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), as AI systems now collect consumer data for hyper-personalized advertising (Aguirre *et al.*, 2015) while simultaneously moderating brand content through automated systems (Gorwa *et al.*, 2020) and shaping consumer experiences via algorithmic curation (Bucher, 2017). Recent policy changes that have expanded AI integration across all platform operations and replaced third-party fact-checking with community- driven oversight systems are examples of this evolution in Meta's platforms.

This change reflects a larger paradigm shift in which data-driven insights gleaned from billions of user interactions, comments, and public posts are increasingly used to inform platform governance decisions, operating within what Zuboff (2019) describes as "surveillance capitalism" where user data becomes a tradable commodity with profound implications for consumer trust and brand loyalty. How do users perceive Meta's recent privacy policy changes regarding AI-driven data collection on Instagram, and what effects do these perceptions have on their trust, engagement, and sense of control over personal information? This question addresses critical gaps in three domains: theoretically, by examining how AI-specific factors like algorithmic opacity and surveillance concerns modify the privacy calculus model (Dinev & Hart, 2006) in social media contexts; contextually, by studying privacy concerns during dynamic policy shifts rather than static environments; and practically, by analyzing how these changes affect brand-consumer relationships through the lens of trust erosion (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008) and engagement strategies.

1. THE EVOLUTION OF AI-DRIVEN SOCIAL MEDIA GOVERNANCE

Nowadays, social media governance has evolved dramatically, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) becoming a central pillar supporting platform operations and policy adherence [1]. This evolution represents a paradigm shift from reactive to predictive governance (Mittelstadt, 2019), where platforms transition from merely hosting content to actively shaping digital ecosystems through algorithmic curation. Unprecedented changes are occurring in the modern digital landscape, with AI technologies becoming more and more essential to platforms' ability to control content, moderate debates, and influence user experiences [2]. These technologies now operate as what Couldry and Mejias (2019) term "data colonialism" - extracting value from user interactions while maintaining the illusion of neutral governance. Social media governance and AI work together through intricate feedback loops in which algorithmic policy enforcement is informed by billions of user interactions, comments, and public posts [3]. This creates a dynamic system where user-generated content directly influences platform governance decisions, while algorithmic systems simultaneously shape what content users see and how they interact (Lemes de Castro, 2018),

establishing what van Dijck *et al.* (2018) describe as "platform society" where private corporations increasingly assume public governance functions.

AI-powered content moderation has become essential for managing the enormous volume of user- generated content across social media platforms. With billions of users posting millions of pieces of content daily, human moderators cannot keep pace with the scale, making AI systems essential for identifying and addressing harmful content **[4]**. However, this reliance on automated systems creates what Crawford (2021) calls "atlas of AI" - a complex mapping of power where technical solutions often obscure underlying social and political problems. To differentiate between harmful and non-harmful content, these systems use machine learning models that have been trained on enormous datasets; however, this procedure presents serious ethical questions regarding bias and fairness **[5]**. The training data itself often reflects historical biases (Eubanks, 2018), while the opacity of these systems makes accountability nearly impossible (Pasquale, 2015), creating what Barocas and Selbst (2016) term "discriminatory design" in algorithmic governance.

Meta's approach to AI integration demonstrates how platforms leverage artificial intelligence for personalized content delivery and enhanced user engagement. The core of personalization is AI predictions, which forecast the value of content based on variables like sharing patterns and user feedback surveys [6]. The company has released over 1,000 AI models, libraries, and datasets for researchers, emphasizing their commitment to transparency and open innovation **[7]**. though critics argue this represents what Tufekci (2015) terms "algorithmic transparency theater", performative openness that masks deeper structural opacity.

Social media algorithms function as "behind-the- scenes engines" that determine which posts, videos, and advertisements appear in user feeds. These systems are designed to maximize engagement by showing content aligned with user interests based on past platform behavior. However, algorithms don't merely cater to preferences; they amplify content likely to generate strong reactions, including controversial or sensational material **[8]**. This amplification effect creates what Marwick (2018) calls "the attention economy" - where platforms prioritize engagement metrics over content quality or social value.

The algorithmic governance model operates through three fundamental dimensions: relational (fragmenting individuals into digital traces), vectorial (orienting relationships to capture trends), and agential (amplifying affinities while containing differences) [9].

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design And Philosophical Underpinnings

In this study, observational netnography is applied to explore consumer perceptions through the qualitative analysis of public online comments on a specific Instagram post by influencer Quentin Saboureau (@qs_seo), who has over 78.7K followers and whose selected post received 338 comments, providing a comprehensive dataset for analysis. This design aligns with the interpretivist paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which prioritizes the exploration of subjective meanings and social constructions within digital communities. Netnography, as a digital adaptation of ethnography, is particularly suited to studying "natively digital" phenomena (Hine, 2015), where online interactions constitute the primary site of cultural production. Netnography, an ethnographic research method adapted for online communities, captures authentic user discourse in its natural digital context and enables the study of cultural meanings and community practices online. This approach is grounded in the foundational work of R.V. Kozinets (2006), whose article is referenced in the methodology to justify the use of observational netnography as a non-intrusive, data-rich method for analyzing online social interactions without influencing the community, and to emphasize its capacity to reveal "latent cultural norms" (Kozinets, 2015, p. 47) embedded in user-generated content.

3.2 Data Collection: Observational Netnography In Practice

To ensure methodological rigor, this study adopts an observational netnographic approach in which audience responses are collected through non- participant observation of digital interactions, in line with Kozinets (2006). This passive observation method was chosen to preserve the ecological validity of the data (Bryman, 2016), avoiding the "observer effect" that could alter user

behavior in participatory designs (e.g., interviews or focus groups). The Instagram post by Quentin Saboureau (@qs_seo) was purposively selected, based on its 1) high engagement (338 comments, 12.4K likes, 1.8K shares), 2) temporal relevance (published during Meta's rollout of AI-driven privacy updates in Q2 2024), and 3) thematic alignment with the research focus on algorithmic governance. This selection allowed for a focused analysis of user perceptions regarding data privacy and platform governance.

3.2.1 Data Collection: Observational Netnography In Practice

The sampling approach combined criterion sampling (Patton, 2015) to target a post meeting the above criteria, with convenience sampling for the 338 comments, which were extracted in their entirety to avoid selection bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Using a social media scraping tool, all 338 comments were extracted and analyzed separately. The tool was configured to capture:

- Metadata: Timestamp, user handle (anonymized post-extraction), likes/replies per comment.
- Content: Full comment text, emojis, and embedded media (e.g., screenshots of policy changes).
- Contextual data: Post caption, hashtags (#MetaAI, #PrivacyConcerns), and engagement metrics.

The dataset included comments in French, which were translated into English to ensure comprehensive analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted inductively to identify emergent themes reflecting user sentiments and concerns about Meta's privacy policy. All data were anonymized and collected exclusively from publicly accessible sources, in strict accordance with ethical research standards.

(See appendix 1)

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis of user-generated comments regarding Meta's AI-related privacy changes uncovers a complex landscape of perceptions, marked by confusion, mistrust, ambivalence, and the development of new forms of collective agency (table 1). The first prominent

theme, difficulties in accessing and implementing privacy protections, points to significant usability barriers. Many users expressed frustration at not being able to locate the “object” or “opt-out” functions across Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook. As one user stated, “Damn, I tried twice with two different methods including yours, and every time I get a slightly different interface without the 'opt- out' button.” Others mentioned linguistic challenges or inconsistent menus: “I don’t understand English — how are we supposed to do this? I’m sick of everything being in English, I have a Samsung.” This confusion was made worse by differences in the interface and the perception that instructions changed depending on the device and the user's location. Such disparities contributed to a sentiment of disempowerment and led several users to conclude that Meta deliberately designed these processes to be unintuitive or obstructive: “There’s no privacy center on WhatsApp, none of what you said shows up.”.

The second theme, distrust in Meta and in the actual effectiveness of the opposition procedure, emerged as a core sentiment. Some users attempted to complete the form to prevent their data from being used to train AI modes tried to fill out the form to stop their data from being used to train AI models, but many others doubted the usefulness or truthfulness of this action. Repeated claims such as “They already collect everything — now they’re just officially announcing it 😉” and “Meta reserves the right to use your data even if you object; it’s written in the form.” reflect a pervasive sense of cynicism. Others interpreted the move as a regulatory smokescreen: “As if they weren’t doing it before — you’re so naive.” The idea that users feel manipulated rather than protected was reinforced by the frequent use of sarcasm or ironic detachment to convey this skepticism.

Closely linked to this was the third theme, concern about AI surveillance and loss of control over one’s digital self. Users invoked dystopian references and expressed fears about the broader implications of algorithmic control. One user warned, “The difference now is that the government will be able to monitor what you post. Orwell 1984.” Another worried about disguised censorship: “Isn’t this more about stopping us from posting certain things, even funny stuff like drawings or metaphors that they might think are harmful — even if it’s just humor. Political commentary too. Basically, banned.” In these accounts, AI is not perceived as a neutral tool but as a potential

instrument of normalization and surveillance.

A fourth theme, ambivalence between privacy concerns and functional dependence, reveals a tension between users' desire to protect their personal data and their practical reliance on Meta platforms for maintaining social ties, professional visibility, or brand-related activities. This internal conflict was reflected in comments such as: "But what about those of us who use Instagram for our business or to earn income? If you do this, the algorithm might be reset or confused… am I wrong?" Others expressed resignation: "I don't post anything on Facebook or Instagram, but I do use WhatsApp." illustrating how hard it is to completely avoid Meta's ecosystem.

The fifth theme, search for alternative platforms, signals an attempt at resistance and escape. Applications such as Telegram, Signal, or BeReal were frequently mentioned as safer or more ethical digital spaces. One user simply noted: "Telegram >", while another suggested: "Maybe BeReal?". However, these expressions were often accompanied by constraints on social connectivity: "It's really hard to find a 'safe' equivalent — and especially to get your friends to move there 😅", revealing the structural difficulty of exiting dominant platforms.

Finally, a sixth and important theme, collective appropriation through peer support, reveals that users did not remain passive. Despite widespread confusion and institutional opacity, many engaged in mutual aid, sharing tutorials, interface screenshots, direct links, and personalized guidance. As one user explained: "Go to your profile, click on the three lines at the top right, scroll to Privacy Center, then look for the blue word 'object' and click it." Others invited their peers to check pinned links or provided follow-up help via private messages: "Check the pinned link, bro :)" or "It's in your DMs, your turn now!" These micro- networks of help reflect a form of bottom-up resistance and collective sensemaking in the absence of clear institutional support.

Overall, the way these themes are interpreted presents a complex picture: although Meta's AI-driven privacy changes sparked anger, frustration, and mistrust, they also sparked forms of both individual and group negotiation. As critical, ambivalent, and occasionally strategically engaged actors navigating an environment characterized by algorithmic opacity, socio-technical asymmetries, and emergent digital solidarities, users were far from being passive recipients of policy updates.

4. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This observational netnographic study examining user perceptions of Meta's AI-driven privacy policy changes through analysis of 338 comments reveals significant insights into the complex relationship between platform governance, user trust, and digital autonomy (Farooq, *et al*., 2024; Lahusen, *et al*., 2024; Huang, & Krafft, 2024). Our findings demonstrate that users exhibit heightened privacy concerns, trust erosion, and behavioral adaptation intentions when confronted with explicit AI data collection practices, challenging previous assumptions about user passivity in the face of privacy policy changes (Chen, X., *et al*., 2025; Chen, M., *et al*., 2024).

The thematic analysis uncovered four primary response patterns that directly address our research question: users express genuine anxiety over Meta's expanded data collection scope, demonstrate diminished confidence in the platform's commitment to user protection, indicate intentions to reduce engagement or seek alternative platforms, and reveal persistent confusion about opt-out mechanisms and control options (Schmitt *et al*., 2022) **[10] [11]**. These findings extend existing privacy calculus theory by demonstrating that AI-related data practices may represent a critical threshold where stated privacy concerns increasingly translate into concrete behavioral intentions, contradicting the traditional privacy paradox observed in social media research (Chen, M., *et al*., 2024; Chen, X., *et al*., 2025). The study contributes methodologically to digital privacy research by demonstrating how netnographic approaches can capture authentic, real-time user discourse around policy changes without researcher interference, providing ecologically valid insights into collective privacy consciousness development within online communities (Addeo, *et al*., 2019; Kozinets, *et al*., 2024).

The theoretical and practical implications of this research are substantial for both platform governance and regulatory frameworks, as our findings reveal how AI-driven data collection fundamentally differs from traditional advertising-based data use in terms of user perception and acceptance (Lahusen, *et al*., 2024; Dij, 2024; Huang, & Krafft, 2024). For social media platforms like Meta, the results suggest that current transparency initiatives, while legally compliant, may be insufficient for maintaining user trust and engagement in an AI-dominated ecosystem, requiring

more intuitive privacy controls and clearer communication strategies that address the collective nature of privacy concerns in digital communities (Karunakaran, *et al*., 2022; Chystoforova, & Reviglio, 2025; Stefanija, & Pierson, 2021). Policymakers can leverage these insights to design more effective privacy regulations that account for the communal aspects of privacy decision-making on social media platforms, supporting recent calls for rights-based approaches to AI governance that emphasize collective rather than individual rights (Lahusen, *et al*., 2024; Hwang, *et al*., 2024) [12].

This study directly addresses critical gaps in existing literature by providing empirical evidence of user perceptions during a specific AI policy transition and demonstrating how observational netnography can be applied to urgent questions in digital governance, offering a scalable methodology for understanding user responses to rapid technological and policy changes in social media environments [13][14] (Akdeniz, *et al*., 2023). The research adds significant value by capturing actual user discourse during live policy implementation rather than relying on hypothetical scenarios, contributing to more user-centered approaches to AI governance that recognize the importance of community dialogue in shaping privacy expectations and platform accountability [15][16] (Costello, *et al*., 2017).

One key limitation of this study is that the video analyzed primarily framed AI as a privacy threat, which may have amplified users' concerns and restricted the expression of more balanced or positive views. Future research could investigate how user perceptions evolve when exposed to content that highlights the practical benefits or ethical safeguards of AI integration on social media platforms.

Table 1. Thematic analysis.

	N
▾ User experience	26
help_support	20
usability_difficulty	9
▾ Privacy concerns	23
privacy_protection	16
distrust_meta	4
legal_confusion	4
▾ Social reactions	19
irony_humor	13
resignation_fatalism	3

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7. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Instagram reel used for netnographic analysis

Content creator	Quentin Saboureau, @qs_seo 
Number of followers	78.7K
Video link	LINK
Engagement context	Tech enthusiasts engage in discussion about Meta's privacy policy.
Observation period	May 29 - June 15 (18 days)
Number of likes	11 969
Number of comments	338
Extraction took	extractcomments.com

WHEN ACCURACY LOSES ITS PRICE: AI AND THE DECLINING WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR VERIFIED INFORMATION

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Keywords: Generative AI; Willingness to Pay; Accuracy Valuation; Forecasting

Description: This paper shows that while generative AI can be a good forecasting tool in some contexts but not others, people systematically fail to recognize these boundaries and underinvest in verified, high-accuracy information.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In the age of AI, information accessibility has shifted from scarcity to a surplus of uncertain accuracy. While platforms like ChatGPT deliver insights at little to no cost, they raise critical concerns regarding the devaluation of trusted information. AI has become indispensable for decision-makers, with 76% of employees using AI tools, yet only 30% consistently verify outputs. This widespread reliance is reshaping marketing: from routine segmentation to strategic forecasting, promising productivity gains but risking the accuracy of marketing decisions.

Historically, reliable information was valued for its scarcity and the expertise required to produce it. However, LLMs now generate persuasive, seemingly expert answers without real-time verification. Their confident presentation creates a perception that high-quality info is cheap and accessible. As a result, individuals may deem AI outputs "good enough", forgoing costly, vetted alternatives. This research examines whether this shift alters the perceived value of expertise and the subsequent consequences for decision-making reliability in the marketing domain.

Method And Data

This research consists of six preregistered experimental studies with a total of 3,365 participants. Across studies, participants complete forecasting and decision-making tasks in which they must decide whether to rely on a generative AI forecast or purchase access to verified, higher-accuracy information. Some studies vary who uses the AI forecast:either a lay decision maker or an expert decision maker - allowing us to examine whether AI-driven devaluation of accuracy differs by users' perceived expertise. We employ a willingness-to-pay (WTP) framework to measure how much participants are willing to invest in accuracy when an AI-generated forecast is available at low or zero cost.

The experimental design further manipulates how AI forecasts are expressed, contrasting confident versus conservative AI outputs, as well as the cost of verification and the objective value of accuracy across decision contexts. Participants make incentive-compatible choices that involve explicit trade-offs between cost and accuracy, enabling observation of information reliance and downstream decision quality. By comparing reliance on AI to demand for verified information across user expertise and AI presentation, the multi-study design quantifies the psychological devaluation of accuracy. All studies were preregistered and use diverse participant samples to ensure the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 shows that priming the predictive ability of generative AI lowers participants' willingness to pay (WTP) for accurate information, establishing an initial devaluation effect. Study 2 demonstrates that offering free AI-generated forecasts similarly reduces WTP for accurate data, indicating that AI availability directly suppresses demand for accuracy. Studies 3a and 3b examine contexts in which AI forecasts are not shown and find that participants still place substantial value on AI-generated estimates, yet fail to appropriately adjust their valuation across contexts with different accuracy requirements. Study 4 extends this pattern to settings in which AI forecasts are shown, revealing that although participants value AI forecasts and are willing to pay for them, they remain miscalibrated in their use and do not sufficiently adjust for differences in accuracy across decision environments.

Studies 5a–5b show that interacting with an AI chatbot boosts users' confidence, reduces estimation errors, and further decreases WTP for accurate information. Study 6 examines purpose-built forecasting tools and finds that while interface design features shape users' confidence in AI outputs, they do not prevent the reduction in WTP.

Overall, the findings reveal a paradox: generative AI democratizes access to forecasts while systematically undermining investment in vetted accuracy.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes several contributions to research on information valuation, decision making, and human–AI interaction. First, it documents a systematic and robust devaluation of accuracy induced by generative AI. Across multiple contexts, AI availability reduces willingness to pay for accurate, vetted information, even when accuracy is consequential for decision quality. This extends prior work on information substitution by showing that AI does not merely replace existing sources, but alters how people value accuracy itself.

Second, the paper identifies miscalibration as a central mechanism underlying AI reliance. Individuals value AI forecasts and are willing to pay for them, yet fail to appropriately adjust their use across contexts with different accuracy requirements. This pattern holds whether AI forecasts are shown or not and persists across different decision environments, highlighting a generalized difficulty in recognizing when AI is versus is not a suitable forecasting tool.

Third, the findings extend to interactive and tool-based AI systems. Chatbot interactions and purpose-built forecasting interfaces increase users' confidence in AI but do not prevent reduced investment in accuracy, suggesting that design improvements alone may be insufficient to correct miscalibration.

Together, this research reveals a paradox of AI adoption: while generative AI democratizes access to forecasts, it can unintentionally undermine demand for vetted accuracy, with implications for consumers, firms, and policymakers designing AI-assisted decision systems.

References are available upon request.

WHEN AI ASSISTANCE BACKFIRES: THE PARADOXICAL EFFECT OF AI-ASSISTED DISCLOSURE ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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Keywords: Human-AI collaboration, AI-assisted, professional services; AI disclosure

Description: This research explores the impact of disclosing AI assisted employees on consumer satisfaction in professional services (i.e., medical services).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As professional services increasingly adopt AI-assisted employees to enhance decision-making and service quality, organizations face growing expectations for transparency regarding AI usage. However, how such disclosure shapes consumer responses in credence-based services remains unclear. This study investigates two core questions: (1) How does disclosing AI assistance influence consumer satisfaction in professional service? (2) What psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions explain this effect?

Drawing on literature suggesting that consumers often doubt AI's professional competence, we propose that AI-assisted disclosure acts as a negative competence cue. Because professional

services are difficult for consumers to evaluate directly, they rely on peripheral signals. When consumer learn that an employee used AI may trigger a negative halo effect that lowers perceived professional competence and satisfaction. Across two experiments in healthcare contexts, we examine whether this downward shift in perceived competence generalizes across expert and non-expert employees, and whether it is attenuated when consumers view AI as highly capable.

Method And Data

We conducted two experiments to examine the impact of AI assisted disclosure. Study 1 examined the impact of AI-assisted disclosure, the mediating role of perceived employee professional competence, and the moderating role of consumers' perceived AI capability. A total of 257 participants were randomly assigned to a two-condition between-subjects design (AI assistance: disclosure vs. non-disclosure). Participants were asked to imagine a respiratory infection scenario. In the disclosure condition, they were informed that the doctor used an AI system to assist with diagnosis and prescribing, whereas no such information was provided in the non-disclosure condition.

Study 2 examines whether employee identity moderates the negative effects of AI-assisted disclosure. We conducted a 2 (AI assistance: disclosure vs. non-disclosure) × 2 (employee identity: expert vs. non-expert) between-subjects experiment. A total of 295 participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Study 2 used a medical service scenario similar to Study 1. Employee identity was manipulated through descriptions of the

doctor's position and experience. In the expert condition, the doctor was presented as a medical professor and senior physician with extensive clinical and research expertise in respiratory diseases. In the non-expert condition, the doctor was described simply as a resident physician.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 found that AI-assisted disclosure significantly reduced consumer satisfaction ($F = 6.06$, $p = 0.014$) and perceived employee competence ($F = 15.83$, $p < 0.001$). Mediation analyses showed significant mediating effects of perceived employee professional competence ($B = 0.41$, 95% CI = [0.1985, 0.6469]). Furthermore, consumers' beliefs about AI capability significantly moderated the effect. The interaction between AI-assisted disclosure and AI capability belief was significant ($F = 22.11$, $p < 0.0001$), and a moderated mediation (PROCESS Model 8) was also supported (index = –0.37, 95% CI = [–0.5465, –0.1920]). When AI capability is high, the negative effects of AI assisted disclosure disappear

In study 2, the results showed the interaction between expert identity and AI assistance is not significant ($p > 0.1$). AI-assisted disclosure consistently reduced satisfaction ($F (1, 291) = 5.28$, $p < 0.05$) and perceived competence ($F (1, 291) = 9.75$, $p < 0.01$), regardless of whether the doctor was an expert or a resident physician. Mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 4) confirmed that perceived professional competence explained these effects for both identities ($b_{expert} = 0.37$, 95% CI = [0.0586, 0.7082]; $b_{non\text{-}expert} = 0.41$, 95% CI = [0.0591, 0.7835]).

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances understanding of AI-assisted employees in professional services by examining how consumers respond to AI-assisted disclosure. First, it extends human–AI

collaboration research by shifting the focus from employees' reactions to AI toward consumers' evaluations. By revealing how consumers judge employees who using AI, the study introduces a more comprehensive framework involving consumers, employees, and AI technology. Second, the findings show that the negative effect of AI assistance disclosure arises from diminished perceptions of employee competence. AI infusion in services not only shapes attitudes toward the technology itself but also produces interpersonal consequences, leading consumers to infer that AI-assisted employees are less capable, which lowers satisfaction. Third, the study identifies key boundary conditions. Consumers' perceived AI capability significantly moderates the effect: when AI is viewed as low in competence, disclosure reduces satisfaction, but when AI is perceived as highly capable, disclosure increases satisfaction. Finally, the results show that employee identity does not buffer this effect. Although experts are generally evaluated more favorably, they still experience the same disclosure-related penalties.

WHEN EXPECTATIONS DON'T MEET REALITY: AGENCY MISMATCH AND RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS IN HUMAN-AI COLLABORATION

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Keywords: agency, human-ai collaboration, AI agency, relationship failures

Description: Drawing on the dimensions of agency framework, this qualitative study of 52 managers identifies eight relationship problems in human-AI interaction stemming from mismatches between human expectations of AI agency and AI's actual capabilities across passivity, automaticity, rationality, endorsement, freedom-to-choose, and consciousness dimensions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Business reality paints a sobering picture of human-AI collaboration. Over 70% of companies report achieving no value from AI initiatives (Bellefonds et al., 2024), while 95% of generative AI pilots fail to meet expected revenue growth (Estrada, 2025). Beyond unrealized value, AI initiatives can result in societal and ethical risks, especially in critical sectors such as healthcare (Ross and Herman, 2023). These observed realities demand deepening understanding of why AI initiatives fail to meet expectations. Amid a recognized shift from human agency toward AI agency (Ågerfalk, 2020), this study investigates mismatches between human and AI agency that cause AI initiatives to fail. We focus on the lack of complementarity in human-AI collaboration, leading to relationship problems and unrealized value. This responds to calls for

research on AI agency beyond successful cases and addresses the need to understand human-AI relationship failures. Employing a qualitative multiple case study approach with 52 semi-structured interviews across retail, financial, and entertainment industries, our findings reveal eight relationship problems stemming from agency mismatches in direct interaction, human-based flaws, AI-based weaknesses, and external forces. This paper contributes to the literature on human-AI collaboration by illuminating dysfunctional relationships and demonstrating how agency mismatches generate unintended consequences.

Method And Data

This study employs a qualitative multiple case study approach across retail, financial, and entertainment industries. 52 semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers between 2024 and 2025, averaging 50 minutes in duration, and transcribed for analysis. Following theoretical sampling principles (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), organizations were selected for their potential to provide revelatory insights into human-AI interaction. Suitability was ensured through the presence of AI-related role titles, publicized AI initiatives, or pre-screening of AI usage. Data analysis followed a two-part process. First, conventional content analysis was applied to inductively generate codes based on common themes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Two lead researchers conducted iterative coding cycles, working both individually and collaboratively while revising a central codebook to capture data nuances (Beverland and Lindgreen, 2010). This procedure yielded 177 unique codes organized into eight topic categories.

Summary of Findings

Drawing on Dattathrani and Dé's (2023) framework of agency dimensions (passivity, automaticity, rationality, endorsement, freedom to choose, and consciousness), this study

identifies eight relationship problems representing mismatches between human expectations and AI's actual agency. *Communication problems* arise from rationality mismatches, where humans assume shared meaning-making that AI's probabilistic processing cannot provide. *Conflict and disagreement* stem from combined rationality and endorsement gaps, as AI generates plausible outputs without reflecting on truth value. *Trust issues* emerge when AI cannot explain its reasoning or commit to consistency, creating plausibility traps that undermine collaboration. *Emotional connection failures* reveal AI's absence of phenomenal consciousness, limiting authentic empathy. *Power and control imbalances* reflect tensions over decision authority and accountability, operationalized through policies maintaining human oversight while employees bypass official channels. *Unrealistic expectations* represent holistic agency mismatches, where users overestimate AI capabilities across all dimensions. External constraints further compound these problems: *financial stress* limits organizational freedom to pursue optimal AI strategies, while *competitive pressures* force reactive rather than deliberate integration. These findings demonstrate that effective human-AI collaboration requires agency calibration, accurately aligning human expectations with AI's actual capabilities across each dimension.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to the current discussion on human-AI collaboration in three ways. First, we expand the understanding of human-AI interaction to encompass uncomplimentary relationships that limit the unfolding of entangled agency. While prior research has focused on successful hybrid agency, we illuminate dysfunctional dynamics, providing theoretical foundations for developing healthier human-AI relationships. Second, we identify eight relationship problems representing distinct mismatches between human expectations and AI's actual agency across six dimensions. Communication failures stem from rationality gaps;

conflict emerges from combined rationality and endorsement deficits; trust erosion reflects endorsement and access consciousness limitations; emotional disconnects reveal absent phenomenal consciousness; power struggles manifest tensions in freedom to choose and endorsement; unrealistic expectations represent holistic agency overestimation; and external constraints compress human freedom to choose. This framework integrates isolated prior findings into a unified theoretical perspective grounded in agency calibration. Third, we demonstrate that effective human-AI collaboration requires accurate alignment between human expectations and AI's actual degree of agency across each dimension. For practitioners, this suggests developing iterative communication strategies, implementing transparency mechanisms, and establishing governance frameworks that balance accountability with productive collaboration. Policy makers should provide ethical AI guidelines and mechanisms to alleviate resource constraints for smaller organizations.

REFERENCES

References are available upon request.

New Products and Innovation

BECOMING SMART: THE EFFECT OF DISCLOSING THE COOPERATION WITH A STARTUP ON CONSUMERS' BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS TOWARDS SMART PRODUCTS

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Keywords: cooperation between incumbent and startup, smart product development and marketing, experimental study, innovation ability, behavioral intentions

Description: We conducted experimental studies to investigate whether disclosing a cooperation with a startup to develop a smart product increases consumers' behavioral intentions—mediated by an increasing perceived innovation ability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Many incumbent firms lack technological competencies to render their products smart. A possible strategy for tackling this challenge lies in the cooperation with a startup granting them access to these competencies (Bormans et al. 2020). The corresponding literature on cooperation between both parties addresses different phases, namely establishing, effectuating, and exploiting the cooperation. While research on the first two phases is extensive (e.g., Hogenhuis et al. 2016), research on exploiting the cooperation is scarce and provides partly contradicting results with

regard to the effect of cooperation disclosure on behavioral intentions (Islam and Buxmann 2018; Schleef et al. 2020). Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the positive impact of general third-party involvement, such as customer empowerment (e.g., Schreier et al. 2012), can be transferred in this case. Consequently, we intend to gain a better understanding of how consumers perceive cooperation disclosure and how it affects consumer behavior. Therefore, we seek to answer the following questions: (1) Does an incumbent's disclosure of cooperating with a startup increase behavioral intentions towards a smart product? (2) Is this effect mediated by perceived innovation ability? (3) Does the effect depend on the product's prior category, that is, whether it was previously non-technical or already technical?

Method and Data

Grounded in signaling theory (Spence 1973), we conducted two online experiments with UK participants recruited via Prolific. Study 1 employed a single-factor between-subjects design. All participants saw the same smart padlock, but the description of its development differed such that the cooperation was disclosed in one group, while it was concealed in the other group. After reading the description, the participants saw a corresponding advertisement. Subsequently, participants responded to items referring to the dependent variables (i.e., willingness to buy, pay for, recommend, and use) and the mediator (i.e., innovation ability). After quality screening, the final sample comprised 85 participants. Study 2 used a 2 (cooperation disclosure: disclosed vs. not disclosed) × 2 (prior product category: non-technical vs. technical) between-subjects design. Once more, participants were presented with the same smart padlock. Depending on their assigned group, the cooperation was disclosed or not to the participants. Additionally, we manipulated whether the smart padlock produced previously by the incumbent was technical or non-technical in nature.

Participants were shown corresponding advertisements. Again, they responded first to items referring to the dependent variable (i.e., willingness to buy) and second to the mediator (i.e., innovation ability). After quality exclusions, 201 participants remained.

Summary of Findings

In both studies, reliability was high across constructs, manipulations worked, and realism checks indicated realistic scenarios. The MANOVA in Study 1 indicated that disclosing startup cooperation significantly increases all four behavioral intentions (i.e., willingness to buy, pay for, recommend, and use). To test the mediation, we used Hayes' PROCESS (Model 4; 10,000 bootstraps) and found that the cooperation's disclosure raises customers' perceptions of the incumbent's innovation ability, which in turn increases behavioral intentions. The two-way ANOVA in Study 2 revealed a significant interaction of cooperation disclosure and prior product category on willingness to buy suggesting that disclosure leads to higher willingness to buy if the product was previously non-technical, but reduces it if the product was technical before. A moderated-mediation with Hayes' PROCESS (Model 8; 10,000 bootstraps) supports that disclosure increases willingness to buy by augmenting perceived innovation ability if the smart product was previously non-technical. Together, the studies indicate that the cooperation signal is beneficial when it marks a substantial technological leap that justifies startup involvement but can backfire if the incumbent has already demonstrated technical capabilities with previous products.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research contributes to two streams of marketing research. First, we extend research on the third phase of inter-firm cooperation, that is, exploiting the cooperation between an incumbent

firm and a startup. We shed light on how this cooperation should be exploited by investigating effects on behavioral intentions while accounting for innovation ability and product category to ascertain under which circumstances the cooperation should be disclosed. Second, by investigating the cooperation's disclosure, we contribute to the literature examing third-party inclusion in product development. As there is a solid basis of literature on customer empowerment and how it is perceived when marketing the jointly developed products, we draw on these findings and transfer them to another type of third-party inclusion. Managerially, our results show that incumbents appearing to lack technical expertise based on their prior products tend to be perceived as more innovative when cooperating with startups. By contrast, when incumbents already possess strong technical capabilities, such cooperations are interpreted as a negative signal, leading to skepticism regarding their innovative abilities. Thus, we urge managers of incumbent firms to be less hesitant to communicate the cooperation with a startup, especially when the jointly developed smart product was previously non-technical.

References are available upon request.

BRAND ECOSYSTEM INNOVATION USING GENAI: VALUE CREATION BY STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT FROM IDEA TO PROTOTYPE

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances research on brand-ecosystem platforms (for social robots) by extending prior frameworks with a mid-fidelity prototype, iterative brand identity development, and multi-phased empirical validation. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines Design Thinking, generative AI (genAI)-based scenario foresight, business model iteration, brand identity and naming strategy with quantitative surveys, the study examines how stakeholders can be systematically integrated into ecosystem innovation. Findings highlight genAI's strategic role in sharpening value propositions, enabling divergent options, and supporting governance. The study contributes a transferable framework, methodological guidelines, and design principles that balance innovation with social responsibility, offering actionable insights for emerging-technology markets.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Academic Contribution: This paper advances the academic understanding of brand ecosystem development by integrating generative AI (genAI) as both a strategic and methodological innovation enabler. It contributes a structured, transferable framework that combines brand strategy, stakeholder co-creation, and iterative prototyping in the context of emerging technology

platforms. Specifically, it addresses a gap in the literature on systematic stakeholder integration into brand ecosystems, offering empirical insights from a mixed-methods study in the field of social robotics. It builds on Service-Dominant Logic (Lusch, Vargo, and O'Brien 2007; Vargo et al. 2017; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2006), Design Thinking (Brown 2008; Lewrick, Link, and Leifer 2020; Plattner 2010; Rauth et al. 2010), Ecosystem and Platform Theory (Adner 2006, 2017; Hein et al. 2020; Iansiti and Levien 2004; Jacobides 2019a; Jacobides 2019b; Jacobides, Cennamo, and Gawer 2018; Moore 1993; Valdez-de-Leon 2019) to show how brands can serve as governance anchors and facilitators of stakeholder alignment.

Practical Contribution: For non-academic stakeholders (particularly municipalities, public sector actors, retail firms, and robotics suppliers) the findings offer a concrete blueprint for ecosystem orchestration. The resulting mid-fidelity platform prototype (*"RoboSpot"*) includes role-based user flows, a matchmaking system, and governance features informed by real stakeholder needs. The iterative use of genAI in scenario design, branding, and business model development provides new tools for innovation teams, showing how *Responsible and Trustworthy AI* can accelerate prototyping while maintaining alignment with societal and institutional constraints.

The study provides value to public institutions, tech developers, consultants, and innovation policymakers aiming to foster responsible AI adoption and scalable service platforms. Its methodology is also relevant for NGOs and academic incubators working at the intersection of technology, branding, and social innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Innovation increasingly emerges within interconnected ecosystems rather than isolated organizations, reflecting a shift toward collaborative, multi-actor value creation (Ceccagnoli et al. 2012; Hein et al. 2019). Ecosystems enable co-creation potential and offer structured access to shared infrastructure (Jacobides 2019b; Engelhardt and Petzolt 2019; Eulerich and Grüne 2021). This development is particularly evident in emerging fields, such as robotics or AI-based services, where platform-based ecosystems function as drivers of technological advancements and cross-sector integration (Ceccagnoli et al. 2012; Hein et al. 2019; Lähteenmäki and Töyli 2023; Pidun, Reeves, and Schüssler 2020). However, while ecosystem research has extensively discussed coordination challenges, less is known about how brands can be deliberately developed as anchoring mechanisms within such innovation processes. In this context, brands serve a dual function in innovation ecosystems: First, they provide strategic orientation for stakeholders through shared mission, vision, values thereby fostering trust (Esch and Esch 2024; Esch and Roth 2019; Hsu, Fournier, and Srinivasan 2016; Jacobides 2019b; Meffert, Burmann, and Koers 2005). They serve as a conceptual framework that supports stakeholder alignment and governance relationship building across diverse stakeholder needs (Kotler, Pförtsch, and Sponholz 2022). Second, brands facilitate co-creation by involving stakeholders in the joint development process of services, value propositions, and experiences.

Early and continuous stakeholder integration is central to successful brand ecosystems (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016). Despite this relevance, systematic approaches to integrating stakeholders into brand ecosystem development remain under-investigated in theory and practice. To address this gap, the paper explores how stakeholder alignment and brand strategy can be orchestrated to build an innovation platform ecosystem for social robots in public spaces.

Fragmented adoption, unclear brand roles, and weak stakeholder integration currently hinder scalability (Henschel, Laban, and Cross 2021; IMARC Group 2024).

Technologically, the study leverages genAI as a strategic enabler for ecosystem development. GenAI is used to develop business scenarios, refine platform-based business models, and co-create brand identities applying advanced prompting techniques and ethical AI methodologies (Alto 2023; European Commission 2020, 2024; Kanbach et al. 2024). Guided by these considerations, the study addresses two research questions that structure the empirical analysis and link each step to the overarching research objective:

RQ1: *How can brand strategy be developed as a unifying anchor for stakeholder engagement and co-creation within an innovation ecosystem?*

RQ2: *How can genAI accelerate the innovation process to develop the strategic building blocks of a brand ecosystem, namely business scenarios, business models, and brand strategy and identity?*

To address the research questions, the study follows an agile, design-oriented research process. Stakeholder research informs future scenarios and value propositions, which are iteratively translated into business scenarios and brand identity with genAI support. The resulting brand ecosystem is operationalized in a mid-fidelity platform prototype (RoboSpot) and evaluated through expert input and surveys, with each step linked to examining brands as ecosystem anchors (RQ1) and genAI's accelerating role in innovation (RQ2). By addressing these questions, the paper provides insights into genAI's strategic role in brand and innovation management, with relevance for brand strategists, ecosystem developers, and public and private AI innovation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how platform-based brand ecosystems can be strategically developed using generative AI (genAI) and participative stakeholder methods, this research integrates three

interconnected domains: (1) brand ecosystems and their strategic building blocks, (2) genAI in brand and innovation management, and (3) stakeholder co-creation based on design thinking. Together, they form a structured yet flexible concept for brand ecosystem innovation.

(1) Defining Brand Ecosystems and Strategic Building Blocks

The rise in platform economies and the digital transformation of industries have elevated ecosystems to a focal point in strategic brand management and business model innovation (Adner 2017; Jacobides, Cennamo, and Gawer 2018; Moore 1993). In contrast to conventional company-centred models, platform-based ecosystems embody interconnected, value-driven networks of heterogeneous actors who collectively generate innovation across institutional boundaries (Arnold et al. 2023; Cusumano, Gawer, and Yoffie 2019). In this rapidly evolving field, brand ecosystems have emerged as orchestrated networks of interdependent actors (e.g., orchestrators, partners, consumers) who interact on shared technological platforms to co-create products, services, and symbolic meaning under the umbrella of a unified brand identity (Arnold et al. 2023; Esch and Roth 2019; Jacobides 2019b). This shift reflects how brands evolve from symbolic representations into relational infrastructures that facilitate value exchange and innovation (Hsu, Fournier, & Srinivasan, 2016). Three core strategic building blocks can be identified for platform-based brand ecosystems (Roth, Beder, and Klicic 2024):

Value Creation & Span: Ecosystem success is predicated on the ability to create value not only for end-users but also for business stakeholders (Jacobides 2019b). A brand ecosystem must enable novel product-service combinations, creating incentives for stakeholders to engage in co-creation. The value span can be designed for specific verticals (e.g., public municipalities, retail) or for broader, cross-industry application. Following a modular logic, successful ecosystems often evolve incrementally to extend their span and relevance (Schreieck, Wiesche, and Krcmar 2016; Zervas, Proserpio, and Byers 2017).

Roles & Participation: Strategic clarity in defining ecosystem roles is essential. Following the taxonomy by Iansiti and Levien (2004), actors may assume orchestrator, complementor, or niche roles (Iansiti and Levien 2004). Governance design, including ownership models, legal entities, and degrees of centralization, determines power distribution and stakeholder incentives (Hein et al. 2020). This includes aligning internal leadership structures with external governance mechanisms and ensuring transparent access, participation rights, and value-sharing principles (Mantena and Saha 2012; Schreieck, Wiesche, and Krcmar 2016).

Brand Identity & Architecture: Adding a brand dimension to ecosystems introduces a unifying logic that can foster trust, purpose alignment, and stakeholder legitimacy. Ecosystem brands are best conceptualized not as singular product brands but as evolving corporate brand architectures that reflect shared vision, values, and identity (Esch and Roth 2019; Keller and Swaminathan 2020). A brand architecture must be flexible to accommodate internal evolution and external market shifts (Baumgarth 2018). Strategic brand building thus involves crafting a cohesive brand identity that aligns ecosystem participants and strengthens shared positioning toward the end customer (Almquist, Senior, and Bloch 2016; Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

The digital-first lifestyle brand *Spotify* (Spotify AB 2025) illustrates how brands function as orchestration frameworks, enabling co-creation. Its brand not only provides orientation through core values, but also unites a diverse network of artists, developers, and consumers. These actors align with a shared purpose of Spotify: to be the daily companion and soundtrack of everyday life, seamlessly integrated into the digital routines.

(2) GenAI in Strategic Innovation and Brand Management

GenAI serves as both a methodical and strategic enabler in ecosystem development. It supports divergent thinking during ideation phases (e.g., scenario forecasting) and convergent thinking in synthesizing viable value propositions and brand architectures (Lewrick, Link, and Leifer 2020;

Plattner 2010; Rauth et al. 2010). Techniques such as in-context prompting, chain-of-thought prompting, and prompt chaining have been shown to improve both creative output and alignment with stakeholder values (Alto 2023; Wei et al. 2022).

When guided by *TrustworthyAI* and *ResponsibleAI* frameworks (Ashok et al. 2022; European Commission 2020, 2024), genAI can ethically accelerate innovation by generating ecosystem blueprints, prototyping customer journeys, and designing brand narratives that align with legal, societal, and strategic imperatives (Cui, van Esch, and Phelan 2024; Kanbach et al. 2024.

(3) Stakeholder Co-Creation and Applied Design Thinking

In line with Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), value is not created by companies and handed off to customers, but rather co-created in dynamic interaction between multiple ecosystem actors (Lusch, Vargo, and O'Brien 2007; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2006). Stakeholders such as customers, suppliers and developers become resource integrators who actively shape services, experiences, and business models. Co-creation thus becomes a foundational principle in brand ecosystem development, enabling strategic alignment with real-world needs, while also fostering legitimacy, innovation quality, and adoption (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum 2013; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016; Vargo et al. 2017).

Successful outcomes depend on the ability to balance exploration and refinement through iterative thinking patterns: divergent thinking, which opens up broad possibilities, and convergent thinking (Design Council 2015; Lewrick, Link, and Leifer 2020; Plattner 2010; Roberts-Smith 2020).

Design Thinking has emerged as a useful methodology for human-centered innovation, promoting empathy, collaboration, and iterative prototyping (Brown 2008; Ingo Rauth et al. 2010). In this sense, platforms and services are not designed *for* stakeholders, but *with* them. This participatory approach supports the SDL proposition that all actors are resource integrators and co-producers of value (Vargo et al. 2017; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a mixed-methods research design, informed by quantitative methods (surveys) and qualitative methods (expert evaluations). Guided by the Double Diamond model as a heuristic framework (Design Council 2015), it integrates design thinking principles, iterative development cycles, and genAI as a strategic enabler. The methodological structure is illustrated in Figure 1.

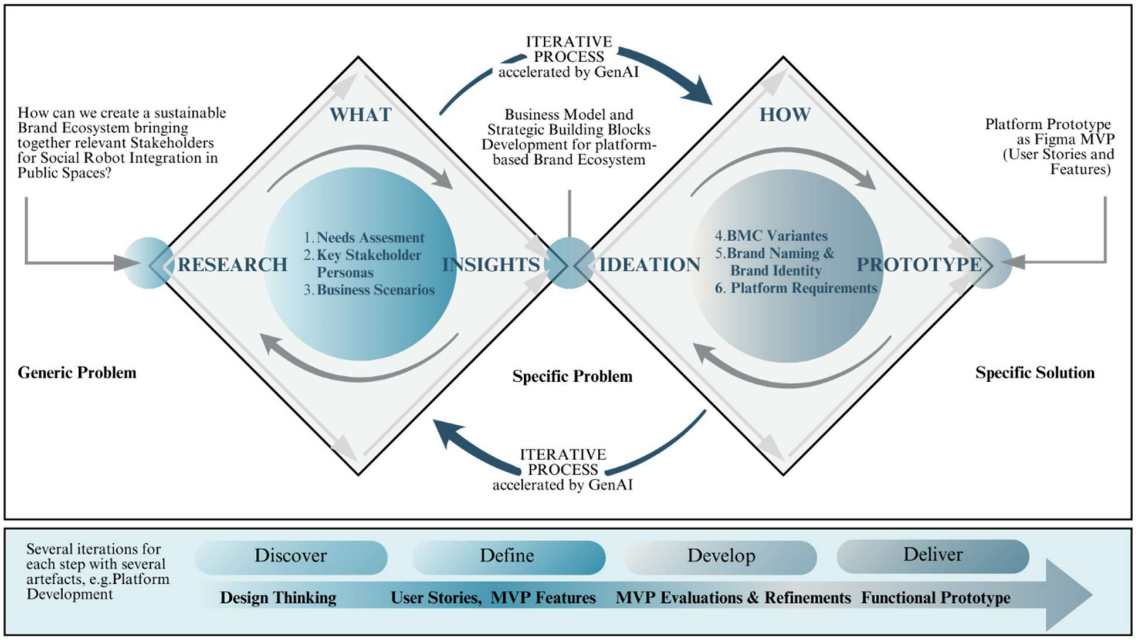


Figure 1 Brand Ecosystem for Social Robotics Strategic Building Blocks Development using Divergent and Convergent Thinking

Source: Own illustration, adapted from Design Council (2015)

In the **Research and Insights phase**, the focus was on supporting divergent exploration: *1. Needs Assessment:* Stakeholder needs and wants but also ecosystem barriers were identified through expert inputs. 2. *Key Stakeholder Personas* (e.g., municipal actors, robotics retailers etc.) were developed based on literature and case studies. *3. Business Scenarios:* GenAI-supported scenario planning generated exploratory future business scenarios. Through prompting, using a Trustworthy and Responsible AI Canvas (Polchar and Karle 2023), and prioritization tools (Lewrick, Link, and Leifer 2020), one future scenario for Business Model Canvas (BMC) prototyping was selected in

guided expert workshops. These steps establish the empirical foundation for the subsequent convergent stages.

In the **Ideation and Prototyping phase**, insights were translated into convergent outputs:

4. *BMC Variants*: In this step, input from the preceding stages were translated into differentiated value propositions and governance models for the brand ecosystem. Based on this and the genAI-informed business scenarios, 16 BMC options were condensed to four future BMC variants (1 Lean practical | 2 Non-profit practical | 3 Lean visionary | 4 Non-profit visionary, see Appendix B1-B4). This step translates divergent exploration into comparable ecosystem configurations.

5. *Brand Naming & Brand Identity*: Naming and identity options were generated in interdisciplinary expert workshops, applying genAI prompting. Additionally, three waves of naming surveys (N = 165; n_1 Pilot = 18, n_2 1st Iteration = 52, n_3 2nd Iteration = 95) evaluated stakeholder resonance, name clarity and brand associations. This stage empirically validates brand identity and evaluates whether naming alternatives align with stakeholder expectations before platform implementation decisions are finalized.

6. *Platform Requirements*: Initially, a Design Thinking co-creation workshop (N=15 stakeholders from public administration, robotics and retailers) defined stakeholder journeys, platform roles, and service interactions for the platform-based ecosystem. Subsequently, the user stories and platform features were co-developed and prototyped (Figma, mid-fidelity wireframe). Platform requirements therefore follow from the validated ecosystem configuration (BMCs) and brand identity work, ensuring alignment between strategy, governance logic, and user-interface-service interactions. The final validation included expert evaluations (N=10) assessing strategic coherence, usability, and stakeholder fit, followed by a quantitative survey of platform requirements (N=92). The concluding phase comprised a structured minimal viable product (MVP) testing with N=5 expert stakeholders. Together, these stages triangulate qualitative and quantitative evidence to

validate earlier outputs (personas, scenarios, BMC variants, branding decisions, and requirements) translate into a coherent platform concept. Feedback loops were used to inform future development cycles, in line with agile best practices (SCRUM) and participatory design principles.

RESULTS

This paper presents a number of findings based on the results of the mixed-methods research, which can be grouped into different themes (see Appendix A).

Brand Identity and Brand Name Testing

The empirical three-stage naming process (N = 165; n_1 = 18, n_2 = 52, n_3 = 95) evaluated brand name alternatives along criteria such as clarity, relevance to service category, overall liking, ease of recall, ease of recognition, brand fit and consistency with brand ecosystem, international transferability, and distinctiveness (Kohli and LaBahn 1997).

Connotations and associations were systematically examined to ensure coherence with the brand ecosystem's identity and strategic direction (ibid.). GenAI supported idea generation via prompt chaining, expanding semantic territories and enabling iterative refinement through stakeholder feedback. The most promising name *RoboSpot* consistently outperformed alternatives across several dimensions and aligned with associations of ‘modernity’, ‘robotics’, ‘technology’, ‘meeting point’, and ’efficiency’, confirming symbolic and functional fit to the envisioned platform. Playful or abstract names like *Roboty* or *RoBee* were less effective. GenAI and co-creative loops enhanced the naming and branding process in a brand ecosystem context. These results informed subsequent design decisions by narrowing the branding space to a validated identity anchor used consistently across the platform concept prototype.

Ecosystem Architecture and Business Model Canvas Iterations

Designing a viable robotics-centered brand ecosystem (platform) required iterative alignment between technological vision, stakeholder needs, and institutional constraints. Based on 16 BMC

variants, developed in multiple genAI-supported scenario sessions, two final scenarios (practical vs. visionary) were selected and each translated into lean and non-profit formats[1]. These versions were visually synthesized using the standardized BMC format across all nine building blocks.

Using the "*How–Wow–Ciao–Now*[2]*"* innovation matrix, the final BMC integrated trust-based governance, stakeholder incentives and scalable services. Therefore, the iterative evaluation led to the synthesis of a final BMC as a **"One-Stop-Shop" for evidence-based (social) robotics implementation**, targeting key ecosystem stakeholders including public-sector users, private suppliers, and knowledge actors. GenAI enabled the translation of fragmented stakeholder insights into structured platform logics. The converged BMC served as the strategic blueprint for platform requirements, including role definitions, governance mechanism, and service elements implemented in the prototype.

Platform Prototype and Evaluation

Based on the converged BMC, and derived platform requirements, a mid-fidelity Figma prototype implemented key platform features, visualizing the key user flows and interaction logic for the primary roles and persona profiles (matchmaking engine, analytics dashboard, knowledge hub[3]). In testing with N=5 expert stakeholders, the prototype achieved a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of +80, categorizing the platform as delivering an excellent UX. All five participants reported high ease of use (M = 5.0) and strong integration of platform features (M = 4.8). Further results of the

[1] See Appendix B1-B4.

[2] This framework categorized business model variants by feasibility, desirability, and innovation potential: **How**-Promising, but currently still unproven concepts; **Wow**-Highly innovative, visionary designs; **Ciao**- Options deprioritized due to limited scalability, niche appeal or potential stakeholder misalignment; **Now**-Immediately implementable models.

[3] The core platform modules are: (1) Matchmaking Engine, a rule-based interface combining AI-supported need analysis and partner recommendations. (2) The Analytics Dashboard, providing real-time monitoring of platform activity, stakeholder engagement, and KPI tracking. (3) The Knowledge Hub & Interaction Layer, offering curated content and access to certified suppliers and partners.

expert evaluation[4] confirmed strong alignment with user expectations, particularly regarding trust, intuitive navigation, and relevance of features: *"At this point, I'd be convinced and click register."* (P3: positive emotional engagement). This final stage provides cumulative validation by testing whether the earlier-stage ecosystem configuration and brand identity and branding decisions translate into usability, and stakeholder acceptance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings illustrate how brand-led ecosystem strategies, combined with genAI and participatory design methods, can accelerate innovation in emerging technology contexts while fostering alignment across diverse stakeholder groups.

Strategic role of the brand in stakeholder alignment (RQ1.1)

Brand strategy proved to be an essential part of guiding collaboration across heterogeneous actors in public and commercial spaces. The brand serves as a unifying governance anchor, paving the ground for a shared vision, mission and values among diverse stakeholder groups. This shared brand identity evolves from symbolic to functional governance mechanisms.

Platform development through stakeholder co-creation (RQ1.2)

The mid-fidelity prototype reflects a co-developed ecosystem platform that integrates core functionalities (e.g., AI-matchmaking, analytics dashboard, knowledge hub) and supports two-sided stakeholder journeys (supply and demand), which directly emerged from stakeholder input. The prototype demonstrates the feasibility of translating abstract brand strategy into tangible UX by stakeholder integration from the earliest stages, which leads to higher strategic legitimacy and market alignment.

[4] Semi-structured interviews were analyzed using structuring qualitative content analysis, following Kuckartz' framework (Kuckartz and Rädiker (2020, 2022, 2024).

GenAI as an innovation enabler (RQ2)

Early-stage integration of genAI accelerates idea generation, brand strategy and business scenario development. Its structured application can enrich each innovation phase (Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver) from expanding the solution space in workshops through strategic iterations and prototyping, it supports both divergent exploration and convergent refinement, enabling a faster, more participatory innovation process.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the prototype achieved high user acceptance in expert testing (N = 5), yet broader validation across diverse stakeholder segments is still pending. Second, the study is situated in the domain of social robotics for public and retail environments. While the underlying brand ecosystem framework is transferable, sector-specific constraints, such as procurement regulations or variations in stakeholder dynamics, may require adaptations before integration into multiple, interconnected ecosystems.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper demonstrates how brand strategy and genAI can jointly enable to orchestrate stakeholder co-creation within an innovation process in emerging technology ecosystems. The developed process offers a testable MVP for scaling social robot services in public settings. Future research should extend validation beyond expert stakeholders through broader qualitative and quantitative studies. Such efforts will enable a deeper understanding of user experience, adoption dynamics, and the operational feasibility of the platform. In the long term, the focus should shift toward scaling the brand ecosystem platform and exploring its integration into multi-ecosystem environments across sectors.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A Brand Ecosystem Innovation through GenAI Acceleration Framework

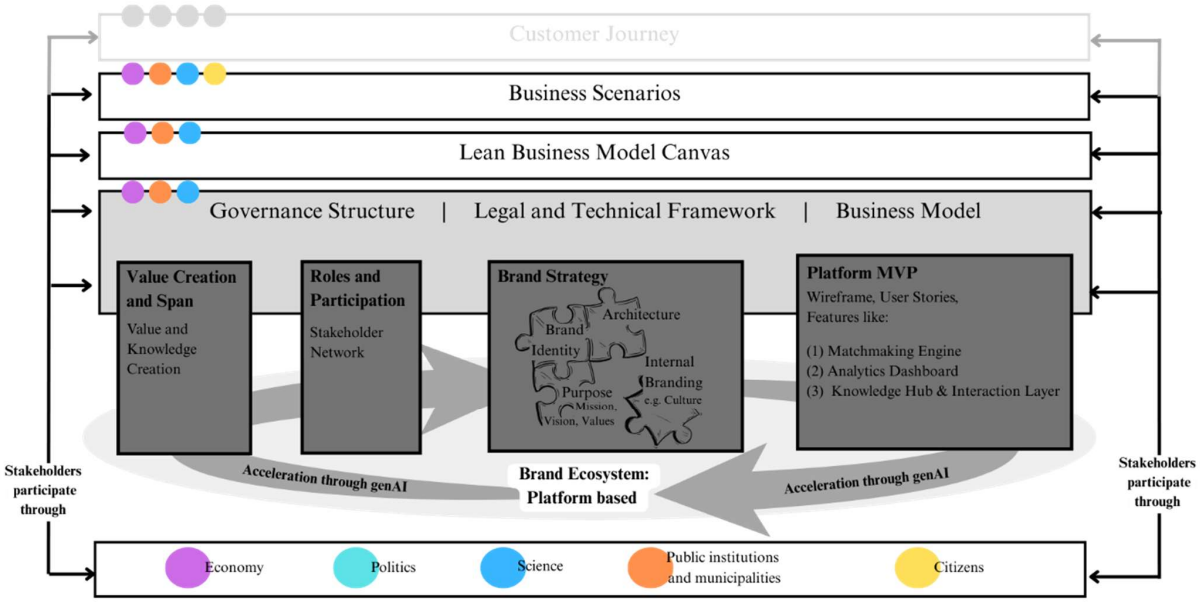


Figure 2 Brand Ecosystem Innovation through GenAI Acceleration Framework (Source: Own illustration)

Appendix B1 Lean Practical BMC

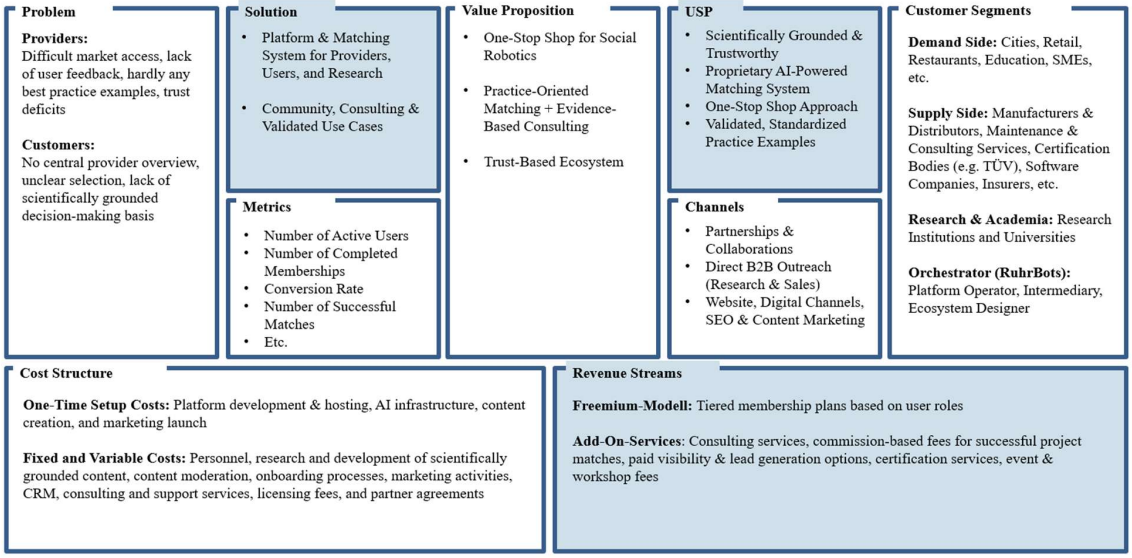


Figure 3 Lean Practical BMC (Source: Own illustration)

Lean Practical: Focuses on minimal viable value delivery, data-enabled service interactions with low entry barriers for public-private.

Appendix B2 Non-Profit Practical BMC

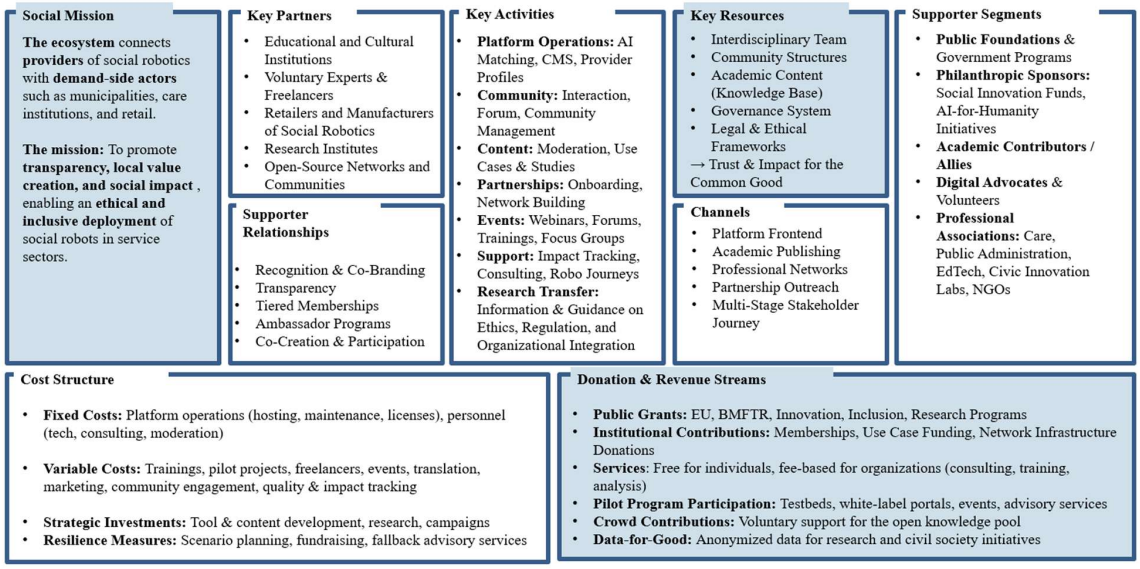


Figure 4 Non-Profit Practical BMC (Source: Own illustration)

Non-Profit Practical: Anchored in municipal and public sector values, this model emphasizes accessibility, trust-building, and local capacity development, with a strong orientation toward social utility and open knowledge exchange.

Appendix B3 Lean Visionary BMC

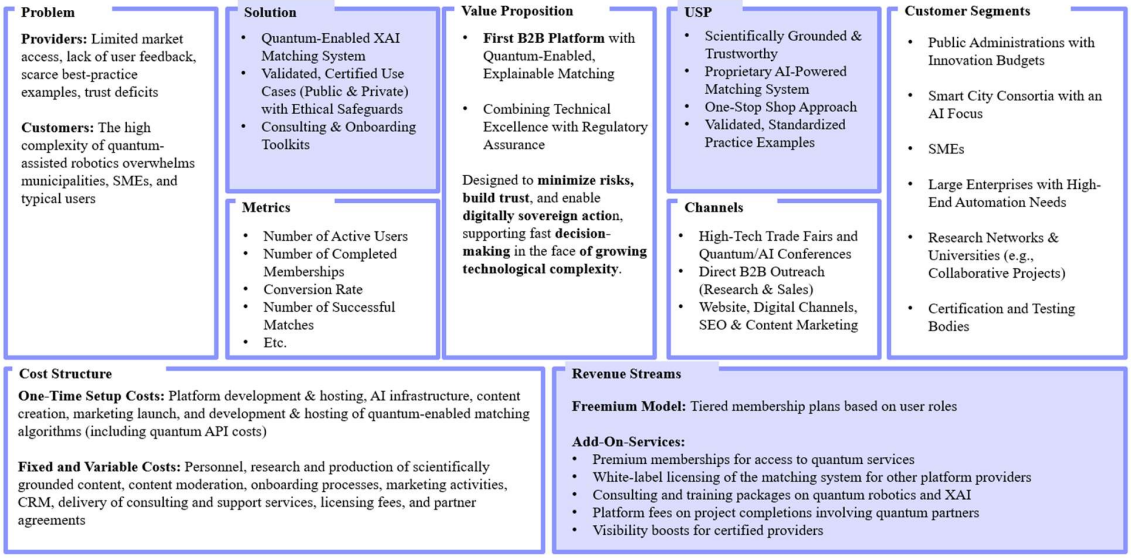


Figure 5 Lean Visionary BMC (Source: Own illustration)

Lean Visionary: Explores future-facing roles including real-time analytics, autonomous stakeholder onboarding, and API integrations for AI-based matchmaking.

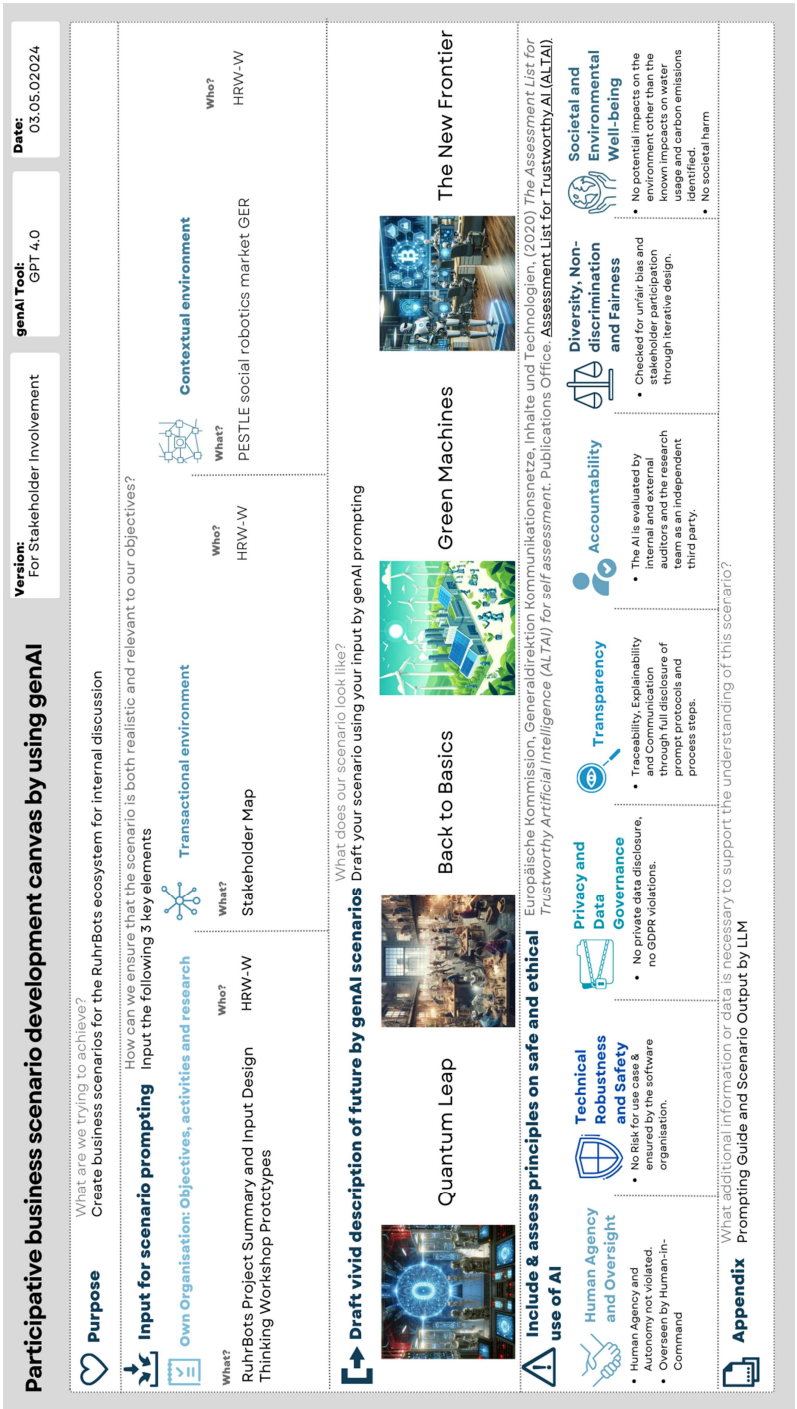
Appendix B4 Non-Profit Visionary BMC



Figure 6 Non-Profit Visionary BMC (Source: Own illustration)

Non-Profit Visionary: Extended beyond service delivery toward a civic technology enabler and adaptive co-creation.

Appendix C Prompting Canvas



For further information see Roth et al (2024)

CAN GREEN INNOVATIONS ENHANCE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE?

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Keywords: sustainability, new product introductions, brand equity, market share attraction model, staggered difference-in-differences model

Description: This project examines how sustainable new product introductions influence brand equity and market performance, and how these effects vary across competitive, institutional, and consumer contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sustainable New Product Introductions (SNPIs) have become increasingly prevalent as firms respond to rising consumer demand for sustainability. Despite this trend, empirical evidence linking SNPIs to tangible market performance outcomes remains limited, with prior research focusing largely on attitudinal outcomes such as brand perceptions. Addressing this gap, this study examines whether and how SNPIs influence parent brand equity, defined as the incremental value a brand name adds to product performance in the marketplace. Drawing on signaling theory and the social goodwill perspective, we argue that SNPIs function as sustainability signals that can enhance brand equity by conveying firms’ environmental commitment. However, the effectiveness of these signals may vary depending on contextual

conditions that affect their credibility and informativeness. Accordingly, this research addresses four core questions: (1) Do SNPIs enhance parent brand equity? (2) Does parent firm ethical disrepute weaken the impact of SNPIs on brand equity? (3) How does consumers' sustainability orientation shape the effectiveness of SNPIs? and (4) Does the sustainability saturation of the retail environment moderate the SNPI–brand equity relationship? By examining these questions, this study advances understanding of when sustainability-oriented innovations translate into meaningful market benefits and provides a nuanced perspective on the boundary conditions of sustainability signaling.

Method And Data

To address the research questions, we conduct two empirical studies using retail scanner data from the U.S. laundry detergent category. Study 1 employs a market share attraction modeling framework to estimate the parent brand equity of a leading national brand across stores. Using store-level sales data, we model brand equity as the brand-specific intercept that captures time-invariant brand strength net of marketing-mix effects and competitive influences. Building on this framework, we embed an event-study design that exploits the staggered rollout of the brand's first sustainable product line across stores within major retail chains. We estimate causal effects using a group-time treatment effects approach, which allows us to compare changes in brand equity before and after the SNPI across treated and not-yet-treated stores. Study 2 extends the analysis to subsequent SNPIs introduced between 2018 and 2019 by multiple brands across the 12 largest U.S. retail chains, which together account for over 60% of category sales. We estimate market share attraction models with brand–retail chain–county fixed effects to assess the generalizability of the results and to examine moderating effects. Together, the two studies provide robust evidence across different launch contexts and levels of analysis.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal that SNPIs have a positive and statistically significant effect on parent brand equity, demonstrating that sustainable product innovations can generate tangible market performance benefits. In Study 1, the first-time launch of a sustainable product line leads to meaningful brand equity gains for the parent brand, supporting the view that SNPIs act as effective sustainability signals. Study 2 confirms the generalizability of this effect across multiple brands and retail chains. However, the findings also highlight important boundary conditions. First, the positive impact of SNPIs is significantly weakened for brands whose parent firms face greater ethical disrepute, suggesting that sustainability signals are less credible when firms have a history of ethical criticism. Second, the effectiveness of SNPIs varies with the retail environment: as the share of sustainable products in a retailer's assortment increases, the incremental signaling value of introducing an additional sustainable product diminishes, consistent with a ceiling effect. In contrast, our analyses do not provide evidence that consumers' sustainability orientation moderates the effect of sustainable new product introductions on brand equity. Overall, the results indicate that while SNPIs can enhance brand equity, their effectiveness depends critically on firm-level credibility and market-level sustainability saturation.

Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to the literature on new product innovation and sustainable consumption. First, it is among the first to provide causal evidence that SNPIs enhance brand equity, a key market-based performance outcome, thereby extending prior research that has largely focused on attitudinal measures. Second, by integrating signaling theory with the social goodwill perspective, the study identifies critical boundary conditions that shape

the effectiveness of sustainability signals. In particular, it demonstrates that parent firm ethical disrepute undermines the credibility of SNPIs, highlighting the importance of environmental legitimacy for sustainability-driven innovation success. Third, the findings reveal a ceiling effect in sustainability signaling at the retail level, showing that SNPIs are less effective in highly saturated sustainable assortments where distinctiveness is reduced. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that firms should view sustainability not as a standalone product attribute but as a coherent, organization-wide strategy. Managers can maximize the returns to SNPIs by strengthening firm-level ethical credibility and by strategically introducing sustainable products in retail contexts where sustainability signals remain distinctive. Collectively, the study advances theory and offers actionable insights into how firms can leverage sustainability-oriented innovation to build long-term brand value.

DETAIL WITH DISCIPLINE: CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AS A BUFFER AGAINST PREANNOUNCEMENT RISKS

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Keywords: New product preannouncement (NPPA), Corporate governance, High-tech industry, Event study

Description: This study demonstrates that in today's information-rich market environment, highly specific new product preannouncements (NPPAs) can reduce short-term stock returns, but strong corporate governance mitigates these effects by enhancing the credibility of detailed disclosures.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In recent decades, new product preannouncements (NPPAs) have been widely viewed as effective signaling tools that reduce uncertainty and enhance shareholder value by providing specific information about upcoming products. However, as capital markets have become increasingly information rich and investors have gained access to broader financial and nonfinancial disclosures, detailed forward-looking statements are subject to greater scrutiny and skepticism. In this context, highly detailed preannouncements may heighten investor attention to potential risks and managerial motives rather than reduce uncertainty. Building on this shift in the information environment, this research examines whether greater preannouncement specificity leads to

negative short-term stock market reactions and whether strong corporate governance mitigates these effects by strengthening disclosure credibility.

Method and Data

We examined NPPAs issued by U.S. publicly traded high-tech firms between 2006 and 2024. Preannouncements were identified from LexisNexis and matched with stock return data from the Center for Research in Security Prices (CRSP), accounting data from Compustat, and corporate governance measures from MSCI ESG ratings, yielding the final sample of 314 preannouncements. We employed an event study methodology and computed cumulative abnormal returns over a (-5,5) window using the Fama-French-Carhart four factor model. Preannouncement specificity was measured based on whether the announcement disclosed the product name, price, and launch date. Corporate governance was captured using MSCI's governance pillar score. We tested our hypotheses using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with controls and conducted robustness checks using alternative measures and event windows.

Summary of Findings

We find that more specific NPPAs lead to negative short-term abnormal stock returns. However, this negative effect is significantly attenuated for firms with strong corporate governance, indicating that governance enhances the credibility of detailed disclosures and shapes investor reactions.

Key Contributions

This research challenges the prevailing view in the NPPA literature that greater specificity uniformly enhances shareholder value by showing that, in today's information-rich environment, more specific disclosure can generate negative short-term market reactions. By identifying corporate governance as a key boundary condition that restores disclosure credibility, the study

advances the NPPA, voluntary disclosure, and impression management literatures. Managerially, the findings underscore the importance of calibrating disclosure specificity rather than assuming that more detail is always beneficial. Also, we suggest that both managers and investors should evaluate preannouncement content in conjunction with firms' governance quality.

References are available upon request.

FROM COMPLEXITY TO CONTROL: A DECISION TREE APPROACH TO MANAGING MARKETING PERFORMANCE IN NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Keywords: Decision Tree Analysis, Scenario Planning, New Product Development, Management Tool, Uncertainty and Risk Management

Description: This paper proposes a decision-tree-based management framework that integrates scenario planning to support the valuation and adaptive control of new product development projects under uncertainty.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How can new product development projects be valued and managed in increasingly complex and uncertain environments while maintaining transparent and decision-relevant performance evaluation?

Method And Data

This study adopts a conceptual and analytical research design. Building on prior literature in marketing performance management, investment valuation, and innovation governance, the paper develops an integrative framework for valuing and managing new product development projects under uncertainty.

The framework is illustrated through a hypothetical new product development case that demonstrates how scenario planning and decision tree analysis can be applied across sequential development and market phases. The case serves as an illustrative application to model discrete and continuous risks, managerial decision points, and alternative project paths within a decision tree structure.

Probabilities and cash flow assumptions are based on plausible, literature-consistent parameterizations and expert-based reasoning that reflect typical uncertainty profiles in innovation projects. The analytical emphasis lies on demonstrating the internal logic, transparency, and decision relevance of the proposed approach rather than on empirical estimation or statistical inference.

Summary of Findings

The analysis demonstrates that traditional valuation approaches commonly used in marketing and innovation management are ill-suited for new product development projects characterized by high uncertainty and complexity. Such projects involve multiple interdependent decision points over time rather than a single all-or-nothing investment decision at one point in time. As a result,

static metrics such as ROI or conventional discounted cash flow models provide limited guidance and fail to reflect the staged and adaptive nature of managerial decision-making.

Applying the proposed framework shows that scenario planning helps structure complex environments into decision-relevant uncertainties, which can then be integrated into a decision tree logic. Decision tree analysis explicitly captures sequential decision points, discrete development risks, continuous market uncertainties, and managerial options such as continuation, delay, modification, or abandonment.

The illustrative application further reveals that the primary value of the approach lies not only in a single project valuation but in the ongoing generation of control-relevant information. By making assumptions, risk drivers, and decision consequences transparent over time, the framework supports continuous monitoring, learning, and adaptive management of new product development projects rather than producing a one-off valuation outcome.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper contributes to marketing research by advancing the methodological toolkit for marketing performance management in contexts of high uncertainty and complexity. It reframes new product development from a single investment decision to a sequence of interdependent managerial choices over time. In doing so, the study challenges the dominance of static performance metrics such as ROI and traditional discounted cash flow models, which inadequately reflect the staged nature of innovation decisions.

A key conceptual contribution lies in extending the existing decision tree analysis toolkit for marketing and innovation contexts. While decision trees are not new, prior applications often

focused on development-stage risks and treated the market phase as an aggregated average outcome, overlooking its volatility. This paper advances the method by integrating scenario planning for input generation and fully modeling the market phase within the decision tree structure. This integration enables the explicit modeling of discrete development risks, continuous market uncertainties, and managerial flexibility within a unified decision logic.

From a managerial perspective, the paper demonstrates how marketing performance evaluation can move beyond one-off valuation outcomes toward ongoing steering and learning. The proposed approach provides transparent, control-relevant information that supports adaptive decision-making throughout the development and market phases of new products, thereby strengthening accountability and strategic alignment amid uncertainty.

HOW PRICE SENSITIVE IST AI? QUANTIFYING THE SYNTHETIC BIAS IN WILLINGNESS-TO-PAY ESTIMATION

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Keywords: Generative AI, Market Research, Willingness to Pay, Pricing, Synthetic Bias

Description: This study assesses the potential of large language models (LLMs) to generate valid willingness-to-pay estimates by comparing synthetically generated responses with real data from incentive-compatible auction mechanisms, highlighting systematic biases and pricing implications.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Accurately measuring consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) is essential for pricing decisions, as it enables the derivation of demand functions and the identification of profit-maximizing prices. While traditional methods such as the Becker–DeGroot–Marschak (BDM) mechanism (Becker et al., 1964) provide incentive-compatible WTP estimates, they are resource-intensive and difficult

to scale. Survey-based approaches, by contrast, are easier to implement but often suffer from hypothetical bias, the tendency of respondents to overstate WTP in scenarios without real consequences. The rise of generative AI and large language models (LLMs) offers a new, scalable alternative for WTP estimation. Although LLMs have been shown to replicate economic patterns like downward-sloping demand, their validity for pricing research remains unclear. This study addresses that gap by comparing synthetic WTP data generated by LLMs to real WTP elicited via the BDM mechanism. We introduce synthetic WTP as a third category of measurement, alongside hypothetical and real WTP, and define the deviation between synthetic and real values as synthetic bias. We investigate whether LLM-generated WTP exhibits systematic bias relative to real, incentive-compatible benchmarks. Moreover, we examine how the use of synthetic WTP affects pricing decisions, including optimal prices, sales volumes, and expected profits.

Method and Data

To evaluate the validity of LLMs for estimating WTP, we conducted two studies comparing synthetic and real WTP values. Real WTP was elicited using the incentive-compatible BDM mechanism in a field setting with 191 student participants. Each participant was matched with a "synthetic twin" generated by an LLM, simulating their demographic and attitudinal profile. Study 1 focused on a vegan Bio Energy Ball, and Study 2 on a Dubai-style chocolate. Participants stated their maximum WTP in the BDM auction, followed by a random price draw determining actual purchase. This mechanism ensures truthful WTP revelation. Alongside WTP, we collected demographic and psychographic data, such as desire to consume and product liking. To generate synthetic responses, we employed structured prompts embedding age, gender, study

program, and product attitudes. The prompt simulated the BDM procedure, asking LLMs to state a price they would be willing to pay. This setup enabled a direct, participant-level comparison between real and synthetic WTP estimates across two product categories.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal a significant synthetic bias in WTP estimates generated by LLMs. In both studies, synthetic WTP values were systematically higher than real, BDM-elicited WTP. In Study 1 (Bio Energy Ball), the mean synthetic WTP exceeded the real value by €0.36 (+22.3%), and in Study 2 (Dubai Chocolate), by €1.30 (+63.7%). Confidence intervals did not overlap, and t-tests confirmed these differences ($p < 0.001$). The mean absolute percentage error across both studies was 61.6%. Distributional analysis showed that synthetic WTP values had greater dispersion. While Study 1 showed a moderate correlation with real WTP ($r = 0.249$; $p = 0.017$), Study 2 did not ($r = 0.128$; $p = 0.205$). Kolmogorov–Smirnov and likelihood-ratio tests rejected distributional equivalence in both cases ($p < 0.001$). In pricing simulations based on logit demand models, optimal prices derived from synthetic WTP were 4.2% (Study 1) and 11.1% (Study 2) higher than those from real data. Resulting profit estimates were overstated by up to €2,556 (+85.8%). These results demonstrate that even seemingly small biases in LLM-generated WTP can translate into substantial overestimation of demand and profitability, particularly in high-margin settings, potentially leading to suboptimal pricing decisions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes four key contributions to marketing research and pricing practice. First, we introduce a novel third category of WTP measurement: synthetic WTP, generated by LLMs. This

extends the traditional dichotomy between real (incentive-compatible) and hypothetical (survey-based) WTP methods and provides a conceptual foundation for future research on AI-generated consumer data. Second, we benchmark synthetic WTP against real WTP obtained through the BDM mechanism in a controlled experimental setting with matched samples. This enables the first systematic quantification of synthetic bias, the systematic deviation between synthetic and real WTP. Third, we show that although LLMs replicate key economic patterns such as downward-sloping demand, they consistently overestimate optimal prices, quantities sold, and profitability. These distortions have direct implications for managerial practice: relying on synthetic WTP for pricing decisions may result in inflated forecasts, suboptimal pricing, and lost revenue. Fourth, we demonstrate that synthetic WTP may still be valuable for early-stage pricing research, for example in scenario analysis or hypothesis generation. By providing a structured validity assessment of LLM-generated WTP data, our study offers guidance on when synthetic data can support pricing decisions, and where it falls short as a substitute for real, incentive-compatible measurement.

References are available upon request.

LINE EXTENSIONS AND CONSUMER CHOICE BEHAVIOR: THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND PRICE

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Keywords: Line extensions, Sustainability, Pricing, Discrete Choice Experiment

Description: This study examines how conventional versus sustainable line extensions shape consumer choice and brand portfolio dynamics, using a discrete choice experiment and counterfactual simulations to show that sustainability and price differentially influence market expansion, consumer switching, and within-brand cannibalization.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms frequently rely on line extensions to access new market segments within an existing product category (Aaker & Keller, 1990), as this strategy entails lower risk and cost than launching a new brand or expanding an existing one (Farquhar et al., 1992; Smith & Park, 1992). One option to implement a line extension is a vertical upward extension, which introduces a new product at a higher price/quality level under the same brand (Boisvert & Ashill, 2022). Sustainable upward extensions signal an enhanced product quality while offering environmental benefits, making them strategically attractive.

This study concentrates on three effects of implementing sustainable (upward) line extensions: Market expansion (consumer entry or exit), switching (consumers shifting from or towards a competitor), and cannibalization effects (shifting within the own brand). Building on this, we propose three research questions: *(1) How can the effects of line extensions on market expansion, switching, and cannibalization be decomposed? (2) To what extent will sustainable line extensions influence market expansion, switching, and cannibalization effects compared to conventional line extensions? (3) To what extent will line extensions with the same vs. a higher price than the parent brand influence market expansion, switching, and cannibalization effects?*

Method And Data

To address the research questions, we used a discrete choice experiment (N = 844) with one control group (no line extension) and four treatment groups varying by extension type (conventional vs. sustainable) and price positioning (parity vs. premium). Each treatment scenario presented a single line extension alongside the parent brand with one price level, implemented through a conditional pricing technique (Orme & Chrzan, 2017) to isolate extension and price effects. With this research, we adapt the idea that preferences elicited through DCEs can be compared even when the studied options differ across versions in the number of attribute-level compositions (Keller et al., 2021) within a single study. By leveraging emerging trade-off decisions, hierarchical Bayes sampling techniques enable the estimation of individual preferences, providing valuable insights into the impact of modifications in attribute levels and forecasting choice probabilities in product selection contexts. We employed a covariate-extended hierarchical Bayes logit estimator and counterfactual simulations to decompose expansion, switching, and cannibalization effects.

Using the individual preferences derived from the posterior distribution of our covariate-extended hierarchical Bayes estimator, we simulate the percentages of respondents who pick one of three brands and four brands, respectively.

Summary of Findings

Our preliminary results show that while switching rates for sustainable extensions are moderate, cannibalization effects are substantially lower, particularly for sustainable upward extensions, which exhibit the highest switching-to-cannibalization efficiency. Additionally, sustainable line extensions perform marginally better in market expansion, indicating that sustainability can increase overall market potential. This pattern suggests that sustainability functions as a category-defining cue that expands brand schemas rather than triggering an internal substitution.

Price positioning further shapes these dynamics. Extensions priced at parity with the parent brand achieve higher market shares and switching rates, maximizing consumer reach and adoption. In contrast, premium-priced extensions significantly reduce cannibalization, appealing to more selective segments and preserving core brand offerings. Notably, despite lower overall volume, sustainable upward extensions generate the most efficient switching by attracting consumers from competitors rather than from within the brand. Together, our preliminary findings indicate that consumers interpret sustainability and price not only as functional attributes but also as categorical signals that guide brand classification and choices. Sustainable (upward) line extensions, therefore, represent a strategically efficient brand architecture tool, enabling firms to introduce sustainable products while expanding markets and minimizing internal competition.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper contributes to marketing research and practice in various ways. Firstly, we examine how sustainable versus conventional line extensions affect market expansion, switching, and cannibalization, thereby advancing understanding of how firms can embed sustainability without undermining brand portfolio performance. Our findings show that sustainable upward extensions, while generating lower sales volume, achieve greater differentiation and significantly reduce cannibalization, making them a strategically efficient option in portfolio consolidation contexts. This extends research in strategic brand management and sustainable product design. Practically, we offer strategic guidance for brand managers in FMCG firms striving to integrate sustainable alternatives without increasing their brand portfolio complexity. Secondly, the study links categorization processes to behavioral outcomes in line extension decisions. We conceptualize sustainability as a category-defining cue rather than a mere product attribute, demonstrating that sustainability signals reshape consumer classification and reduce within-brand substitution, particularly when aligned with price positioning. Thirdly, we contribute to methodology by combining a five-condition discrete choice experiment with a covariate-extended hierarchical Bayes model, allowing us to isolate pricing and sustainability effects within a single estimation framework.

References are available upon request.

NEOPHOBIA MEETS NOVELTY: FOOD CUES, PERCEIVED RISK, AND DARK KITCHENS ADOPTION

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Keywords: *Dark kitchens; Food quality; Food authenticity; Food hygiene; Perceived risk; Consumer neophobia*

Description: This study investigates how food quality, authenticity, and hygiene shape consumer adoption of dark kitchens, revealing that quality is a consistent driver of ordering intention, hygiene influences intention indirectly by lowering perceived risk, and neophobia strongly amplifies risk perceptions that suppress adoption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

Dark kitchens represent a digitally mediated and delivery-only food service model that challenges conventional mechanisms through which consumers evaluate food services. The absence of physical service environments, direct human interaction, and visible food preparation processes heightens uncertainty and raises questions about how consumers form adoption

intentions. Prior research has largely framed dark kitchen adoption through a risk-reduction lens, emphasizing hygiene and safety as primary determinants of consumer trust. However, as dark kitchens increasingly become embedded within mainstream food delivery ecosystems, it remains unclear whether perceived risk continues to dominate consumer decision-making or whether food-related value cues exert stronger influence.

Accordingly, this study investigates how perceived food quality, food authenticity, and food hygiene shape consumers' intention to order from dark kitchens, both directly and indirectly through perceived risk. Further, it examines consumer neophobia as a boundary condition that intensifies risk perceptions in response to this novel service model. The central research question guiding this study is: *How do food-related cues and consumer neophobia jointly influence perceived risk and ordering intention in the context of dark kitchens?* By addressing this question, the study seeks to clarify whether adoption decisions are primarily driven by uncertainty avoidance or by value-oriented evaluations of food attributes.

METHOD AND DATA

This study adopts a quantitative, empirical design using survey data collected from consumers with prior experience ordering from dark kitchens in India. Data were gathered through a self-administered online questionnaire employing convenience sampling. The final sample comprised 253 valid responses from urban consumers aged between 18 and 35 years, representing Tier 1 to Tier 3 cities. All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature and operationalized on five-point Likert-type scales.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data, given its suitability for theory development, prediction-oriented research, and models

involving mediation and moderation effects. The analytical procedure followed a two-step approach: assessment of the measurement model to establish reliability and validity, followed by evaluation of the structural model to test direct effects, mediation via perceived risk, and moderation by consumer neophobia. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to assess the significance of hypothesized relationships. This approach enabled a robust examination of how food cues, risk perceptions, and individual differences jointly shape dark kitchen adoption intentions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that perceived food quality and perceived food authenticity exert strong and significant direct effects on consumers' intention to order from dark kitchens. In contrast, perceived food hygiene does not directly influence ordering intention. Instead, hygiene operates indirectly by reducing perceived risk, which in turn negatively affects intention. Notably, perceived risk does not mediate the effects of food quality or authenticity, suggesting that these cues function as value-enhancing attributes rather than as mechanisms of uncertainty reduction.

Consumer neophobia emerges as a critical psychological factor that heightens perceived risk. Individuals with higher levels of neophobia report stronger risk perceptions associated with dark kitchens. However, neophobia does not directly suppress ordering intention, indicating that elevated risk awareness does not necessarily translate into behavioral resistance when strong food-related value cues are present. Overall, the results suggest that while risk remains relevant, it plays a secondary role compared to intrinsic evaluations of food quality and authenticity. As dark kitchens mature within digital food ecosystems, consumer decision-making appears increasingly driven by perceived value rather than by efforts to minimize uncertainty.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it challenges the dominant assumption that perceived risk is the central mechanism driving adoption in digitally mediated food services. By demonstrating that food quality and authenticity directly shape behavioral intention, the study repositions risk as a contextual factor rather than a primary driver. Hygiene is shown to function as a threshold expectation essential for legitimacy but insufficient as a differentiator thereby refining existing models of food service evaluation.

The study also advances understanding of consumer neophobia by showing that it amplifies risk perceptions without necessarily constraining adoption behavior. This finding suggests a shift from risk-avoidance logic toward value-based decision-making in increasingly normalized digital food contexts. From a managerial perspective, the results indicate that dark kitchen operators should foreground food quality and authenticity in their communication strategies, while maintaining hygiene as a non-negotiable operational standard rather than a promotional focus. Collectively, the study positions dark kitchens as a meaningful context for rethinking how trust, value, and intention are formed in digitally mediated service environments.

References are available upon request

PERCEIVED FIT IN THE CONTEXT OF LINE EXTENSIONS: EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCT'S DIMENSIONS AND RELEVANCE FOR FMCG BRANDS

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Keywords: Line extension, Perceived fit, Dimension, FMCG brands, Qualitative-empirical research

Description: This paper examines how perceived fit is understood and applied in FMCG line extensions, drawing on insights from semi-structured interviews with managers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Line extensions (i.e., products introduced within an already established product category) are a common growth strategy for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) brands, yet research on their success factors remains limited. While prior studies have extensively examined category extensions (i.e., products introduced in a new product category), line extensions have received considerably less attention, despite their high relevance in practice.

One success factor that has repeatedly been shown to positively influence extension evaluations is the perceived fit between the extension and the parent brand. However, the perceived fit between an extension and its parent brand has not yet been examined in depth, especially in the context of line extensions.

Existing research offers heterogeneous definitions and measurement approaches for perceived fit, resulting in an inconsistent and fragmented understanding of the construct and its dimensions. Moreover, it remains unclear which factors make perceived fit particularly relevant for a line extension and its parent brand, as only a few studies have examined brand, extension, and consumer influences. Against this background, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What is perceived fit in the context of line extensions? and (2) In which settings is perceived fit relevant?

Method And Data

Given the limited prior exploration of perceived fit and the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the construct, this study employs a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with FMCG managers. Previous research has largely focused on the

consumer perspective and has frequently relied on survey-based measures, offering only limited insight into the construct's characteristics. The managerial perspective provides insights into real-world decision-making, as managers are closely involved in the development and marketing of line extensions and regularly balance brand considerations with consumer needs and responses. Accordingly, the empirical setting is the FMCG sector, where line extensions are common and part of daily business practice.

Using a combination of judgmental and snowball sampling, 29 brand, product, and marketing managers from the beauty care, food and beverages, and home care sectors were selected for the study. Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached and were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

For data analysis, MAXQDA was used, following a deductive-inductive two-cycle coding approach. The analysis started with descriptive coding to structure the data and was followed by axial coding to identify relationships and develop broader categories and subcategories.

Summary of Findings

The preliminary findings suggest that perceived fit is understood as the extent to which a line extension aligns with the parent brand's core, that is, the brand-specific characteristics that shape consumer associations (e.g., packaging style or price positioning). A high perceived fit is achieved when these associations are consistently conveyed by the extension, with the brand's existing products in the category (i.e., core range) serving as a reference. Accordingly, perceived fit comprises three dimensions that capture the degree of overlap between the extension and the core range in terms of target group, benefits, and required resources.

The results further indicate that the importance of perceived fit varies across contexts. Specifically, the analysis identifies seven brand-, product-, and consumer-related factors that

shape the role of perceived fit in the FMCG sector. A higher level of fit tends to be more critical for brands with lower (vs. higher) brand strength, higher (vs. lower) price positioning, and smaller (vs. larger) product portfolios. In addition, perceived fit plays a more important role for product categories characterized by higher (vs. lower) development effort and lower (vs. higher) purchase frequency, as well as for consumers with higher (vs. lower) involvement and older (vs. younger) age.

Key Contributions

This study advances the academic literature on line extensions in several ways. First, it offers a comprehensive conceptualization of perceived fit that provides a more robust foundation for future operationalizations of the construct. Second, the study contributes to categorization theory by clarifying how line extensions are linked to parent brand categories and by providing insight into the underlying processes that shape consumer categorization. Third, the research identifies contextual variables that influence the relevance of perceived fit, helping to refine empirical research designs and open avenues for future research.

The study is also highly relevant for brand and product managers. First, the perceived fit dimensions help generate new ideas for line extensions by highlighting which product characteristics can be adapted while staying true to the brand core. Second, the identified dimensions make perceived fit more tangible and actionable, enabling managers to identify potential misfits early on and minimize the risk of failed launches. Third, the identified contextual factors help managers evaluate whether a high fit is required or if a more experimental approach is viable. This allows for more targeted innovation strategies aligned with brand goals and market realities.

References are available upon request.

THE FINANCIAL AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF ANNOUNCING NON-FUNGIBLE TOKENS (NFTs)

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Keywords: non-fungible tokens, NFT, event study, firm value, marketing-finance interface

Description: This research conducts an event study to explore the conditions under which firms' NFT announcements lead investors to reward or penalize them.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Through blockchain technology, NFTs represent an emerging opportunity for firms in which they can leverage their brand elements to develop innovative digital products that provide value to consumers based on their rarity, uniqueness, and utility. Although many firms have developed and announced NFTs in recent years, the market continues to operate without accurate insight regarding the value of these products and how they should be designed and retailed. As investors assess the long-term implications of firms' marketing activities, their perspective is invaluable since it directly affects stock price (i.e., firm value) and can give strategic guidance to firms for the future. Our research explores the impact of NFT announcements on the stock returns of publicly traded firms. By doing so, we are able to establish the conditions under which NFTs enhance (or damage) firm value. Our work is the first to empirically explore these questions, as existing NFT research has primarily been conceptual in nature.

Method and Data

We utilize business newswire services to collect NFT announcements made by publicly traded U.S. firms (121 in total). We then employ the event study methodology to estimate the change in a firm's stock price as a result of the announcement of its NFT. We then regress this change against several hypothesized predictors in addition to control variables, to explore which factors lead firms to witness different financial effects than others. We also employ the Heckman procedure to control for self-selection bias.

Summary of Findings

From a theoretical perspective, we contribute to signaling theory by finding that investors' informational asymmetry is not only reduced by firms' NFT announcements (which reveal these innovative products for the first time), but also by the specific strategies that firms reveal through these announcements. From a managerial perspective, our work suggests that firms should be careful when designing and retailing NFTs. We find that firms are rewarded specifically when bundling in-real-life (i.e., physical) capabilities with an NFT, choosing a blockchain that utilizes the proof-of-stake consensus mechanism when minting an NFT (as opposed to proof-of-work), or auctioning/selling their NFT (as opposed to offering it for free).

Statement of Key Contributions

For academics, our research adds significant knowledge to the area of digital product development and innovation. It carefully reviews and examines how firms have approached an emerging technology (i.e., blockchain technology) and utilized their brand elements to offer a new type of product (i.e., NFTs) that aims to provide various types of value to consumers. We also offer a variety of new research directions that academics can approach in the future.

For non-academics, our research provides first-of-its-kind insight to for-profit firms. Our event study provides a direct analysis of firms' NFT announcements and strategies, so that firms can understand how to approach NFTs effectively. It provides them guidance on what types of features (i.e., capabilities) they should bundle with their NFTs, which type of blockchain they should utilize (as each has different environmental/sustainability impacts), where they should retail NFTs to consumers, and whether they should offer NFTs for free or sell/auction them to consumers.

The Impact of Inclusive Design Product Extensions on Existing Consumers' Response Toward the Brand

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Keywords: Social innovation, Inclusive design, Moral satisfaction, Self–brand connection, Empathy

Description: This research examines how inclusive-design (vs. traditional) product extensions influence existing consumers' brand responses by eliciting moral satisfaction, contingent on empathy toward the targeted group and self–brand connection.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As firms increasingly pursue inclusive growth, many adopt inclusive design by introducing product extensions tailored to underrepresented groups while retaining their core offerings. Although inclusive design is often framed as socially desirable and strategically beneficial, firms remain uncertain about how such initiatives affect their existing consumers. Prior research on brand extensions suggests that serving new or dissociative user groups can alienate core customers by threatening identity signaling or brand distinctiveness. At the same time, work on inclusive design suggests a general favorable response. This tension raises a fundamental question: How do existing consumers respond when a brand introduces an inclusive-design product extension?

We propose that inclusive design extension can enhance, rather than threaten, existing consumers' brand responses by eliciting moral satisfaction—a self-relevant positive emotion arising from perceiving morally praiseworthy action. Building on research on self–brand connection, we argue that consumers who feel connected to a brand may experience its inclusive action as self-relevant, producing vicarious moral satisfaction. However, we further propose that this effect is contingent on two boundary conditions: consumers' empathy toward the targeted group and their self–brand connection. Together, we clarify when inclusive design extension improves existing consumers' brand responses and when its benefits attenuate.

Method and Data

We test our framework across one preliminary study using secondary data and four controlled experiments. First, we analyze Google Trends data to provide suggestive field-level evidence,

examining whether real-world inclusive product launches are associated with positive changes in brand interest. Next, two laboratory experiments establish the core effect by comparing inclusive-design product extensions with traditional extensions and measuring existing consumers' brand attitudes and purchase intentions. These studies vary product categories and rely on preregistered designs to ensure robustness.

A subsequent experiment examines the underlying psychological process, testing whether moral satisfaction mediates the effect of inclusive design on brand responses. Finally, a behavioral experiment employs a real brand and its actual inclusive product line to examine a key boundary condition. This study measures consumers' voluntary engagement with the brand as a function of extension type and self–brand connection, allowing us to assess whether inclusive design translates into observable behavior in a realistic market context. Together, these studies combine field evidence, controlled experimentation, and behavioral outcomes to provide a comprehensive test of the proposed framework.

Summary of Findings

Across studies, we find consistent support for the proposed framework. The preliminary analysis using Google Trends data shows that inclusive product launches are associated with increased brand interest, suggesting real-world relevance. In controlled experiments, inclusive-design extensions generate more favorable brand attitudes and purchase intentions among existing consumers than traditional extensions. A process test demonstrates that these effects are mediated by moral satisfaction, identifying it as the key psychological mechanism through which inclusive design shapes consumer responses.

Importantly, the benefits of inclusive design are not universal. The positive effect depends on consumers' empathy toward the targeted group and their self–brand connection. In a behavioral study using a real brand, inclusive design increases voluntary brand engagement only among consumers with strong self–brand connection; when self–brand connection is weak, the inclusive-design advantage diminished. Together, these findings show that inclusive design can enhance brand responses among existing consumers, but only when consumers experience the brand's inclusive action as morally meaningful and self-relevant.

Key Contributions

This research advances marketing theory by explaining when and why inclusive-design product extensions improve responses among a brand's existing consumers. We conceptualize inclusive design as a distinctive form of brand extension that signals moral action and demonstrates that its effectiveness operates through moral satisfaction—a moralized positive affect distinct from general positivity. This process is contingent on consumers' empathy toward the targeted group and their self–brand connection (SBC), clarifying mixed findings in the extension and alienation literatures by identifying conditions under which inclusive growth strengthens, rather than threatens, brand relationships. The research further bridges work on empathy, moral emotions, and brand relationships by introducing vicarious moral satisfaction, whereby strong brand ties allow consumers to experience a brand's inclusive action as self-relevant moral behavior.

Managerially, the findings offer actionable guidance for implementing inclusive extensions without alienating core customers. Firms can pretest target groups on empathy, maintain core offerings while adding inclusive variants, and use perspective-taking communications to enhance empathic concern—particularly among high-SBC consumers. The framework also informs social enterprises and policymakers by showing that inclusive initiatives gain support when they elicit

empathy and foster identification. Overall, the research provides a practical roadmap for translating inclusive initiatives into durable consumer–brand relationships.

THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL CAPABILITIES ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND MARKET RADICALNESS OF NEW PRODUCTS

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Keywords: relational capabilities, technological and market radicalness

Description: We explore the role of two relational capabilities--channel management (CM) and customer relationship management (CRM) capabilities--in the technological and market radicalness of new products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

While relational capabilities are the cornerstone of modern marketing practice and theory, there are conflicting claims about their value for breakthrough or radical innovations. On the one hand, firm capabilities in general and marketing capabilities, in particular, have been found to play an important role in technological innovations (e.g., Han, Liu, Zhang, and Nilesen 2023). At the same time, other research has painted a bleak portrait of the role of marketing capabilities and specifically close customer relations in developing radical innovations (e.g., Hamel and Prahalad 1994; Utterback 1994): attention to customers can avert attention to new technologies and emerging markets to stifle breakthrough innovation (Bower and Christensen 1995). Our goal is to explore this conflicting role of relational capabilities in breakthrough or radical innovations. In our work, we distinguish two relational capabilities--one tied to customer relations management (CRM) capabilities and another one linked to channel management (CM) capabilities following

the literature (e.g., Moorman and Day 2016). We also distinguish two dimensions of new product radicalness—technological and market ones (Ozkaya, Droge, Hult, and Calantone 2015; Sorescu, Chandy and Prabhu 2003; Zhou et al. 2005).

Method and Data

We tested our hypotheses with a sample of 111 Dutch B2B firms (Dunn & Bradstreet business directory) from technologically intensive industries that engage in product innovation. Marketing managers or general managers were selected as the key informant.

All constructs were measured at the firm level. To tap technological and market radicalness, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which products introduced by their firms the last three years exhibit significantly different technology and large increase in customer value and new customer benefits respectively with the help of Likert scales from Gatignon et al. (2002) and Chandy and Tellis (1998; 2009). Measures for marketing relating capabilities were derived from Morgan, Vorhies, and Schlegelmilch (2006); We also accounted for the technological and financial resources of the firm, market and technological turbulence, and the firm size (log of number of employees). We explored two outcomes of radical innovations: financial performance of the business unit and sales from radical innovations.

On data purification and checks, after removing items with poor factor loadings in exploratory analysis, the remaining items were entered into confirmatory factor analyses with satisfactory model fit. As the dependent and independent variables were obtained from a single key informant, we tested for common method bias which indicated that the method bias is not a serious concern in the dataset. Our hypotheses were tested using the covariance matrix and maximum likelihood estimation in LISREL 8.80 (Ping, 1995).

Summary of Findings

Our findings show that channel management capabilities reduce while CRM capabilities foster the technological and market radicalness of new products. Our results also show that technological radicalness helps firms grow their revenues from radical innovations though it weakens firm financial performance. In contrast, market radicalness fosters firm financial performance with no effect on revenues from radical innovations.

Key Contributions

We extend marketing strategy and innovation research as this is the first study, to our knowledge, to explore the effects of *two relational capabilities* on technological and market radicalness of new products. A key finding of our work is that relational capabilities have contrasting role in the technological and market radicalness of new products. Prior research has examined the role of marketing resources in general (Moorman and Slotegraaf 1999), the role of product scope (Chandy et al. 2003), the role of outside-in marketing capabilities in technological innovations (Han et al. 2023) and new product performance (Mu 2015), and the role of different marketing resources in radical innovations (Kyriakopoulos et al. 2016). Adding further nuance to past knowledge, we parse out the effects of CRM and CM capabilities.

We also extend the marketing capabilities research that is typically limited to examining the *direct* impact of different marketing resources on overall firm performance (e.g., Krasnikov and Jayachandran 2008; Morgan 2012). Our focus on breakthrough innovation, hence, expands the direct effects view of marketing capabilities on company performance (e.g., Homburg and Wielgos 2022; Morgan et al. 2009). Finally, our work offers some directions to managers for deploying and benefiting from relational capabilities in pursuit of radical innovations.

References are available upon request.

UNFOLD THE POTENTIAL: A WORKSHOP CONCEPT FOR AI-ENABLED BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION

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Keywords: Business Model Innovation, Workshop Concept, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), Business Model Patterns.

Description: This paper proposes a structured five-phase workshop concept that uses empirically grounded AI Business Model Cards to support organizations - especially SMEs - in systematically designing and innovating AI-enabled business models.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly recognized as a strategic technology that reshapes how organizations create, deliver, and capture value. However, widely used business model workshop concepts and frameworks struggle to represent AI's potential to innovate existing business models and support to generate new, diverse Business Models. This creates a practical and theoretical gap: companies may understand the general promise of AI but often lack structured methods to translate AI potential into concrete business model innovations. The challenge is especially relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which depend on innovation for competitiveness but face constraints such as limited financial resources, lack of systematic approaches, and restricted managerial or technical expertise. Against this background, the paper addresses the need for actionable guidance that supports organizations in integrating AI into business model design processes. The guiding research question is: How can organizations be enabled to extend existing or develop new business

models with an AI component? To answer this question, the paper proposes a structured workshop concept that combines collaborative business model development with pattern-based inspiration using a dedicated set of AI Business Model Cards.

Method And Data

This paper adopts a conceptual, design-oriented approach to develop a structured workshop concept for AI-enabled business model innovation based on established literature streams on business model innovation, design thinking, workshop facilitation, and AI adoption. The output is a five-phase workshop process that operationalizes AI-enabled business model development in a replicable format. The workshop phases are aligned with the logic of the design thinking process (Explore, Ideate, Prototype, Test, Realize), enabling both structured progress and iterative refinement. A central design element is the integration of the AI Business Model Cards, which represent 20 empirically grounded AI business model patterns that serve as reusable solution templates and idea triggers. The cards function as “boundary objects” to support interdisciplinary collaboration and to translate abstract AI potential into actionable business model components. During the workshop, participants document the current business model using the Business Model Canvas, identify innovation goals through diagnostic tools (e.g., SWOT, stakeholder mapping), and generate concepts by recombining patterns. Subsequent phases emphasize rapid prototyping and early testing (e.g., canvases, storyboards, role plays), followed by an experimentation roadmap for implementation.

Summary of Findings

The paper’s main outcome is a structured five-phase workshop concept that helps organizations systematically design or redesign business models with an AI component. In Phase 1 (Opening), participants align objectives, establish psychological safety, and document the status quo using the Business Model Canvas, supported by external inspiration such as customer insights or market research. Phase 2 (Target Definition) guides teams to choose

between two pathways: improving an existing business model or creating an entirely new one. For innovation, frameworks like SWOT analysis and stakeholder mapping link strategic issues to specific BMC blocks. For creation, the process begins with customer segments to explore unmet needs. Phase 3 (Ideation & Exploration) introduces the AI Business Model Cards as structured creativity triggers that break cognitive lock-in and stimulate pattern-based reasoning. Phase 4 (Prototyping & Testing) converts ideas into tangible business model prototypes and validates assumptions through stakeholder feedback in the spirit of lean experimentation. Finally, Phase 5 (Experiment Roadmap & Next Steps) consolidates learning into actionable experiments, responsibilities, and success metrics rather than prematurely finalizing a single "perfect" business model. The authors also acknowledge limitations, including limited validation so far and the need for field testing, and highlight future research opportunities for expert reviews and SME applications.

Statement of Key Contributions

The paper contributes to both academic research and managerial practice in three ways: First, it advances the business model innovation (BMI) literature by emphasizing that AI does not merely improve operational efficiency, but fundamentally reshapes the underlying logic of value creation, value delivery, and value capture through data-driven capabilities and continuous learning. This perspective highlights why conventional tools like the Business Model Canvas, while useful, remain insufficient to fully unfold AI's innovative nature. Second, the study provides a methodological contribution by developing a replicable five-phase workshop framework grounded in design science and socio-technical thinking. By integrating pattern-based design knowledge into an interactive workshop format, the proposed approach offers a structured way to move from analyzing a current business model toward generating, prototyping, and validating AI-enabled innovations. In particular, the AI Business Model Cards deliver a practical mechanism for structured inspiration and interdisciplinary

dialogue, reducing communication barriers between business and technical stakeholders. Third, the workshop concept offers strong applied value for practitioners - especially SMEs - by lowering entry barriers to AI-enabled business model development and providing a concrete process that can be adapted to different contexts. Overall, the paper bridges conceptual insights on AI-enabled BMI with implementable guidance, creating a foundation for future empirical validation and refinement.

UNPACKING FOOD PACKAGING: A THEMATIC REVIEW OF DESIGN ELEMENTS AND CONSUMER RESPONSES

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Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Food Packaging, Design Elements, Sustainable Consumption

Description: This study provides a comprehensive thematic synthesis of 140 peer-reviewed articles to organize food packaging design elements into a unified framework explaining their effects on consumer responses and sustainable food innovation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Since food purchase decisions are often habitual and involve limited information processing, consumers typically enter retail settings without well-formed preferences, rather than engaging in extensive information searches beforehand. In this context, packaging functions as an immediate heuristic that guides choice at the point of purchase. Packaging design comprises multiple elements, which collectively impact consumer behavior. However, the existing literature remains fragmented across various disciplines and topics, lacking an integrative framework to explain how different design elements – such as color, shape, and imagery – systematically influence consumer responses. To address this gap, this study conducts a systematic review of 140 peer-reviewed articles. The central research question examines how packaging design elements can be organized into a coherent and hierarchical thematic framework that accounts for their effects on consumer expectations, perceptions, evaluations, and behaviors. In addition, this research investigates how these elements can be strategically leveraged to influence dietary choices, sustainable consumption behaviors, and consumer adoption of food innovations. By synthesizing prior research into descriptive, visual, physical, and operational themes, this study provides a structured knowledge base that supports strategic communication, as well as consumer-centric and sustainability-oriented packaging innovation in the food sector.

Method and Data

Literature was identified through searches in Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost Business Source Ultimate, limited to English-language peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in the

Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List. A structured keyword search covering packaging design, food and beverage contexts, and consumer responses was conducted on April 1, 2024, yielding an initial pool of 12,977 records. After removing duplicate records, the remaining articles were screened at the title, abstract, and full-text levels following the PRISMA guideline, resulting in a final sample of 140 articles.

The core analytical approach is an inductive thematic analysis, allowing themes to emerge from the reviewed articles rather than imposing predefined classifications. Each article was analyzed to capture its primary research focus based on research questions, hypotheses, and key findings. Initial thematic labels were then developed. These themes were iteratively compared and refined through multiple coding cycles to reduce overlap and enhance conceptual clarity of thematic clusters. Through repeated cycles of consolidation, a hierarchical taxonomy comprising main research themes and their subthemes was established. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of certain studies, some papers were assigned to multiple thematic categories.

Summary of Findings

Four core research themes are identified: descriptive, visual, physical, and operational elements. Descriptive elements focus on textual cues, such as eco-related and ethical claims, nutritional information, labeling formats, framing strategies, and linguistic or geographical indicators. Across these studies, informational cues often operate through cognitive processing and halo effects, shaping consumer perceptions of food healthfulness, quality, and sustainability, sometimes at the expense of objective accuracy.

Visual elements represent the most extensively studied theme and encompass food and non-food imagery, anthropomorphic designs, color, typeface, transparency, and layout features. Findings

consistently show that visual aesthetics influence product expectations, attention, and sensory perceptions through mechanisms such as elements congruency, processing fluency, and affective responses.

Physical elements, including packaging material, texture, shape, and size, highlight the role of tangible and tactile cues. This stream demonstrates that packaging material and texture can affect perceived food naturalness and quality, while shape- and size-related biases may distort portion quantity perception and consumption judgments.

Operational elements, though least examined, reveal how functional features such as resealable packaging and easy-handle devices influence consumption monitoring, portion control, and food waste reduction. Collectively, the findings highlight packaging as a multidimensional communication and usage system that influences consumer affect, cognition and behavior.

Key Contributions

This study provides the first comprehensive thematic synthesis of food packaging design, positioning packaging as both a communication channel and behavioral trigger. By systematically reviewing 140 peer-reviewed articles, the study consolidates a fragmented literature into a coherent four-theme framework encompassing descriptive, visual, physical, and operational packaging elements.

From a theoretical perspective, the framework bridges disconnected research streams in marketing, consumer psychology, and sensory science. Moving beyond isolated examinations of individual cues, it offers an integrative structure that enables the joint consideration of multiple packaging elements and their distinct mechanisms. Importantly, the synthesis highlights

underexplored domains, particularly physical and operational elements, that offer promising avenues for future research on dietary behavior, sustainability, and consumer adoption of food innovations.

From a practical perspective, the thematic taxonomy translates complex academic insights into actionable guidance for designers, product developers, and marketers. It clarifies how different packaging elements serve complementary roles: descriptive and visual elements influence attention and perceptions, whereas physical and operational features more directly influence consumption, portion control, and food waste. For policymakers and non-profit organizations, the framework provides evidence-based directions for promoting healthier and more sustainable food choices through design interventions such as clear labeling, sustainable materials, and resealable packaging.

Digital Marketing, Social Media and Online Platforms

UNMASKING THE MACHINE: AI DISCLOSURE, AUTHENTICITY, AND FRAMING IN AI INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Keywords: AI Influencers, Disclosure, Authenticity, Message Framing, Source Framing

Description: We establish that AI disclosure undermines influencer's authenticity and reduces consumer engagement and examine how framing strategies mitigate this effect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As AI influencers increasingly populate social media feeds, questions about how consumers perceive and respond to these non-human agents become more urgent. While AI-generated personas offer scalability, consistency, and creative flexibility, they also evoke scepticism because they lack the lived experiences that typically underpin influencer authenticity. This tension becomes particularly salient when the influencer's artificial nature is explicitly disclosed. The present research examines whether disclosing an influencer as AI-generated diminishes consumer engagement, and if so, whether this effect arises from reduced perceptions of both influencer authenticity and message authenticity. Moreover, the research investigates whether strategic communication choices, specifically the way messages are framed and the persona the AI influencer adopts, can restore authenticity and counteract the negative impact of disclosure. By integrating theories of authenticity, persuasion knowledge, and source-message congruency, this work seeks to understand how consumers process AI-generated content and whether the authenticity deficit associated with disclosure can be overcome. The inquiry is motivated by a rapidly evolving influencer landscape in which marketers must balance the ethical expectation of disclosure with the practical necessity of maintaining audience engagement.

Method And Data

The research employs three experimental studies to test the effects of AI disclosure and explore ways to mitigate its consequences. The first study uses a between-subjects experiment to determine whether disclosing an influencer as AI-generated reduces engagement relative to a non-disclosed control. The second study strengthens the comparison by contrasting an AI-disclosed influencer with a human-disclosed influencer, thereby isolating the impact of artificial identity on authenticity perceptions. Participants view a realistic social media post and complete measures of influencer authenticity, message authenticity, and engagement, allowing for the testing of a sequential mediation process. The third study introduces a 2 x 2 design in which message framing (emotional versus rational)

and source framing (idiocentric versus allocentric) are manipulated to assess whether congruency between persona and message style can offset the authenticity penalty produced by disclosure. Across all studies, participants are recruited from a diverse online panel, manipulation checks ensure realism and validity, and relevant covariates, including scepticism toward influencers and AI, are controlled. Together, these studies provide a rigorous empirical foundation for evaluating both the presence of a disclosure penalty and the potential for framing strategies to mitigate it.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal a consistent pattern, that is, disclosing an influencer as AI-generated significantly reduces consumer engagement. The first study establishes this initial disclosure penalty, showing that even minimal disclosure information can prompt audiences to distance themselves from the content. The second study replicates this effect and uncovers the psychological process that drives it. When consumers learn that an influencer is artificial, they perceive the influencer as less authentic, and this diminished authenticity extends to the message itself. The resulting decline in message authenticity ultimately lowers engagement intentions. This serial pathway demonstrates that authenticity operates as a transmissive mechanism, flowing from the influencer to the content in a way that shapes behavioral responses. The third study offers an important qualification, that is, the negative effects of AI disclosure are not inevitable. When the influencer's persona aligns with the style of the message, such as an allocentric AI delivering a rational, fact-based appeal or an idiocentric AI delivering an emotional, narrative one, authenticity perceptions recover, and engagement improves. These results show that strategically crafted congruency can ease the authenticity deficit created by disclosure.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature on digital persuasion and AI-mediated marketing by demonstrating that AI disclosure is a consequential element of influencer communication, one that directly shapes authenticity perceptions and behavioral engagement. The work identifies authenticity as the central mechanism linking disclosure to consumer response, advancing theoretical understanding by revealing a sequential process in which authenticity attributed to the influencer transfers to the message and ultimately influences engagement. The research also offers a novel integration of message framing and source framing, showing that their congruency can counteract the negative effects of disclosure. This finding broadens source-message matching theory by applying it to AI-generated communicators, highlighting how persona design and communication style jointly shape authenticity. For practitioners, the results provide timely guidance; although ethical standards increasingly require transparency, such disclosure carries engagement costs, unless matched with coherent communication strategies. By aligning an AI influencer's persona with an appropriate message style, marketers can restore perceived authenticity and maintain the effectiveness of their campaigns. In doing so, this research bridges theoretical insight with practical relevance in the rapidly evolving domain of AI-powered influencer marketing.

"When Social Media Turns Divisive: How Polarization Impacts Brand Reputation and Abnormal Rate of return: A Case of Vaccine Companies

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Keywords: Polarization, Text Analysis, Brand Reputation, Rate of return.

Description

The research paper have examined the effect of polarization at social media measured from unstructured text data from telegram using custom built dictionary on rate of return and brand reputation of companies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Social media which is important marketing tool for companies have become a key platform for people to express their views and advocacy. However, due to various such echo-chamber it has also become polarized. Such polarization expressed at social media create an implication for organizations that uses it for marketing purposes. As user-generated content in the form of comments and discussion boards is produced in real time, it serves as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) about brands. When such e-WOM is positive, it can enhance brand image and improve financial performance. However, negatively valanced content, particularly when embedded in polarizing contexts, can harm brand equity. Therefore, such assertions leads to research gap that needed to assess that, polarization directed towards organization at social media can measured effectively and whether polarization have any measurable organization effect such as financial and non-financial. In such regard to we aim answer following three key research questions.

RQ1: *How can the social media polarization and brand as non-financial effect can be measured from social media*

RQ2: *What is effect polarization on financial outcomes of organization*

RQ3: *What is effect polarization on brand related outcomes of organization*

Data and Method

The present research have collected social media unstructured text data from Telegram platform's groups and channel using application programming interface (API). The dataset for analysis have been prepared by first identifying dominant brands being discussed using name entity recognition model of Spacy. The analysis suggests that vaccine companies of Moderna and Pfizer are most dominant in our overall social media dataset (composed on 2 millions posts). By following such, we have extracted Telegram posts in which both of companies (Moderna and Pfizer) are discussed. The dataset was further resampled on daily basis by taking average. Secondly, we have collected daily closing share price data on Pfizer and Moderna by matching dates with textual data using yahoo finance API. The Fama Frech Three Factor model is used to develop abnormal rate of return on the companies. To measure the polarization as constructs TextBlob lexicon is used and to measure brand reputation custom built dictionary is developed. Finally, to assess effect of polarization on rate of return and brand reputation fixed effect panel model with standardized co-variance is used.

Summary of Findings

The results of our model 1 (rate of return) shows that, Polarization ($p<0.00$, $\beta=-0.0019$) and brand reputation ($p<0.000$, $\beta=-0.0019$) at lags 3 significantly affect rate of return. Further, our interaction model suggest brand reputation affect the rate of return at lag 3 ($p<0.000$, $\beta=-0.0025$) but polarization except lag 3 affect ARR at daily (p<,0.000, $\beta=0.0077$) and at lag 5 ($p<0.05$, $\beta=0.0115$) and lag 7 ($p<0.000$, $\beta=-0.0043$). The result on our second model (brand reputation) suggest that, polarization have at daily ($p<0.000$, $\beta=2.7059$) lag 3 ($p<0.000$, $\beta=0.2053$) lag 5 ($p<0.000$, $\beta=-0.2899$) and lag 7 ($p<0.000$, $\beta=0.1069$). The same results have also been found in interaction model. The results suggest important implication. While reputation in both main and interaction model affects negatively to the ARR, polarization on other hand have positive effect at lag 3 in main model, daily and at lag 5 in interaction effect model. But, it has negative significant effect at lag 7 ($\beta=-0.0043$). This suggest that, when polarizing information and signals on both vaccine brands persist for a week, it can lead to significantly negative effect on the ARR

Key Contributions to Academe and Practitioners

Our research offers contributions to academic literature and managerial practice. For academic literature, we advances field of information signaling theory by empirically demonstrating role of social media polarization acting as signal that can affect brand reputation and financial performance. By developing a novel brand reputation dictionary grounded in Erdem & Swait (2001) framework, this study provides a new methodological approach for analyzing brand equity in dynamic, real-time information environments. Finally, It also extends theoretical understanding by positioning polarization as a critical construct within asymmetric information markets offering nuanced perspective on role of social media in shapes brand outcomes.

For practitioners, it highlights three actionable insights. First, it emphasizes the strategic importance of addressing social media driven polarization, especially for companies operating in socio-politically sensitive sectors such as healthcare and climate change. Our findings demonstrate that, polarization can disrupt information flows, damage brand reputation, and negatively affect abnormal stock returns. Second, the research provides a practical tool of dictionary-based framework to monitor brand reputation in real time enabling managers to detect early warning signals and respond proactively. Third, for public sector leaders and policy makers, the study underlines the need to recognize reputation and polarization as critical antecedents in stakeholder relationships.

"I HAVE SOCIAL MEDIA, BUT WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT MY AUDIENCE?": A CASE STUDY OF A SMALL MUSIC CHARITY TRANSFORMING SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYTICS INTO ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

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Keywords: Social Media Analytics, Charity Music, Psychographics, Text Analysis
Description: This study presents a case study of a small music charity, deriving audience psychographics from social media data.

ABSTRACT

Many small organizations struggle to derive insights from social media data. This study demonstrates a case study of a small music charity enabling rapid and intuitive psychographic profiling of its audience with social media data. The user-generated content from Twitter provided a snapshot of audience mindsets and attitudes, while that of YouTube offered a glimpse into audience interests. The findings offer an integrated view of audience psychographics critical for product development and marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Music has long been employed in philanthropic activities (Plotinsky 1994; Angell 2014). Since the surge of charitable initiatives prompted during the First World War, charitable organizations have employed musical events to raise money for good causes as well as attract potential donors (Angell 2014). The success of these organizations primarily relies on the donations they secure, but fundraising remains a major challenge amid increasing competition. Therefore, it is not surprising that the marketers at these organizations seek effective ways to appeal to their audiences (Xu, Mehta, and Dahl 2022).

Effective marketing starts with aligning customer needs with the organization's capabilities (McDonald and Payne 2006), and knowing who their customers are, what makes them tick, and how they make choices in their lives can help organizations tailor their

offerings to better address their customer needs. For this reason, psychographics – people's less apparent emotional and psychological traits – have long been of interest to marketers (Wolburg and Pkrywczynski 2001). Traditionally, the search for this insight was achieved by structured surveys or qualitative methods like focus group discussions and interviews (Pitt, Bal, and Plangger 2020). These methods can be resource-intensive and thus are not readily viable for small-scale organizations. Owing to the widespread popularity of social media, it is ever more becoming a source of capturing knowledge from customers (He et al. 2019). Social media serves as an outlet for people to express their thoughts, ideas, opinions, emotions, and comments freely (Yuan et al. 2018) and provides marketers with the opportunity to listen to their audiences candidly (Arrigo, Liberati, and Mariani 2021). Schwartz et al. (2013) examined Facebook status updates from users who have also taken personality tests to demonstrate how language use on social media can elicit personality insights. Mogaji, Farinloye, and Aririguzoh (2016) investigated comments on bank advertisements from Facebook to identify key factors that influence customer attitudes toward bank brands. He et al. (2019) studied people's online discussions regarding laptop choices on Twitter to identify customer knowledge. Arrigo, Liberati, and Mariani (2021) analyzed Facebook likes given by users interested in pharmaceutical products and health to model magazines and TV channel preferences. Yet previous studies have primarily focused on analyzing data collected from a single platform and have not explored the psychographics of the audience in the charity music space leveraging social media data.

In this study, we perform a cross-source data collection and analysis across different social media platforms to mine comprehensive psychographic insights into supporters of charitable music. Each social media platform offers unique features and generates varied types of data; hence, the current study derives psychographic insights from different social media platforms by identifying 1) frequently used words in user-generated content and 2) other popular media consumed to infer the interests of the charitable music audience. This study aims to shed light on the underlying psychographic qualities of the charitable music audience and demonstrate how basic analytics techniques can be adopted by small-scale organizations with limited resources and technical skills to deliver valuable audience insights.

METHODOLOGY

Manchester Camerata is a British chamber orchestra charity determined to make positive changes in peoples' lives through music. They are keen on understanding lifestyles

and motivations which unify their audiences beyond demographics but have faced challenges in achieving this due to constrained resources.

The current study collected and analyzed various forms of user-generated data from social media accounts run by the charity to infer their audience's interests, values, attitudes, and lifestyle choices. In our study, we focused on data collected from Twitter and YouTube. Instagram and Facebook were removed from consideration due to their strict requirement for explicit user permission to access a user's data in API including publicly shared information.

Twitter

Twitter API V2 allows legitimate access to Twitter's database of tweets, user-related information, and other fundamental data features. There are different subscription tiers available for users. The basic access was purchased for one month to collect tweets.

Twitter users can write a brief description of the account that will appear on their Twitter profile. It is one of the first details the viewers see about an account and a summary of information that defines who they are. It usually contains a key message that is informative and self-expressive. For example, a user bio "A husband, father, actor, director, & a climate justice advocate with an eye out for a better, brighter, cleaner, & more hopeful future for all of us." (Ruffalo 2025) implies that "family", "career", "environment", and "positive change" are of great value to the account holder.

In this study, we accessed the Twitter API V2 to collect user bio. First, we extracted the list of followers of Manchester Camerata. Using their unique ids, we queried and collected user bios of the followers if they existed. A total of 15,811 user bios were collected from Twitter API. The extracted user bios were tokenized and preprocessed to eliminate irrelevant texts, such as punctuations, email addresses, URLs, emojis, timestamp, non-English characters using Python Gensim and NLTK library. Lemmatization was applied to reduce words to their root form. For example, the words "programming" and "program" were reduced to their root form "program". Stopwords – a set of commonly used words (i.e. a, the, is, are, etc.) – were also removed. The preprocessed tokens were converted into a dictionary mapping each word to a unique id. The tokenized user bios were then converted to a bag-of-words (BoW) format, which is a numeric feature vectors recording word frequencies. Words that most frequently appeared in user bios were easily identified by the word frequencies

obtained from BoW representation. The most frequently appeared words in user bios were regarded as commonly expressed self-described traits.

It was also assumed that recent tweets reflect users' latest interests or concerns. Therefore, we retrieved the followers' recent five tweets to understand the topics they are currently interested in. Before the retrieval, accounts with an excessive number of tweets posted were assumed as business accounts or bots generating automated tweets. Automated tweets are highly unlikely to carry personal qualities, so they were excluded from consideration.

Due to the limited number of tweets allowed to be pulled (10,000 tweets per month), accounts that were in the mid-range in terms of the number of tweets posted were considered in the analysis. It was assumed that accounts with a realistic number of tweets posted would belong to actual users rather than bots. Recent five tweets of those users selected were retrieved from Twitter API. Approximately 10,000 tweets were obtained and processed for analysis.

YouTube

YouTube Data API provides access to data resources pertinent to channels, comments, members, playlists, subscriptions, and videos. Viewers on YouTube subscribe to channels that publish content of their interests, and they are notified of new video releases on the channels that they subscribe to. Subscription lists can inform us what topics viewers are interested in. We examined publicly shared subscription lists of Manchester Camerata subscribers. Out of ~1,500 subscribers, only 328 subscribers publicly disclose their subscription lists. 328 subscribers subscribe to 134,649 channels; YouTube currently allows users to subscribe up to 2,000 channels initially, with the potential to increase as their channel grows, which means the size of data can grow exponentially. Therefore, we randomly selected 100 unique subscribers assuming that they are the representative group of the entire audience.

After retrieving subscription lists of sampled subscribers, further details about each channel were collected for analysis. First, subscribed channel descriptions were collected and frequently appearing words were detected. YouTube channels include short descriptions about who they are, what content they create, and why people should watch their channel. Channel descriptions may contain keywords describing topics that the subscribers find intriguing. Secondly, popular channels subscribed by sampled subscribers were identified. Identifying popular channels subscribed to by the commenters may provide valuable insights into their

interests and preferences as well as potential content that they want to see in the future. Thirdly, the topic categories of popular channels were investigated.

RESULTS

Twitter User Bios

A total of 15,811 user bios were collected and analyzed to identify frequently appearing words. Given that all charity music supporters enjoy music, the word ‘music’ was eliminated from the analysis. Music-related terms were frequently encountered; for example, different job titles in the music industry as well as words related to classical music. There were several words hinting at someone’s values toward life observed: people, young, social, health, culture, charity, together, and others (Fig. 1).

The top 30 most frequently appearing words in Twitter user bios are summarized as below.

1. ‘manchester': 1106,
2. 'director': 699,
3. 'arts': 664,
4. 'classical': 584,
5. 'composer': 580,
6. 'base': 540,
7. 'work': 505,
8. 'uk': 503,
9. 'new': 494,
10. 'orchestra': 461
11. ’live': 421,
12. 'love': 410,
13. 'conductor': 404,
14. 'teacher': 391,
15. 'world': 364,
16. 'musician': 363,
17. 'people': 362,
18. 'opera': 357,
19. 'art': 346,
20. 'make': 337,
21. 'lover': 335,
22. 'creative': 326,
23. 'artist': 321,
24. 'professional': 304,
25. 'london': 299,
26. 'theatre': 299,
27. 'life': 294,
28. 'school': 293,
29. 'pianist': 284,
30. 'young': 282,

Frequently used words in user bios covered a broad spectrum of topics, and they were grouped into broader categories based on their semantic meanings in Table 1.

Table 1. Semantic grouping of frequently appearing words in Twitter user bios.

Category	Word
Music	Orchestra, Conductor, Piano, Pianist Musician, Concert, Opera, Classical, Chamber, Producer, Choir, Sing, Violinist, Contemporary, Soprano, String, Cellist, Jazz,
Occupation	Manager, Director, Teacher, Professional, Lead, Business, Artist, Education, Freelance, Writer, University, Head, Management, Founder, Consultant, Trustee, Coach, Student, Research, PhD, Author

Values	New, Live, Love, People, Creative, Life, Support, Young, Community, Service, One, International, World, Social, Culture, Best, Help, Family, Free, Passionate, Provide, Charity, Independent, Group, Interest, Care, Open, Team, Together, Share, Experience
Lifestyle	Health, Digital, Learn, Member, Travel, Home, Mum, Quality, Dog, High, Study, Dad, Youth
Location	Manchester, London, City, West, Local, England
Hobby	Theater, Festival, Musical, Arts, News, Social, Food, Film, Radio, Performance, Dance, Event

Twitter Recent Tweets

As seen in the word cloud generated, it was observed that several words dominated the tweets. Words that describe positive emotions and action verbs like “go”, “look”, “see”, “come” that are frequently used in recommendations were observed (Fig. 2). One possible interpretation is that people tend to post tweets about specific events they have attended and share their experiences.

The most frequently appearing words were grouped into semantic categories (Table 2). Words describing emotions, attitude/mindset, and identity seemed to be the most relevant information that can be extracted from the myriad of words semantically scattered throughout.



Figure 1. Word cloud of frequently appearing words in Twitter user bios.



Figure 2. Word cloud of frequently appearing words in recent tweets.

Table 2. Semantic grouping of recent tweets.

Emotion	Thank, Great, Love, Like, Happy, Excite, Miss, Best, Wonderful, Full, Amaze, Beautiful, Lovely, Hope, Fantastic, Special, Welcome, Sorry, Proud, Incredible, Congratulations,
Attitude/ Mindset	• National, Local, New, Free, Open, World, Explore, Global, Nature, Travel, Culture • Support, Team, Community, Family, Service, Everyone, Home, Together, Care, Charity • Experience, Win, Learn, Start, Life, Health, School, Chance, Yes, Opportunity, Change, Build
Identity	Single, Old, Youth, Dementia, Student, Couple, Mental, University, Child, Son, International

YouTube Subscribed Channel Description

100 sampled subscribers are subscribed to 46,176 channels. The words frequently appeared in the channel descriptions included typical lingo used to welcome viewers and encourage people to like and subscribe to the channels. Words like “channel”, “subscribe”, “welcome”, “like”, “please”, “enjoy”, “join”, “share”, “content”, and “follow” dominated the word cloud, and they were further removed from the chart. Words hinting at people’s interests and lifestyles included “world”, “classical”, “orchestra”, “musical”, “international”, “film”, “art”, and “entertainment” (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Word cloud of YouTube subscribed channel descriptions.

YouTube Subscribed Channel Genres

Analysis of channel information revealed that the sampled subscribers follow a variety of music channels. Some of the commonly subscribed popular channels include

@avrotrosklassiek, @nprmusic, @bach, @deutschegrammophon, @ted, and most of the channels feature classical music (Fig. 4). Topic categories of channels that the audience subscribes to were analyzed, and a histogram was constructed to display the frequency distribution of the topics identified. The vertical axis represents the number of occurrences for each topic of the subscribed channels. The horizontal axis represents different topics arranged in descending order by their counts. Fig. 5 shows that 'Music' was the utmost popular topic that the audience was passionate about. Different music genres such as 'classical_music', 'pop_music', 'rock_music', 'independent_music', 'electronic_music', 'soul_music', and 'jazz' were ranked high. Besides the topics related to music, people showed a keen interest in "lifestyle_(sociology)" content. "lifestyle_(sociology)" is usually related to vlogs that people share their daily lives. Recreational terms like 'entertainment', 'film', and 'hobby' as well as more thought-provoking topics, such as 'society', 'knowledge', 'technology', and 'politics' were also observed.

DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this research demonstrated how social media data can elicit psychographic variables of the audience of a charity music organization without advanced techniques. Undoubtedly, the analysis results revealed that 'music' is a significant part of one's identity, whether it be occupation, lifestyle choices, or means of self-expression.

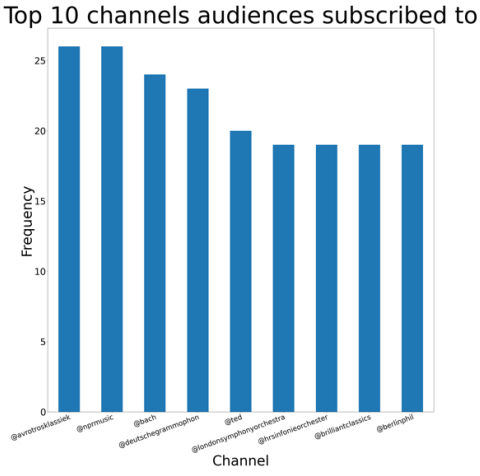


Figure 4. Top 10 YouTube channels subscribed.

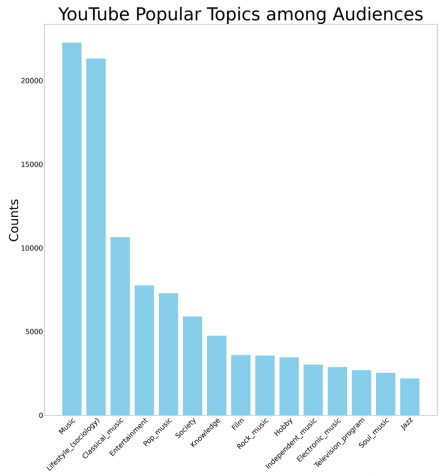


Figure 5. Popular content topics among the audience.

The analysis of user bios collected from Twitter implied that the audience believes that they have a responsibility to create a better society, recognize the importance of community, celebrate cultural diversity, embrace life experiences, and are optimistic about what the future holds. Though the analysis of the recent five tweets of selected users was unable to detect a

strong pattern, terms used to describe feelings, attitudes, and roles were frequently observed. Taking a closer look at terms conveying attitudes and mindsets toward life hinted that the audience carries a strong sense of community, strives for self-enrichment, and comprises cultural explorers. Due to the Twitter API basic tier limit, we were able to collect a total of 10,000 tweets from 2,000 users. Collecting more tweets from a wider group of users is likely to enable clearer insights. The analysis of YouTube subscription lists revealed that the audience enjoys a wide range of music genres beyond classical music. This suggests that the audience is willing to explore a broad spectrum of genres. They are also interested in diverse forms of recreational content, including vlogs, films, and hobby-related content. Studies have shown that engaging prospective donors in creative activities positively influences their donation behaviors (Xu, Mehta, and Dahl 2022). For practice, discovered insights can inspire creative marketing ideas and be incorporated into program curation and delivery.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we present a case study of how a small charity music organization could benefit from social media data to uncover the psychographics of its audience. Using user-generated data retrieved from Twitter and YouTube, we have discovered characteristics that bring the charitable music audience together: 1) they value “community”, “diversity”, “social welfare”, “future-forward”, “embracing life”, and “enrichment”, 2) they are explorers of a wide range of music genres from classical to postmodern to pop music, and 3) they enjoy lifestyle, entertainment, society, and knowledge content. These insights can enable organizations to make data-driven decisions about how to move forward with planning and marketing their offerings. The current study also hopes to encourage small-scale organizations with limited resources to leverage social media data to derive psychographic insights.

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"PEOPLE DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT IN REAL LIFE": NATURAL RESISTANCE TO SOCIAL MEDIA BEAUTY IDEALS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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Keywords: Adolescence, social comparison, beauty ideals, body image and resilience.

Description: This multi-case study examines how natural coping mechanisms evolve across three developmental stages in Estonian girls in response to social media's beauty ideals and appearance pressures.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study explores how natural adaptive mechanisms develop and function across different developmental stages and individual contexts in response to social comparison pressures. The research investigates both universal protective patterns and individualized defensive strategies that emerge without formal intervention. The overarching aim is to understand how adolescent girls naturally develop coping mechanisms to manage appearance pressures, social stressors, and identity challenges associated with social media exposure and peer comparison. The research question examines what specific adaptive mechanisms participants employ to manage social comparison stressors and maintain well-being across different developmental stages. Using qualitative interview analysis and multi-case comparative thematic analysis, the study identifies and categorizes naturally occurring protective strategies related to social comparison processes. Grounded in social comparison theory, this investigation treats adolescents as active agents capable of developing sophisticated self-protective responses rather than passive recipients of social pressure. The study addresses a critical gap in existing research by focusing on how these mechanisms emerge organically rather than through adult-designed interventions or formal programming.

Method and Data

This research employs a multi-case study methodology examining three Estonian girls representing different developmental stages and adaptive approaches: Lotte (age 10), Gunna (age 14), and Maris (age 14). Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to explore each participant's experiences with social comparison challenges, adaptive responses, and protective strategies. Interview topics included self-perception relative to peers, peer relationships, challenging experiences with comparison, coping mechanisms for managing comparison pressures, creative activities, physical practices, and social support utilization. Participants also discussed makeup use as both a response to comparison pressures and a tool for emotional regulation and self-expression. Interview transcripts were analyzed using multi-case comparative thematic analysis, examining patterns within each participant's responses while identifying both universal themes and individual variations across participants. Analysis focused on identifying adaptive mechanisms, protective processes, and defensive strategies specifically related to social comparison management, exploring how similar protective functions manifest through different individual approaches. Original names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and protect participants' identities in accordance with ethical research standards.

Summary of Findings

Analysis revealed sophisticated adaptive mechanisms across all three participants, demonstrating both universal protective functions and individualized implementation strategies. Lotte demonstrated boundary-respectful creative problem-solving, future-oriented acceptance strategies, and collection-based control as primary coping mechanisms. Gunna employed empowered physical transformation through exercise, sophisticated creative expression through art and music, autonomous digital environment management including deleting Instagram, and balanced social participation strategies. Maris utilized strategic social support cultivation, body neutrality as a defensive strategy, activity-based confidence building through sports, and balanced appearance engagement without excessive consumption. Cross-case analysis identified universal protective functions including sophisticated awareness of social comparison processes, creative expression as a central coping mechanism, physical embodiment as a source of agency, and strategic relationship management. Developmental progression was evident from externally supported

experimentation in pre-adolescence to more autonomous decision-making in adolescence. However, both fourteen-year-olds demonstrated distinct adaptive styles despite similar developmental stages, suggesting individual variation in comparison management preferences and multiple valid pathways to resilience that reflect temperament, experience, and environmental resources.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study offers a framework for understanding how natural coping mechanisms evolve across developmental stages in response to social comparison pressures, revealing both shared protective patterns and individualized expressions of resilience that develop without adult intervention or formal programming. The research demonstrates adolescents are active agents developing personalized strategies that reduce psychological harm while maintaining social connection, with adaptive responses varying across individuals and developmental stages. These findings have significant implications for mental health practitioners, educators, parents, and policymakers by enabling strength-based interventions that build upon existing coping capacities rather than imposing predetermined solutions. The study extends social comparison theory by showing progression from externally supported to internally autonomous comparison management while allowing for individual variations, challenging linear developmental models and deficit-focused approaches. It reveals naturally developed, sophisticated comparison management systems that preserve social connection while minimizing harm, emphasizing strategic engagement over avoidance. The multi-case qualitative analysis uncovers complex coping processes that single-case or survey-based methods may overlook. This research shifts the narrative from viewing adolescents as vulnerable subjects requiring external solutions to recognizing the sophistication and agency embedded in their everyday resilience.

References are available upon request.

BEHIND THE CAMERA, INSIDE THE ORGANIZATION: AN UNEXPLORED FRAMEWORK OF INFLUENCER MARKETING CAMPAIGN

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Keywords: Influencer Marketing Campaign, Desire-Rollout-Evaluation (DRE), Qualitative research

Description: This study establishes a systematic, flexible, and organization-centred framework that elucidates the influencer marketing campaign (IMCN) journey from its inception to termination or prolongation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Influencer marketing (IM) has received considerable attention in past research, highlighting its growing relevance, there remain a few shortcomings. Previous research has provided valuable insights into influencer characteristics and their effects on consumer behavior; few studies have examined IM from an organizational perspective. In particular, there has been limited attention to how organizations identify and select an appropriate social media influencer (SMI). This study addresses this gap by establishing a systematic, flexible, and organization-centred framework that elucidates the IMCN process from its inception to termination or prolongation, offering a more holistic understanding of the influencer selection process and evaluating the campaign's efficacy. This study addresses the three overarching research questions: RQ1: What is the rationale behind implementing the IMCN from an organizational perspective? RQ2:

What is the process to recruit and onboard an SMI and roll out an IMCN? RQ3: How does an organization monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the IMCN?

Method and Data

We developed the interview guide and collected the data in semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted both face-to-face and online, with an average length of 35 to 55 minutes. Participants were selected from the electronics industry through convenience sampling. Data collection continued until the 12th interview, at which point theoretical saturation was reached. All the interviews were manually transcribed, and the transcriptions were cross-checked and validated by three doctoral scholars to ensure accuracy. Subsequently, the transcripts were imported into the NVivo software to employ the thematic analysis.

Summary of Findings

The study conceptualised the Desire-Rollout-Evaluation (DRE) framework. The first theme, Desire, explains the rationale behind utilizing IMCN. In line with that, respondents highlighted the importance of staying competitive: *"Even if we are unsure of the ROI, we cannot ignore what the competitors are doing."* – CMO of the organization. Another respondent emphasized shifts in media consumption: *"Consumers are not glued to the TVs anymore. It is all about on-demand content, readily available.... The younger generation uses social media platforms as their primary source of information and entertainment."* From these insights, the study identified key factors that drive organisations to adopt IMCN, including peer pressure, changing media consumption, efficient and wider reach, and diversified media mix. The study identified the second theme, Onboarding and Rollout, which delineates the process of selecting an SMI and rolling out an IMCN. The respondent highlighted that, *"We look beyond the numbers; we look at whether the influencer feels like an organic fit for our brand, whether they are creating trending content, and their knowledge regarding the algorithm."* Along with the

existing factors such as authenticity, homophily, similarity, target audience, credibility, follower count, expertise, reach, and engagement. The study provides unexplored factors such as comic intelligence, geographical location (local/regional/global), influencer's form (Virtual/Human), cultural and social sensitivity, wittiness, storytelling fluency, trend anticipation skills, and algorithm awareness for influencer selection. The third theme, Evaluation, explains the ways to evaluate the efficacy of the IMCN. Respondents indicated the importance of qualitative evaluation, *"If comments show excitement, curiosity, or genuine appreciation, that's a strong indicator that the content connected emotionally,"* said the social media manager. Another respondent emphasizes the importance of quantitative evaluation: *"Conversion doesn't mean buying any electronic item. It could be adding it to the Wishlist, signing up for a product launch, or even visiting our partner retail stores after watching a video."* – Marketing Manager.

Statement of Key Contributions

The proposed Desire-Rollout-Evaluation (DRE) framework articulates a systematic and flexible process of IMCN from its inception to its potential termination or prolongation from an organizational perspective, diverging from the consumer perspective of IM literature (Audrezet *et al.,* 2020; Song *et al.,* 2024). Prior literature emphasizes heavily on the celebrity selection process (Hollensen & Schimmelpfennig, 2013); nevertheless, in light of evolving marketing dynamics, this study offers a comprehensive process of selecting an appropriate influencer for an effective marketing campaign. This study advances Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990) by incorporating new factors for influencer selection. In line with the findings of De Veirman *et al.* (2017), this study reaffirms that having a large number of followers does not indicate that there will be more engagement. Marketers should consider influencers' comic intelligence, geographical location (local/regional/global),

influencer's form (virtual/human), cultural and social sensitivity, wittiness, storytelling fluency, trend anticipation skills, and algorithm awareness.

References are available upon request

BEING REAL OR FEELING REAL? VIDEO INFLUENCERS' AUTHENTICITY STRATEGIES AND CONSUMERS' RESPONSES

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Keywords:
influencer marketing, influencer's authenticity, sentiment analysis, skepticism, altruism

Description:
This research examines how influencer-staged authenticity cues, specifically claims of negotiating preferential treatment for followers, produce paradoxical effects on consumer responses, eliciting both altruistic perceptions that boost purchase intentions and skepticism that reduces purchase intentions but increases engagement, across three studies including sentiment analysis of 70,000 livestream comments, a survey, and an experiment, while influencer popularity moderates these effects.

XTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how video influencers' authenticity strategies, particularly when they claim to secure preferential treatment on behalf of their followers, influence audience perceptions and behavioral intentions. Specifically, we ask: How do these authenticity cues simultaneously evoke perceived altruism and skepticism, and how do these perceptions translate into actions such as purchase intention and commenting behavior? Drawing on cue theory and dual-process models, we conceptualize influencer behaviors as staged cues, which can carry both positive and negative signals. Furthermore, we examine the moderating role of influencer popularity, hypothesizing that high-follower influencers might provoke stronger skepticism, whereas low-follower influencers may foster trust more effectively. Previous research often assumes authenticity cues have uniform effects, overlooking the nuanced psychological processes and contextual moderators. By addressing these gaps, this study seeks to clarify under what conditions audiences interpret influencer actions as genuinely altruistic versus self-serving, and how these interpretations shape engagement and consumption behavior in social commerce environments.

Method and Data

We employed a comprehensive multi-method approach to rigorously examine the dual effects of influencer authenticity strategies on audience responses. First, we conducted large-scale sentiment analysis on 76,674 comments collected from TikTok and Bilibili videos, focusing on posts where influencers negotiated benefits for their followers, allowing us to identify nuanced patterns of audience sentiment and emotional reactions. Second, a survey of 1,100 participants captured perceived altruism, skepticism, and behavioral intentions, while accounting for influencer popularity as a key moderating factor. Third, a scenario-based experiment with 360 participants manipulated authenticity strategies (high, low, control) and influencer popularity (high vs. low) to establish causal relationships. Structural equation modeling, confirmatory factor analysis, and the PROCESS macro were employed to validate measurement reliability, assess mediation effects, and test moderated-mediation models. By combining real-world behavioral evidence, self-reported psychological responses, and controlled experimental manipulation, this triangulated design provides robust and comprehensive insights into the psychological mechanisms through which staged authenticity cues shape audience trust, engagement, and critical scrutiny.

Summary of Findings

Results demonstrate the double-edged nature of influencer authenticity strategies. Perceived altruism positively mediates both purchase intention and commenting behavior, while perceived skepticism negatively affects purchase intention but paradoxically increases comment engagement, reflecting critical evaluation. Influencer popularity significantly moderates these effects: low-popularity influencers enhance altruistic responses, strengthening trust and fostering purchases, whereas

high-popularity influencers intensify skepticism, eliciting more critical comments. Sentiment analysis corroborates these patterns, showing more polarized reactions for low-popularity influencers and generally positive responses for high-popularity ones. Survey and experimental evidence confirm that authenticity cues are interpreted contextually rather than uniformly, producing divergent outcomes. Overall, these findings underscore the complex interplay between perceived altruism, skepticism, and influencer characteristics, highlighting that the same authenticity strategy can simultaneously cultivate trust and trigger critical scrutiny among audiences.

Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions in social commerce and influencer marketing. First, it extends cue theory by conceptualizing influencer behaviors, such as claiming preferential treatment for followers, as staged authenticity cues that actively shape audience perceptions rather than being passive signals. This highlights the nuanced psychological processes by which audiences interpret influencer actions, demonstrating that the same cue can simultaneously evoke trust and skepticism. Second, the study demonstrates that authenticity strategies influence consumer behavior in complex ways, simultaneously fostering trust and positive engagement while also provoking critical scrutiny, depending on how audiences interpret the influencer's actions. Importantly, these mechanisms affect different types of engagement differently: altruism promotes both purchase intention and positive commenting, while skepticism may suppress purchases but increase critical engagement, revealing the paradoxical effects of authenticity. Third, the research uncovers influencer popularity as a key moderating factor, showing that low-popularity influencers are more likely to be perceived as altruistic, whereas high-popularity influencers often trigger greater skepticism. Finally, the study provides actionable guidance for practitioners: influencers and brands can design authenticity cues and tailor messages based on audience size and platform to enhance trust, encourage engagement, and optimize conversion, offering practical insights for navigating social commerce.

BEYOND LIKES: HOW REPLY NETWORKS DRIVE CONTENT CONSUMPTION AND CO-CREATION

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Keywords: Reply network analysis; Bonding social capital (degree centrality); Bridging social capital (betweenness centrality); Status-based social capital (eigenvector centrality); Multilevel hierarchical modeling

Description: This paper examines how conversational reply dynamics on YouTube generate distinct forms of social capital that shape content consumption and co-creation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Digital platforms have transformed audience engagement from passive consumption to interactive participation, yet limited research explains how conversational dynamics translate into engagement outcomes. Prior work typically separates structural network analysis from conversational behavior, overlooking how micro-level interactions scale into macro-level influence.

This study asks: How do conversational reply behaviors generate distinct forms of social capital, and how do these forms shape content consumption and co-creation on YouTube? Drawing on social capital theory, we conceptualize reply networks as sites where bonding, bridging, and status capital emerge through repeated interaction, brokerage, and positional

prominence. We further examine how conversational practices—such as reply depth, interaction breadth, and emotional variation—produce these structural positions.

By focusing on Netflix's official YouTube trailers, where engagement is competitive and highly visible, this research challenges the assumption that high-status users dominate participation. Instead, it investigates whether connectors and brokers play a more central role in sustaining dialogue and collaborative meaning-making within online audiences.

Method and Data

The study analyzes 65 official Netflix trailers on YouTube released between 2024 and 2025, spanning films, series, and documentaries. These trailers generated over 50,000 comments and replies, forming conversational reply networks in which users interact with one another as well as with content.

For each trailer, we construct directed reply networks where nodes represent users and edges represent reply relationships. We operationalize bonding capital using degree centrality, bridging capital using betweenness centrality, and status capital using eigenvector centrality. Conversational practices—including reply depth, breadth of interaction partners, and emotional variation across replies—are modeled as antecedents of these positions.

Engagement outcomes are captured as content consumption (likes) and content co-creation (thread expansion and additional comment contributions). Multilevel models account for users nested within trailers, allowing us to link micro-level conversational behavior to macro-level engagement outcomes across diverse content contexts.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal clear differences in how forms of social capital shape engagement. Bonding and bridging capital are consistently associated with higher levels of co-creation, including

longer threads and increased participation from other users. Users who repeatedly interact or broker across conversational clusters stimulate dialogue and sustain collective sensemaking.

In contrast, status capital is negatively associated with content consumption. Although high-status users occupy structurally prominent positions, their presence does not translate into greater liking behavior and may discourage broader participation. This result contradicts classical diffusion models that emphasize prestige-based influence.

Conversational practices play a key role in generating these outcomes. Reply depth strengthens bonding capital, interaction breadth promotes bridging positions, and emotional variation facilitates brokerage across clusters. Together, the results demonstrate that influence in reply networks emerges from relational connectivity and conversational effort rather than positional prestige alone.

Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it integrates conversational reply dynamics with network analysis, extending social capital theory to online comment networks. Replies are shown to be structural mechanisms through which engagement is generated, rather than isolated expressions.

Second, it challenges status-centric models of influence by demonstrating that prestige-based centrality does not foster participation. Instead, connectors and brokers—those occupying bonding and bridging positions—are the primary drivers of co-creation.

Third, the study offers practical implications for content managers. Encouraging cross-thread interaction and sustained dialogue may be more effective than amplifying high-status users. By shifting attention from visibility to connectivity, this research reframes how platforms and brands can cultivate participatory engagement in competitive digital environments.

BRANDING FROM THE INSIDE OUT DURING TRANSITION: A CO-CREATION MODEL AND CASE STUDY FOR NONPROFITS

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Keywords: Co-creation, Nonprofit branding, Student-generated content, Brand ambassador programs, Social media marketing

Description: This paper presents a three-year participatory case study that adapts a corporate personal branding framework to a nonprofit context through a student-led brand ambassador program.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Higher education institutions face increasing pressure to engage digitally native audiences through branding approaches that are authentic, participatory, and aligned with institutional mission. Traditional top-down branding models have become less effective with Generation Z audiences, who place greater trust in peer-generated content, transparency, and networked communication. While prior research highlights the promise of co-creation and user-generated content in nonprofit contexts, limited empirical work has examined how student-led branding initiatives function as an integrated marketing system over time or how corporate personal-branding frameworks can be systematically adapted to nonprofit environments.

This study investigates how a corporate personal and employee branding framework can be adapted for nonprofit higher education branding through a structured student brand ambassador program. The research examines how infrastructure design, training, platform strategy, and co-creation processes influence institutional branding performance, including reach, engagement, and brand alignment across digital platforms. A secondary objective is to assess how participation in these branding systems contributes to student skill development. The study is guided by four research questions addressing framework adaptation, infrastructure and platform strategy evolution, the branding impact of student-generated content, and the professional development outcomes associated with participation. By addressing these questions, the research responds to calls for system-level, longitudinal analyses of co-created branding in nonprofit marketing contexts.

Method and Data

This research employs a three-year participatory case study design examining the School of Management Brand Ambassadors program at California Lutheran University. Guided by participatory action research principles, the study integrates researchers, students, university leadership, and community stakeholders in the iterative design, implementation, and evaluation of a student-led branding system. The longitudinal case study approach enables examination of branding strategy evolution, governance mechanisms, and performance outcomes across time.

Data collection followed a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data included platform analytics from Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, capturing reach, views, engagement rates, and follower growth across multiple campaigns and academic years. Qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews with 30 current and former student ambassadors, complemented by document reviews, campaign artifacts, and observational data. Interviews focused on branding processes, content strategy execution, collaboration, governance, and perceived alignment between individual and institutional brand objectives.

The adapted branding framework was implemented through four iterative phases: marketing and infrastructure gap analysis, reformulation strategy, tactical implementation, and evaluation. This phased design supported continuous system refinement while generating empirical insights into how co-creation infrastructure and student-led content production operate within nonprofit branding environments.

Summary of Findings

Findings demonstrate that structured, student-led co-creation can significantly enhance nonprofit brand reach, engagement, and authenticity when supported by intentional infrastructure and governance. Across three years, student-generated content drove substantial growth in views and engagement, with Instagram and TikTok consistently outperforming industry benchmarks for education and nonprofit sectors. Early gains driven by viral visibility evolved into more sustainable, audience-aligned engagement as platform strategies matured and content execution became more intentional.

Qualitative findings illuminate the mechanisms underlying these outcomes. Students emphasized the importance of clear guidelines, platform-specific strategy, mentorship, and feedback in enabling effective content creation while maintaining brand alignment. Institutional trust and cross-department collaboration further amplified branding impact. While participation also contributed to the development of marketing, communication, and leadership skills, these outcomes emerged as a complementary benefit of engaging students as active contributors within a structured branding system.

Overall, the findings position co-creation not as an ad hoc content tactic, but as a scalable branding system capable of delivering sustained institutional value while engaging participant networks.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to marketing and nonprofit branding scholarship in three primary ways. First, it extends a corporate personal and employee branding framework into a nonprofit higher

education context, reconceptualizing co-branding as a participatory marketing system rather than a top-down communication approach. The resulting framework offers a transferable model for mission-driven organizations seeking to align individual voices with institutional brand identity.

Second, the research provides rare longitudinal empirical evidence on the branding performance of student-generated content across multiple digital platforms. By integrating platform analytics with qualitative process data, the study advances understanding of how co-created content drives engagement, authenticity, and brand equity over time.

Third, the study offers actionable guidance for nonprofit and higher education leaders on designing sustainable co-creation infrastructure, including training, governance, risk management, and evaluation. While student skill development emerges as an important secondary outcome, the research primarily positions co-creation as a strategic branding capability that simultaneously strengthens organizational performance and participant engagement.

References are available upon request.

Creator Economy: Definition, Scope, and Boundaries

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Keywords: creator economy, creators, platforms, consumer, artificial intelligence

Description: This article proposes a comprehensive definition of the creator economy, the actors and their interrelationships in the creator economy ecosystem, and the influence of AI.

Extended Abstract

Research Question

The rapid rise of the creator economy has fundamentally transformed how value is generated, distributed, and consumed in the digital age. Given that brands and advertisers are heavily investing in the creator economy to grow their businesses and view it as a primary source of attracting and engaging with customers, it becomes essential for academic scholarship to keep pace with the phenomenon's growth.

Yet, academic literature on the creator economy lags and remains fragmented and conceptually unsettled (Peres et al. 2024). A central gap in the literature is the lack of a comprehensive review of the creator economy's terminology, definition, and scope. Existing scholarship often focuses on specific aspects—such as content creation, platform dynamics, or monetization—without integrating them into a coherent framework. This piecemeal approach has led to conceptual ambiguity, making it difficult to delineate the scope and boundary conditions of the creator economy and hindering effective scholarly inquiry and managerial decision-making. This article aims to fill this knowledge gap on what constitutes the creator economy and its boundary condition by addressing the following research questions:

- What constitutes the creator economy, and what are its boundary conditions?
- How can the “creator economy” be comprehensively defined?
- How do the various entities in the creator economy interact with one another?
- What are future research directions and managerial implications for the creator economy?

Method and Data

We begin by identifying scholarly work and practitioner reports that offer definitions or descriptions of the creator economy. As our objective is to provide an overall framework and definition of the concept, we exclude articles that do not define the creator economy (e.g., articles focusing on the consequences of the creator economy, such as influencer marketing). We found 28 publications, including published articles, working papers, and practitioner reports. We synthesized the content of these articles and collected one or more definitions of the creator economy listed in each work. The 28 works we reviewed contained 34 definitions of the creator economy. These varying definitions underscore the need to craft a comprehensive definition of the concept. We analyzed the text of these definitions and then took the elements found in most of the definitions to construct the definition of the creator economy:

Summary of Findings

We define the creator economy as *"a dynamic digital ecosystem in which creators leverage online platforms and tools to create, distribute, and monetize diverse content to an audience".* Our comprehensive definition of the creator economy incorporates the essential elements of its ecosystem and eliminates those that diverge from the central idea of what constitutes a creator economy and covers all the essential concepts that are part of the creator economy.

Key Contributions

We attempt to provide a comprehensive definition of the creator economy. To do so, we review the existing literature on the creator economy, which attempts to define it and describe its key elements. We then critically review the existing definitions and arrive at a comprehensive definition of the creator economy. Additionally, we offer a detailed conceptualization of the creator economy, which encompasses the various entities within the ecosystem and their

interactions with one another. We also review the variety of terminologies in the creator economy literature and clarify what does not constitute a creator economy. Emanating from our conceptualization, we offer managerial implications and future research directions. We hope that our conceptualization and explication of the terminology advances future academic research and clarifies marketing strategies and policy perspectives for effective management of the creative economy.

Designing to Engage: The Role of Multimodal Cues in Nonprofit YouTube Video Thumbnails

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Keywords: Nonprofit Marketing, Social Media Engagement, Multimodal Communication, YouTube Thumbnails, Emotional Cues

Description: This study investigates how the interplay between visual emotional expressions, color attributes, and textual sentiment in YouTube thumbnails relates to user engagement for nonprofit organizations.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study examines how emotional and aesthetic cues in nonprofit video thumbnails and captions are jointly associated with user engagement on social media. We conceptualize thumbnail features not as independent signals, but as interdependent elements that relate to how emotional information is perceived and elaborated. While prior research has largely examined facial expressions, textual sentiment, and visual attributes in isolation and

predominantly in commercial or crowdfunding contexts, this study centers on mission-driven settings and explicitly foregrounds cross-modal dynamics on social media.

Specifically, we examine how visual aesthetics moderate the relationship between emotional cues and engagement. Accordingly, we address the following research question: How do thumbnail colorfulness, color complexity, and emotional tone in video captions moderate the relationship between facial emotional expressions and user engagement in nonprofit video content?

Method and Data

The dataset collected for this study comprises 6,050 YouTube videos produced by the top 23 NPOs listed by Forbes, including the American Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse, and UNICEF. It spans a nine-year period from 2011 to 2020 to ensure a robust longitudinal representation of nonprofit digital communication. For each video, we collected the thumbnail image, caption text, and view count. To focus specifically on human emotional cues, only thumbnails containing at least one detectable human face were retained for analysis. Facial emotional expressions in thumbnails were classified into three categories: happiness, sadness, and neutrality. Color attributes were quantified to measure image colorfulness, while image entropy was used to capture color complexity. Caption sentiment was analyzed to classify text as positive, negative, or neutral. These multimodal features were examined using negative binomial regression models to evaluate both the main and interaction effects of visual and textual cues on user engagement.

Summary of Findings

The regression model demonstrated a strong fit to the data, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in user engagement. The findings indicate that while both visual and textual emotional cues are essential for attracting attention on YouTube, their influence is more complex than previously suggested. Positive emotional cues remain the most consistently associated with higher engagement. Thumbnails featuring positive facial expressions and videos with positive descriptions are both linked to increased views. In contrast, negative facial expressions do not show

a clear independent association with engagement, while negative textual sentiment exhibits only a weak positive tendency. This suggests that in nonprofit communication, emotional tone expressed through text may play a different role than emotion conveyed visually.

Interaction analyses further reveal diminishing returns for emotional congruence across modalities. When multiple emotional cues are combined, their joint presence does not amplify engagement and instead appears to weaken the relationship between the primary emotional signal and user response. This pattern suggests that once viewers' attention is captured by a dominant emotional cue, adding additional emotional signals may reduce clarity rather than enhance impact.

Finally, visual aesthetics play an important moderating role. The association between emotional facial expressions and engagement becomes weaker in highly colorful or visually complex thumbnails. These results highlight that emotional signaling is most effective in visually restrained environments where the human face remains the central focal point. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of strategically balancing emotional content and visual design in nonprofit video communication.

Key Contributions

This study advances multimodal communication research by introducing a cross-modal, boundary-condition perspective on emotional signaling in nonprofit social media. Rather than examining visual or textual cues in isolation, this research contributes an integrated framework that conceptualizes thumbnail features as interdependent elements whose relationships with engagement vary across aesthetic and emotional contexts. In doing so, the study extends existing literature beyond dominant single-cue approaches and commercial settings by centering on mission-driven communication.

The findings contribute theoretically by challenging the prevailing assumption that stronger or more emotionally aligned cues are uniformly associated with higher engagement. Instead, this study highlights that emotional associations are contingent on visual design environments, thereby emphasizing the importance of aesthetic moderation in emotional communication. This

perspective reframes emotional effectiveness as context-dependent rather than additive, offering a more nuanced understanding of how multimodal signals relate to audience responses.

Beyond theory, the study offers practical contributions by translating these insights into actionable guidance for nonprofit organizations. It suggests that engagement-related associations are linked not to maximizing emotional intensity or visual richness, but to strategic coherence and restraint. By foregrounding emotional clarity and cross-modal alignment, this research provides a resource-efficient framework for nonprofits seeking to optimize social media communication under constrained budgets.

REFERENCES

References are available upon request.

Title: DEVELOPING TRUST IN ONLINE B2B RELATIONSHIPS

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Keywords: B2B, online, relationship marketing, social media, trust

Description: This study examines trust development between B2B suppliers and customers on social media using a multiple case study of seven B2B firms in China.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How do suppliers leverage social media to develop trust with their customers?

Method And Data

The paper employs a multiple-case study methodology, utilizing qualitative data. The research was conducted in first-tier cities across different regions of China. A qualitative multi-method approach was employed, combining semi-structured interviews, netnography, and documentary analysis. In total, 31 semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior representatives from marketing, SM marketing, sales, and digital departments.

The interview data were analyzed thematically using NVivo, integrating qualitative data from multiple sources to identify patterns and themes within the dataset. Analytical rigor was enhanced through independent coding by three researchers, followed by iterative discussions to reconcile interpretations, identify recurring patterns, and jointly refine second-order themes and higher-level

theoretical dimensions. Following established qualitative data analysis procedures, we first identified first-order concepts grounded in the data, which were then grouped into second-order codes reflecting emerging theoretical patterns through an abductive analytical approach.

Summary of Findings

The study identifies five distinct trust-building enablers that help suppliers in establishing and developing trust in online contexts: 'trusted content', 'partner endorsements', 'social circle of acquaintances', 'high customer stickiness', and 'interpersonal salespeople-customer trust'. Using these interdependent themes, we demonstrate how B2B suppliers seek to develop trust with their customers in online contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study addresses three main gaps in the literature and makes corresponding contributions. First, while trust development in B2B relationships has been extensively examined in offline contexts, it remains underexplored in online settings, where fostering interpersonal rapport is more challenging. Our findings challenge the view that B2B relationships must ultimately be enacted through offline channels, demonstrating instead that B2B relationships can be developed and sustained in online contexts. Second, much of the existing research on trust in B2B relationships focuses on Western settings. By contrast, China is characterized by strong relationship-building norms, including high levels of relationship investment and long relationship duration. This study examines how trust develops and is manifested in the Chinese context, showing how the merging of business and personal social media (SM) platforms creates new opportunities for trust development. Third, prior B2B SM research predominantly concentrates on platforms such as LinkedIn, with limited attention to other platforms, such as WeChat. This study demonstrates how

the distinctive functions of Chinese SM platforms support the development of trust in B2B relationships.

DRIVING ENGAGEMENT: THE S-SHAPED ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAPTION LENGTH

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Keywords: Caption, Engagement, Social Media, Text Length

Description: We examine the impact of caption text length on engagement and find a cubic S-shaped relationship moderated by media type, with optimal lengths (e.g., 1,405 characters for videos) yielding engagement increases of up to 24.4%.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Social media posts consist of a main content and a caption, that is a text that accompanies and frames the post. In contrast to the main content, the caption receives little systematic attention from creators, but it can be changed and adapted efficiently—especially with the help of large language models. The question we are investigating is: How does the caption text length affect the engagement of social media posts? We study the potentially non-linear effect of caption length and its moderation by media type (video, sidecar, photo). Based on conflicting findings in previous literature that assumed linear or quadratic effects, we propose a cubic S-shaped relationship grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Resource Matching Theory.

Method and Data

We analyze a preregistered large-scale field data set consisting of 75,396 Instagram posts from 934 top influencers.

We measure engagement as the average of standardized ln(likes+1) and ln(comments+1), with robustness checks using ln(likes) separately. Caption text length is measured in characters. We control for media type, posting time, influencer fixed effects, and further post characteristics.

We estimate the effect of caption length on engagement using OLS regression with polynomial terms and a Generalized Additive Model (GAM), testing for the significance of the cubic relationship.

Summary of Findings

The results confirm our assumption that the effect of caption text length on engagement follows a cubic S-shaped pattern, moderated by media type. The relationship shows an initial decline to a local minimum, followed by an increase to a local maximum, and a subsequent decline. Optimal caption lengths vary by media type; for example, the optimum for video posts is at 1,405 characters.

Optimizing caption length from the local minimum (e.g., 325 characters for videos) to the optimum can increase engagement by up to 24.4% relative to the interquartile range of the standardized engagement variable. The results remain robust across model specifications and dependent variables.

Key Contributions

In contrast to previous research, which assumed linear or quadratic effects and yielded conflicting results, our study reveals a cubic S-shaped relationship between caption text length and engagement. This finding can explain prior inconsistencies and provides a more nuanced understanding of engagement dynamics.

Our results show social media managers and influencers specific optimal text lengths that vary by media type and substantially outperform commonly used shorter captions. Extending captions to these optima—easily achievable with large language models—offers significant engagement gains. The insights are actionable for influencers, for-profit firms, non-profit organizations, and public campaigns aiming to maximize outreach and impact through tailored caption strategies.

FROM INFLUENCE TO INFAMY: CONSUMER RESPONSES AND MEDIA LEGITIMACY IN COMPANY-INFLUENCER TRANSGRESSIONS

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Keywords: brand transgressions, influencers, media legitimacy, corporate misconduct

Description: This research shows that when companies and influencers jointly mislead consumers, influencers face stronger backlash due to reduced media legitimacy, though certain response strategies can help restore trust.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates who bears the brunt of consumer backlash when companies and influencers jointly mislead consumers. Despite the rise of company–influencer collaborations, little is known about reputational consequences when both parties are involved in transgressions. Traditional transgression research typically focuses on single actors, either the company or the influencer/endorser, making it unclear how blame is distributed when responsibility is shared. The central question is: When companies and influencers jointly violate consumer trust, who suffers greater backlash, and why? The authors propose that influencers face harsher consumer responses than corporate partners. They also explore the underlying mechanisms, particularly the role of media legitimacy, the extent to which journalists portray influencers or companies as credible or blameworthy, and whether influencers can mitigate reputational damage through specific response strategies.

Method and Data

Using an empirics-first, multimethod approach, the authors integrate real-world data, experiments, surveys, and text analysis to examine responses to company–influencer transgressions. The research begins with a natural experiment using social media data from a recent transgression, analyzing over 100,000 consumer and journalist tweets via sentiment analysis and difference-in-differences regressions. Controlled experiments test the role of media legitimacy through randomized scenarios. Additional studies recruit journalists to examine headline framing and influencer response strategies. This multimethod design triangulates across behavioral, perceptual, and textual evidence, allowing the authors to trace the causal chain from media framing to consumer attitudes and to test corrective interventions.

Summary of Findings

Across eight studies, the research consistently finds that influencers face significantly greater backlash than companies when both jointly mislead consumers. This asymmetry is not driven by visibility or prominence but by reduced media legitimacy, the way journalists frame and criticize influencers more harshly than corporate partners. Media negativity toward influencers predicts consumer backlash, as consumers internalize journalistic cues when responsibility is ambiguous. Influencers can regain legitimacy and improve consumer evaluations by engaging directly with critical journalists, signaling accountability under scrutiny.

Key Contributions

This research makes three main contributions. First, it extends the transgression literature by analyzing multi-actor violations, showing that even shared misconduct produces unequal reputational fallout, with influencers punished more severely. Second, it advances influencer marketing research by identifying media legitimacy as a key determinant of consumer backlash, shifting focus from influencer visibility to how the media frames moral responsibility. Third, it contributes to media effects theory by demonstrating that journalistic framing, not coverage volume, drives reputational outcomes. Managerially, the findings urge companies to adopt joint accountability frameworks, influencers to prioritize transparent and media-engaged crisis responses, and journalists to recognize their role in shaping public fairness perceptions.

References are available upon request.

TITLE: FROM PASSION TO PRESSURE: EXPLORING THE STRUGGLES OF LIFESTYLE MICRO-INFLUENCERS ON INSTAGRAM

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Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Digital Labour, Occupational Stress, Authenticity, Instagram.

Description: This paper examines how lifestyle micro-influencers experience occupational stress as personal passion becomes professionalized labour within Instagram's platform economy.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study investigates how lifestyle micro-influencers on Instagram experience and manage occupational stress as personal passion becomes professionalised digital labour. Although influencer marketing research has expanded rapidly, existing studies largely prioritise consumer responses, brand outcomes, and persuasion effectiveness, leaving the psychological and emotional experiences of influencers underexplored (Abidin 2015; Casaló et al. 2020). Addressing this gap, the study asks how Instagram lifestyle micro-influencers perceive and cope with stress arising from authenticity performance, brand expectations, follower relationships, and algorithmic control.

The research is guided by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which explains burnout as a function of sustained job demands exceeding available resources (Bakker and Demerouti 2014), and Transactional Stress Theory, which emphasises cognitive appraisal and coping in response to environmental stressors (Lazarus and Folkman 1987). By conceptualising influencing as a form of platform-mediated digital labour (Glatt 2022), the study examines how authenticity, which is commonly framed as a personal or relational asset in influencer marketing (Audrezet et al. 2020), also operates as a psychological demand. The research, therefore, seeks to advance understanding of stress, burnout, and coping within the precarious influencer marketing digital work.

METHOD AND DATA

This research draws on a qualitative pilot study adopting a constructivist approach to explore the lived experiences of lifestyle micro-influencers on Instagram. Six UK-based micro-influencers were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling, each maintaining between 10,000 and 100,000 followers and actively engaged in brand collaborations. The full study, which is ongoing, expands the research sample size and incorporates additional data sources. Instagram was selected due to its continued strategic relevance within influencer marketing and its emphasis on visual self-presentation and engagement metrics (Jin and Ryu 2019).

Data collection employed a two-week diary-based method, enabling participants to submit written or audio reflections documenting daily experiences of content creation, brand communication, follower interaction, and psychological strain (Bolger et al. 2003; Cottingham

and Erickson 2019). Two participants also completed follow-up semi-structured interviews to provide additional depth and clarification.

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following an iterative coding process that combined inductive insights with deductive engagement with the JD-R model and Transactional Stress Theory (Braun and Clarke 2022). Ethical approval was obtained from Edinburgh Napier University, and all participant data were anonymised to ensure confidentiality and research integrity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that lifestyle micro-influencers experience sustained psychological strain arising from the convergence of commercial demands, follower expectations, and algorithmic uncertainty. Authenticity emerged as a central tension: while it provides meaning, trust, and professional value, it simultaneously requires continuous emotional, relational, and aesthetic labour. Participants reported exhaustion from the need to remain constantly visible and emotionally available to followers within trans-parasocial relationships (Lou 2021), describing ongoing pressure to engage, respond, and perform intimacy.

Algorithmic unpredictability was identified as a major stressor. Influencers felt compelled to post consistently and avoid breaks to prevent visibility loss, often experiencing anxiety and self-doubt when engagement declined. Commercial pressures from brands, including rigid deadlines and engagement-based performance metrics, further intensified emotional labour and reduced creative autonomy.

Although influencers employed coping strategies such as selective brand alignment, boundary-setting, peer support, and income diversification, these resources offered only partial relief, as core stressors remained structurally embedded in platform and industry practices.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes theoretically by extending the Job Demands-Resources model to platform-based influencer labour, demonstrating how authenticity functions simultaneously as a psychological resource and a chronic job demand, intensifying demand-resource imbalance beyond traditional organisational contexts (Bakker and Demerouti 2014; Roczniewska and Bakker 2021). It also extends the Transactional Stress Theory beyond traditional work settings by showing how influencers' stress appraisals are structured by platform algorithms, metric-driven visibility, and reputational precarity, conditions not theorised in the original framework (Lazarus and Folkman 1987).

Conceptually, the study extends research on trans-parasocial relationships by revealing their dual role as sources of emotional fulfilment and sustained psychological burden for influencers (Lou 2021). Practically, the findings highlight the need for systemic change within the influencer ecosystem. Brands are encouraged to adopt more sustainable partnership practices, including flexible timelines and reduced reliance on engagement-based metrics. Social media platforms should address algorithmic exhaustion through greater transparency and creator well-being safeguards. In conclusion, the study underscores the limitations of individual coping strategies

and calls for structural interventions to support influencer well-being within digital marketing systems.

References are available upon request.

FROM STATIC TO DYNAMIC: HOW SEARCH BOX PLACEHOLDER STYLES SHAPE SERENDIPITY AND MEANINGFULNESS ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

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Keywords: Search box, Placeholder style, User agency, Digital platforms

Description: This research shows that meaningful digital discovery emerges not only from search interface design, but from consumers perceived role in serendipitous discovery.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Evolving digital platforms have transformed the ecosystem of retail and e-commerce worldwide. The integration of advanced technologies, including AI, has cluttered the digital platforms with multiple features and information. The search box on the digital e-commerce platforms provides clear and easy access to the desired information. This search box serves as the first point of contact for the consumer to start an interaction by searching for the desired information. Affordance in the search box is mostly provided through placeholder text. The style of the placeholder text in the search box is what this research examines across three experimental studies. Drawing on experiential value theory and regulatory focus theory, we study how micro-level interface design, such as the styles of search box placeholders, shapes consumer experiences in digital commerce. Anticipated outcomes extend the theory by linking micro-design elements to experiential value creation, offering practitioners the insights for e-commerce interface design.

Method and Data

This research consists of three between-subjects online experiments with random assignment. Participants evaluated simulated digital search box interfaces. In Studies 1 and 2, search box design was manipulated (action-oriented, list-based, or static), and participants reported perceived serendipity and meaningfulness. Study 2 additionally measured regulatory orientation. In Study 3, interface design was held constant while user agency was manipulated through framing prompts. Across studies, hypotheses were tested using regression-based mediation and moderation analyses with bootstrapped confidence intervals. Sample sizes ranged from approximately 100 participants per cell.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, we find that dynamic search box designs (action- and list-based) lead to higher perceived meaningfulness compared to a static search box. Mediation analyses show that this effect is explained by increased feelings of serendipity, indicating that dynamic interfaces enhance experiential value by fostering unexpected yet meaningful discovery. Study 2 replicates these effects while introducing regulatory orientation as a moderator. Although regulatory orientation does not significantly moderate the relationship between search interface design, serendipity, and meaningfulness, the main effects remain robust, suggesting that the experiential benefits of serendipitous discovery extend across motivational orientations. In Study 3, we isolate the psychological mechanism underlying these effects by holding the interface constant and manipulating user agency framing. Results indicate that framing the search experience as self-directed increases perceived serendipity, which in turn enhances meaningfulness, demonstrating that experiential value depends not only on interface affordances but also on consumers perceived role in discovery.

Statement of Key Contributions

The study is expected to contribute to the academic marketing literature by introducing a novel conceptual framework that bridges the link between micro-level interface design on digital platforms with the experiential consumer outcomes. By integrating the Experiential Value Theory (EVT) and Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT), we demonstrate over three experiments that micro-level design choices in the search box placeholder (dynamic vs. static) can significantly shape consumers' sense of meaningfulness during online shopping. The rationale for the effect is demonstrated by introducing the feelings of serendipity as a mediator. This combination offers fresh insights, as most of the prior work in this domain has primarily focused on reviews, personalisation and recommendation agents. Our study extends the body of knowledge by providing a mechanism that explains how the subtle micro design elements of a search box interface are a core gateway to digital consumption and can generate experiential value. To account for the boundary conditions, the study has used priming with the regulatory orientation and user agency of the consumers. Overall, the conceptual framework offers a detailed and precise theoretical understanding of digital experience design.

For non-academic stakeholders, the research findings are directly relevant to e-commerce, quick-commerce, ONDC platforms, individual brand platforms, other digital retailers, and platform UX/UI designers. The findings will help the stakeholders move beyond price and assortment as the only differentiating mechanisms on the digital platforms. The subtle micro design elements can also provide differentiation and alter the experiential value of the consumers, making their platform usage more meaningful. Also, the results will help platform stakeholders rethink the increasing importance of user agency, which can foster trust in the platform's usage. In a competitive landscape dominated by algorithm-driven personalisation, our research underscores

the importance of micro-design interventions that shape consumer perceptions of discovery, engagement, and platform meaningfulness. These actionable insights can be leveraged by firms to optimise design interfaces that not only facilitate transactions but also move beyond by redefining the consumer-platform relationships.

Our research findings also hold implications for policymakers and consumer advocacy groups who are interested in understanding how interface designs nudge consumer attention. The conceptual framework unpacks the underlying mechanisms related to subtle design changes on the micro level and their effect on the consumers, thereby welcoming a debate on transparent and consumer-centric digital design practices. Overall, this paper bridges theory and practice by showing that search box design is not only trivial but it is central to how consumers experience and evaluate digital marketplaces**.**

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that even micro-level interface cues, such as search box placeholders, significantly influence consumer experiences in digital commerce. By linking placeholder style to serendipity and meaningfulness, moderated by regulatory focus and user agency, we extend theory and provide actionable insights. Subtle design decisions can transform mundane interactions into meaningful ones, reinforcing the strategic importance of experiential design in e-commerce.

REFERENCES: References are available upon request.

FROM STREAMERS TO BRANDS: EXPLORING THE MECHANISMS OF TRUST TRANSFER IN LIVE-STREAMING COMMERCE

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Keywords: Live-streaming commerce, Trust transfer, Social support, Dynamic brand experience

Description: This study investigates how consumers' trust in streamers transfers to brands in live-streaming commerce, the mediating role of perceived brand social support, and the moderating effect of dynamic brand experience.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the rapid growth of live-streaming commerce (LSC), brands increasingly rely on streamers to engage consumers in highly interactive, real-time environments, raising critical questions about how brand trust is formed in this context. As consumers often focus their attention and trust on streamers rather than brands, it remains unclear whether trust in streamers can be transferred to the endorsed brand, and whether such transfer is consistent across live-streaming situations. Although trust transfer theory provides a general framework, prior research has offered limited insight into the psychological processes through which consumers evaluate brand trustworthiness during live-streamed interactions.

Accordingly, this study raises several interrelated research questions: through what psychological mechanisms does trust in a streamer translate into trust in the brand, particularly with respect to consumers' perceived brand social support during live streams? Under what conditions, such as variations in the perceived quality of the streamer-brand interaction, is this trust transfer strengthened or weakened? Finally, does trust developed toward the brand in this process meaningfully shape consumers' subsequent purchase intentions in live-streaming commerce?

Method And Data

To address the proposed research questions, we conducted a scenario-based online experiment in China, a leading market for live-streaming commerce. Participants were recruited through the Credamo platform and were required to have prior live-streaming shopping experience. Using a 2 (streamer trust: high vs. low) × 2 (dynamic brand experience: high vs. low) between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Streamer trust was manipulated through textual descriptions of a fictional streamer, while dynamic brand experience was manipulated using staged live-streaming materials that reflected varying levels of brand-streamer interaction quality across multiple phases of the livestream. After exposure to the scenarios, participants completed validated measures of perceived brand social support, brand trust, and purchase intention, along with relevant control variables. After data screening, the final sample consisted of 422 valid responses. Established reliability and validity checks confirmed the adequacy of the measurement model. The

hypothesized moderated mediation model was tested using structural equation modeling and bootstrapping procedures.

Summary of Findings

This study reveals several key findings regarding the trust transfer process in live-streaming commerce. First, consumers' trust in streamers is found to positively influence their trust in the endorsed brand, providing empirical support for trust transitivity in a context where streamers play a dominant role. This suggests that even when brand presence is relatively attenuated, streamer credibility can still serve as an important foundation for brand trust formation.

Second, the results demonstrate that this trust transfer is contingent on both perceived brand social support and dynamic brand experience. Specifically, when dynamic brand experience is strong, higher streamer trust enhances consumers' perceptions of brand social support, which in turn strengthens brand trust. In contrast, under weak dynamic brand experience, greater trust in the streamer reduces perceived brand social support and ultimately undermines brand trust, highlighting a conditional and potentially adverse trust transfer effect.

Finally, the findings show that brand trust developed through this process significantly increases consumers' purchase intentions, underscoring the behavioral relevance of trust transfer in live-streaming commerce.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on live-streaming commerce (LSC). First, this study extends prior trust transfer research in live-streaming commerce by explicitly examining brands as a key trust-receiving target. While existing studies have primarily focused on trust transfer from streamers to platforms or products, this research demonstrates that brand trust represents a distinct and consequential outcome of streamer trust, with meaningful implications for brand-related purchase intentions.

Second, this study advances social support theory in LSC by identifying perceived brand-provided informational and emotional support as critical mechanisms underlying brand trust formation. By highlighting consumers' perceptions of brand-generated support, it offers a novel explanation of how trusting beliefs and trusting intentions jointly emerge in live-streaming environments.

Third, this research deepens insights into trust transfer mechanisms by introducing dynamic brand experience as a key boundary condition. By revealing when and how trust transfer is strengthened or undermined, the study moves beyond assuming trust transfer to explicating its contingent process, thereby offering a more nuanced and process-oriented theoretical account of trust dynamics in LSC.

GUILT AS A DRIVER: HOW UNDERCONSUMPTION CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCES GREEN CONSUMPTION INTENTIONS

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Keywords: underconsumption, social media marketing, experimental research

Description: Relying on a qualitative study, a multilevel analysis and an experiment, this study presents insights into why viewers watch unboxing videos and shows the context dependent importance of design characteristics for the effectiveness of unboxing videos.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates the role of underconsumption content on social media in shaping viewers' emotional responses, behavioral intentions, and engagement. Underconsumption content promotes reduced consumption behaviors—such as prolonging the use of items, avoiding unnecessary purchases, or embracing second-hand goods—challenging prevailing consumerist norms (Chen and Liu, 2023). The search term 'underconsumption core' results in over 50 million videos on TikTok, and famous TikTok accounts that regularly publish underconsumption content attract several thousand followers (e.g., @goingzerowaste_ 320,571; @sabrina_pare 267,600 followers). One of the most popular underconsumption

videos on TikTok, published in July 2024, has garnered over 8 million views and 882,000 likes (@itshardouthereman).

While sustainability communication on social media has been studied in the context of pro-environmental messaging, little attention has been given to content explicitly promoting lower consumption. The central research question is: How does underconsumption content on social media influence viewers' emotional reactions and subsequent orientations toward sustainable consumption and engagement? By examining this question, the study aims to bridge the gap between sustainability communication research and social media behavior, focusing on both affective reactions and cognitive-behavioral outcomes.

Method and Data

A mixed-methods design was employed, comprising a qualitative study and an online experiment. The qualitative study involved 83 participants recruited via Prolific, who responded to open-ended questionnaires about their emotional reactions to underconsumption videos. This approach aims to explore the emotional reactions and perceived consequences experienced during and after exposure to an underconsumption video. Building on these insights, a quantitative experiment with 143 participants tested the psychological mechanism of guilt. Participants were randomly assigned to view either underconsumption or regular consumerist content. Post-exposure measures assessed green consumption intentions and engagement with the content. Mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS procedure, with 5,000 bootstrapped samples, to evaluate the indirect effects of guilt on green consumption intentions and engagement, controlling for social desirability.

Summary of Findings

Qualitative findings revealed that guilt was the dominant emotional response to underconsumption content, often prompting self-reflection, reinforcement of existing sustainable behaviors, or reactance. Participants reported increased awareness of overconsumption and intentions to adopt more sustainable habits. The experimental study confirmed that underconsumption content significantly elevated guilt ($b = .6696$, $p < .05$), which in turn mediated increased green consumption intentions ($b = .1890$, $SE = .1047$, 90%CI = [.0360; .3767]) and engagement ($b = .1373$, $SE = .0893$, 90%CI = [.0125; .3005]) with the content. The direct effect of underconsumption on green consumption intentions was non-significant ($b = .2673$, $p = .2228$), suggesting that guilt is the key psychological mechanism, while engagement was influenced both directly ($b = .7781$, $p = .0114$) and indirectly via guilt. In sum, the results indicate that underconsumption content not only motivates sustainable behavior through emotional activation but also enhances social media engagement, amplifying message visibility.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions. First, it introduces underconsumption content as a relevant form of sustainability communication. While prior research has mainly focused on consumerist or pro-environmental messages, little attention has been paid to content explicitly promoting reduced consumption.

Second, it provides insights into viewers' emotional reactions to underconsumption content. The findings highlight guilt as a dominant response but also reveal additional patterns, including inspiration, self-reflection, reinforcement of existing sustainable behaviors, and reactance. These results help to understand how individuals interpret sustainability-related content on social media.

Third, it demonstrates guilt as a mediating mechanism linking underconsumption content to both behavioral intentions and engagement. These findings advance understanding of how sustainability messages can be strategically designed on social media, balancing emotional activation with potential defensive reactions. Practically, the study informs content creators and marketers on promoting reduced consumption while fostering audience engagement and behavioral change.

References are available upon request.

HOW LABELLING AND AUTHORSHIP SHAPE CONSUMER RESPONSES TO AI-GENERATED MARKETING CONTENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Keywords: social media, AI-generated content, higher education communication, schema congruity theory, credibility, consumer engagement.

Description: This study examines how labelling AI-generated marketing content on social media influences consumer responses and engagement intentions, highlighting the moderating role of thematic congruence and the mediating effects of credibility and emotional perceptions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In recent years, growing scholarly and practitioner attention has been directed towards marketing content generated by artificial intelligence (AI) and its influence on consumer behaviour in digital environments. Historically, AI-assisted marketing outputs disseminated in public channels were rarely identified or disclosed as such. However, recent regulatory developments and the broader imperative for transparency in AI usage have led certain social media platforms to introduce labels indicating that a given post was generated using AI technologies, thereby increasing user awareness of content provenance. Despite this shift, the academic literature offers limited and fragmented insights into how such labelling practices affect consumer responses, particularly in relation to thematic congruence between source and message (i.e., the degree to which the topic of a message aligns with the nature of its source). It remains unclear whether AI-generated and explicitly labelled marketing messages about AI-based offerings are evaluated more favourably than those concerning unrelated products or services, and whether such congruence fosters trust and credibility or instead reduces receptivity in non-AI contexts. To address this gap, the study examines how authorship labelling influences responses to AI-generated marketing content on social media, integrating theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Method And Data

A 2×2 between-subjects experiment (N = 372) examined the effects of AI content labelling (AI-labelled vs unlabelled) and thematic congruence (AI-related vs non-AI-related topic) on consumer responses to social media marketing content. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and viewed a realistic Facebook-style post (image and text) consistent with the manipulation. Data were collected from active social media users in Lithuania via a non-probability convenience sample (6–21 April 2025) using LimeSurvey. Recruitment occurred through Facebook research groups, the researcher's social media, and Kaunas University of Technology channels. Of 480 responses, 108 were excluded for failed

manipulation checks, leaving 90–96 participants per condition. The questionnaire included scenario exposure, manipulation/attention checks, 7-point multi-item measures of perceived source–content congruence, content credibility, source credibility, engagement intentions, and demographic questions. Manipulation checks assessed whether participants noticed the "AI info" label and correctly identified the post's topic. Data were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.2., including reverse coding, factorability tests (KMO ≥ .611; Bartlett's $p < .001$), and exploratory factor analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation. Source credibility split into four dimensions (competence, empathy, goodwill, trustworthiness), prompting refinement of related hypotheses. All scales showed acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .722–.903$).

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that AI authorship labelling significantly increased perceived source–content congruence, with a medium effect size. This effect was amplified when the post topic was AI-related, indicating that AI-labelled marketing content is evaluated more favourably only when thematic congruence aligns the source cue (AI) with audience expectations, consistent with schema congruity theory. Higher perceived congruence was associated with stronger credibility perceptions, positively predicting content credibility and multiple dimensions of source credibility. Exploratory factor analysis revealed four distinct source credibility components – competence, empathy, goodwill, and trustworthiness – with empathy exhibiting the strongest positive association, highlighting the role of affective credibility in AI-mediated communication. However, source–content congruence had a statistically significant but practically negligible direct effect on engagement intentions, suggesting that congruence alone is insufficient to stimulate behaviours such as liking, commenting, or sharing. Instead, engagement intentions were primarily driven by content credibility and two emotional dimensions of source credibility – empathy and goodwill. Interestingly, trustworthiness was negatively associated with engagement intentions, implying that highly trusted sources may not motivate interaction and that engagement may be more linked to affective activation than perceived reliability. Overall, the findings show that AI labelling can enhance consumer responses when contextually justified, and credibility-related perceptions – rather than congruence itself – explain willingness to engage.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the academic marketing discipline by integrating established theoretical perspectives – including schema congruity theory – to conceptualise the role of AI content labelling within technology-mediated brand communication. By situating the investigation within a theoretically grounded framework, the research extends scholarly understanding of how message characteristics and source attributes interact in shaping consumer responses to AI-generated content in social media environments. Methodologically, the work contributes a robust 2×2 between-subjects experimental design employing realistic social media stimuli, offering a replicable framework for future inquiries into AI–human content interactions. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study offers actionable insights for a range of non-academic stakeholders. Marketing practitioners, creative agencies, and social media managers can draw on the conceptual framework to design

disclosure practices that align with both ethical imperatives and strategic communication objectives. Policymakers, regulators, and non-profit organisations may also find value in the study's implications for the development of guidelines and standards aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and trust in AI-mediated marketing.

HOW WARMTH AND COMPETENCE DRIVE DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT ON LINKEDIN: THE ROLE OF IDENTIFICATION AND CULTURAL VALUES

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Keywords: warmth, competence, identification, long-term orientation, employee advocacy, digital engagement

Description: This paper examines how perceptions of warmth and competence influence digital engagement on LinkedIn through psychological identification, revealing how individual long-term orientation strengthens this mechanism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background and Research Question

Employee advocacy, the voluntary promotion of one's organization through personal social media channels, is emerging as a powerful form of digital communication. On professional platforms like LinkedIn, employee-shared content often generates higher engagement and perceived authenticity than corporate messages (van Zoonen et al., 2016). Yet the underlying psychological mechanisms driving such engagement remain unclear. While research has examined message content and platform algorithms (Balaji et al., 2023), little is known about how audiences evaluate the *person* behind the post and how such evaluations influence their engagement behavior.

Drawing on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske et al., 2007), this study examines how perceptions of *warmth* and *competence* shape digital engagement. These two universal dimensions of social judgment influence trust and behavioral intent (Cuddy et al., 2008), but have rarely been applied to professional peer-to-peer contexts. On LinkedIn, where personal and organizational identities intersect, such judgments are likely central to engagement decisions.

We propose that psychological identification, the process of perceiving the communicator as relatable or aspirational (Kelman, 1961), serves as a mechanism linking social perception to engagement. When users identify with an employee advocate, they are more likely to engage with their content as a reflection of shared values or professional ideals (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Furthermore, we investigate long-term orientation (LTO), an individual-level cultural value reflecting perseverance and relational investment (Yoo et al., 2011), as a moderator strengthening the identification–engagement link.

Method and Data

To test this framework, a 2 (warmth: high vs. low) × 2 (competence: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment was conducted with 400 European professionals active on LinkedIn. Participants, recruited via Qualtrics, represented diverse industries and managerial levels across Northern, Central, and Southern Europe. Each participant viewed a simulated LinkedIn post by a fictional user experience (UX) professional whose warmth and competence cues were systematically manipulated.

All constructs were assessed using established multi-item, seven-point Likert scales. Warmth and competence were measured using Halkias and Diamantopoulos (2020); identification using Whittler and DiMeo (1991); long-term orientation (LTO) via Yoo et al. (2011); and digital engagement intentions via De Vries and Carlson (2014) and Giakoumaki and Krepapa (2020). Data quality was ensured through attention checks and variance screening.

Summary of Findings

Results reveal a pathway from social perception to engagement. Both warmth and competence significantly and independently increased digital engagement intentions, confirming additive rather than interactive effects. Users were most likely to engage when advocates displayed both traits strongly (high-warmth/high-competence), but each trait alone also increased engagement relative to low-trait conditions.

Identification fully mediated the effect of warmth and competence on engagement. When participants perceived the advocate as warm and competent, they were more likely to identify with them, viewing the communicator as “my type of professional”, which in turn predicted stronger engagement (liking, sharing, connecting).

Furthermore, long-term orientation moderated this mediation process. The relationship between identification and engagement was stronger among individuals high in LTO. These participants were more inclined to engage as a means of expressing a strategic, value-based affiliation with the advocate. In contrast, low-LTO individuals engaged more casually, suggesting that cultural orientation shapes the depth and motivation of engagement. This interaction highlights how identity-driven behaviors are conditioned by enduring personal values that influence relational goals in digital spaces.

These results demonstrate that perceptions of warmth and professional competence shape user engagement by fostering psychological identification, and that this identity-based mechanism is intensified among those with future-oriented cultural values.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to digital engagement theory in four key ways. First, it extends the SCM to the context of professional digital networks. While warmth and competence have been extensively studied in brand and interpersonal perception (Aaker et al., 2010; Halkias & Diamantopoulos, 2020), this study demonstrates their relevance for peer-driven interactions on LinkedIn, where users evaluate advocates as both individuals and representatives of organizational identity.

Second, it introduces identification as the psychological mechanism linking social perception to behavioral engagement. Engagement with employee-shared content stems not merely from message appeal but from perceived self-relevance. This finding advances theory on identity-based motivation (Kelman, 1961; Cohen, 2001) and extends it to digital, career-oriented platforms where self-presentation and affiliation are intertwined.

Third, it integrates a cultural perspective by demonstrating that engagement is culturally contingent: for high-LTO individuals, identification more strongly drives

engagement because it aligns with relational persistence and long-term self-concept goals. This expands understanding of cross-cultural variability in digital advocacy and contributes to the literature on culturally informed marketing communication (Yoo et al., 2011).

Finally, the study offers practical guidance for organizations developing employee advocacy programs. Advocates should project both warmth (authenticity, approachability) and competence (expertise, credibility) to maximize engagement. In culturally diverse or high-LTO audiences, messaging that emphasizes relationship-building, mentorship, and long-term value creation is likely to be particularly effective.

References available upon request.

HUMAN VS. VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS IN SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT ENDORSEMENT: THE MODERATING ROLE OF LONELINESS

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Keywords: Social media influencer, sustainability, perceived social relatedness, curiosity, loneliness

Description: The present research posits that consumers prefer human (rather than virtual) influencers' endorsement of sustainable (but not unsustainable) products because individuals perceive social relatedness from these influencers, which in turn, stimulates curiosity towards endorsed products, but lonely individuals prefer human influencers' endorsement of unsustainable (rather than sustainable) products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Because virtual influencers (VIs) are algorithmically generated and lack real-world experiences, emotions, or "spirit" (Li et al., 2023; Miao et al., 2022; Hawk et al., 2011; Longoni et al., 2019), consumers infer that VIs lack genuine concern for environmental and social issues. In contrast, human influencers (HIs), as fellow humans, are expected to engage in sustainable actions rooted in connectedness to the environment and other people (Jansen et al., 2024). Thus, HIs are more likely to evoke perceived social relatedness, a sense of interpersonal connection and intimacy (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). Heightened relatedness increases curiosity about sustainable products, consistent with consumers' tendency to seek information that is frequently activated and strongly interconnected to their mental models (Sharot & Sunstein, 2020). Accordingly, HIs' (rather than VIs') endorsements of sustainable products are perceived as more socially relevant, stimulating consumers' curiosity about the endorsed product. However, loneliness moderates this effect. Although lonely individuals would prefer HIs (over VIs) to satisfy affiliation needs (Inagaki et al., 2016), their self-focused orientation (Bosacki et al., 2020; Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017) reduces their preference for inherently other-focused sustainable products (Lim 2017; Sheth et al. 2011), thereby increasing preference for unsustainable options.

Method and Data

Study 1 (N = 205 CloudResearch Connect; 50.2% male, Mage = 35.36) tested the effect of influencer type (HI vs. VI) on the evaluation of brand attitude and purchase intention for sustainable vs. unsustainable product (product type). Study 1 employed a 2 (influencer type: HI vs. VI) × 2 (product type: sustainable vs. unsustainable) between-subjects design.

Study 2 (*N* = 200 CloudResearch Connect; 50% male, *M*age = 36.40) corroborated the findings in Study 1, and secondly, elucidated the underlying mechanisms for the proposed effect. This study employed a 2 (influencer type: HI vs. VI) × 2 (product type: sustainable vs. unsustainable) between-subjects design.

Study 3 (*N* = 299 CloudResearch Connect; 50.2% male, *M*age = 38.65) aimed to establish loneliness as the boundary condition for the effect of influencer type on sharing intention for sustainable vs. unsustainable product. Study 3 used a 2 (influencer type: HI vs. VI) × 2 (product type: sustainable vs. unsustainable) × 2 (loneliness: lonely, not lonely) between-subjects design.

Summary of Findings

Across three experimental studies (*N* = 704), we examined the effects of influencer type (HI vs. VI) and product type (sustainable vs. unsustainable) on consumer preferences. Study 1 showed that sustainable (vs. unsustainable) product endorsements by HIs (rather than VIs) led to more favorable brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions. Study 2 investigated the mediating roles of perceived social relatedness and curiosity, demonstrating that HIs endorsing sustainable products elicited more positive brand attitudes, greater purchase intentions, and increased willingness to share the social media post. Study 3 employed a moderated moderation model to identify loneliness as a boundary condition. Specifically, lonely individuals showed greater sharing intentions for unsustainable products endorsed by HIs, whereas non-lonely individuals were more inclined to share sustainable product endorsements.

Key Contributions

This research makes four theoretical contributions. First, it extends nascent work on HIs and sustainable endorsements (Wang et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2024) by identifying perceived social relatedness and curiosity as underlying mechanisms and loneliness as a moderator. Second, it

advances social media research by explaining why consumers prefer HI-endorsed sustainable products on Instagram, an underexplored question (Kim & Drumwright, 2016). Third, it challenges conventional thinking about curiosity by showing that, in sustainable endorsement contexts, HIs elicit stronger curiosity than VIs, contrary to prior associations of curiosity with virtual realities and AI (Beck, 2022; Kim & Choo, 2023). Fourth, our research contributes to the loneliness literature by demonstrating that lonely individuals prefer unsustainable (over sustainable) products endorsed by HIs. From a managerial perspective, brands aiming to promote sustainable products should prioritize HIs over VIs. However, because lonely individuals prefer unsustainable over sustainable products, marketers should avoid eliciting loneliness cues in their advertisements. Further, as perceived social relatedness and curiosity drive the effectiveness of HIs, marketers should explore strategies to enhance these perceptions in influencer-led campaigns.

References are available upon request.

IMPERFECTLY PERFECT: HUMAN-LIKENESS, AI DISCLOSURE, AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT WITH VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

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Keywords: virtual influencers, influencer marketing, AI marketing, anthropomorphism, consumer brand engagement

Description: This paper reports findings from a pre-study showing that realistic virtual influencers can trigger psychological discomfort consistent with uncanny valley effects, while stylized or imperfect designs reduce unease and generate more consistent responses, addressing practical implications for AI marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Virtual influencers (VIs)—digital characters that engage audiences and endorse brands on social media—are increasingly prevalent, offering marketing potential, greater message control,

and cost efficiency while influencing consumers similarly to human influencers (e.g., Franke et al., 2023), yet raising concerns about trust, authenticity, and engagement, which remain underexplored (e.g., Miao et al., 2022).

Building on research showing that anthropomorphism—attributing human-like traits such as appearance, morality, intelligence, and emotional awareness—enhances consumer responses, including purchase intentions (e.g., Dabiran et al., 2024), this study examines whether disclosing a VI's artificial identity mitigates these effects and how human-likeness and disclosure jointly shape consumer brand engagement through psychological distance and source credibility.

Although psychological distance and source credibility are well established, their roles in VI marketing remain underexplored. Drawing on the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) paradigm (Nass et al., 1994), which suggests that people respond to humanlike technologies as if they were social beings, and on uncanny valley theory (Mori, 1970), which describes the psychological discomfort triggered by entities that appear almost but not fully human, this study asks: In what ways does disclosing a VI's artificial identity influence the relationship between anthropomorphism and CBE? Which psychological mechanisms mediate these relationships?

Method and Data

This ongoing study investigates how virtual influencer human-likeness affects consumer brand engagement using a 2×2 experimental design. Anthropomorphism is expected to increase engagement directly and indirectly through reduced psychological distance and increased source credibility, with disclosure of the VI's artificial nature moderating these effects. A pre-study conducted in June 2025 with 45 participants, recruited from the authors' personal networks,

tested and refined the visual stimuli by comparing hyper-realistic and unrealistic VI images, assessing perceived realism, engagement potential, and qualitative impressions.

They were presented with two visual representations of the same VI: one designed to appear hyper-realistic and the other intentionally unrealistic. Each participant viewed two images per version, for a total of four stimuli. The stimuli were generated on Tensor.Art using the Juggernaut - Aftermath model. To ensure consistent interpretation, participants were explicitly informed that the images did not depict real people. After viewing the stimuli, they completed a brief survey assessing perceived realism, comparative judgments between the two versions, engagement potential, and provided open-ended qualitative impressions of the VI. The feedback gathered informed refinements to the visuals, ensuring greater clarity and differentiation between the realistic and unrealistic conditions. Data analysis was conducted in SPSS.

Summary of Findings

Pre-study results show that the realistic virtual influencer elicited greater discomfort, consistent with uncanny valley effects: 26.1% of respondents felt “not at all comfortable” interacting with the realistic. Only 15.2% rated the realistic VI as “very realistic,” and 17.4% felt that neither image resembled a real person, indicating limited anthropomorphism and a need to refine stimuli. Despite discomfort, 21.7% believed the realistic VI could be “very successful” on social media, highlighting a paradox between personal unease and perceived success. In contrast, the unrealistic VI produced more consistent responses, with 48.9% reporting no comfort and 31.1% slight comfort, and lower variability overall, suggesting that clear artificiality may reduce uncertainty and stabilize evaluations.

Open-ended feedback revealed that the realistic VI's overly perfect appearance—flawless skin, symmetrical features, and emotionless expressions—contributed to perceived artificiality and likely triggered uncanny valley effects. One participant described it as, "Too 'filtered'... skin has almost no texture. Too perfect and thus not interesting," while another said, "Influencer's look feels empty, with no empathy." In contrast, the unrealistic VI's clearly stylized design was immediately recognized as artificial and did not provoke discomfort, highlighting that obvious imperfection or cartoonish design may improve perceptions and engagement.

Key Contributions

This study advances VI marketing theory and practice by examining how human-likeness and disclosure interact to shape consumer brand engagement, introducing psychological distance and source credibility as mediators. It highlights a paradox: highly realistic VIs can provoke unease yet still be perceived as successful. Using custom VIs, the study shows that hyper-realistic or overly perfect designs increase unease, while stylized or imperfect VIs—featuring subtle flaws such as natural skin texture or slightly untamed hair—can reduce uncanny valley effects and improve engagement. Transparent disclosure is also recommended, particularly for realistic VIs, to maintain trust.

These findings offer several practical insights: marketers can benefit from using imperfect VIs to reduce discomfort and maintain engagement, as slight flaws in appearance can make VIs feel more approachable. Brands should also clearly indicate when VIs are used, especially for highly humanlike VIs, using prominent cues such as disclaimers in captions to reduce potential consumer backlash. Stylized or cartoonish VIs can also help avoid uncanny

effects, especially among perceptive audiences familiar with AI content. Overall, these insights help marketers balance realism, disclosure, and ethics while providing a foundation for future research on responsible and effective VI marketing.

References are available upon request.

IMPULSE BUYING IN LIVE STREAMING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW USING TCCM FRAMEWORK

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Keywords: Impulse buying, live streaming commerce, systematic literature review, TCCM framework, future agenda

Description: This study systematically reviews research on impulse buying in live streaming commerce using the TCCM framework, identifying its development trends and proposing a future research agenda.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Unlike traditional online shopping, which primarily depends on consumers browsing independently (Xin et al., 2024). Live streaming commerce integrates livestream with online shopping, offering an immersive interactive environment. This allows consumers to interact with streamers and co-viewers in real time, obtain information, and place orders instantly (Lo et al., 2022). This emerging model has reshaped consumer shopping behaviors, with impulse purchasing becoming more prevalent in live streaming contexts, attracting widespread academic attention. Existing literature reviews of impulse buying in live streaming both adopted the stimulus–organism–response model to organize studies and construct integrative frameworks (Lee et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025). However, such single logic struggles to capture the complexity of live streaming scenarios (Bigne et al., 2020). With numerous high-quality studies constantly emerging, current reviews fail to reflect the latest developments. Therefore, a new systematic review is needed to comprehensively map the body of knowledge and provide fresh insights. To achieve this objective, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. In this domain, what theories (T), contexts (C), characteristics (C), and methods (M) have been adopted?

RQ2. Based on the TCCM framework, what is the future research agenda?

Method And Data

The process of selecting and reviewing articles followed the SPAR-4-SLRprotocol developed by Paul et al. (2021), involving three key phases: assembling, arranging, and assessing. The literature reviewed in this study was retrieved from the Web of Science and Scopus databases, which are widely recognized as authoritative and reliable sources for searching for high-quality publications (Ford et al., 2023; Paul et al., 2021). A systematic search was conducted using multiple keyword combinations related to live streaming and impulse buying. After removing duplicates, non-journal publications, non-empirical studies, thematically irrelevant articles, and studies not published in journals with JIF ≥ 1 or listed in the ABDC ranking, 82 high-quality studies were included. Compared with other literature review methods, a framework-based review enables the synthesis of prior research with greater analytical breadth and depth, thereby enhancing scholarly impact (Paul et al., 2021). Thus, this review is framework-oriented, employing the TCCM framework, which can systematically organize and assess both theoretical foundations and empirical findings within the research field from perspectives of theory, context, characteristics, and method.

Summary of Findings

This study indicates that over half of livestreaming impulse buying studies employ the stimulus–organism–response model to explain how individual traits, streamer characteristics,

livestreaming experiences, social influence, and marketing strategies trigger impulse buying by shaping consumers' internal states. However, overreliance on a single theory may limit theoretical progress, future research should adopt diverse theories (e.g., marketing ethics theory).

Existing research primarily focus on Asia, particularly in China. Future studies should emphasize cross-cultural comparisons to uncover differences in purchasing decisions across diverse sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, limited existing research has explored specific age groups. Future investigations should further identify variations in impulse buying across different age cohorts.

Regarding variables, streamer interaction and social presence are the most common antecedents. Consumer trust is widely used as a mediating variable, while personal traits are often employed as moderators. However, exploration of factors related to social and marketing stimulus remains insufficient. For instance, future studies could examine the impacts of positive and negative comments shared by co-viewers in live streaming and dynamic marketing strategies.

Methodologically, most studies are quantitative, with surveys being widely used. Future research could understand consumers' post-purchase psychological processes following impulse buying adopting qualitative method.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes contributions both in theory and practice. It provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on impulse buying in live streaming commerce drawn on the TCCM framework, thereby offering a holistic understanding of this field. By identifying gaps in the area from perspectives of theories, contexts, constructs, and methods, this study offers avenues for future research expansion. Specifically, this review suggests that future researchers can utilize marketing ethics theory to investigate impulsive purchasing behavior. It also highlights the potential for cross-national and cross-generational investigations. Furthermore, factors at the social and marketing mix levels remain underexplored research areas. Additionally, the findings also provide valuable implications for marketing practitioners. This study identifies the drivers and outcomes of impulse buying in live streaming commerce. Streamers and live streaming platforms can strategically leverage these discoveries to enhance consumer engagement and drive sales. For instance, social presence serves as a key factor stimulating impulse buying. Platforms and streamers can put emphasis on optimizing interface design and interactive strategies to enhance viewers' feeling of being with others, thereby more effectively driving viewers' purchase intention.

INFLUENCING THE INFLUENCERS: STAKEHOLDER SALIENCE IN SOCIETAL ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: social media influencers; stakeholder theory; stakeholder salience; societal engagement

Description: This study explains how Finnish social media influencers navigate competing stakeholder expectations when deciding whether and how to engage with societal issues.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Social media influencers (SMIs) are significant commercial and societal actors who operate as intermediaries between their engaged audiences and organizations within social media channels (Borchers, 2023; Suuronen et al., 2022; Martínez-López et al., 2020). SMIs increasingly participate in societal discussions (Arnesson 2023; Harff and Schmuck 2024; Suuronen et al., 2022), yet such engagement exposes them to conflicting expectations, reputational risks, and commercial constraints (Riedl et al., 2021; Valenzuela-García et al.,

2023). While prior research has primarily examined how influencers shape their audiences (Campbell and Farrell 2020; Farivar et al., 2021), far less is known about how influencers themselves are shaped by stakeholder pressures when deciding whether, when, and how to engage with societal issues (Grgurić Čop, Culiberg, and First Komen 2024). Drawing on stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and stakeholder salience (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997), the objective of this study is to understand how different stakeholders influence the SMIs' participation in societal discussions. Thus, we ask: 1) What are the different stakeholders that shape SMI's participation in societal discussion? and 2) How do they differ in terms of salience factors?

Method and Data

We adopted an explorative qualitative research design (Kleining & Witt, 2001) and conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with Finnish SMIs who had at least 2,000 followers, had commercial collaborations with organizations, and had engaged in discussions on societal topics in their social media channels. Interviewed influencers varied in content domain (e.g., lifestyle, travel, beauty), platform use, years of experience, number of followers, and work status (full-time vs. part-time influencers). Interviews were conducted remotely via Teams or phone, recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

The interview protocol explored influencer role perceptions, open-ended stakeholder identification, perceived expectations and pressures, and concrete participation decisions. To reduce priming, stakeholders were first discussed freely before introducing a literature-based stakeholder list. Data were analyzed abductively using iterative open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Stakeholder salience factors (power, legitimacy, urgency) (Mitchell et al., 1997) informed second stage of analysis. Analytical rigor was supported

through reflective memoing and consistency checks with the second author, during which coding decisions and interpretations were reviewed and refined.

Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that influencers have nine main stakeholders, which can be broadly divided into two analytically distinct forms: background and situational stakeholders. While situational stakeholders generate participation pressure, background stakeholders determine which expectations become actionable or ignored. Thus, they reflect different underlying logics: identity-based logic is rooted in background stakeholders, and situational stakeholders are driven by commercial, relational, and normative logics.

Background stakeholders (influencers' close personal circles and potential other occupations) exert continuous filtering on societal participation, shaping what influencers perceive as safe, ethical, or professionally acceptable to say. Situational stakeholders (audiences, brands and agencies, other influencers, media, social media platforms, society, governmental, and societal institutions), became salient in specific moments of societal discussion. Audiences exhibited relational salience, combining legitimizing engagement with supportive feedback, using power with coercive backlash, creating urgency to act. Brands and agencies constrained participation through commercial neutrality norms, while other influencers exerted peer pressure to engage with trending topics. Media and platforms, perceived as largely uncontrollable forces, shaped urgency and visibility. Society and governmental institutions were primarily associated with expectations of responsibility rather than direct pressure, indirectly assigning influencers a civic role in raising awareness and strengthening public messages.

Key Contributions

This study makes three key contributions. First, it applies stakeholder salience theory into influencer context, demonstrating that influence operates through multiple coexisting logics. We show that influencers' participation decisions are shaped by the interplay of commercial, relational, normative, and identity-based logics, which shape which stakeholders they prioritize in societal discussions. Across stakeholder groups, the salience of expectations varied, as stakeholders differed in the power, legitimacy and urgency of their claims, and these attributes shifted depending on the societal topic and timing.

Second, the study shows the difference between background and situational stakeholders and how stakeholder salience functions as a filtering process. Situational stakeholders' pressures are interpreted through background stakeholder boundaries, resulting in selective engagement, strategic silence, and timing-based participation.

Third, the findings reveal an emerging form of informal civic duty, whereby societal and governmental institutions implicitly shift communicative responsibility for public issues to influencers. Influencers internalize these expectations and take on delegated communicative roles as a moral duty and increasingly as part of their professional standards.

Together, these insights reposition influencers as frontline communicators of societal issues, whose participation is shaped by overlapping commercial, social, institutional, and personal-professional constraints rather than individual choice alone.

References are available upon request.

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRODUCT PLACEMENTS IN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' VIDEOS: THE IMPACT OF BRAND–CONTENT INCONGRUENCY ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: Product Placement; Influencer Marketing; Brand–Content Incongruency; Consumer Engagement; Information Fluency

Description: This paper examines how brand–content incongruency in influencer short videos affects consumer engagement and identifies information fluency as an underlying cognitive mechanism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Influencer short videos have become a dominant form of digital advertising, with product placements increasingly embedded within narrative-driven content. While prior research has extensively examined influencer characteristics, sponsorship disclosures, and brand–influencer fit, little is known about how the internal alignment between advertising content and video narratives influences consumer engagement. Existing studies typically

assume a linear relationship between congruency and effectiveness, overlooking the possibility that moderate incongruency may stimulate attention and engagement. Drawing on schema incongruency and information processing theories, this study investigates whether brand–content incongruency in influencer videos exerts a nonlinear effect on consumer engagement. We propose that placements that are either overly congruent or extremely incongruent may reduce engagement, while moderate incongruency may enhance viewers' attention and interaction. In addition, we examine information fluency as a key psychological mechanism, exploring whether changes in processing ease explain how incongruency influences engagement outcomes.

Method And Data

To address the research questions, we adopt a multi-method research design combining large-scale secondary data analysis with controlled experiments. First, we analyze a real-world dataset of 21,699 influencer videos containing product placements collected from Bilibili. Using a fine-tuned large language model, we automatically identify brand placements and classify brand–content incongruency based on relevance and expectancy dimensions. Consumer engagement is measured through sentiment-based analysis of time-stamped audience comments during advertising segments.

Second, we conduct a laboratory-style online experiment to establish causality and examine the mediating role of information fluency. Participants are randomly assigned to view influencer videos with low, moderate, or high levels of brand–content incongruency created through systematic editing of placement content. This design enables direct tests of causal effects and underlying cognitive mechanisms.

Summary of Findings

Across both secondary data analysis and experimental evidence, the results consistently reveal an inverted U-shaped relationship between brand–content incongruency and consumer engagement. Moderate incongruency generates higher engagement compared to highly congruent or extremely incongruent placements. Observational analyses show that engagement initially increases with incongruency but declines once incongruency exceeds an optimal threshold. Experimental results corroborate these findings, indicating stronger engagement and purchase intentions under moderate incongruency conditions. Furthermore, information fluency is found to partially mediate this relationship. As incongruency increases, information fluency decreases, reflecting greater cognitive processing difficulty. Moderate reductions in fluency stimulate curiosity and deeper processing, thereby enhancing engagement, whereas excessive disfluency impedes comprehension and diminishes consumer response.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to influencer marketing and advertising research by demonstrating that brand–content incongruency has a nonlinear effect on consumer engagement. It challenges the conventional assumption that higher congruency always improves advertising effectiveness and identifies a “moderate incongruency” sweet spot that maximizes engagement.

The study also advances theory by introducing information fluency as a key cognitive mechanism explaining how consumers process embedded brand content in influencer videos. Methodologically, it showcases the use of large language models for scalable and nuanced analysis of product placements in short-video data. From a managerial

perspective, the findings suggest that marketers should strategically design placements that balance novelty and coherence to enhance consumer engagement without triggering resistance.

LINGUISTICALLY MOBILIZING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT? WHEN AND HOW REGULATORY MODE DECREASES SELF-DISCREPANCY MESSAGE EFFECTIVENESS

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Keywords: self-discrepancy, regulatory mode, regulatory fit, engagement, text analysis

Description: This research demonstrates that self-discrepancy language can decrease customer engagement when combined with assessment language but not when paired with locomotion language, with feeling right mediating these effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Customer engagement is important for companies because it is directly correlated with business profitability (Forbes 2020). One tactic marketers commonly use to effectively increase customer engagement is to elicit self-discrepancies by using words such as “need” and “wish for” in their marketing communications. In a pilot study, 50 managers agreed that highlighting how a product addresses a customer need effectively increases customer engagement (M = 8.32, SD = 0.82, $t(49)$ = 28.66, $p < .001$, d = 0.82). Yet, anecdotal evidence suggests a large variance in customer engagement

(e.g., number of shares) in response to advertising posts on social media that use self-discrepancy language (e.g., “If you can dream it, you can do it” by Ferrary was shared 81 times, while “Select the details for the #Ferrari #812Superfast you’ve always wished for,” was only shared 27 times). Thus, marketers may struggle to consistently elicit customer engagement by highlighting self-discrepancy. Academic research mirrors this mixed anecdotal evidence. While some studies demonstrate that highlighting self-discrepancy can increase engagement (e.g., Pezzutti et al., 2023), others suggest that highlighting self-discrepancy can have negative effects on customer engagement (e.g., brand attachment; Malaer et al., 2011).

This phenomenon-driven research draws on self-discrepancy theory and regulatory mode theory to illuminate when and why self-discrepancy language may decrease customer engagement. Across two large datasets and two pre-registered experiments, we illuminate a substantive phenomenon and find that using self-discrepancy language in marketing communications can decrease customer engagement. However, this is only the case when combining self-discrepancy language with assessment-oriented language (e.g., “consider”, “think”), while it is not the case when combining self-discrepancy language with predominant locomotion-oriented language (e.g., “act", “lead”). Moreover, we provide measured and manipulated process evidence that regulatory fit measured by “feeling right” explains the interactive effect of self-discrepancy language and regulatory mode on customer engagement. In the following, we present the empirical evidence of our effects using multiple measures of customer engagement (i.e., willingness to pay, number of shares, number of backers) to reflect its multidimensional nature (Lim et al., 2022).

Studies 1A and 1B provide correlational field evidence that self-discrepancy language can decrease customer engagement when combined with assessment predominant language. We operationalized discrepancy and assessment predominance from brand-generated posts (Study 1A) and Kickstarter project descriptions (Study 1B) using dictionary-based entity extraction (Berger et al., 2020). We

found a negative interaction effect of discrepancy and assessment predominance on customer engagement in both studies (Study 1A (shares count): b = -7.48*10^{-5}, SE = 2.81*10^{-6}, $p < .001$, 95% CI_{Boot} [-8.03*10^{-5}, -6.93*10^{-5}], *Adjusted R-squared* = 1.61*10^{-5}); and Study 1B (backers count): b = -4.06*10^{-4}, SE = 1.11*10^{-4}, $p < .001$, 95% CI_{Boot} [-6.24*10^{-4}, -1.88*10^{-4}], *Adjusted R-squared* = 2.56*10^{-4}).

Study 2 used a 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental design to provide causal evidence for these observed effects. First, participants saw a Facebook post of moisturizing cream with self-discrepancy words in the *self-discrepancy language present* condition, an no self-discrepancy words in the *self-discrepancy language absent* condition. In the *locomotion predominance* condition words such as "lead" and "take charge" were included while the *assessment predominance* condition included words like "consider" and "think" (Kanze et al., 2021). Participants then indicated their willingness to pay (WTP) for the cream and reported how they felt about the post (1 = wrong; 7 = right; Camacho et al., 2003). A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant self-discrepancy x regulatory mode language interaction ($F(1, 496) = 4.41$, $p = .036$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$). Linguistically highlighting self-discrepancy decreased willingness to pay when paired with assessment-orientation language ($M_{\text{no discrepancy}} = 20.62$, SD = 11.65 vs. $M_{\text{discrepancy}} = 16.28$, SD = 12.78, $F(1, 251) = 8.00$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$) but not when paired with locomotion-orientation language ($M_{\text{no discrepancy}} = 22.27$, SD = 13.51vs. $M_{\text{discrepancy}} = 22.67$, SD = 12.51, $F(1, 245) = .06$, $p = .809$, $\eta^2 = .00$). A moderated mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 8; Hayes, 2017) revealed a significant index of moderated mediation: b = -2.56, SE = 0.77, 95% CI_{Boot} [-4.18, -1.19]. Specifically, the indirect effect of self-discrepancy language through feeling right on customer engagement was negative and significant in the *assessment predominance* condition (b = -3.56, SE = 0.77, 95% CI_{Boot} [-5.20, -2.19] and attenuated in the *locomotion predominance* condition (b = -1.00, SE = 0.49, 95% CI_{Boot} [-2.05, -0.14].

Study 3 used a moderation-of-process approach (Spencer et al., 2005) to further test the underlying mechanism. We manipulated if people were made aware of their reduced feelings of rightness as making bias explicit can reduce their impact, thus attenuating the interaction effect we observe (Isler & Yilmaz, 2023). A three-way ANOVA on WTP revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(1, 839) = 4.22$, $p = .040$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$). The results showed a significant interaction between self-discrepancy and assessment predominance in the *attention to the source of feeling right absent* condition, the default ($F(1, 425) = 7.57$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). However, when directly drawing participants' attention to the source of feeling right (i.e., *attention to feelings of rightness present* condition), the results showed a non-significant interaction between self-discrepancy language and regulatory mode language ($F(1, 414) = 0.27$, $p = .871$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$), thus providing further causal evidence for feeling right as underlying mechanism.

Theoretically, this research helps resolve seemingly conflicting findings by offering insights on when and why self-discrepancy language may reduce customer engagement. In doing so, this research is, to our knowledge, the first to consider the interactive effect of self-discrepancy theory and regulatory mode theory—two central theories in consumer research on goal pursuit. Practically, this research suggests that managers should use self-discrepancy language (i.e., words like "need", "want", "dream, "wish", "ideal") in combination with language inducing a locomotion orientation but avoid language stressing an assessment orientation.

References are available upon request.

MAPPING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Social Media Marketing; Consumer Experience; Content Creation; Systematic Literature Review.

Description: This paper systematically maps recent empirical research on artificial intelligence in social media marketing and proposes an integrative conceptual model linking technical capabilities, content strategies, consumer experience, and social perceptions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the social media marketing ecosystem. Technologies such as personalization algorithms, chatbots, virtual influencers, and predictive analytics are changing how brands communicate with consumers, optimize campaigns, and build relationships in highly dynamic and interactive environments. At the same time, these developments raise important challenges related to authenticity, trust, and consumer perceptions. Although prior research acknowledges AI's potential to improve user

experience, personalize content, and increase engagement, existing empirical evidence remains fragmented and often focused on isolated dimensions, with limited integration across studies.

Against this background, this paper addresses the central research question: What is the current state of empirical research on the application of AI in social media marketing, and how can this evidence be systematically organized to clarify key applications, outcomes, and conceptual gaps? More specifically, the paper asks: (1) What are the main AI applications currently used in social media marketing? (2) What effects does AI have on central social media marketing outcomes? And (3) What theoretical and methodological gaps remain, and which future research directions are most relevant for consolidating this emerging domain?

Method And Data

This paper adopts a systematic literature review approach to provide a comprehensive and transparent synthesis of recent empirical research on artificial intelligence in social media marketing. To ensure broad coverage of high-quality academic work, the review draws on two well-established bibliographic databases: Scopus and Web of Science. A structured search strategy was developed to capture studies located at the intersection of artificial intelligence, marketing, and social media, incorporating alternative terminologies commonly used in the literature. To reflect the recent technological shift associated with the widespread diffusion of generative AI tools, the review focuses on journal articles published between 2023 and 2025. Only empirical studies written in English and explicitly addressing the use of AI in social media marketing contexts were included. Conceptual papers, literature reviews, and studies not centered on social media marketing were excluded to ensure analytical consistency. The article selection process followed the PRISMA protocol, involving duplicate removal, abstract screening, and full-text assessment based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final sample comprises 103 empirical articles. Data analysis combined descriptive analysis

with qualitative thematic examination and keyword co-occurrence analysis, enabling the identification of dominant research themes, methodological patterns, and conceptual linkages across studies.

Summary of Findings

The review identifies a fast-growing but conceptually fragmented body of empirical research on AI in social media marketing. Across the 103 articles, four dominant and interconnected thematic domains emerge. First, *Technical AI Models* emphasize machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, and sentiment/emotion analysis as the computational basis enabling AI applications in social media contexts. Second, *Branding and AI-Generated Content* examines how these capabilities are translated into marketing practice through content creation, personalization, brand voice consistency, and virtual influencers. Third, *Consumer Experience and Response to AI Content* focuses on consumer outcomes such as engagement, trust, emotions, satisfaction, attitudes toward the brand, and purchase intention. Overall, studies indicate that AI-enabled content can improve marketing outcomes, particularly when perceived as relevant, informative, and engaging. However, consumer responses are not uniformly positive. Fourth, *Perceptions of AI and Its Role in Marketing* highlights concerns related to authenticity, transparency, anthropomorphism, and ethical acceptability. Consumers may value AI for efficiency and innovation, but may also react negatively when AI-driven content is perceived as artificial, emotionally distant, or manipulative. A central finding of the review is that most studies examine isolated relationships within individual domains, with limited integration across technical, strategic, and perceptual levels.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes four key contributions to the literature on AI in social media marketing. First, it provides a timely and systematic synthesis of recent empirical research conducted after the

widespread diffusion of generative AI, offering an up-to-date overview of a rapidly evolving field. Second, the study structures a fragmented body of knowledge by organizing prior research into four coherent thematic categories: Technical AI models, Branding and AI-Generated Content, Consumer Experience and Response to AI Content and Perceptions of AI and Its Role in Marketing. This categorization clarifies dominant research focus and highlights underexplored conceptual linkages. Third, the paper advances theory by proposing an integrative conceptual model that connects technical AI capabilities to marketing content strategies, consumer experience, and higher-order consumer perceptions. By articulating these relationships, the model moves beyond isolated effect studies and supports a more cumulative understanding of how AI shapes consumer-brand interactions in social media environments. Finally, the paper identifies critical theoretical and conceptual gaps, emphasizing the need for greater integration across technical, strategic, and perceptual perspectives. Together, these contributions help consolidate an emerging research domain and provide a coherent foundation for future theory development in AI-driven social media marketing.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: INVISIBLE ENGAGEMENT AS A DRIVER OF BRAND PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: Consumer engagement, invisible engagement, social media, brand outcomes.

Description: This paper reveals that invisible forms of consumer engagement—such as reading, viewing, and saving content—offer deeper insights and stronger short-term and long-term brand impact than traditional visible metrics, challenging conventional approaches to measuring digital engagement.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions – As consumers spend nearly four hours a day on mobile devices, digital platforms now shape how people seek information, entertain themselves, and make purchase decisions. Yet marketing practice still relies on visible, platform-provided metrics such as likes, comments, and clicks, which capture only a small portion of the consumers' interactions. A vast realm of invisible engagement—reading, viewing, searching, or saving content—remains largely unmeasured but may better reflect how consumers actually interact with brands. This article asks three central research questions**:** (1) What is invisible engagement, and how does it differ from visible one? (2) How does invisible engagement influence short-term brand outcomes compared to visible engagement? (3) What role does

invisible engagement play in long-term brand building? These questions are especially important in an advertising ecosystem that rewards short-term effects and risks undervaluing deeper forms of engagement. Drawing on a multi-method study of 12,855 branded social media posts and their associated interactions, the paper provides empirical evidence that invisible engagement has stronger short-term effects than visible metrics and holds strategic value for long-term brand growth.

Method And Data - To collect the data on invisible engagement, we collaborated with a leading global cosmetics company, which facilitated access to a distinctive sample of participants closely aligned with typical consumers in the cosmetics sector. Our sample consisted of women aged 20–55, who reported active daily use of Facebook and Instagram for a minimum of thirty minutes. A total of 44 female participants were recruited through a professional agency to ensure representativeness within the target demographic of our industry partner. Following the methodological guidelines of the Digital Practices Tracing (DPT) protocol, participants signed an informed consent prior to data collection. During a one-week observation period, participants were instructed to record all social media usage and general Internet browsing activities, with explicit instructions to pause recordings when accessing personal or sensitive information to protect privacy. Data collection occurred between February and March 2024. All video recordings were anonymized to maintain participant confidentiality. The procedure resulted in a total of 250 hours of screen recordings, with an average of 5 hours and 36 minutes per participant, from which we extracted a sample of 12,855 social media ads that the participants were exposed to.

Summary of Findings – This study identifies five forms of invisible engagement—stop, see, search, save, and shop—that provide a fuller picture of how consumers interact with brand social media content. Stop actions occur when users pause on a post for more than two seconds and are strongly linked to brand recall. See actions, such as zooming images,

expanding text, or browsing carousels, signal content interest. Search actions reflect deliberate, self-directed information seeking within or beyond the platform, while save behaviours—screenshots, bookmarks, wishlists—support later reconsideration and often precede purchases. Shop actions involve browsing e-shops, checking specifications, or adding items to a cart. Findings show that invisible engagement meaningfully contributes to long-term brand building. Stop and see behaviours represent attention-based interactions that align with established pathways to brand memory, strengthening awareness, salience, and mental availability over time. The study also demonstrates strong short-term effects: posts without likes but with see, search, or save actions generated higher shop engagement rates (10.1%) than posts with likes (6.8%). A Poisson mixed-effects model confirms a significant positive relationship between invisible engagement and shop behaviours ($\beta = 1.16171$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increases in invisible actions substantially raise the likelihood of shopping engagement.

Statement of Key Contributions – This paper advances understanding of digital consumer engagement and its strategic implications. First, it introduces the concept of invisible engagement—behaviours such as reading, viewing, searching, or saving content—that occur beyond platform-reported metrics like likes, comments, and shares. While visible metrics have long dominated marketing practice, the paper shows that invisible engagement provides a more accurate and nuanced picture of how consumers interact with brands, offering insight into both immediate reactions and longer-term preferences. Second, using a multi-method approach that combines large-scale digital data with qualitative tools, the study analyzes 12,855 branded social media posts to compare visible and invisible engagement. The findings show that invisible behaviours exert a stronger influence on short-term consumer actions than traditionally measured metrics. Third, the research demonstrates the long-term strategic value of invisible engagement. Whereas visible metrics often drive short-term optimization,

accounting for invisible engagement allows marketers to connect with deeper consumer motivations and support sustainable brand growth. Finally, the paper challenges the industry's reliance on platform-defined metrics and calls for conceptually grounded measures that capture the full spectrum of consumer behaviour. Overall, it bridges key gaps between theory and practice by establishing invisible engagement as a critical driver of brand outcomes.

NOT JUST NEGATIVE: MAPPING EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO FEAR-MONGERING NARRATIVES ON YOUTUBE

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Keywords: Fear-mongering; Consumer-generated content; Discrete emotions; Computational text analysis

Description: This research examines how consumer-generated fear-mongering narratives in online video shape the mix of emotions expressed in audience discussions and identifies which emotional responses are associated with different narrative framings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question. This research examines how consumer-generated fear-mongering narratives shape emotional responses in online video environments. We address two related questions: (1) How do fear-oriented narrative framings in social video content relate to the emotions expressed by audiences in surrounding discussions? And (2) which emotional responses are most strongly associated with fear-mongering versus reassuring narratives?

Method and Data. We study consumer-generated video content on a major social media platform together with the associated audience response. Using a combination of computational text analysis and statistical modeling, we examine how differences in narrative framing and

emotional tone are related to the emotional composition of viewer responses. The analysis focuses on identifying systematic associations rather than isolating individual creators or topics.

Summary of Findings. The results reveal consistent emotional patterns. Videos that frame topics as dangerous or alarming are followed by discussions marked by elevated expressions of disgust and reduced expressions of joy. In contrast, reassuring or safety-oriented narratives are associated with more neutral and positive emotional responses. Notably, explicit expressions of fear do not increase reliably across fear-framed content, suggesting that fear-mongering operates through emotional pathways other than fear itself.

Key Contributions. This research extends prior work on fear appeals by shifting attention from firm-generated messages to consumer-generated narratives in social media contexts. Whereas existing research often treats fear as a singular outcome, our findings highlight the importance of examining the broader mix of discrete emotions that circulate through online conversations. By showing how fear-mongering reshapes emotional discourse rather than simply intensifying fear, this work advances understanding of emotion dynamics in digital environments and offers insight for firms, public agencies, and platforms seeking to monitor and respond to emotionally charged consumer narratives.

Playing to Win: Mapping the Gamification Landscape in Marketing

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Keywords: Gamification, Bibliometric Analysis, Bibliographic Coupling, Cluster Analysis, Review

Description: This study maps the evolution of gamification research in marketing through bibliometric analysis and thematic clustering, identifying four major clusters along with the key themes and directions for future research

ABSTRACT

This study offers a systematic review of gamification in marketing, based on a bibliometric analysis of 90 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus. Using the Bibliometrix package in R, we mapped the science through keyword co-occurrence analysis and bibliographic coupling to identify theme structures in the field. The results show four main research clusters: gamification in offline contexts, advertising, online communities, and engagement. Each cluster highlights different applications, concepts, and new research priorities. Based on these findings, the paper offers suggestions for future research directions, providing scholars with a thematic roadmap to support theoretical growth and practical uses in gamification marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Marketers continually seek innovative ways to enhance effectiveness, and gamification—"enhancing a service with affordances for gameful experiences to support users' overall value

creation" (Huotari & Hamari, 2017)—has emerged as a key strategy. The global gamification market is projected to grow 29.01% annually, reaching $92.51 billion by 2030 (Mordor Intelligence, 2025). Coined by Nick Pelling in 2002, gamification gained marketing attention after the first Journal of Advertising article in 2013 and has since expanded across domains including fintech (Yang et al., 2023), fitness apps (Kunkel, Hayduk, & Lock, 2023), and advertising (Sreejesh & Ghosh, 2025).

Despite growing adoption, findings are inconsistent. Monetary rewards may harm retail outcomes (Bauer et al., 2020) but benefit fintech users (Behl & Pereira, 2021). Uncertainty in game mechanisms, such as "spin-the-wheel" games, can enhance enjoyment and reduce negative experiences (Nazifi et al., 2025). Gamification effects may persist beyond gameplay (Ho et al., 2023) but often decline once elements are removed or goals are reached (Blanchard & Palazzolo, 2024).

Existing reviews often focus on specific sectors—hospitality and tourism (Ciuchita et al., 2023; Pasca et al., 2021), servitization (Shi et al., 2017), advertising (van Berlo et al., 2022), or brand engagement (Malik et al., 2024)—providing fragmented insights. To address this, the present study conducts a bibliometric analysis of A and A* marketing journals. Using bibliographic coupling and keyword analysis, it maps the intellectual structure, identifies dominant clusters, and proposes future research directions.

RQ1: How is the research landscape of gamification in marketing structured?

RQ2: In the identified thematic structure, what are the motor, basic, niche, and emerging themes in gamification research?

RQ3: What promising paths and directions can guide future research on gamification in marketing?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the methodology. Section 3 presents the findings from keyword analysis and bibliographic coupling. Section 4 outlines future research directions, followed by conclusions, implications, and limitations.

METHODOLOGY

Following Donthu et al. (2021), this study adopts a single-database approach using Scopus to ensure data consistency and reduce human error. An initial search using the keyword *"gamification"* in the TITLE–ABS–KEY field yielded 19,815 records. The dataset was refined by restricting the subject area to Business, Management, and Accounting and limiting document types to journal articles, resulting in 1,037 records. After excluding non-English publications, 1,005 articles remained. To ensure quality, only articles published in A and A* category journals were included, reducing the dataset to 388 studies. Further filtering to marketing journals yielded 137 articles, and a manual screening of abstracts was conducted to remove papers in which gamification was not the primary focus or where the studies were purely qualitative. This resulted in a final sample of 90 articles. The study adopts a science mapping approach to examine relationships among research constituents (Zupic and Čater, 2015). Specifically, co-word analysis and bibliographic coupling were employed. Co-word analysis was used to identify prominent research themes based on keyword co-occurrence, while bibliographic coupling was applied to map the intellectual structure of gamification research in marketing. Bibliographic coupling assumes that publications sharing common references are conceptually related (Donthu et al., 2021). All analyses were conducted using Biblioshiny within the Bibliometrix R package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017).

FINDINGS

Keyword analysis and bibliographic coupling revealed top keywords and four thematic clusters of gamification research in marketing: offline contexts, advertising, online communities, and engagement.

Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis for science mapping excluded ‘gamification’ due to its obvious presence. The most frequent keyword was ‘engagement’ (12 occurrences), reflecting gamification’s widespread use in enhancing user engagement across contexts (Eisingerich et al., 2019; Högberg et al., 2019). Next was ‘Self-determination theory’, highlighting gamification’s ability to satisfy competence, autonomy, and relatedness, thereby boosting autonomous motivation, positive attitudes, and behavioral intentions (Bitrián, Buil, and Catalán, 2021a; Bitrián, Buil, and Catalán, 2021b; Buil, Catalán, and Martínez, 2020; Yeh, Chang, and Li, 2025).

‘In-game advertising’ was another prominent keyword, showing how gamification improves advertising effectiveness, brand recall, and recognition (Sreejesh, Ghosh, and Dwivedi, 2021). Other keywords demonstrate gamification’s broad applicability: ‘cash rewards’ in gamified fintech apps with uncertain game elements (Behl & Pereira, 2021), ‘gameful experience’ representing positive emotional and engaging qualities of gamified apps (Eppmann et al., 2018), and topics like sustainability, gamified services, and fitness apps, highlighting diverse applications.

Bibliographic Coupling

Bibliographic coupling resulted in four clusters and will identify the broad spectrum of themes and the latest developments in the domain. These clusters are described in detail:

Cluster 1: Gamification In Offline Contexts

Five articles examine gamification in offline settings. Hedonic value drives continued engagement more than rewards (Högberg et al., 2019). Elements such as likes promote greater intrinsic motivation, loyalty, and participation than points (Feng et al., 2020). Uncertainty is key: unpredictability drives positive retail outcomes (Tsai, 2024), and blind box products increase enjoyment, especially for costly items (Miao et al., 2023). However, gamification does not always boost offer uptake unless it includes active engagement (Högberg, Shams, & Wästlund, 2019). Overall, offline gamification succeeds by stimulating intrinsic motivation, engagement, and hedonic value rather than relying solely on rewards.

Cluster 2: Gamification And Engagement

The largest cluster (71 articles) shows that gamification elements boost engagement (Hsu, 2023), brand awareness, loyalty (Abou-Shouk & Soliman, 2021), and even sales. Badges and leaderboards outperform coupons (Ho et al., 2023), but removing elements can reduce desired behaviors (Blanchard & Palazzolo, 2024). While motivation and performance improve, creative or high-quality outputs may not (Ikhide et al., 2022; Zimmerling et al., 2019). Flow is encouraged by gameplay, but excessive interactivity can reduce story enjoyment (Vega & Camarero, 2024). Losing competitions can harm engagement unless offset by prior involvement (Leclercq et al., 2018). Engagement outcomes vary by age, experience, and gender (Jang et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2022). Personalization and emerging technologies like AI and the metaverse can enhance results.

Cluster 3: Gamification In Advertising

Nine articles focus on in-game advertising (IGA) and advergames. IGA effectiveness depends on context: ads draw less attention than TV ads (Ghosh et al., 2022a) but perform well on related platforms like social media and PCs, enhancing brand recall (Sreejesh et al., 2021). Brand memory

declines faster on mobile, although mobile outperforms PCs under strict gameplay rules; otherwise, PCs yield better behaviors (Sreejesh & Ghosh, 2025). Fast games favor logo recall, slow games boost less-known brands' attitudes and purchase intentions (Rialti et al., 2022; Ghosh et al., 2021). Flow improves game and brand perceptions, especially on social media/PCs. Adults favor IGAs; children prefer advergames (Ghosh et al., 2022b). Intrusiveness can reduce effects (Malhotra et al., 2021). Success depends on platform, design, speed, brand familiarity, and audience.

Cluster 4-Gamification In Brand Communities

Five articles examine gamification in brand communities. Gamification affordances foster customer citizenship behaviors and strengthen social capital (Li et al., 2024). Elements fall into social (competition, cooperation), immersion (avatars, characters), and achievement (points, badges) types (Koivisto & Hamari, 2019). In green logistics, interactivity mattered more than competition or achievement (Liu et al., 2024), while achievement and social features enhanced brand engagement and equity elsewhere (Xi & Hamari, 2020). High distributive justice can reduce game-related uncertainty, lowering fun for low-engaged, reward-focused members (Leclercq et al., 2020). Element choice should be strategically tailored to context.

Synthesis of Findings Across Research Clusters

While bibliographic coupling identifies four clusters, the findings reveal a connected pattern in gamification research. Offline studies show gamification activates intrinsic motivation and hedonic value through uncertainty, enjoyment, and experiential design, initiating consumer engagement (Högberg et al., 2019; Feng et al., 2020; Tsai, 2024). This links to the engagement cluster, where engagement translates gamified experiences into behavioral outcomes, influenced

by design continuity, personalization, and user characteristics (Leclercq et al., 2018; Ho et al., 2023; Blanchard & Palazzolo, 2024). In advertising, engagement shapes processing of brand stimuli, with flow and immersion affecting attention, recall, and attitudes depending on platform, device, and game design (Sreejesh et al., 2021; Ghosh et al., 2022a; Rialti et al., 2022). In brand communities, socially embedded engagement drives outcomes via social capital, competition, cooperation, and fairness, affecting participation and contribution (Xi & Hamari, 2020; Leclercq et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024). Collectively, gamification activates motivation, channels engagement, shapes experiences, and produces individual and collective marketing outcomes.

Thematic Analysis

Using Biblioshiny, we created a thematic map from author keywords (Figure 1), plotting themes along two axes: centrality, showing interaction with other themes, and density, indicating strength and development (Cobo et al., 2011). Excluding the keyword *gamification* revealed several distinct themes. In the upper-right quadrant (motor themes), well-developed and highly connected topics include brand loyalty, gameful experience, sustainability, serious games, and social marketing. Upper-left (niche themes) contains in-game advertising, advergames, emerging markets, and fintech—well-developed internally but weakly linked to other themes. The lower-left quadrant includes engagement, online community, and experience, which are emerging or declining, highlighting a need to move beyond user engagement. In the lower-right quadrant (basic themes), self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation, consumer engagement, and customer experience remain relevant but are still building internal coherence, indicating ongoing research.

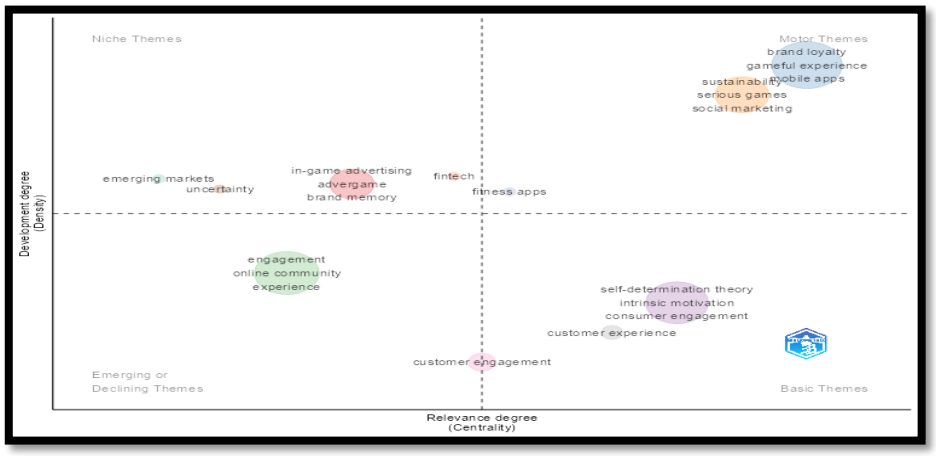


Figure 1: Thematic Map

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Developing Basic Themes (Bottom-Right Quadrant)

Themes like self-determination theory, consumer engagement, and customer experience are important but need stronger internal coherence. Expanding beyond self-determination theory to include frameworks like goal-setting or regulatory focus could improve insights on motivation and the balance of hedonic and utilitarian factors. Future research should track actual behaviors, loyalty, and word-of-mouth rather than treating engagement as the end goal, and examine game elements such as progress bars, treasure hunts, and personalized challenges while balancing skill and difficulty.

Developing Motor Themes (Top-Right Quadrant)

Well-established themes, including brand loyalty, gameful experience, and sustainability, are interconnected. Studies should explore long-term effects beyond initial excitement, compare gamification with traditional marketing across contexts, demographics, and regions, and assess outcomes such as brand evaluation, patronage, recall, ad avoidance, and social sharing.

Developing Niche Themes (Top-Left Quadrant)

Specific themes like in-game advertising, fintech, and advergames are isolated from the broader field. Research should integrate these areas by testing design factors (game speed, ad placement, language), genre effects (strategy vs. simulation), and reward types (status vs. monetary), including visibility in luck- or performance-based games.

Developing Emerging/Declining Themes (Bottom-Left Quadrant)

Themes such as engagement and online communities should address risks like addiction and saturation, influenced by personality. Objective methods, including app analytics and neuromarketing, are needed to complement self-reports. Gaps remain in understanding early user drop-off and sustaining retention after novelty fades.

CONCLUSION & LIMITATIONS

This study analyzed 90 articles from A and A* marketing journals to examine gamification research. Four main themes emerged, revealing consistent and conflicting findings and highlighting areas for future study. Research is shifting from primarily using self-determination theory to exploring frameworks like goal-setting, regulatory focus, and attachment theory, and from individual game mechanics to overall design journeys and long-term effects. Negative impacts of gamification remain underexplored. Management insights show the same mechanics can have different effects across sectors, emphasizing industry-specific design, and age and gender differences highlight the need for personalization. Companies should focus on the full customer journey and measure actual behavior rather than intentions.Limitations of this study include the use of a single database, narrow subject areas, and dependence on Bibliometrix for analysis.

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POST-PANDEMIC SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CROSS-PLATFORM CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TOP UNIVERSITIES' FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, AND YOUTUBE PAGES

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Keywords: social media marketing, higher education, content analysis, platform strategy, audience engagement

Description: This study examines how the world's top universities strategically use social media in the post-pandemic era to enhance branding and stakeholder engagement through a cross-platform content analysis of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Building on the identified gaps in the literature and the practical demands confronting higher education marketers worldwide, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do universities use social media in terms of (a) frequency of posting, (b) types of posts, (c) length or duration of content, (d) profile photo, (e) cover photo, (f) information type, and (g) topic?

2. Is there a relationship between the social media pages' (a) frequency of posting, (b) follower size, (c) page performance index, (d) post interaction rate, (e) page age, and (f) reputation score?
3. What are the best practices in social media marketing in the context of higher education institutions?

Method and Data

Manual and computerized content analysis were employed to examine post-pandemic social media strategy among ten purposively selected universities from the Times Higher Education (THE) 2025 World Reputation Rankings. The units of analysis were (1) each university's official Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube pages and (2) individual social media posts. The platform set was selected to capture differences in platform affordances and to ensure data accessibility; YouTube was included for its video-based affordances and relevance to higher education branding. For each university and platform, the sample comprised the top ten posts by engagement within the post-pandemic observation window. Page-level metrics (e.g., follower size, page performance indicators, and interaction rates) and post-level characteristics (e.g., content type and topic) were collected using Fanpage Karma and structured coding procedures. The dataset covers the period May 1, 2023 to May 31, 2025, with data extraction conducted on June 6, 2025.

Summary of Findings

The analysis shows clear platform specialization among the top universities, indicating that higher education social media strategy has shifted from uniform cross-posting to platform-tailored execution. Across pages, higher posting frequency is associated with page growth, but it

is accompanied by lower per-post engagement, highlighting a strategic trade-off between scaling reach and sustaining interaction quality. At the post level, content that signals authenticity consistently outperforms event-centric messaging. In particular, behind-the-scenes content and alumni-centered storytelling generate higher interaction than posts focused primarily on announcements and institutional events. Overall, the findings suggest that performance is strongest when universities align message type and format with platform affordances while maintaining brand coherence across channels.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to higher education marketing and social media strategy in four ways. First, it addresses a documented gap by offering a theoretically grounded, cross-platform examination of how elite universities coordinate platform-specific content in the post-pandemic period. Second, it extends Platform Affordance Theory by showing how institutions preserve brand coherence while tailoring message formats and themes to different platform capabilities and audience expectations. Third, it provides empirical evidence of a strategic performance trade-off: higher posting frequency is linked to page growth but lower per-post engagement, informing decisions about cadence versus interaction quality. Fourth, it yields actionable best practices for universities seeking to strengthen digital branding, demonstrating that authenticity-oriented content (for example, behind-the-scenes and alumni narratives) is more effective than event-centric posting in driving interaction.

References are available upon request.

TITLE : SALES PITCH INTENSITY IN LIVE COMMERCE

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Keywords: Live Commerce, Sales Pitch Intensity, Informational Appeals, Emotional Appeals, Vocal Delivery

Description: Using AI-based analysis of over 10,000 livestream sessions, this study shows that informational intensity enhances sales performance while emotional intensity often reduces it in live commerce settings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sales pitches have long been central to marketing strategy, but their role in live commerce a rapidly growing form of real-time retail remains underexplored. Live commerce combines product demonstrations, interactive communication, and instant purchase opportunities, creating a unique persuasive environment characterized by high uncertainty, time pressure, and information asymmetry. In this context, consumers cannot physically examine products and must rely entirely on sellers' real-time communication to make purchase decisions.

Existing research often treats sales content simplistically, such as by counting product mentions, without recognizing its multidimensional character. Moreover, the systematic integration of message intensity encompassing both what is said and how it is said into a unified framework remains rare. This study addresses these gaps by asking: How does sales pitch intensity, disaggregated into informational and emotional components, affect sales performance in live

commerce? Furthermore, how do phonetic delivery features vocal pitch and pronunciation clarity moderate these effects?

Drawing on dual-process theory and persuasion knowledge theory, we propose that informational intensity enhances sales by reducing uncertainty and facilitating systematic evaluation, whereas emotional intensity may backfire by triggering skepticism and cognitive load. This research advances understanding of persuasive communication in voice-driven, real-time retail environments.

Method And Data

This study analyzes 10,436 livestream sessions from Naver Shopping Live, Korea's leading live commerce platform, spanning four product categories fashion apparel, accessories, cosmetics, and food. For each broadcast, sales outcomes (total value and order counts), engagement metrics (likes), and complete audiovisual recordings were collected.

Sales pitch intensity was measured through an AI-based multimodal framework. Broadcast audio was transcribed and segmented into sentences, then classified as informational, emotional, or neutral using zero-shot classification. A theory-driven codebook was constructed specifying subcategories: informational content includes product mentions, pricing, and deals; emotional content includes humor, affective appeals, and small talk.

Intensity was operationalized along three linguistic dimensions: frequency (share of sentences per broadcast duration), proximity (inverse sequential distance between same-type sentences), and stress (proportion containing linguistic intensifiers). These dimensions were normalized and

multiplied to construct composite indices. Phonetic features vocal pitch and pronunciation accuracy were extracted using acoustic analysis and speech recognition models.

Fixed-effects panel regression was employed to estimate effects on sales performance, controlling for seller heterogeneity, time factors, and contextual variables.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal asymmetric effects of informational and emotional intensity on sales performance. Informational intensity significantly enhances both sales value and order quantity, indicating that fact-based, detailed product information drives purchasing behavior. In contrast, emotional intensity consistently reduces both outcomes, suggesting that heightened emotional appeals suppress sales performance in live commerce settings.

Phonetic delivery moderates these effects in distinct ways. Higher vocal pitch amplifies both the positive impact of informational intensity and the negative impact of emotional intensity. Clear pronunciation reduces the harm of emotional appeals, though it slightly weakens the benefits of informational content. Pitch variation enhances the effectiveness of informational messages, while pronunciation variation shows general positive effects with minimal interaction with content type.

Product characteristics further moderate intensity effects. For search goods and utilitarian products, informational intensity proves particularly effective, whereas emotional appeals become more detrimental. Contextual factors such as multi-product broadcasts, larger discounts, and first-time sessions strengthen the positive effects of informational intensity while exacerbating the negative effects of emotional intensity. These patterns indicate that

informational appeals perform best when consumer information needs are high, whereas emotional appeals tend to undermine sales in high-information-need contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to marketing literature and practice. First, it advances understanding of persuasive communication by introducing a multidimensional conceptualization of sales pitch intensity that integrates informational and emotional content with phonetic delivery. This approach moves beyond simple content classifications and provides a theoretically grounded framework for analyzing persuasive messaging in real-time retail environments.

Second, the study demonstrates that intensity not merely the presence of message content determines persuasive impact. Drawing on dual-process theory and persuasion knowledge theory, the findings reveal that informational and emotional appeals respond differently to intensity, with informational content amplifying persuasion while emotional content often undermines it. This asymmetry challenges conventional assumptions about emotional engagement in sales contexts.

Third, the AI-based multimodal framework offers a scalable methodology for analyzing speech in marketing contexts. By integrating speech-to-text processing, machine learning classification, and phonetic analysis, this approach can be extended to diverse sales environments beyond live commerce.

From a managerial perspective, the findings recommend that live commerce practitioners prioritize structured informational content, tailor emotional appeals to product type and context, and train sellers in effective vocal delivery to optimize sales performance.

SEEING ACTUAL FOOD PRODUCTS IN REAL TIME BRINGS ME CLOSER TO ONLINE SELLERS: THE IMPACT OF LIVE STREAMING SHOPPING ON CONSUMER FOOD PRODUCTS PURCHASING INTENTION

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Keywords: Live Streaming Shopping (LSS), perceived proximity, psychological distance, purchase intention, food marketing.

Description: This study examines how key characteristics of Live Streaming Shopping reduce consumers' perceived psychological distance, thereby increasing their intention to purchase food products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the rapid growth of online food markets, LSS has become a prominent channel, particularly in China, leveraging real-time interaction to enhance information transparency and trust. Prior research indicates that online grocery purchases depend on accessible product information and trust (Morganosky and Cude 2000; Tyrväinen and Karjaluoto 2022). LSS characteristics affect consumers' perceived psychological distance, such as synchrony, responsiveness, telepresence, immersion, para-social interaction, and social presence. This distance encompasses temporal, spatial, and social dimensions (Gahinet and Cliquet 2018; Trope and Liberman 2010). Reduced psychological distance can increase trust and

contextualized experience (Edwards et al. 2009; Poushneh 2021). Specifically, this research investigates the effect of temporal distance (shaped by synchrony and responsiveness), spatial distance (influenced by telepresence and immersion), and social distance (affected by para-social interaction and social presence) on the intention to purchase food via LSS.

Method and Data

A quantitative online survey was conducted with Chinese consumers experienced in Live Streaming Shopping (LSS), recruited via the Credamo platform. Participants were presented with a simulated scenario of an LSS room on Douyin selling apples, including platform details, anchor identity, product origin, price, and an image, to contextualize their responses. The questionnaire employed 7-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Scales for key constructs were adapted from established literature: synchrony (Kweon et al. 2011; Men et al. 2023), responsiveness (Li et al. 2022), telepresence (Ming et al. 2021; Men et al. 2023), immersion (Chang and Yu 2023), para-social interaction (Xu et al. 2020), social presence (Ming et al. 2021; Chen and Liao 2022), and purchase intention (Zhang et al. 2021; Chen and Liao 2022). Items were translated into Chinese and verified by bilingual researchers.

Data collection occurred between March 14 and April 6, 2025. From 353 initial recruits, screening questions and response-time checks yielded a final sample of 311 participants. The sample was predominantly aged 21-40 (83%) and female (71%), aligning with typical LSS user demographics. This profile ensures that respondents are familiar with the research context.

Summary of Findings

This study investigated the impact of perceived psychological distance on food purchase intentions via Live Streaming Shopping (LSS). Analysis of survey data from 311 experienced Chinese consumers revealed that specific LSS characteristics significantly influence purchase intention. Ordered logistic regression results (McFadden's pseudo-R^2 = 0.5611) identified synchrony ($p=.003$), telepresence ($p=.014$), immersion ($p<.001$), and para-social interaction

(p=.024) as significant predictors. However, responsiveness and social presence did not show significant effects in the model. These findings validate the proposed measures for perceived distance dimensions: temporal distance (via synchrony/responsiveness), spatial distance (via telepresence/immersion), and social distance (via para-social interaction/social presence). The results confirm that reduced psychological distance, facilitated by key LSS features, directly enhances consumers' intention to purchase food products.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to both academia and practice. Theoretically, it bridges a gap by proposing and validating a framework that links six LSS characteristics to three dimensions of perceived psychological distance (temporal, spatial, and social) in the food purchasing context. It provides a basis for subsequent experimental studies on perceived proximity in LSS.

For practitioners, the findings offer actionable insights for developing LSS in the food sector, especially for fresh and local products. Food producers and sellers can enhance perceived proximity and purchase intention by strategically augmenting key LSS features such as synchrony, telepresence, immersion, and para-social interaction. Furthermore, by influencing psychological distance and improving access to product information, LSS can be leveraged to motivate consumer choices towards healthier, more sustainable foods, supporting the necessary dietary system transition.

References are available upon request.

STARS OVER SUBSTANCE – ONLINE REVIEW SENTIMENT AS THE KEY TO BRAND TRUST AND PREMIUM PRICING

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Keywords: Review Valence, Review Depth, Reviewer Expertise, Brand Trust, Willingness to Pay a Price Premium.

Description: This research offers novel insights into how online review attributes influence brand trust formation and premium pricing in services, showing that consumers particularly consider the positive sentiment of online reviews (i.e., review valence), whereas review depth and reviewer expertise do not show a differential effect on brand trust formation and subsequent spending levels.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Online reviews provide a convenient way to assess and compare products and services (Sparks, Perkins, and Buckley 2013). As a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), they are especially important in experience-based industries such as hospitality (Zhang et al. 2021). With approximately 80% of travelers reading hotel reviews before booking (Bai et al. 2023), understanding and managing online reviews has become crucial for hospitality providers to generate future demand (Olson and Ro 2020). While prior research has extensively explored the impact of review attributes such as valence, depth, and reviewer expertise on performance outcomes (Dellarocas, Zhang, and Awad 2007), less is known about the underlying mechanisms by which these attributes influence consumers' later behavior (e.g., Vermeulen and Seegers 2009). Drawing on trust transfer theory (McKnight 1998), this paper argues that brand trust serves as a key mechanism for online review attributes to translate into tangible economic behaviors, such as consumers' willingness to pay a price premium (e.g., Leckie, Dwivedi, and Johnson 2023). Furthermore, since the influence of online reviews can vary widely across individuals (c.f., social comparison theory; Festinger 1954), consumers' likelihood of following others' recommendations is inspected as a boundary condition in this relationship.

Method and Data

Two online experiments with a 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial design were conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Study 1 (n=164, M_{age} = 35 years, 44.5 % female) examined how review valence (negative vs. positive) and reviewer expertise (low vs. high) influenced participants' rating of brand trust. Study 2 (n=166, M_{age} = 35 years, 48.2 % female) analyzed the

effects of review valence (negative vs. positive) and review depth (short vs. long) on brand trust. Both studies considered consumers' willingness to pay a price premium as the dependent variable, and adoption propensity as a moderator (a-path). Participants were shown a brief scenario featuring a screenshot of a fictional hotel listing on a popular online review platform. Depending on the scenario, *review valence* ranged from negative (1 star, negative text and description) to positive (5 stars, positive text and description), *review depth* varied from low (short, not detailed) to high (detailed, lengthy), and *reviewer expertise* ranged from low (low contributor level, few contributions and helpful votes) to high (high contributor level, many contributions and helpful votes). Hereafter, an online survey assessed the effectiveness of the manipulations, participants' willingness to pay a price premium, brand trust, adoption propensity, controls, and demographics.

Summary of Findings

To examine the proposed research model, several moderated-mediation analyses were conducted (Hayes 2022; Model 7). The findings reveal that positive online reviews significantly influence brand trust, particularly among consumers with high adoption propensity, which translates into a greater willingness to pay a price premium for the respective brand. Review depth and reviewer expertise, however, did not show significant effects on consumers' brand trust and subsequent spending intentions. This is surprising and suggests that consumers particularly consider the positive sentiment of online reviews (Hartmann et al. 2023) when building brand trust and later spending intentions, regardless of the review's depth or the reviewer's expertise. Although longer reviews based on expert knowledge are considered more helpful and trustworthy in the marketing literature (Huang et al. 2025), this does not lead to greater trust in the corresponding service brand or increased willingness to pay a price premium.

Statement of Key Contributions

The findings emphasize the critical role of a positive review sentiment (Hartmann et al. 2023) in building brand trust and charging premium prices. Strategies that encourage consumers to leave positive feedback in a simple, unambiguous way should be prioritized, as longer or expert-authored reviews do not influence trust formation. Resource allocation should particularly focus on fostering simple, sentiment-driven feedback approaches (e.g., scores, stars, emoticons). Likewise, targeting consumers with a strong tendency to adopt others' recommendations can enhance the trust-building effect of positive online reviews and, subsequently, their spending behavior. This can be achieved, for example, by identifying users who have recently consulted online reviews before making a purchase and subsequently re-targeting them through personalized campaigns or loyalty programs that emphasize peer validation.

References are available upon request.

STRATEGIC EMOTION IN INFLUENCE MARKETING: A NEW PARADIGM FOR DIGITAL PERSUASION

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Keywords: Social Media, Marketing, Influencer, Emotions

Description: This study advances influencer marketing research by examining emotional influence strategies across multiple content categories on Instagram.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Emotions play a central role in consumer behavior, particularly within social media. Influencer marketing differs from traditional advertising by relying on social proof and emotional persuasion rather than direct exposure. Through frequent, personal, and seemingly authentic content, influencers build strong emotional connections with their audiences. These relationships often resemble parasocial bonds, where followers feel personally connected to influencers despite the one-sided nature of the interaction. The effectiveness of influencer marketing lies not only in reach but in its persuasive power. Emotional closeness and perceived authenticity increase trust, making audiences more receptive to recommendations. However, these emotional bonds can negatively affect consumer decision-making. The constant presence of emotionally charged content blurs the line between relevant and irrelevant information, making informed choices more difficult. As a result, followers may engage in impulsive purchasing behavior, leading to financial strain and unhealthy consumption patterns. Given the rapid growth of influencer marketing and its economic significance, understanding emotional persuasion has become increasingly important. Different emotional appeals can trigger different consumer responses, suggesting that influencers use distinct emotional strategies depending on content type. Hence, we address this research question: Which emotional influence strategies are employed by influencers, and in what intensity, across different content categories?

Method and Data

The study analyzed a dataset of 1,386 Instagram posts across seven influencer content categories: Fashion & Beauty, Tech & Gaming, Parents & Pets, Health & Fitness, Lifestyle & Travel, Food & Sustainability, and Finance & Business. Each post was manually coded for ten predefined emotional dimensions using a standardized coding scheme. A team of trained reviewers conducted the coding, and inter-coder reliability was ensured through independent coding and consensus-based resolution of discrepancies, enhancing the robustness of the emotional classifications. Emotional intensity was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “not present at all” to “very strongly present.” Mean scores were calculated for each emotional dimension, and no normalization was required because all variables shared the same measurement scale. To examine emotional similarities across content categories, a multidimensional scaling analysis was performed using Euclidean distances derived from aggregated emotion profiles. The analysis employed a non-metric MDS algorithm and resulted

in a two-dimensional perceptual map. Spatial proximity indicates greater emotional similarity between categories. The two dimensions were interpreted inductively, reflecting a continuum from self-expression to social orientation and from enjoyment-driven to responsibility-driven content. The high variance explained indicates a good model fit and supports the interpretability of the emotional structure.

Summary of Findings

Across all content categories, positive emotional appeals showed the highest overall intensity, followed by group belonging, hedonic gratification, and fear of missing out. Emotional branding and narrative persuasion appeared at moderate levels, while self-congruence and empowerment were less prominent. Negative emotional appeals and nostalgia were used least frequently. The multidimensional scaling revealed three distinct clusters. Cluster A, characterized by everyday orientation and self-care, included parents & pets, health & fitness, food & sustainability, and tech & gaming. These categories relied primarily on positive emotional appeals, with secondary emphasis on group belonging, empowerment, or hedonic gratification. Cluster B, labeled self-presentation and escapism, comprised fashion & beauty and lifestyle & travel. Both categories displayed very high levels of positive emotional appeals, alongside strong emotional branding, hedonic gratification, and narrative persuasion. Fashion & beauty was more closely associated with self-expression, while lifestyle & travel leaned toward social orientation. Both were clearly situated on the enjoyment-driven side of the second dimension. Cluster C consisted solely of finance & business. This category emphasized group belonging, narrative persuasion, emotional branding, and fear of missing out, while positive emotional appeals played a comparatively smaller role.

Key Contributions

In Cluster A, the dominance of positive emotional appeals, combined with empowerment and group belonging, reflects themes of health, self-care, and everyday responsibility. Emotionalization is embedded in practical value and community support rather than driven by strong hedonic or scarcity-based appeals. Cluster B exhibits a pattern characterized by highly intensified positive emotional appeals, emotional branding, and elevated levels of fear of missing out and group affiliation. These strategies support aspirational self-presentation and escapism, encouraging audiences to disengage from everyday routines and immerse themselves in idealized lifestyles. Visually rich and narrative-driven content plays a central role in creating hedonic and inspirational consumer experiences. Cluster C, consisting solely of finance and business content, stands apart from all other categories. Here, group belonging and narrative persuasion outweigh positive emotional appeals, alongside a broad mix of additional strategies such as empowerment, emotional branding, and scarcity cues. This configuration reflects a persuasion logic that combines rational value propositions with carefully targeted emotional signals. The study contributes theoretically by mapping emotional strategies across content categories using two latent dimensions: self-expression versus social orientation, and enjoyment- versus responsibility-driven content. Practically, the findings highlight the need for category-specific emotional strategies, as persuasion mechanisms vary substantially across influencer domains.

References are available upon request

SUPERVISED POSITIONING MAPS OF BRAND SEGMENTS FROM UNSTRUCTURED TEXT REVIEWS

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Keywords: Positioning map, Brand segmentation, Unstructured text reviews, group variable selection, Market structure analysis.

This paper proposes a novel approach for generating action-oriented positioning maps with interpretable dimensions across brand-specific segments using unstructured online reviews.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand positioning maps have been an important data visualization tool in marketing for decades. Given such popularity and usefulness, numerous dimensionality reduction methods have been used to construct these maps, such as multidimensional scaling (MDS), principal component analysis (PCA) and t-Distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding (t-SNE). The data types range from classic survey data to modern behavioral and digital data, including online consumer reviews, search data, and consumer choice panel data. Among these, unstructured online reviews offer a relatively inexpensive way to capture large amounts of rich information about consumers' attitudes.

While existing methods can provide useful insights into market competition and the relative similarity structure among products or brands, the maps they produce often fall short in one or more of the following three essential properties: actionability, performance metrics, and heterogeneity of brand groups. Specifically, their x- and y- dimensions are often difficult to interpret and are not connected to key outcomes such as customer satisfaction. Moreover, they typically assume a single map for all brands. To address these limitations, there is a need to develop a novel mapping approach that utilizes online review data to generate actionable, segment-level brand maps.

Method and Data

This paper presents a novel method for generating action-oriented brand positioning maps with interpretable dimensions across brand-specific segments, utilizing unstructured online reviews. We developed two novel features: a bi-level clustering algorithm and stochastically flexible

variable selection. By doing so, our approach identifies segment-level, interpretable dimensions of brand maps, helping marketers develop effective repositioning strategies to enhance customer ratings. Additionally, our method can enhance actionability by providing nuanced, word-level effects within each dimension, compared to existing dimensionality reduction methods.

Yelp, a major online review site for local businesses, regularly provides datasets for analytics competitions (see www.yelp.com/dataset/). We downloaded a review dataset spanning 17 years, from 2005 to 2021, which includes star ratings and a large volume of unstructured textual reviews. We applied this method to the real-world unstructured Yelp reviews for the top 30 fast-food franchise brands. For our analysis, we focused on the top 30 brands in the quick-service and fast-casual categories, as ranked by *Restaurant Business* magazine in the United States. The top 30 brands include 5,085 business units and a total of 134,940 reviews in the dataset. Our preprocessing procedure yielded a 350-word frequency matrix for the independent variables, after removing words that were very sparse.

Summary of Findings

We first demonstrate that brand positioning maps generated by existing methods (e.g., MDS, t-SNE, supervised PCA, and BERTopic) provide limited capability for dimension labeling, segment-specific mapping, and visualizing the relationship between brand positions and star ratings. In contrast, our approach produces segment-specific maps with clearly interpretable, actionable dimensions that are strongly associated with star ratings. In particular, our method constructs two segment-level positioning maps for the 30 fast-food brands: Segment 1, characterized by x- and y- dimensions capturing *service responsiveness* and *food satisfaction*; and Segment 2, defined by x- and y- dimensions reflecting *deliciousness & pleasantness*, as well as *operational concerns*. Segment 1 consists of specialty and fast-casual brands (e.g., Arby's,

Chipotle, and Five Guys) with higher average ratings and service-oriented keywords, whereas Segment 2 is comprised of traditional fast-food chains (e.g., McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's) with lower ratings and keywords focused on value and convenience. Furthermore, our approach improves actionability by identifying influential terms and their corresponding coefficients, which can be leveraged to enhance the effects of these dimensions on the ratings. Finally, our model achieves higher predictive accuracy than five benchmark methods, such as LDA, supervised LDA, PCA, supervised PCA, and partial least squares (PLS).

Key Contributions

The main contribution is the generation of superior brand positioning maps for comprehensive market structure analysis, that (1) are segment-specific, (2) feature more interpretable and actionable dimensions, and (3) exhibit enhanced prediction of outcome variables, such as customer ratings. When applying this novel approach, segment-specific maps provide zoomed-in insights into the competitive dynamics among brands that share similar attribute dimensions within a close competitive set, while between-segment maps offer a broader view of the overall market structure, highlighting brand segments and their key dimensions. As the proposed method reveals a confirmatory factor structure of the selected words across the dimensions, it facilitates cross-validation and improves generalizability across datasets. In addition, this method yields nuanced insights into the specific words included in each dimension and their effects on the performance metric, enhancing the map's actionability in a way that existing dimensionality reduction methods used for positioning mapping cannot offer. These characteristics make the resulting maps valuable for managers seeking to strategically (re)position their brands in hyper-competitive markets, as well as for researchers aiming to understand and elucidate brand market structures based on key dimensions.

THE IMPACT OF AI DISCLOSURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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Key Words: Disclosure, User-generated-content, Attribution, Warmth, Competence, Artificial intelligence, Labeling.

Description: This study applies the Stereotype Content Model to demonstrate that AI disclosure labels on social media increase user engagement primarily by boosting perceptions of competence, rather than by undermining warmth, with effects moderated by content type and creator popularity.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how AI disclosure labels influence user engagement on social media. Drawing from the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), we propose that AI disclosures signal high competence but low warmth, leading to competing effects on engagement. The findings inform theory and guide disclosure design, placement, and platform transparency policy.

INTRODUCTION. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into content creation has transformed social media landscapes globally (Burrus et al., 2024). Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube now host increasing amounts of AI-generated content (AIGC), raising critical questions about transparency and user trust (Wittenberg et al., 2024). In response, major platforms have implemented AI disclosure policies, requiring creators to label AI-assisted or fully AI-generated posts (TikTok,

2023; YouTube, 2023; Instagram, 2023). However, the psychological and behavioral impacts of these disclosures on user engagement remain poorly understood (Davis & Miller, 2022). Thus, our research question asks: What is the effect of AI disclosure on engagement (likes, shares, saves, and comments) with user-generated content? This study investigates how AI disclosure labels influence key engagement metrics—likes, shares, comments, and saves—on TikTok, currently the world's fastest-growing social media platform (Statista, 2023).

Our research is grounded in the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how users perceive and evaluate content (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). We propose that AI disclosure labels trigger two competing psychological mechanisms: (1) they enhance perceptions of competence by signaling technical sophistication and production quality, which may increase engagement (Longoni & Cian, 2020); while (2) they reduce perceived warmth by diminishing the sense of human connection, which may decrease engagement (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). To comprehensively test these propositions, we employ a multi-method research design combining large-scale observational data analysis with controlled experimental methods.

The observational study analyzes 30,606 TikTok videos, comparing engagement metrics between AI-labeled and unlabeled content. This is complemented by a controlled experiment with 224 participants that directly measures the mediating roles of warmth and competence perceptions. Our findings challenge prevailing assumptions about consumer aversion to AI, demonstrating that disclosure labels can actually

enhance engagement by emphasizing technical competence, even when they somewhat reduce emotional connection.

Our research makes three key contributions. First, we extend disclosure theory (Friestad & Wright, 1994) to the novel context of AI-generated content. Second, we apply the SCM framework to human-AI interaction in marketing communications. Third, we provide empirical evidence challenging the prevailing assumption that AI disclosures necessarily reduce engagement due to authenticity concerns (Lefkeli et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW. At its core, traditional disclosure theory posits that transparency reduces information asymmetry and builds trust (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, when the subject of disclosure is a non-human creator (AI), the mechanism shifts fundamentally. AI disclosure does more than convey "transparency"; it primarily triggers the audience's social cognitive and attributional processes regarding the source of the content (Weiner, 1985).

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) provides the precise theoretical lens for this investigation. SCM posits that individuals evaluate any social entity (including technology) along two fundamental dimensions: warmth (intentions, friendliness, trustworthiness) and competence (efficacy, skill, intelligence) (Fiske et al., 2007). In traditional UGC, warmth perceptions (e.g., authenticity, emotional connection) are central to driving engagement (Berger et al., 2020). However, AI disclosure labels fundamentally alter this attribution: they shift the perceived source from "human" to "machine." This shift is hypothesized to systematically decrease perceived warmth (as

AI lacks human emotional intent) while systematically increasing perceived competence (as AI is associated with algorithmic precision and technological advancement) (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Longoni & Cian, 2020).

Therefore, this study uses the dual-dimensional framework of SCM as its core to propose that AI disclosure exerts differential effects on user engagement through two parallel and competing mediating pathways: warmth and competence. This moves beyond the single "transparency-trust" pathway of traditional disclosure theory, offering a more nuanced psychological mechanism for understanding disclosure effects in the AI era.

Disclosure research has long demonstrated that transparency enhances consumer trust by reducing information asymmetry (Day, 1976; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Carl, 2008). In traditional marketing contexts—such as product origins, nutritional labeling (Moorman, 1996), financial transparency (Franco, 2002), and influencer marketing (Karagur et al., 2021)—disclosures have been shown to improve brand evaluations (Araya et al., 2019). However, these findings primarily concern human-generated disclosures about tangible goods or services, leaving a gap in understanding disclosures for AI-generated digital content.

A key distinction of AI disclosures is their focus on non-human authorship (Vlacic et al., 2021). While traditional disclosures clarify product attributes or human biases, AI labels fundamentally reshape perceptions of content creation itself (Cetinic & She, 2021). This shift is critical because user-generated content (UGC) traditionally derives value from perceived human authenticity (Berger et al., 2020; Kim & Johnson,

2016). The impersonal nature of AI-generated content introduces unique challenges: studies suggest AI disclosures may reduce trust by making content seem less relatable (Lefkeli et al., 2023), though others argue AI's perceived competence can enhance credibility in specific contexts (Huschens et al., 2023).

Thus, while conventional disclosure frameworks emphasize transparency's benefits, AI disclosures operate differently, potentially altering how consumers process information (Longoni & Cian, 2020). This divergence underscores the need to reassess disclosure effects in the AI era.

User-generated content (UGC) has become a cornerstone of social media marketing, valued particularly for its perceived authenticity and relatability (Berger et al., 2020). The emergence of sophisticated AI tools has blurred traditional distinctions between human and machine-generated content, enabling creators to produce high-quality content with unprecedented efficiency (Wang et al., 2024). This technological shift raises critical questions about how audiences respond to content when they know it has been created or enhanced by AI.

Prior research suggests that different types of content rely on distinct psychological mechanisms for engagement. Emotional content (e.g., personal narratives) depends heavily on warmth and perceived authenticity, while informational content (e.g., tutorials) benefits more from perceptions of competence and expertise (Glikson & Woolley, 2020). We extend this framework to AI disclosures, hypothesizing that their effects will vary systematically based on content type and creator characteristics.

CONCEPTUALIZATION. This study draws on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), a foundational framework in social cognition research that posits individuals evaluate any social target—including groups, individuals, or technologies—along two universal dimensions: warmth and competence. Warmth captures perceptions of trustworthiness, friendliness, sincerity, and emotional intention; competence captures perceptions of capability, intelligence, skill, and efficacy. These two dimensions not only guide how perceivers categorize others but also predict downstream behavioral tendencies—warmth drives affiliative, emotionally supportive behaviors, while competence drives respect and task-related engagement (Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

In the context of user-generated content (UGC) on social media, warmth perceptions are central to fostering emotional engagement—such as commenting, saving, or forming parasocial relationships—whereas competence perceptions are more likely to fuel evaluative engagement, such as liking, sharing, or trusting content quality (Glikson & Woolley, 2020; Longoni & Cian, 2020). Importantly, when content is disclosed as AI-generated, this activates distinct attributional processes (Weiner, 1985; Mizerski, Golden, & Kernan, 1979): users become explicitly aware that the content lacks a human origin, which tends to decrease warmth (as AI lacks emotional intent) but simultaneously increases competence (as AI implies algorithmic sophistication and precision).

HYPOTHESES. Drawing on this dual-path perspective, I theorize competing effects of AI disclosure labels. On one hand, AI labels may reduce perceived emotional

authenticity, making the content feel impersonal or less "human"—thus lowering engagement metrics that rely on social presence and empathy, such as comments or saves (Berger et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2002). On the other hand, AI disclosure may enhance perceptions of professional quality, credibility, and effort, thereby increasing task-focused engagement like likes and shares (McKee, Bai, & Fiske, 2023; Glikson & Woolley, 2020).

Therefore, Hypothesis 1a predicts that UGC with an AI disclosure label will receive lower overall engagement than UGC without such a label, especially on emotionally driven behaviors. Hypothesis 2a proposes that this effect is mediated by reduced perceived warmth. Conversely, Hypothesis 1b proposes that AI disclosure will lead to higher engagement, particularly for performance- or quality-driven behaviors, and Hypothesis 2b posits this effect will be mediated by elevated perceived competence.

Beyond these main effects, I propose two moderating variables. First, the popularity of the content creator may buffer the negative impact of reduced warmth. Popular creators tend to have strong parasocial bonds with followers and are perceived as both warm and competent (Walsh et al., 2024; Chauhan, 2020), which may allow them to retain high engagement even when AI is disclosed. Thus, Hypothesis 3 suggests that AI disclosure will reduce engagement less for popular creators than for ordinary ones.

Second, I consider the role of content type in moderating these effects. According to prior literature, human-related content (e.g., content about family,

emotion, identity) typically elicits engagement via emotional resonance and warmth, while non-human-related content (e.g., data visualizations, tutorials) is evaluated more through a competence lens (Longoni & Cian, 2020; Zhou et al., 2023). When AI is disclosed in emotionally expressive content, the mismatch between source (AI) and content goal (emotional bonding) may undermine engagement. In contrast, AI-labeled non-human content may benefit from alignment between source and goal. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 states that AI disclosure will reduce engagement less for human-related content, as warmth remains more stable, and benefit non-human content, where competence becomes more salient.

This theoretical framing—rooted in SCM's dual-dimension structure—explains how and why AI disclosures can produce divergent outcomes across different engagement contexts. It also integrates AI perception literature with consumer behavior research, providing a rich lens for predicting heterogeneous consumer responses to AI-generated content in digital environments.

METHOD AND RESULTS. Study 1 aims to preliminarily test the main effects of AI disclosure labels (H1a, H1b) on social media engagement (likes, comments, shares, saves) using large-scale observational data, and to explore the moderating roles of content type (H4) and creator popularity (H3).

We collected video data from the Chinese version of TikTok via its public API, randomly sampling videos published between June 1, 2023, and August 31, 2023. After removing duplicates, incomplete records, and extreme outliers (e.g., engagement metrics beyond the 99.9th percentile), the final valid sample consisted of 30,606 videos.

Videos explicitly containing platform-official AI disclosure labels (e.g., “AI-generated” or “Created with AI technology”) in their metadata were coded as the “AI-labeled group” (N=1,334); videos without such labels comprised the “non-AI-labeled group” (N=29,272). AI label identification was based on explicit metadata fields—no predictive model was used for classification. The previously mentioned logit model was employed in the first stage of a Heckman two-stage correction model to estimate the probability of a video being chosen by the creator to receive an AI label, thereby controlling for self-selection bias, not to determine label presence.

To address the sample size disparity, we used robust standard errors in regressions and conducted a robustness check via Propensity Score Matching (PSM), with key findings remaining consistent. Engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares, saves) were compared between groups. Control variables (video length, content age, creator age and popularity, content type) were classified using percentile-based groupings and keyword models.

The Heckman-corrected OLS regressions showed that AI disclosure labels were positively and significantly associated with higher engagement across all metrics (e.g., coefficients: likes 0.240, comments 0.265, shares 0.309, saves 0.360; $p<.001$). Interaction analyses revealed that the positive effect of AI labels was stronger for non-human-related (informational) content and attenuated for popular creators. These results suggest AI disclosure boosts engagement primarily by signaling competence, particularly for task-oriented content and less popular creators, while popular creators may see reduced engagement due to compromised warmth/authenticity perceptions.

Overall, the findings challenge the assumption that AI disclosure necessarily decreases engagement, underscoring the roles of perceived competence and contextual factors like content type and creator popularity.

Study 2. This experimental study investigates the psychological mechanisms underlying the impact of AI disclosure labels on user engagement with social media content, building on prior findings that AI-labeled content receives higher engagement. The experiment involved 244 participants, with 224 included in the final analysis after attention checks. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: one group viewed a 15-second video without an AI disclosure label, while the other group viewed the same video explicitly labeled as "AI-generated content." The study aimed to validate the role of perceived warmth and competence, as outlined by the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), in mediating the relationship between AI disclosure and engagement.

The manipulation check confirmed the effectiveness of the experimental design, with significantly more participants in the AI-labeled condition correctly identifying the content as AI-generated ($\chi^2(1)=115.81$, $p < 0.001$).

To test H1a (AI disclosure reduces engagement) and H1b (AI disclosure increases engagement), we compared the engagement intentions between the experimental (AI label present) and control (AI label absent) groups. Binary logistic regression results showed that AI disclosure significantly increased intentions to like ($b = 1.360$, $SE = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$) and share ($b = 0.904$, $SE = 0.312$, $p < 0.01$) the content but had no significant effect on saving or commenting intentions. This pattern partially

supports H1b, indicating a positive effect of AI disclosure on certain engagement behaviors (liking, sharing). However, because it showed no significant effect on saving or commenting—behaviors typically associated with deeper emotional or evaluative investment—the comprehensive negative effect predicted by H1a was not fully supported. This suggests that the impact of AI disclosure is behavior-specific, with its positive effects mainly manifesting in relatively superficial, efficacy-driven behaviors.

Mediation analyses with 5,000 bootstrap resamples demonstrated that both perceived warmth and competence partially mediated the effects of AI disclosure on liking and sharing. For warmth, the indirect effects were significant for liking ($b = 0.636$, $SE = 0.184$, $p < 0.01$) and sharing ($b = 0.482$, $SE = 0.164$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, competence mediated these behaviors, with indirect effects of 0.372 ($SE = 0.152$, $p < 0.01$) for liking and 0.316 ($SE = 0.135$, $p < 0.05$) for sharing. Neither warmth nor competence mediated saving or commenting, suggesting these behaviors require deeper cognitive or emotional engagement beyond what AI labels alone influence.

The findings indicate that AI disclosure labels enhance surface-level engagement behaviors like liking and sharing by boosting perceptions of competence and warmth, while more effortful actions such as saving or commenting remain unaffected. This aligns with prior research suggesting that different engagement types are driven by distinct psychological mechanisms. Importantly, the results counter concerns that AI disclosures harm emotional connection, instead showing that emphasizing technical competence can foster interaction. These insights provide valuable guidance for platforms and creators seeking to optimize AI disclosure

strategies, highlighting the dual roles of warmth and competence in shaping user engagement. The study advances marketing theory by clarifying how AI disclosures influence consumer behavior and offers practical implications for leveraging AI transparency in digital content strategies.

THEORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. This research makes significant contributions by robustly applying the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to the novel domain of AI disclosure in social media. It demonstrates that SCM's warmth and competence dimensions serve as powerful parallel mediators, explaining the heterogeneous effects of AI labels on different engagement behaviors. By doing so, it challenges and refines the prevailing narrative that AI disclosure uniformly undermines engagement due to authenticity loss.

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. For platform designers, the findings advocate for disclosure mechanisms that can subtly highlight AI's competent capabilities without starkly undermining perceived warmth, especially for emotional content or popular creators. For content creators and marketers, the study provides a strategic framework: leveraging AI disclosure may be particularly effective for informational content where competence is valued, while a more cautious approach might be warranted for emotional content or for creators with a strong personal brand built on authenticity.

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The Impact of Influencer Selfies on Engagement

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Keywords: Influencer marketing, Selfies, Psychological Distance

Description: This work demonstrates that influencer selfies drive higher engagement than others-taken photos by reducing psychological distance, but only in appearance-based domains and mainly among micro and macro influencers, with weaker effects in professional contexts.

Extended Abstract

Research Question

This research examines whether posting influencer selfies, compared to photos taken by others, increases engagement by reducing psychological distance, and how this effect varies across influencer domain, follower size, and posting context.

Method and Data

We adopt a multimethod approach combining large-scale field data and a controlled experiment. First, we train a machine learning classifier to identify selfies in over 100,000 images and analyze approximately 20,000 posts across Instagram and Weibo. This analysis reveals a consistent and significant association between influencer selfies and engagement. Next, we conduct a controlled experiment to establish causal evidence and to examine psychological distance as the mechanism. Finally, drawing again on the Instagram and Weibo datasets, we explore the boundary conditions of the effect, testing variation by influencer domain, follower size, and posting context.

Summary of Findings

Using large-scale datasets from Instagram and Weibo, we find a consistent and significantly positive association between influencer selfies and engagement. Results from our controlled experiment further demonstrate that selfies increase engagement indirectly by reducing psychological distance; once psychological distance is included as a mediator, the direct effect of selfies on engagement becomes non-significant, indicating full mediation.

Extending the Weibo dataset to include influencers in functional domains (e.g., technology, automotive, outdoor), we find that the positive effect of selfies occurs only in appearance-oriented domains such as fashion. When segmenting the Instagram dataset by influencer tier (mega, macro, micro, nano), we observe that micro influencers benefit the most from posting selfies, followed by macro influencers, whereas the effect is weaker for mega and nano influencers. Finally, by classifying post captions into personal versus professional contexts, we find that the positive effect of selfies diminishes in professional settings.

Key Contributions

This work contributes to three literature streams. First, we extend influencer marketing research by highlighting visual self presentation. Second, we advance visual marketing (Argyris et al. 2020; Yu et al. 2020) by distinguishing between selfies and others taken photos (Y. Li and Xie 2019; Liu et al. 2020; L. Zhao et al. 2023). Third, we deepen understanding of the social function of images (Chung et al. 2023) by connecting image creation mode to construal level theory. Practically, managers should encourage head selfies to foster perceived closeness, particularly in appearance focused categories.

THE MIMICRY OF NEGATIVE VALENCE IN ONLINE WOM: A COGNITIVE APPROACH

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Keywords: WOM, Mimicry, Negative Valence, Nonconscious processing

Description: This paper shows that when writing online reviews, consumers systematically mimic the negative tone of nearby posts—largely through nonconscious processes—leading even satisfied customers to express more negative opinions when exposed to proximate negative evaluations.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Online reviews influence consumer decision-making, shaping expectations, choices, and brand reputations (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Moore & Lafreniere, 2020). Although positive reviews are more prevalent (De Angelis et al., 2012), negative reviews exert a disproportionate impact on sales and

market outcomes (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Varga & Albuquerque, 2023). A common assumption is that negativity in reviews primarily reflects poor consumption experiences. However, research on online word of mouth (WOM) suggests that review content is systematically biased by contextual factors and prior contributions (Godes & Silva, 2012; Moe & Schweidel, 2012; Schlosser, 2005, 2009).

Prior work offers mixed predictions about mimicry in review writing. Schlosser (2005) argues that consumers strategically adjust their tone downward when exposed to negative reviews to signal competence, whereas Moore and McFerran (2017) contend that mimicry is affiliative and therefore mainly positive. This paper addresses two core questions. First, do consumers systematically mimic the negative valence of proximate reviews, such that exposure to nearby negativity leads them to express more negative opinions regardless of their actual experiences? Second, what psychological mechanisms underlie this effect? Specifically, is negative-valence mimicry primarily a conscious, strategic process, or does it operate largely outside awareness through nonconscious cognition?

Methods and Data

The research employs a multimethod design combining one large-scale field study with two controlled experiments across distinct consumption contexts. Across all studies, negative valence is operationalized counting negative words with the LIWC 2022 “tone_neg” dictionary.

Study 1 analyzes archival TripAdvisor data from 2004–2008, when reviews were displayed in strict reverse chronological order (Wang & Chaudhry, 2018). This feature allows precise identification of the three proximate reviews visible to each focal reviewer. The analysis models the relationship between the focal review’s negative valence and the average negative valence of the three immediately

preceding reviews, controlling for reviewer tendencies, content characteristics, hotel attributes, and time effects. Negative binomial regressions test whether proximate negativity predicts subsequent negativity.

Study 2 provides causal evidence in a laboratory setting. Undergraduate participants read three reviews about university study areas that were manipulated to be either low or high in negative valence while holding length, emotionality, and extremity constant. Participants then wrote their own reviews.

Study 3 applies a process dissociation paradigm (Fitzsimons & Williams, 2000; Kramer & Block, 2008) using a 2 × 2 × 2 between-subjects design that manipulates exposure context, motivational alignment, and attentional resources, enabling estimation of conscious and nonconscious components of mimicry.

Summary of Findings

Across field and laboratory settings, the results consistently demonstrate that consumers mimic the negative valence of proximate reviews. In the TripAdvisor field data, the average negativity of the three preceding reviews significantly predicts the negativity of the focal review, even after controlling for reviewer history, content features, hotel characteristics, and time effects. This pattern indicates that negativity propagates within review streams beyond what would be expected from independent consumer experiences.

The experimental studies replicate and strengthen this conclusion. In Study 2, participants exposed to highly negative reviews wrote approximately 68% more negative words than those exposed to less negative reviews, despite reporting comparable experiences with the target setting.

Study 3 both confirms negative-valence mimicry and reveals its psychological basis. Participants who read a negative review produced significantly more negative language than those who read a neutral control passage. Process dissociation estimates that the nonconscious component accounts for roughly 80% of the total mimicry effect, whereas the conscious component contributes only about 12%. In relative terms, nonconscious mimicry is approximately six times larger than conscious mimicry.

Together, these findings demonstrate that consumers systematically absorb and reproduce negativity in their linguistic environment, largely without deliberate intent or awareness.

Statement of Key Contributions (208 words)

This paper advances theory on online WOM and linguistic mimicry in two central ways. First, it extends prior work on review mimicry (Schlosser, 2005; Moore & McFerran, 2017) by demonstrating robust negative-valence mimicry from a cognitive rather than purely social or affiliative perspective. Whereas earlier accounts emphasized strategic self-presentation or social bonding, the present findings show that consumers mimic negativity even when such behavior offers no clear interpersonal benefit. This reframes negative review dynamics as a cognitive phenomenon rooted in automatic language processing.

Second, the paper offers a novel methodological and theoretical contribution by decomposing mimicry into conscious and nonconscious components. While prior research suggests that mimicry may occur at either level (Ki & Kim, 2019), this work is the first to quantify their relative contributions in online reviews. Using a process dissociation framework, the study demonstrates that nonconscious processes dominate linguistic mimicry, exceeding conscious influence by a factor of six. Reviewers are therefore

not primarily choosing to be more negative; rather, they are subtly shaped by the linguistic environment in which they write.

Platforms and managers should therefore consider interventions—such as awareness cues or design features promoting authentic and diverse expression—to prevent self-reinforcing cascades of unwarranted negativity.

Note. References are available upon request.

THE OPTIMAL AGE FOR INFLUENCER SOCIAL CREDIBILITY

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Keywords:

influencer marketing, age appearance, source credibility, engagement, purchase intention

Description:

This paper demonstrates that influencers' apparent age has an inverted U-shaped effect on marketing outcomes because increasing age enhances credibility while reducing attractiveness, leading moderate ages to maximize engagement and persuasion/purchase intention across platforms and contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper examines how an influencer's apparent age affects marketing effectiveness and whether there is an optimal age that maximizes outcomes such as engagement and purchase intention. While prior influencer research has extensively studied signals of credibility, attractiveness, and follower-related metrics, age has largely been treated as a static background characteristic rather than a strategic variable. This gap becomes increasingly relevant as AI filters

and virtual influencers allow creators and brands to deliberately manipulate age appearance independently of biological age. Drawing on Source Credibility Theory, the paper asks whether apparent age exhibits a nonlinear, inverted U-shaped relationship with influencer outcomes. The authors theorize that age influences two key persuasion drivers in opposite directions: increasing age raises perceived credibility, while simultaneously reducing perceived physical attractiveness. Because both dimensions are required for effective persuasion, outcomes may peak at a moderate, "just-right" age rather than at very young or very old appearances. Beyond identifying this core relationship, the paper further investigates when the optimal age shifts. Specifically, it examines contextual moderators such as AI disclosure, influencer gender, audience gender and age, and influencer–audience age matching. Overall, the research positions apparent age as a theoretically grounded and managerially actionable lever in influencer marketing.

Method And Data

The paper employs a multi-study, preregistered design combining observational data, field experiments, and controlled online experiments to ensure robustness, causality, and mechanism validation. Study 1 analyzes 8,544 Instagram posts from 204 human and virtual influencer accounts covering a wide age range. Engagement outcomes are modeled using nonlinear specifications, with extensive controls and generalized additive models used to detect curvature. Study 2 is a TikTok field experiment using AI-generated influencer personas that systematically vary in apparent age, gender, and appearance. Randomized posting of short music clips allows causal identification of age effects on real platform views under natural conditions. Study 3 is an online experiment (N = 1,487) conducted in a LinkedIn-like context, independently manipulating apparent age, credibility signals, and attractiveness, enabling direct tests of mediation and

interaction effects. Study 4 (N = 1,237) extends the analysis to an Instagram-like promotional context and examines boundary conditions, including AI disclosure and audience characteristics. Across studies, age is treated as a continuous variable, preregistration ensures transparency, and both parametric and nonparametric analyses guard against misspecification.

Summary of Findings

Across four preregistered studies, the results consistently support an inverted U-shaped relationship between apparent influencer age and marketing outcomes. Influencers with moderately aged appearances outperform both younger-looking and older-looking counterparts in terms of engagement, purchase intention, and job suitability. Although the precise optimal age varies across platforms and contexts, the nonmonotonic pattern replicates across observational data, field experiments, and controlled online studies. Mechanism analyses show that apparent age has opposing effects on the two core dimensions of source credibility. As apparent age increases, perceived credibility rises, whereas perceived attractiveness declines. Importantly, these dimensions interact positively in predicting outcomes, such that performance is highest when both are sufficiently strong. Independent manipulations in Study 3 confirm that credibility mediates the positive effect of age, attractiveness mediates the negative effect, and their interaction explains the observed curvature. The findings further demonstrate that contextual factors shift the curve. AI disclosure reduces credibility and attractiveness, lowering overall outcomes. Influencer gender, audience gender, audience age, and age matching influence performance levels, while evidence for systematic slope changes is limited. Overall, the results establish apparent age as a powerful and context-sensitive determinant of influencer effectiveness.

Key Contributions

This paper makes important contributions to influencer marketing and source credibility research. Conceptually, the paper introduces apparent age as one controllable factor that influences credibility and attractiveness in opposite ways. By demonstrating that these countervailing forces jointly produce an inverted U-shaped relationship with outcomes, the paper extends Source Credibility Theory and specifies when nonmonotonic persuasion effects should arise. Empirically, the study provides robust, preregistered evidence across multiple platforms, influencer types, and outcome measures. The combination of real-world observational data, a live platform field experiment, and controlled online experiments strengthens both internal and external validity. Methodologically, the paper advances best practices by modeling age continuously, using nonparametric techniques to diagnose curvature, and directly testing mechanisms through independent manipulations. Substantively, the research challenges the common assumption that younger influencers are always more effective. Instead, it introduces the **"**age Goldilocks effect,**"** showing that moderate apparent age often maximizes impact. Managerially, the findings position apparent age as a strategic lever that brands, creators, and platforms can actively set and adjust to optimize campaign performance, independently from extant goldilocks effects such as posting behavior or audience size.

THE ROLE OF INFLUENCERS' POWER ON BRAND TRUST IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

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Keywords: influencer marketing; brand trust; healthcare; social media influencer power; credibility

Description: This study examines how social media influencers' personal attributes shape perceived credibility and ultimately drive brand trust in the healthcare sector.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How do social media influencers' personal attributes shape followers' perceptions of expertise and trustworthiness, and how do these perceptions influence brand trust in the healthcare industry? The research addresses a critical gap in the influencer marketing literature by examining persuasive

mechanisms in a highly sensitive and regulated context. Specifically, it investigates whether two personal attributes—attitude homophily and interactivity—positively influence perceived expertise and trustworthiness, which in turn shape brand trust. While prior research largely focuses on commercial sectors, healthcare decisions involve elevated perceived risk and strong reliance on credible information sources. This study therefore explores persuasion pathways in a domain where credibility and trust are essential to consumer well-being and brand legitimacy.

Method and Data

We conducted an online survey with 475 French social media users recruited *via* Prolific. Respondents were exposed to randomized vignette posts featuring healthcare influencers on Instagram and then evaluated influencer attributes and brand trust. All measurement items used validated scales. Structural equation modeling tested hypothesized relationships between personal attributes (attitude homophily, interactivity), perceived characteristics (expertise, trustworthiness), and brand trust. Reliability and validity checks, including confirmatory factor analysis, HTMT, and common-method bias tests, supported scale robustness. This empirical design allowed us to assess both direct and mediated paths reflecting persuasion theory in a healthcare context.

Summary of Findings

Results show that attitude homophily and interactivity significantly and positively influence perceived expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise positively affects trustworthiness and also directly predicts brand trust, while trustworthiness emerges as the strongest determinant of brand

trust. These findings indicate that similarity and relational engagement enhance perceived knowledge and integrity, which then transfer to trust in healthcare brands. The mediation results confirm that personal attributes shape brand trust largely through credibility perceptions. This model extends persuasion theory, highlighting that in healthcare, credibility formation plays a central role and that trustworthiness is especially critical.

Key Contributions

This research advances influencer marketing theory by clarifying how personal attributes and perceived credibility drivers translate to brand trust in a high-stakes healthcare setting. It extends persuasion theory by demonstrating dual mediation through expertise and trustworthiness, emphasizing trustworthiness as the dominant factor. Managerially, the findings offer guidance for healthcare firms and policymakers on selecting influencers whose authenticity, similarity to audiences, and interactive behaviors can foster trust and responsible communication. As consumers increasingly turn to digital platforms for health information, identifying credibility pathways supports ethical and effective influencer strategies and strengthens public trust in medical brands and information sources.

References are available upon request.

THE USE AND IMPACT OF SOCIAL BOTS AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

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Key Words: AI, Social Bot, Social Media, Attention Seeking, Self-Determination

Description: This paper investigates why socializer frequently request social bot replies and how unfulfilled requests affect their perception and action toward to the platform.

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Self-Determination and Attention Seeking Theories, this paper finds that socializers (users with few followers but high engagement desires) are most likely to request a social bot, driven by needs for attention and relatedness, and that unfulfilled requests significantly harm their perception and action.

INTRODUCTION. While a substantial body of marketing scholarship focuses on social media influencers, this group represents a tiny fraction of users. Most social media participants have few followers, primarily falling into two categories: Socializers, who actively post content seeking social connection but often receive limited engagement, and Lurkers, who observe content passively (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020). To address the unmet social needs of users—especially Socializers—platforms have begun deploying social bots: AI algorithms

designed to interact with users by replying to posts, thereby offering algorithmic social validation and visibility (Ferrara et al., 2016; Gao, Zhang, & Lysyakov, 2025).

However, due to resource constraints, many user requests for bot interactions go unfulfilled, which may lead to user dissatisfaction and disengagement. This research therefore investigates two key questions: (1) Which category of users is most likely to request a social bot? and (2) How do users respond when such a request is not granted?

Guided by Attention Seeking Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this research proposes that Socializers, driven by stronger needs for attention and relatedness, are the most likely to seek interactions with social bots. It further examines how contextual factors (e.g., language style, posting time) moderate this tendency and explores the negative consequences of unfulfilled bot requests on users' platform perceptions and behaviors. By shifting focus from influencers to socializers and providing early insights into social bots as psychologically oriented AI tools, this research contributes to a more inclusive understanding of social media engagement and offers practical guidance for platform design and resource allocation.

LITERATURE REVIEW. Marketing research on social media has largely revolved around influencers, who are typically defined as users with a large number of followers, high visibility, and the ability to shape consumer attitudes and behaviors through content creation (Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019; Enke & Borchers, 2019). In reality, influencers account for less than 3% of all users on platforms like

Instagram and Weibo (Influencity, 2023), meaning the overwhelming majority of social media participants are systematically underrepresented in the academic literature.

These users—often categorized as socializers and lurkers—differ from influencers in fundamental ways. Socializers actively create content for self-expression and social interaction but typically maintain small follower networks and receive low engagement (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020). Lurkers, in contrast, predominantly consume content with minimal visible contribution (Menayes, 2014). Despite their lack of broad visibility, socializers collectively form the backbone of social media ecosystems, driving the majority of user-generated content and platform activity (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Wu et al., 2011). However, the limited reach and social feedback experienced by socializers—who actively seek acknowledgment—can lead to feelings of isolation and reduced participation motivation, posing a potential threat to long-term platform engagement and sustainability (Tufekci, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2015; Van der Harst & Angelopoulos, 2024). Surprisingly, marketing theory has yet to fully explore the psychological and behavioral dynamics of this vastly larger user base, particularly how socializers cope with unmet needs for attention and social relatedness in online environments.

To address the engagement gap facing these users, social media platforms have recently introduced social bots—AI-powered agents designed to proactively

respond to user posts and simulate human-like interaction (Gao, Zhang, & Lysyakov, 2025; Ng & Carley, 2025). Social bots are distinct from traditional customer-service chatbots in both function and purpose: rather than resolving transactional issues or delivering product information, social bots aim to provide relational interaction by commenting on user content, offering emotional support, or generating playful, context-aware replies (Castelo et al., 2023). For instance, Weibo's CommentRobot posts encouraging messages in response to personal stories or affirmations to lifestyle content. These bots are designed not only to increase engagement metrics but also to create a sense of social presence for users who may otherwise be overlooked (Gao, Zhang, & Lysyakov, 2025). Early evidence suggests that such bots can be particularly effective in stimulating interaction among low-engagement users and may serve as digital companions, especially for socializers seeking validation and connection (Cassia & Magno, 2024; Ng & Carley, 2025).

CONCEPTUALIZATION. Attention Seeking Theory (Ashford, Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016; Edwards, 2016) provides a crucial lens for understanding the motivations behind users' requests for social bots. The theory posits that individuals inherently desire recognition, validation, and feedback from others to enhance self-esteem, social standing, and psychological well-being (Ashford, Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Welford, 1977). This desire for attention becomes particularly pronounced in social contexts where feedback is scarce or insufficient (Edwards, 2016; Neave, Tzemou, & Fastoso, 2020). On social media platforms, this

need is amplified and reinforced by the very architecture of visibility and feedback mechanisms (e.g., likes, comments) (Seidman, 2013; Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington, 2017). Users, especially "Socializers" who post actively but receive limited engagement (Brandtzæg, 2010; Frison & Eggermont, 2015), consistently face a gap between their desired attention and the feedback they actually receive. This "attention deficit" motivates compensatory behaviors to seek alternative sources of validation (Shabahang et al., 2022). Social bots, by providing immediate, predictable, and non-judgmental replies (Gao, Zhang, & Lysyakov, 2025), serve as a scalable algorithmic solution that helps bridge this gap and fulfill users' unmet need for attention (Pethig & Kroenung, 2022).

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing deeper, fundamental psychological needs that drive user behavior, most notably the need for relatedness—the need to form stable and meaningful social connections (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The fulfillment of this need is critical for fostering sustained engagement and intrinsic motivation (Dholakia, 2006; Ferguson, Gutberg, Schattke, Paulin, & Jost, 2015). On social media, "Socializers," who exhibit strong social motivation and frequently post to connect with others (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011), often experience insufficient reciprocity and feedback due to their limited audience, leading to feelings of disconnection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Lurkers have lower participation but still possess a moderate need for relatedness, desiring a sense of belonging within the online community (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Tufekci, 2008). In contrast,

"Influencers" typically have their need for relatedness well-met through their extensive follower bases (Ki & Kim, 2019). Although artificial, social bots can provide personalized, empathetic, and emotionally resonant responses that effectively simulate social connection, alleviate loneliness, and enhance a sense of belonging (Cassia & Magno, 2024; Good, Hughes, Kirca, & McGrath, 2022), thereby compensatory satisfying users' (particularly Socializers') need for relatedness.

HYPOTHESES. Based on the two theoretical frameworks above, I propose the following hypotheses. H1 (Baseline Hypothesis) proposes that requests for a social bot are more likely to come from *Socializers* than from either *Influencers* or *Lurkers* (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011; Frison & Eggermont, 2015; Al-Emadi & Yahia, 2020). This main effect is driven by two core psychological mechanisms. H2 (Mediation via Need for Attention) proposes that social bots help *Socializers* (more than Influencers or Lurkers) satisfy their need for attention, and this need mediates their request behavior (Neave, Tzemou, & Fastoso, 2020; Shabahang et al., 2022). H3 (Mediation via Need for Relatedness) proposes that social bots help *Socializers* (more than Influencers or Lurkers) satisfy their need for relatedness, and this need mediates their request behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Cassia & Magno, 2024).

Furthermore, two contextual factors are posited to strengthen these psychological needs for Socializers, thereby moderating their request behavior. H4 (Moderation by First-Person Language) proposes that Socializers (but not Lurkers or

Influencers) are more likely to request a social bot if their posting contains first-person language, as this linguistic style amplifies their need for attention (Brockmeyer et al., 2015; Kacewicz et al., 2013; Vasalou, Joinson, & Pitt, 2007). H5 (Moderation by Posting Time) proposes that Socializers (but not Lurkers or Influencers) are more likely to request a social bot if their posting occurs during the evening, as this temporal context heightens their psychological sensitivity to the need for relatedness (Castaldo, Venturini, & Frasca, 2021; Farnadi et al., 2014; Thij et al., 2020).

Finally, negative consequences are expected when a request goes unfulfilled. H6 (Consequences of an Unfulfilled Request) proposes that an unfulfilled social bot request will have a negative impact on *Socializers'* (but not Influencers' or Lurkers') (a) perceptions of and (b) intentions toward the social media platform (Richins, 1983; Ofir & Simonson, 2001; Schneider & Bowen, 1999).

METHOD AND RESULTS. When completed, my paper will consist of four studies. I have completed the first three studies and plan to conduct one more.

***Study 1*.** This study empirically examined which users are more likely to request a social bot and under what conditions, testing H1, H4, and H5. Using a dataset of 487,015 posts from Sina Weibo's CommentRobot feature, the key independent variable was follower count, serving as a proxy for user type (non-influencers vs. influencers), based on prior research linking high follower numbers to influencer status (Brandtzæg & Heim, 2011). The dependent variable was a binary indicator of whether a post explicitly mentioned the bot to request a reply. Key moderators were

the use of first-person language (a binary variable) and posting time (hour of day). A class-balanced weighted logistic regression was employed for analysis.

The results strongly supported the hypotheses. H1 was confirmed: users with fewer followers (non-influencers) were significantly more likely to request a bot ($b = -1.65$, $p < .01$). Model-free evidence showed that over 90% of users with under 10,000 followers requested a bot, compared to only 5.7% of users with over 1 million followers. H4 and H5 were also supported via significant interaction effects. The negative relationship between follower count and bot request was significantly stronger for posts containing first-person language (interaction: $b = -1.49$, $p < .01$), supporting H4. Furthermore, this relationship was stronger for posts made later in the day (interaction: $b = 0.37$, $p < .01$), supporting H5, as evening posting heightened the effect.

Two major endogeneity concerns were addressed. First, balance checks on the subsample of bot-requesting posts revealed minimal differences between fulfilled and unfulfilled requests across key covariates (e.g., SMDs < 0.10), alleviating concerns of non-random bot assignment. Second, a control-function approach using an instrumental variable (concurrent user requests for the bot) was employed to account for unobserved confounders. Diagnostic tests indicated no residual endogeneity, validating the core findings.

To verify the robustness of the user-type measure, the main analysis was repeated using posting frequency (posts per month) as an alternative proxy, which

distinguishes active "socializers" from passive "lurkers." The results remained consistent: posting frequency had a strong positive effect on bot requests ($b = 10.40$, $p < .001$). When both follower count and posting frequency were included in a joint model, both were significant in the expected directions (posting frequency: $b = 10.19$, $p < .001$; follower count: $b = -1.65$, $p < .001$), confirming that the results are stable across different operationalizations of user category.

Study 2. This study employed an online experiment with 971 Prolific participants ($M_{age} = 41.3$; 50.2% male) to experimentally test the proposed psychological mechanisms underlying social bot requests (H2, H3), examine downstream consequences of an unfulfilled request (H6a, H6b), and replicate the core relationship between user type and likelihood of requesting a social bot (H1) documented in Study 1. Early in the study, participants self-classified their user type and were categorized as socializers (n = 352; 36.3%), lurkers (n = 547; 56.3%), or influencers (n = 72; 7.4%). All participants then imagined joining a new platform ("*WhyNot*") with 10 followers, wrote a short post, and were given the option to request a reply from a social bot. Overall, 62% of participants requested the bot (n = 601). Those who requested the bot were randomly assigned to either a fulfilled condition (received a standardized bot reply) or an unfulfilled condition (received no reply). The proposed mediators were measured using validated multi-item scales on 7-point Likert scales: need for attention (5 items; $\alpha = .88$; average loading = .72) and need for relatedness (5 items; $\alpha = .86$; average loading = .74). Platform outcomes were assessed via reliable multi-item measures capturing platform perception ($\alpha = .98$; average loading = .84)

and platform action intentions (α = .97; average loading = .82).

The results provided strong support for the hypotheses. Replicating Study 1, H1 was confirmed: logistic regression predicting whether participants requested a social bot (1 = yes, 0 = no), controlling for age and gender, showed that socializers were significantly more likely to request a bot than other user types ($b = 1.234$, $p < .01$). Model-free evidence converged with this result: socializers exhibited the highest request rate (74.43%), compared to influencers (68.06%) and lurkers (53.02%).

To test the proposed psychological mechanisms, I conducted a parallel mediation analysis (PROCESS; Model 6) with user category as the predictor, need for attention and need for relatedness as mediators, and bot request as the binary outcome, controlling for age and gender. Consistent with H2 and H3, socializer status significantly predicted both mediators: need for attention ($b = 0.994$, $p < .01$) and need for relatedness ($b = 1.234$, $p < .01$). Both mediators, in turn, positively predicted requesting a social bot: need for attention ($b = 0.313$, $p < .01$) and need for relatedness ($b = 0.442$, $p < .01$). The coefficient for socializer status decreased when the mediators were included (from $b = 1.234$ to $b = 0.982$ with attention included; and to $b = 0.775$ with relatedness included), consistent with partial mediation.

Finally, the experiment tested whether an unfulfilled bot request is associated with more negative downstream platform outcomes (H6a, H6b). Among participants who requested a bot (Request = 1), regression analyses (controlling for age and gender) showed that socializers reported significantly lower platform perceptions (b =

−0.874, $p < .01$) and weaker action intentions ($b = −0.568$, $p < .05$) than other user types. In summary, Study 2 provides causal evidence that socializers' higher propensity to request social bots is partly driven by heightened needs for attention and relatedness, and that bot-seeking users—especially socializers—exhibit more negative platform evaluations and reduced intended engagement in the context of unmet expectations.

THEORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. This research shifts scholarly focus from influential users to the often-overlooked group of "Socializers," broadening the understanding of social media user behavior. By integrating Attention Seeking Theory and Self-Determination Theory, the study finds that Socializers proactively engage with social bots to compensatory fulfill their unmet needs for attention and relatedness. This addresses a significant gap in the literature and provides a more comprehensive perspective on how the majority of socializers shape platform dynamics.

Furthermore, this study deepens the understanding of AI interactions, specifically positioning social bots as a distinct category designed to address users' psychological and emotional needs. The findings demonstrate that bot replies can effectively enhance users' sense of social connection and attention. Simultaneously, the research reveals that when user requests—especially those from Socializers—go unfulfilled, it triggers significant negative psychological and behavioral consequences (e.g., disappointment, reduced engagement intentions). This underscores the critical importance of transparency and providing explanations in AI-user interactions,

offering new theoretical insights.

PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. This research offers actionable insights for social media platforms. First, platforms should recognize that Socializers constitute the user majority and that their psychological needs are crucial for platform vitality. Deploying social bots to provide timely, personalized interactive feedback to users with low visibility can enhance their sense of belonging and value, thereby improving overall user retention and well-being. Second, platforms can leverage linguistic analytics (e.g., the use of first-person pronouns) to identify users with heightened attention-seeking needs and prioritize providing them with social bot interactions. This optimizes resource allocation and enhances personalized experiences. Third, given that unfulfilled requests significantly harm users' perceptions and future engagement intentions (particularly for Socializers), platforms must carefully manage user expectations. Clear communication explaining the bot's reply mechanism or resource constraints can mitigate user dissatisfaction. Finally, platforms should establish ongoing monitoring and feedback mechanisms to continuously refine bot interaction strategies based on user data, ensuring the effectiveness and ethical deployment of AI.

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UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PATHWAY OF ENGAGEMENT IN AD-EMBEDDED SHORT-FORM VIDEOS: THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION

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Keywords: Short video, perceived media value of content, personalization, parasocial interaction

Description: Engagement in ad-embedded short-form videos is predictably associated with a multilayered psychological mechanism that may operate as an underlying causal pathway within a personalized algorithmic environment, in conjunction with creator behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The existing literature on short-form video engagement has not sufficiently accounted for psychological mechanisms. Current research has mainly focused on social media users' motivations, influencer marketing, or audiovisual elements, which can only partially explain users' engagement because users' psychological reactions to certain content features and

platform design have not been well studied. Therefore, this study asks: How do the features of short-form videos and platform design shape short-form video audiences' behavior and psychological responses through psychological paths?

Method and Data

We measured all constructs on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Measurement items were adopted from prior studies with established reliability and validity. As our participants were Chinese nationals, the questionnaire was translated into Mandarin Chinese. Before completing the questionnaire, we invited participants to watch short videos to help them recall their viewing experience. After data collection, we identified and removed suspicious response patterns, including inattentive responding, straightlining, diagonal responding, alternating extreme-pole responding, and inconsistent answers.

Summary of Findings

Grounded in triadic reciprocal determinism and the AIDA model, the current data supported the following hypothesized associations. Perceived media value of the content and wishful identification were positively associated with short-video content engagement, whereas the associations of being hooked and perceived platform personalization with engagement were not supported, and statistical power to detect these associations was insufficient. Perceived platform personalization, being hooked, wishful identification, and parasocial interaction were positively associated with the perceived media value of the content; perceived platform personalization and parasocial interaction were positively associated with being hooked; being hooked, parasocial interaction, and perceived platform personalization were positively associated with wishful

identification; and parasocial interaction was positively associated with perceived platform personalization. Statistical power for tests of the mediation paths linking the study variables was insufficient, so the mediation analysis is inconclusive.

Statement of Key Contributions

Existing literature on social-media engagement mainly adopts the uses-and-gratifications framework, in which motivation is a vital factor. However, this study introduces triadic reciprocal determinism and the AIDA model as a new theoretical framework to illustrate the psychological path of audience engagement with short-video content under specific environmental and behavioral conditions. In addition, to develop new perspectives on the internal state of short-video viewers when they engage with short-video content, we introduce the concept “perceived media value of the content” to enrich factors affecting individuals’ internal states.

Our research findings suggest that engagement may not be driven by a single factor but by a multilayered psychological mechanism activated by a personalized algorithmic environment in conjunction with creator behavior. Parasocial interaction appears to play an initiating role in this mechanism, moving audiences from virtual interaction to role identification and value assessment. This mechanism maps the psychological path of short-video viewers, providing theory-driven empirical evidence for future causal inference of short-video engagement. It also provides MCNs and other production organizations with a concrete way to leverage creators’ on-screen behaviors—such as levels of parasocial interaction—to predict dissemination potential.

UNLOCKING DIGITAL EFFICIENCY: META-ANALYTIC EVIDENCE ON ADVERTISING TOOL EFFECTIVENESS

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study presents a meta-analytic review of empirical research on the effectiveness of online advertising, grounded in the Advertising Value Model and its contemporary extension. Drawing on 30 quantitative studies, the analysis synthesizes effect sizes for the classical determinants of advertising value, including informativeness, entertainment, irritation, and credibility, as well as emerging factors relevant to current digital advertising practices. Preliminary findings indicate that credibility shows the strongest positive association with consumer attitudes toward online advertising, followed by informativeness and entertainment, whereas irritation correlates with negative responses. The analysis further extends the traditional framework by examining the influence of interaction, personalization, and privacy concerns, which are systematically related to consumer sensitivity in digital contexts. Rather than providing definitive conclusions, this extended abstract offers an integrative theoretical synthesis that affirms the ongoing relevance of the Advertising Value Model and underscores the importance of considering interaction-based design and data governance.

The study provides a basis for future research examining how psychological mechanisms of effectiveness translate into digital advertising performance.

Keywords: online advertising; digital effectiveness; meta-analysis; advertising value; psychological determinants

Description

This paper presents a work-in-progress meta-analytic review of the effectiveness of online advertising, integrating classical and emerging determinants within the Advertising Value Model.

Research Question

This abstract examines the effectiveness of online advertising today and whether the classic Advertising Value Model (AVM) continues to explain how consumers respond. Past studies have focused on factors such as credibility, informativeness, entertainment, and irritation, but their findings often differ. New technologies and evolving regulations have introduced features such as personalization and interactivity, along with heightened privacy concerns, which may alter how people perceive the value of advertising. This study uses pooled evidence to test the core ideas of the AVM and examines how the model might be updated to account for the complexities of digital advertising. Instead of relying on single studies, it uses a synthesis approach to examine the overall links between key advertising factors and consumer responses. Since this project is ongoing, it focuses more on developing theory than on drawing firm conclusions about cause and effect. The main goal is to explain how factors that add or reduce value interact in digital advertising and to build a clear foundation for future research.

Method and Data

This study employs a meta-analysis to synthesize quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of online advertising. Studies are selected according to established research standards. Only empirical studies that examine actual online advertising by companies in commercial settings are included. These studies must focus on advertising effectiveness and report measurable outcomes, such as purchase intention, brand attitudes, engagement, or similar consumer responses.

Only peer-reviewed journal articles that use quantitative methods, such as experiments, quasi-experiments, or regression analyses, are included. Studies must be available in full text and provide enough detail to extract effect sizes. The analysis focuses only on studies relevant to digital marketing practice. Study selection happens in two steps. First, titles and abstracts are checked for relevance and methodological suitability. Then, full texts are reviewed for quality, data availability, and context. For each study retained, a standardized coding system is used to collect details on publication, research design, ad formats, sample characteristics, and effectiveness measures. This structured process helps make the data more comparable and reliable.

Summary of Findings

Early results from the meta-analysis indicate that the main factors in the Advertising Value Model remain important in digital settings. Credibility has the strongest positive association with consumers' perceptions, followed by informativeness and entertainment. Irritation is associated with negative consumer responses, although the magnitude of this effect varies across studies.

Beyond the traditional factors, new elements are becoming more important. Interactivity and personalization are clearly linked to better consumer responses, underscoring the importance of

relevance and engagement in digital advertising. On the other hand, privacy concerns make people less receptive to advertising, suggesting that feeling watched or losing control can undermine advertising effectiveness. There is substantial variation across studies, indicating that effect sizes depend on the platform, how ads are delivered, and the audience. Because the analysis is still in progress, these results present general trends rather than definitive answers and point to areas requiring further research and theory development.

Key Contributions

This study adds to research on digital advertising by providing pooled evidence that the Advertising Value Model remains relevant. The results show that the model's main factors remain closely linked to how consumers respond to online ads, supporting its role as a key framework for understanding advertising value. The study also updates the Advertising Value Model by adding personalization, interactivity, and privacy concerns as key parts of advertising effectiveness. By examining how these factors interact, the research goes beyond traditional explanations and highlights the importance of interactive design and data practices. By using pooled evidence rather than single-study results, this analysis helps interpret past research with mixed findings. The new theory suggests that digital advertising operates through two main mechanisms: value is created by relevance and interaction, but reduced by concerns about data use and control. As a work in progress, this abstract provides a clear foundation for future research and theory-building.

Note: References are available upon request.

VIRTUAL FACES, REAL REACTIONS: UNDERSTANDING ENGAGEMENT ACROSS INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER TYPOLOGIES

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Keywords: Virtual Influencers; Influencer Marketing; Consumer Engagement, Interactive Marketing.

Description: This paper investigates how varying levels of realism and humanness in virtual influencers shape distinct forms of consumer engagement on Instagram, showing that hyper-realism increases scrutiny and skepticism while stylized or nonhuman designs foster stronger emotional, social, and narrative bonds.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – The research question guiding this study focuses on understanding how

and why consumer engagement differs across virtual influencer (VI) typologies defined by varying degrees of realism and humanness. Specifically, the paper asks: (1) what factors shape consumer engagement with virtual influencers, and (2) how these engagement mechanisms vary across different categories of virtual influencers. Rather than treating virtual influencers as a homogeneous phenomenon, the study explicitly interrogates whether design attributes—such as human likeness, visual realism, and overt artificiality—systematically influence how audiences respond cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally on social media platforms. The research question is motivated by inconsistent findings in prior literature, where some studies report high engagement with virtual influencers while others highlight skepticism, discomfort, and reduced emotional connection. By adopting a comparative, cross-case approach, the study seeks to unpack these contradictions and move beyond binary debates (e.g., human vs. nonhuman, real vs. artificial). In doing so, the research question aims to clarify which engagement dimensions (e.g., admiration, criticism, skepticism, social bonding, narrative affiliation, and character affiliation) are activated by specific VI designs, and under what conditions. Ultimately, the research question positions virtual influencer engagement as a contingent outcome shaped by the interaction between visual design, anthropomorphism, and narrative strategy, thereby advancing a more nuanced and theory-driven understanding of engagement in AI-mediated marketing contexts.

Method And Data – The study adopts a qualitative, comparative cross-case research design to examine how consumer engagement varies across different types of virtual influencers defined by their levels of realism and humanness. Guided by established typologies, the authors purposefully selected four Instagram-based virtual influencers that collectively represent realistic

human, realistic nonhuman, unrealistic human, and unrealistic nonhuman categories. Data were collected from Instagram posts published between March 2023 and June 2024, yielding 686 posts and 24,300 user comments. After removing spam, duplicates, and irrelevant content, the final dataset comprised 17,149 comments, ensuring analytical depth and cross-case comparability.

Data extraction combined automated scraping via a Chrome extension with manual verification to preserve contextual accuracy. The analysis followed a rigorous three-stage qualitative coding process using NVivo 10, integrating inductive and deductive approaches. First-order descriptive codes were derived directly from user comments, then aggregated into second-order, theory-informed themes, and finally consolidated into six overarching engagement dimensions. Inter-coder reliability was ensured through coding comparison queries and consensus resolution. To enable systematic comparison across influencers with unequal comment volumes, the study applied frequency ratio normalization, allowing proportional analysis of engagement patterns. This methodological approach ensures qualitative rigor while enabling robust cross-case insights into virtual influencer engagement dynamics.

Summary of Findings – The findings reveal that consumer engagement with virtual influencers is multidimensional and strongly contingent on the influencers' levels of realism and human likeness. Across all cases, six engagement dimensions emerge: admiration, criticism, skepticism, social bonding, character affiliation, and narrative affiliation, but these are activated differently depending on VI design. Realistic human VIs attract the highest levels of criticism and skepticism, driven by heightened expectations and discomfort associated with near-human realism, consistent with the uncanny valley effect. Small visual or behavioral inconsistencies

prompt scrutiny and doubts about authenticity. In contrast, admiration is primarily linked to human likeness rather than realism, with stylized but humanlike VIs receiving strong aesthetic and personality-based praise.

Social bonding, character affiliation, and narrative affiliation are most pronounced for nonhuman and clearly artificial VIs. These influencers benefit from creative freedom, humor, and fictional storytelling, which lower authenticity expectations and encourage interaction, emotional attachment, and imaginative engagement. Unrealistic nonhuman VIs, in particular, foster deeper community interaction and stronger emotional ties through consistent narratives and distinctive personas. Overall, the findings challenge the assumption that greater realism enhances engagement. Instead, they show that realism increases risk, while stylization and overt artificiality can strengthen emotional, social, and narrative forms of engagement. The results highlight the importance of aligning VI design with desired engagement outcomes.

Statement of Key Contributions – The study makes several key contributions to virtual influencer and digital marketing research by offering a differentiated, theory-driven understanding of consumer engagement with AI-generated personas. First, it advances the literature by moving beyond the dominant tendency to treat virtual influencers as a homogeneous category, instead systematically distinguishing between four influencer typologies based on realism and humanness. This typological approach provides conceptual clarity and enables a more precise explanation of why engagement outcomes vary across virtual influencers. Second, the study enriches customer engagement theory by identifying six distinct engagement dimensions—admiration, criticism, skepticism, social bonding, character affiliation, and narrative affiliation—and demonstrating how these dimensions are selectively

activated by different design attributes. In doing so, it clarifies the roles of anthropomorphism, narrative creativity, and the uncanny valley effect in shaping consumer responses. Third, the research contributes to ongoing debates on authenticity and parasocial interaction in AI-mediated contexts by showing that deeper emotional and narrative engagement often emerges from stylized or nonhuman designs rather than hyper-realistic ones. Finally, the study offers actionable implications for practitioners, illustrating how brands, non-profits, and policymakers can strategically align virtual influencer types with communication goals, audience expectations, and ethical considerations. Overall, the paper bridges theory and practice by providing both analytical precision and practical guidance for leveraging virtual influencers in contemporary marketing ecosystems.

References are available upon request.

WHEN GREEN ADS LOOK HUMAN: THE MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED AUTHENTICITY IN AI-GENERATED HUMAN ENDORSERS

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Key words*: AI-Generated Human Endorsers, Perceived Authenticity, Green Purchase Intention, Green Advertising, Skepticism toward Sustainability Claims*

Description: This paper investigates how perceived authenticity shapes consumer responses to AI-generated human endorsers compared to human actors in green advertising.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As AI-generated human endorsers become increasingly common in digital advertising, a central question emerges: how do consumers evaluate sustainability messages delivered by spokespersons who look human but are known to be artificially generated? Green advertising is uniquely sensitive to authenticity cues because environmental claims often carry moral weight and are scrutinized for honesty, transparency, and ethical alignment. While prior research suggests that AI-generated agents may elicit lower trust or heightened skepticism, it remains unclear whether these effects stem directly from the endorser's artificial origin or from consumers' perceptions of how "real" or authentic the spokesperson appears. This study therefore examines whether AI-generated human

endorsers influence green purchase intention and skepticism relative to human actors, and whether perceived authenticity serves as a boundary condition shaping these responses. Specifically, we ask whether the perceived realness of the spokesperson—regardless of their actual origin—amplifies or mitigates consumer skepticism toward sustainability claims. By exploring these questions, the research seeks to clarify when AI-generated human endorsers help or hinder sustainability persuasion and to identify the psychological mechanisms that drive consumer responses in this emerging domain.

Method and Data

We conducted a between-subjects online experiment using three one-minute sustainability ads modeled after real All-birds campaigns. The first stimulus featured the original All-birds advertisement with real human actors, including Hana (Director of Sustainability) and Philip (Motion Designer), promoting the brand's eco-friendly shoe line. The second stimulus presented an AI-generated human endorser—created using advanced video-synthesis tools—to replicate the style and messaging of the original All-birds video while clearly signaling a synthetic spokesperson. The third stimulus used a hyper-realistic AI-generated human endorser that closely resembled the actors in the original ad but provided no information about whether the spokesperson was human or AI-generated. This undisclosed condition was intentionally designed to mirror current advertising practice, in which brands increasingly use digital production tools without specifying the origin of the endorser. Participants (N = 206) were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions and completed a manipulation check assessing perceived realness of the spokesperson. They then reported ad message effectiveness (Hirsh et al., 2012), green purchase intention (Sreen et al., 2018), and skepticism toward green ads (Matthes et al., 2014). Eco-friendly enthusiasm (Roberts & Bacon, 1997) and perceived authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) were also

measured. Analyses included ANOVA/ANCOVA, MANOVA, and Hayes' PROCESS Model 1 to test moderation.

Summary of Findings

After removing outliers and retaining only high-quality responses, the manipulation check confirmed that participants distinguished among the spokesperson conditions based on perceived realness, $F(2, 203) = 9.997$, $p < .001$, with human actors rated as most real. To assess the robustness of our results, all analyses were conducted both with and without eco-friendly enthusiasm (EFE) as a covariate. When EFE was included, ANCOVA results showed no significant effect of actor type on green purchase intention, $F(2, 202) = 1.66$, $p = .193$ (H1 not supported), nor on skepticism toward green ads, $F(2, 202) = 0.52$, $p = .596$ (H2 not supported). A MANOVA revealed no joint multivariate effect, Wilks' $\Lambda = .979$, $F(4, 402) = 1.09$, $p = .360$ (H3 not supported), and EFE did not moderate actor-type effects on purchase intention, $F(2, 199) = 0.18$, $p = .836$ (H4a not supported). Running the same tests without EFE produced an identical pattern of non-significant main and multivariate effects, indicating that the null results were not due to covariate suppression. Across both model specifications, Hayes' PROCESS Model 1 confirmed a consistent moderation for H4b: actor type × perceived authenticity significantly predicted skepticism, $F(2, 199) = 6.83$, $p = .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .064$. AI-generated human endorsers reduced skepticism at low authenticity ($p = .042$) but heightened skepticism at high authenticity ($p = .001$), underscoring perceived authenticity—not spokesperson origin—as the pivotal boundary condition in green advertising.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to emerging work at the intersection of AI-generated human endorsers and sustainability communication by showing that the effectiveness of green advertising cannot

be explained by spokesperson type alone. Across two analytic specifications—with and without eco-friendly enthusiasm as a covariate—human actors, AI-generated human endorsers, and undisclosed digital spokespersons produced comparable levels of green purchase intention and skepticism, challenging the common assumption that consumers inherently distrust AI-generated human figures. Instead, the findings highlight perceived authenticity as the central boundary condition shaping consumer reactions. When authenticity perceptions were low, AI-generated human endorsers reduced skepticism relative to human actors; when authenticity was high, they triggered sharper skepticism. This pattern demonstrates that consumers respond not to the spokesperson's actual origin but to the authenticity they attribute to the messenger. The study also advances theoretical conversations in anthropomorphism and ethical boundary research by illustrating how authenticity expectations guide social and moral judgments of synthetic human agents in a domain where credibility is especially scrutinized. For practitioners, the results suggest that AI-generated human endorsers are not inherently risky in green campaigns; rather, their success depends on managing authenticity cues and aligning expectations with the level of realism the ad intends to convey.

Note: References are available upon request

WHEN PICTURES SPEAK: THE IMPACT OF PRODUCT VS. LIFESTYLE IMAGES IN SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS ON CONSUMER RESPONSES

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Keywords: Social media marketing, Product versus lifestyle images, Visual imagery, Consumer engagement, Longing

Description: This paper examines how product versus lifestyle images in social media posts influence product evaluation and engagement through emotional mechanisms of visual persuasion, particularly visual attractiveness and longing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Visual content is a central driver of attention and interaction in social media environments, where users make rapid decisions about whether to engage with a post. Brands predominantly rely on two image types in their social media communication: product images that present the item in isolation, and lifestyle images that embed the product in a real-life or aspirational context. While prior research has examined visual characteristics such as complexity, contextual backgrounds, or narrative elements, an empirical comparison of these two dominant image types within social media posts remains largely absent. Moreover, it is unclear through which psychological mechanisms image type influences consumer responses, and whether these effects depend on product type.

Against this background, this research addresses three questions. First, it examines whether image type (product vs. lifestyle images) affects consumers' product evaluations and engagement intentions in social media posts. Second, it investigates the underlying emotional and perceptual mechanisms, focusing on visual attractiveness and feelings of longing. Third, it explores whether the impact of image type differs for hedonic versus utilitarian products. By addressing these questions, the study advances understanding of visual persuasion in social media and clarifies how different image strategies shape consumer responses in digital environments.

Method and Data

The study employed a 2 (image type: product image vs. lifestyle image) × 2 (product type: utilitarian vs. hedonic) between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The stimuli were authentically designed social media posts for a fictitious brand. Product images displayed the product in isolation against a neutral background, whereas lifestyle images embedded the product in an atmospheric beach setting with a person depicted from behind. Product type was operationalized using an external hard drive (utilitarian) and an instant camera (hedonic). All other post elements were held constant.

After excluding incomplete responses and failed attention checks, the final sample consisted of 154 participants (62% female; M_age = 35.5 years). Manipulation checks confirmed successful differentiation of image type, with lifestyle images perceived more strongly as real-life scenes than product images, and product type, with the instant camera rated as significantly more hedonic than the external hard drive. Data were analyzed using two-way ANOVA and mediation analyses.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal an effect of image type on consumer responses. Two-way ANOVA showed that lifestyle images generated higher engagement than product images and led to more favorable

product evaluations. Product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) had no significant main effect on engagement or product evaluation, and the interaction between image type and product type was non-significant for both outcomes, indicating that the effect of lifestyle imagery is independent of product type.

Lifestyle images were perceived as more attractive and elicited stronger feelings of longing than product images.

Mediation analyses revealed significant indirect effects, indicating that both attractiveness and longing mediated the effect of image type on product evaluation and engagement.

Key Contributions

The study makes three main contributions. First, it addresses a key research gap by systematically comparing two dominant image types in social media communication – product versus lifestyle images. The results show that lifestyle images, compared to product images, generate stronger effects on product evaluation and engagement, mediated by visual attractiveness and feelings of longing. This advances theory by highlighting emotional and aesthetic mechanisms in models of visual persuasion. Second, it extends self-reference theory by showing that lifestyle scenes evoke longing, which facilitates self-referential associations and ultimately strengthens consumer responses in social media environments. Third, it challenges conventional assumptions about product type, revealing that lifestyle imagery benefits even utilitarian products, thereby questioning established distinctions between functional and hedonic consumption cues in digital contexts.

Beyond academe, the findings are highly relevant for brands. Practitioners can optimize image strategies to strengthen emotional connection and increase visibility and organic engagement in social media where user attention is extremely limited. Importantly, lifestyle images also enhance

product evaluation, suggesting that social media visuals can trigger purchase impulses already in the inspiration phase. The results inform both individual post design and long-term visual brand guidelines, including influencer collaborations and user-generated content integration.

References are available upon request.

Who You Meet and What You Play: Exploring Fan Engagement in a Virtual Arena

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Keywords: Metaverse, Fan Engagement, Illusionary Friendship, Team Fanship.

Description: This paper tests how Fan-to-Star versus Fan-to-Fan interactions in a sports metaverse shape team fanship and revisit intention through distinct psychological pathways.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Metaverse-based sports experiences promise more than viewing content; they allow fans to enter a shared virtual arena and interact through embodied avatars. Yet many metaverse initiatives have struggled to sustain engagement, suggesting that technological novelty alone does not reliably translate into repeat use. This research asks a focused question: How does the target of interaction in the sports metaverse—interacting with a star avatar versus interacting with other fans—shape team fanship and intention to revisit the platform, and through what psychological mechanisms?

We theorize that "interactivity" is not one uniform feature. Instead, who users interact with changes the relational meaning of the experience. In Fan-to-Star (FTS) encounters, real-

time responsiveness and co-presence with a star avatar can simulate a personally directed bond. We capture this metaverse-specific bond with the construct illusionary friendship, and propose that it strengthens belongingness, which then promotes team fanship. In Fan-to-Fan (FTF) encounters, peer interaction is expected to generate belongingness more directly through shared rituals and group affiliation, which then increases team fanship. Finally, we examine whether team fanship functions as the main psychological driver of revisit intention in the metaverse sports setting.

Method and Data

We conducted a between-subjects experiment in a simulated NBA metaverse environment. Participants (N = 222), screened for prior familiarity with metaverse platforms to ensure ecological validity, were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: Control, Fan-to-Star (FTS), or Fan-to-Fan (FTF). In the control condition, they navigated alone. In the FTS condition, they interacted with a life-sized avatar of their favorite NBA player and completed a brief pass-and-shoot activity with scripted friendly dialogue. In the FTF condition, they joined fan avatars wearing the same team jersey and explored a fan zone together, chatting and reacting to highlights. After manipulation checks, we evaluated the hypothesized model using multi-path mediation logic to test the sequential flow: interaction condition → (illusionary friendship / belongingness) → team fanship → revisit intention.

Summary of Findings

Results supported a dual-path framework in which interaction type fostered retention through distinct relational mechanisms. In the Fan-to-Fan (FTF) path, interaction increased belongingness (B = 0.80, p = .001), which predicted team fanship (B = 0.60, p < .001); the indirect effect via belongingness was significant (effect = 0.48, 95% CI [0.21, 0.78]). In the

Fan-to-Star (FTS) path, interaction increased illusionary friendship (B = 2.19, p < .001), which predicted belongingness (B = 0.46, p < .001); belongingness then predicted team fanship (B = 0.60, p < .001), yielding a significant serial indirect effect (effect = 0.60, 95% CI [0.39, 0.85]). Finally, team fanship predicted revisit intention (B = 0.50, p < .001). Overall, these results show that engagement in the sports metaverse depends not only on interactivity, but also on who users interact with.

Key Contributions

This study advances metaverse and sports marketing research by positioning interaction structure—Fan-to-Star (FTS) versus Fan-to-Fan (FTF)—as a core driver of engagement. It shows that interactivity is relationally differentiated: FTS encounters cultivate illusionary friendship that can extend into belongingness and team fanship, whereas FTF foster belongingness directly via peer co-presence and shared fan practices. By mapping these two routes, the research refines parasocial relationship theory for avatar-mediated environments, clarifying how personalized virtual bonds translate into team-level attachment. Managerially, the findings suggest that star-avatar presence alone is insufficient; platforms should design responsive, personalized exchanges to make the FTS route effective, simultaneously supporting scalable FTF spaces that cue shared identity. Overall, the results caution against a “more interactivity is better” view and suggest aligning interaction targets with the desired relational outcome to strengthen fanship and revisit intention.

WILL VISITORS' PRIVACY-INVASIVE PERCEPTIONS AFFECT AUGMENTED REALITY (AR) APPLICATIONS IN MUSEUMS?

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Keywords: Augmented Reality (AR), Privacy, Museum, Self-Determination Theory, Questionnaire,

Description: Our study examined the relationships between consumers' location privacy concerns, autonomy/self-determination, and their privacy management strategies and confirmed with the empirical data that authorship and self-congruency and interest-taking indices predict consumers' control and ownership of location information, but not their location privacy concerns.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

The advent of augmented reality (AR) technologies has posed brand new challenges and opportunities to art exhibitions, galleries, and museums to deliver creative and cultural content (Kang and Yang 2019). Additionally, despite technology's algorithmic capabilities to offer consumers the most personal and contextually relevant information, researchers have observed that consumers desire a sense of free will to make their own choices and decisions (André et al. 2018). Based on existing literature, we speculate that their level of autonomy and self-determination will predict their concerns over location privacy (RH1). Additionally, we also

reason that the level of the same construct is likely to predict their management strategy of private location information (RH2). The other three research hypotheses were proposed:

RH3: Consumers' location privacy concerns affect their privacy management strategies.

RH4: Consumer interest-taking index affects their privacy management strategies.

RH5: Consumers' location privacy concerns mediate the relationship between consumer autonomy and privacy management strategies.

Method and Data

We employed an online questionnaire to collect empirical data from 262 participants conveniently recruited to examine the relationships of these variables. Composite scores were used in the confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis using Amos 25. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of study constructs were used to assess the reliability and convergent validity of the study constructs in the model. Most CR statistics range from .662 to .917 and generally exceed the cutoff criteria of .70 to ensure acceptable reliability (Fornell and Lacker 1981; Nunnally 1978). AVE statistics are generally higher than the recommended cutoff of .50 for the majority of study variables, ranging from .396 to .688 (Fornell and Lacker 1981), indicating a good convergent validity for the majority of the study constructs.

Discriminant validity has been assessed when compared with the square root of AVE with inter-construct correlations (Hair et al. 2010). The square root statistics of the study constructs range from .83 to .63, and all exceeded the inter-construct correlations, indicating a strong discriminant validity among our constructs.

Using SPSS Amos 25, other model fit statistics were reported to examine these relationships ($\chi 2$ = 381.282, df =200, CFI= .923; GFI=.892; AGFI = .851; RMSEA = .059;

NFI=.854; TLI=.902; CFI=.923; AIC=539.282). The model fit indices suggested an acceptable model (Moss 2016).

Summary of Findings

Consumer autonomy did not predict consumers' location privacy concerns (RH1) but only partially predicted consumers' privacy management strategies. For example, the authorship/self-congruency index positively predicted and explains 25.6% of the variance of consumers' decisions to share the control and ownership of their location privacy with museums (RH2-1). Consumers' location privacy concerns in a museum setting explain 38.5% of the variance in their decision to prevent museums from accessing their location information (i.e., boundary linkage strategy) (RH3-2), and 41.4% of the variance in boundary permeability strategy (RH3-3).

The authorship/self-congruency index was found to negatively predict and explain 15.1% of the variance in their decision to allow museums to access their location information (i.e., boundary linkage strategy) (RH2-2), and the interest-taking index was found to negatively predict and explain 14.1% of the variance in consumers' willingness to give up their control and ownership of their location privacy with museums (RH4-1). While the interest-taking index negatively predicted and explained 15.7% of the variance in consumers' boundary permeability strategy (RH4-3), it did not predict their decision to allow museums to access their location information (i.e., boundary linkage strategy) (RH4-2).

Findings supported the mediation effects of location privacy concerns between authorship/self-congruency index and boundary linkage (RH5-3) (β=.038, $p<.05$) and boundary permeability (β=.034, $p<.05$) (RH5-2), while other mediation effects were not significant (β_{RH5-1}=.007, $p>.05$; β_{RH5-4}=.005, $p>.05$; β_{RH5-5}=.027, $p>.05$; β_{RH5-6}=.024, $p>.05$).

Key Contributions

As many museums have adopted location-sensitive AR exhibitions to access these cultural contents via visitors' smartphones, users' location information and financial information will likely be easily disclosed to the extent that personal privacy may be violated (Fairfield 2012). One of the location-sensitive applications is to display information about a scene, a cultural artifact, or an artist when visitors walk through a museum with their mobile phones (Liedtke 2016).

Thirdly, however, despite technology's algorithmic capabilities to offer consumers the most personal and contextually relevant information, researchers have observed that consumers desire a sense of free will to make their choice and decision (André et al. 2018). Following the same line of thinking, an important question to explore is how museum visitors' autonomy to avoid privacy-invasive concerns would affect the emerging AR applications that rely on visitors' locational information to generate location-relevant cultural content inside the museums. Additionally, since past studies on location-sensitive applications often include consumers' location privacy concerns as an important variable, this study includes this variable as a mediator (Electronic Frontier Foundation n.d.). This empirical study aims to understand the relationships between consumer self-determination and autonomy, location privacy concerns, and their privacy management strategies.

References are available upon request.

WITH OR WITHOUT THE FILTER?: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING BEAUTY FILTER USE AMONG GIRLS AGED 13 TO 14 ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Keywords: Adolescent girls, beauty filters, beauty norms, social comparison and social media.

Description: This study protocol examines how early adolescent girls interpret filtered and unfiltered selfies and how such exposure shapes perceptions of beauty and posting intentions on social media.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study explores how early adolescent girls interpret digitally altered faces created through beauty filters in contrast to unfiltered facial appearances on social media. Grounded in Social Comparison Theory, the study examines how appearance-based comparison operates when girls are exposed to filtered and unfiltered versions of the same face. Rather than conceptualizing girls as passive recipients of idealized beauty standards, the study positions them as active interpreters who evaluate, negotiate, and reflect on filtered beauty culture. The overarching aim is to understand whether side-by-side exposure to filtered and unfiltered facial images reinforces existing beauty ideals or prompts critical reflection on unrealistic appearance standards. The study further examines how filtered images function as evolving social norms and how visual contrast may create moments of disruption in internalized ideals. By focusing on how these moments of comparison shape perceptions of beauty and posting intentions, the study seeks to extend current understandings of appearance-based comparison and digital self-presentation in early adolescence. How do girls aged 13 to 14 perceive digitally filtered versus unfiltered female selfies, and how does this exposure influence their notions of beauty and postability on social media?

Method and Data

This study employs a qualitative research design using visual elicitation interviews with early adolescent girls aged 13 to 14 living in Estonia. Data collection follows a three-stage interview structure designed to capture baseline interpretations, introduce a brief visual micro intervention, and assess potential shifts in meaning-making. In Stage 1, participants view three different faces presented in five versions each, four filtered and one unfiltered, and are asked to evaluate which images they find most beautiful and most post-worthy. In Stage 2, participants are exposed to eleven additional faces shown side by side in filtered and unfiltered versions using the same beauty filter across all faces, allowing direct observation of digital modification. In Stage 3, participants return to the original images from Stage 1 and repeat the evaluation tasks. Interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Complementary rating tasks are used descriptively to support the interpretation of narratives. Data are analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify patterns in perceptions of beauty, social comparison, emotional responses, and posting intentions before and after exposure.

Summary of Findings

As a study protocol, this paper does not report empirical findings but outlines theoretically informed expectations regarding how exposure to visual contrast may shape early adolescent girls' interpretations of beauty and postability. The design anticipates that filtered selfies operate as normalized beauty standards that guide habitual upward comparison, while side-by-side exposure to unfiltered images may interrupt automatic evaluations and prompt reflection on digital modification. The study expects that participants' narratives may reveal tensions between aesthetic preference, perceived social norms, and concerns about authenticity. Shifts in evaluative language, emotional tone, or posting intentions following exposure are anticipated to indicate moments of reflective distancing rather than wholesale rejection of beauty norms. By capturing girls' interpretations in their own words, the study aims to illuminate how brief visual exposure can reshape meaning-making processes related to beauty and online self-presentation without relying on didactic instruction.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to research on body image and social media by advancing a visually grounded, qualitative approach to understanding appearance-based comparison in early adolescence. The paper reconceptualizes engagement with beauty filters as an interpretive process rather than a passive internalization of ideals. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of visual elicitation interviews for capturing real-time meaning-making in digital contexts and for studying micro-level processes often overlooked in survey-based research. Conceptually, the study positions side-by-side image comparison as a visual micro-intervention that can foster critical awareness through exposure rather than instruction. Practically, the protocol offers insights relevant to educators, media literacy practitioners, and policymakers seeking brief, scalable strategies to support adolescents in critically evaluating unrealistic beauty standards.

References are available upon request.

Advertising, Promotion, and Marketing Communications

A THEORY ON SENSORY MAPPINGS IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

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Authors' contributions: Both authors have contributed equally.

Keywords: Sensory marketing; sensory mapping; consumer responses; semantic processing; conceptual typology

Description: This paper develops a unified typology and conceptual model of sensory mappings in consumer research, clarifying four distinct mapping types and explaining how different sensory stimuli can produce convergent, divergent, and mixed consumer responses.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sensory marketing engages the consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior (Krishna 2012, p. 332). It plays a critical role across marketing domains, from product development to communications. Despite its importance, sensory marketing research is characterized by three persistent challenges: construct proliferation, unexamined interrelationships, and mixed empirical outcomes.

Construct proliferation in evident in prior reviews that focus primarily on tangible stimuli directly perceived through the senses (hereafter, physical sensory cues) (Krishna 2012; Pandey and Tripathi 2025; Wörfel et al. 2022). This dominant perspective overlooks intangible stimuli conveyed through sensory language (linguistic sensory cues), despite their widespread

use in brand and product communication (Fenko et al. 2010). Accordingly, the first research question addressed in this paper is: What are the different types of sensory mappings?

In practice, sensory mappings involve multiple overlapping pathways towards consumer responses and evaluations. Prior research has largely examined individual sensory stimuli and their isolated effects within single sensory modalities (Pandey and Tripathi 2025) Therefore, we ask: How do different types of sensory mappings interact, and how can they be effectively combined?

Finally, sensory mapping often produce mixed outcomes. To explain this variability, we ask: Which moderating variables account for the mixed effects of sensory stimuli on consumer evaluations?

Summary of Findings

This paper proposed a typology of sensory mappings based on two dimensions: the nature of sensory stimuli (physical vs. linguistic) and the type of consumer responses they elicit (sensory vs. semantic). Physical sensory cues are tangible stimuli directly perceived through the senses, whereas linguistic sensory cues are intangible stimuli indirectly perceived through sensory language. Sensory consumer responses occur within the sensory domain, while semantic consumer responses relate to meaning, such as brand associations and emotions.

Combining these dimensions, we identify four forms of sensory mappings: sensory correspondence, semantic correspondence, sensory communication, and semantic communication**.** A conceptual model with propositions is then developed to explain how these mappings interrelate, highlighting how sensory intensity and semantic knowledge moderate outcomes, accounting for mixed consumer evaluations. For sensory correspondence and sensory communication: the impact of physical sensory cues on consumer evaluations is mediated by sensory and semantic consumer responses. For semantic correspondence and

semantic communication, respectively: the impact of linguistic sensory cues on consumer evaluations is mediated by sensory consumer responses and semantic consumer responses.

We identify sensory cue intensity and consumers' semantic knowledge as key moderators that shape the effectiveness of sensory mappings. Together, these mechanisms explain when and why sensory stimuli generate divergent consumer evaluations. Finally, a future research agenda is proposed, outlining directions for the conceptual advancement of sensory mappings.

Statement of Key Contributions

We offer a delineating theoretical contribution to sensory marketing research by developing a sensory mapping typology. We build on this typology through a conceptual model with propositions to explain how different sensory mappings interrelate and identify sensory intensity and semantic knowledge as key moderators that shape consumer evaluations. Our theoretical model addresses the key challenge that there is a lack of umbrella theory that can guide the design of sensory cues sensory marketings strategy across sensory modalities. Additionally, the theoretical model proposed in the current paper highlight the role of linguistic cues in simulating sensory responses and communicating semantic knowledge of the brands and products.

Practically, our conceptual model serves as a useful guide for marketers in designing effective sensory stimuli. First, it outlines the distinct pathways through which different sensory stimuli influence consumer responses. Second, it emphasizes the importance of adjusting sensory intensity according to consumers' sensitivity thresholds, accounting for both sensory deprivation and sensory overload. Third, it discusses the role of consumers' existing semantic knowledge in moderating the perception of sensory cues. Together, these insights help optimize consumer evaluations of product design, packaging, branding, and communication strategies.

BEYOND ENGAGEMENT: HOW METAVERSE BASED GREEN ADVERTISING SHAPES TRUST AND ECO-FRIENDLY CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examine how green advertising on the metaverse affect consumer sustainable behaviour. It utilize the Technology Acceptance Model to demonstrate that perception of the metaverse as well as trust in green advertising influence consumer sustainable behaviour indirectly through perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness.

KEYWORDS Green advertising, sustainability, consumer behaviour, TAM theory, Metaverse advertising.

DESCRIPTION

The study is exploring how green advertising on the metaverse impacts consumer sustainable behaviours and uses technology acceptance model.

INTRODUCTION

The changing nature of consumer interactions with brands and messages regarding sustainability have changed totally with advancements in metaverse digital technologies. Consumers now have the ability to explore digital worlds in the emerging metaverse and interact through avatars or other digital means, as well as receive real-time contextual information of products through the use of metaverse. In contrast to traditional green advertising, where advertisers communicated

environmentally friendly features primarily through static statements or symbolic representations (Banerjee, Gulas, and Iyer 1995; Gu, Liu, and Chen 2022; Iyer 1995), metaverse based green advertisements actually incorporate sustainability messaging within an interactive, metaverse experience, allowing consumers to experience environmental responsibility in real-time. The metaverse is increasingly viewed as a distinct digital marketing interface due to its heightened interactivity, metaverse and sense of presence (Dwivedi et al. 2023; Hollensen, Kotler, and Opresnik 2023; Kirbas and Dogan 2023). While prior research has separately examined consumer's engagement in virtual environment (Dwivedi et al. 2023) and the effect of green advertising on attitudes, trust and behavioural intentions (Chen 2010; Peattie 2010a), (Davis 1989: Venkatesh and Davis 2000). Because the study has been conducted separately, there is no understanding of how metaverse-based green advertising impacts digital consumers who use metaverse experiences regularly. The TAM-based conceptual framework we design bridges this gap.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as metaverse-based green advertising is a technology-driven environment where consumer responses depend on perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU). Perception of the metaverse (PM) and green trust (GT) are included as antecedents because metaverse experiences and the credibility of green trust shape these beliefs and influence consumer sustainable behaviour (CSB).

OBJECTIVE

- To examine the impact of PM and GT in the metaverse on PEOU and PU in metaverse-based green advertising.

- To examine the mediating role of PEOU and PU in linking perception of the metaverse and GT with consumer sustainable behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GREEN ADVERTISING & METAVERSE

Advertising is paid for communication by businesses to affect consumers. Advertising now promotes products and companies along with environmental effect and sustainability. Thus green advertising is at the centre of advertising. (Gu, Liu, and Chen 2022). Green as youth is the first of three green advertising faces. Green advertising is fresh and developing. It is still being defined and explored like any new idea. Second, green envy should affect consumer psychology, not simply morals. Third, green as money: Green advertising can raise sales and image (Banerjee, Gulas, and Iyer 1995; Iyer 1995). The word “metaverse” comes from Neal Stephenson’s 1992 book Snow Crash. It became real in 2003 with Second Life, where people could create avatars and interact in virtual worlds. The prefix “meta,” meaning “beyond,” shows how these digital spaces offer experiences that go beyond the real world (Hollensen, Kotler, and Opresnik 2023). The "metaverse" consists of shared virtual spaces where people can interact, create, work learn and shop together without being physically present. Rather than increasing online time, it enhances the quality and value of digital experiences (gracelm 2021). Metaverse advertising uses immersive 3D virtual spaces to create interactive brand experiences, allowing consumer to explore virtual store, engage with products and communicates with brand avatars in a more realistic and engaging way (Dwivedi et al. 2023).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND& CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The technology acceptance model is commonly used to study how people adopt new technology. TAM involves PEOU and PU effects on technology use. PU and PEOU measure how much a person believes a system will increase their productivity and ease of use. These factors affect technology use intention, which usually leads to use. TAM is flexible with e-commerce, mobile apps, e-learning, and the metaverse because useful and easy-to-use technologies are more popular (Davis 1989) (Venkatesh and Davis 2000). This study applies TAM to examine how PM and GT shape PU and PEOU, which then drive CSB**.** The model highlights the role of technology perceptions and trust in promoting sustainable consumption in metaverse.

PM-PEOU

The perception of the metaverse refers to how people see the metaverse depends on how real, useful and engaging they find it and how easy it is to interact with other there (Dwivedi et al. 2023) If it feels simple to use, people are more likely to try it (Davis 1989).

H1-PM has a significant impact on PEOU.

PM-PU

Perceived usefulness someone feels a platform or tool helps them. They hold the belief that it can enhance their life, simplify their tasks, or align with their principles (Davis 1989).

H2- PM has a significant impact on PU.

GT – PU

Green trust is built when consumers perceive that an organization's environmental efforts are genuine. If a customer feels that a company is genuinely committed to helping the planet and not just making claims for marketing purposes, they are more likely to trust and support it (Chen 2010). People trust metaverse green message when they seem honest, helping them learn and make sustainable choice.

H3-GT in the metaverse has a significant impact on PU.

GT-PEOU

When consumer trust green advertising in the metaverse, they feel less doubt and find the context easier to engage with. This trust makes interacting with eco-friendly messages feel natural and convenient, enhancing their overall experience.

H4-GT in the metaverse has a significant impact on PEOU.

PEOU-PM AND CSB

Consumer sustainable behaviour refers to the choices and actions people take that help protect the environment, such as purchasing eco-friendly products and reducing waste, all of which fall under this category (Peattie 2010), linking the metaverse alone may not make people act sustainably, but if it feels easy to use, they are likely to do eco-friendly actions. So ease of use helps turn a good view of the metaverse into CSB.

H5- PEOU mediates the relationship between PM and CSB.

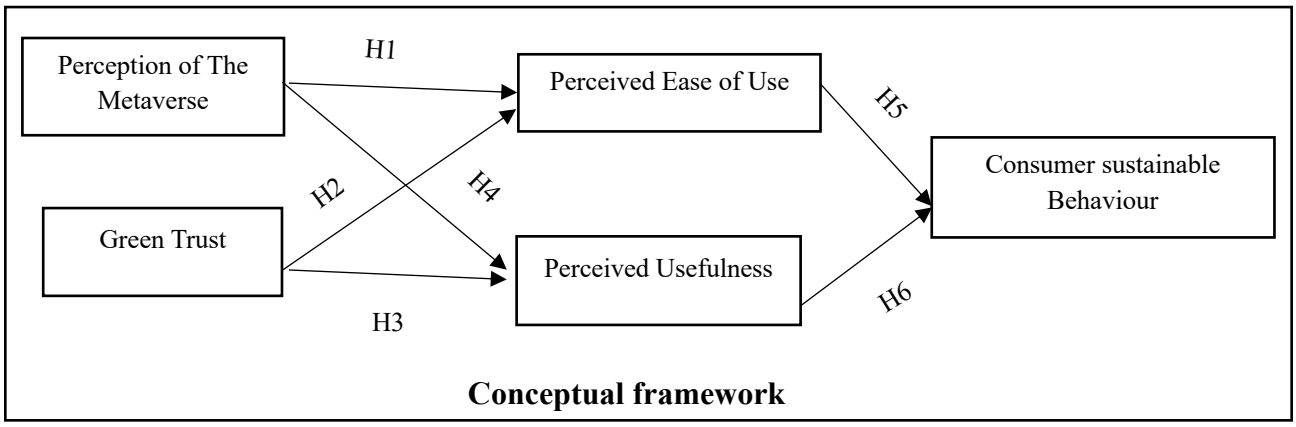
PU– PM AND CSB

Consumer Sustainable behaviour occurs when users perceive the metaverse as useful, with green advertising providing helpful information that turns positive perceptions into responsible actions.

H6- PU mediates the relationship between PM and CSB.

Construct	Role of framework	Meaning	Source
PM	Independent variable	How people see the metaverse in terms of how real, useful and engaging it feels.	(Kirbas and Dogan 2023)
GT	Independent variable	How much people trust a brand's environmental and sustainability claims.	(Chen 2010)
PEOU	Mediation	How easy people feel it is to use the metaverse platform .	(Davis 1989)
PU	Mediation	How helpful people think the metaverse is for understanding or supporting sustainable choices.	(Davis 1989)

CSB	Dependent variable	How people behave when they try to buy and use products in an environmentally friendly way.	(Quoquab, Mohammad, and Sukari 2019)



Conceptual framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

MEASUREMENT SCALE

All measuring items have been taken from previous research to ensure content validity with minor language adjustment to align with the context of metaverse based green advertising and consumer sustainable behaviour. We evaluated every construct using a five point scale, where 1 signified "strongly agree'' and 5 denoted " strongly disagree.'' Appropriate changes to the modification were made to make it clearer and more relevant to the metaverse and sustainability framework.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used purposive and convenience sampling as non-probability techniques within a cross- sectional quantitative design using primary data. From May to August 2025, this information was gathered by sending a structured google forms survey to people who heard about metaverse platform and green advertising. The online survey method was cost-effective, environmentally friendly and suitable for a technology oriented context . Out of 154 responses, 148 valid cases were evaluated using PLS-SEM to test the proposed model and hypotheses.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in Smart PLS 4.0 (Hair et al. 2019). This variance-based method was selected for its suitability in predictive modelling, theory development, and simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models (Reinartz, Haenlein, and Henseler 2009). The measurement model was evaluated through factor loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for reliability and validity, while discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. The structural model was assessed using R^2, Q^2, and SRMR values (Henseler, Hubona, and Ray 2016) with path significance tested via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, ensuring robust testing of the hypothesized relationships among PM, GT, PEOU, PU, and CSB.

COMMON METHOD VARIANCE

Harman's single-factor test was utilized to assess common technique bias. The findings revealed that the first factor represented 35.66% of the total variance, significantly below the advised limits of 50% This suggests that no single factor was dominant the variance, indicating that common method variance is not a significant issue in this study. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was utilized to assess possible variation among the measurement items.The VIF values ranged from 1.121 to 1.798**,** indicating that all indicators fall well below the recommended threshold of 5.0 (Hair et al. 2019).

MEASUREMENT MODEL ASSESSMENT

We checked the measurement model's validity and reliability by looking at factor loading, composite reliability (CR) and average variance (AV)removed. Table1 summarizes outcomes. All

indicator loadings exceeded 0.60 (Hair et al. 2019), confirming that the items are valid construct measurements. PM1 (0.808), GT4 (0.861), PU2 (0.880), and CSB2 (0.826) had high loadings, indicating indicator reliability. To preserve only credible signs, PU5 was eliminated during analysis due to insufficient loading. The composite dependability ranged from 0.618 to 0.829. PEOU (0.803), PU (0.737), and CSB (0.829) met reliability norms, whereas PM (0.618) and GT (0.693) were somewhat below 0.70. Chin (1998) suggests these values are appropriate in exploratory investigations. AVE values for all constructions surpassed 0.50, ranging from 0.556 to 0.634. Convergent validity is established when each construct explains more than half of its indicators' variance (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The measurement model appears reliable and convergent based on these data. This ensures that constructs are accurately measured and can be used for structural model assessment. Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The results presented in Table 2 indicate that all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2009). This confirms that the constructs-Consumer Sustainable Behavior (CSB), Green Trust (GT), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), and Perception of the Metaverse (PM)-are conceptually distinct and do not suffer from multicollinearity issues. In other words, while the constructs are related as expected in the theoretical model, they capture different dimensions of sustainable consumer behavior in the metaverse context. This provides strong result that the measurement model achieves discriminant validity (DV), thereby enhancing the robustness of subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 1 Measurement Model Assessment

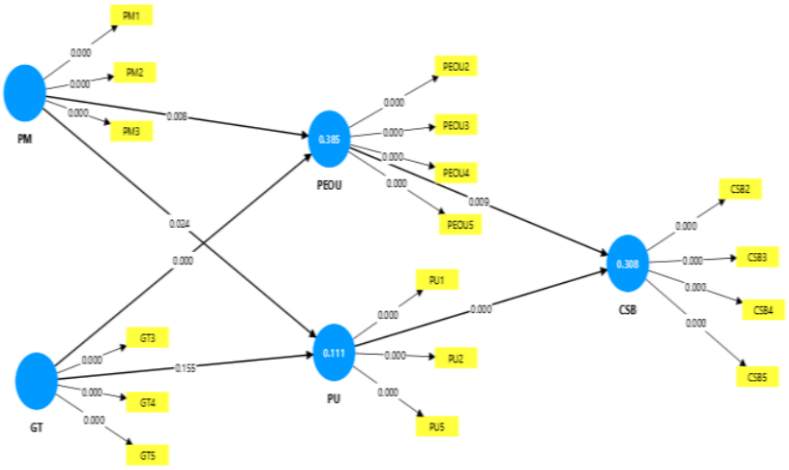
Construct	**Items**	**Loading**	**CR**	**AVE**
PM	PM1	0.808	0.618	0.556
	PM2	0.718		
	PM3	0.706		
GT	GT3	0.663	0.693	0.599

	GT4	0.861		
	GT5	0.784		
PEOU	PEOU2	0.784	0.803	0.619
	PEOU3	0.75		
	PEOU4	0.777		
	PEOU5	0.832		
PU	PU1	0.794	0.737	0.589
	PU2	0.88		
	PU5			
CSB	CSB2	0.826	0.829	0.634
	CSB3	0.813		
	CSB4	0.719		
	CSB5	0.821		

NOTE- PM- perception pf the metaverse , GT- Green Trust , PEOU- perceived ease of use , PU- perceived usefulness, CSB- consumer sustainable behaviour, CR- composite reliability, AVE- Average variance extracted

Table 2 Discriminant validity HTMT

Construct	**CSB**	**GT**	**PEOU**	**PM**
CSB	0.262			
GT	0.358	0.78	0.568	
PEOU	0.445	0.524	0.331	
PM	0.653	0.344	0.568	0.4



ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL MODEL

Table 3 summarizes the results**.** Perception of the metaverse (PM) had a positive, significant effect on PEOU (β = 0.233, p = 0.008) and PU (β = 0.258, p = 0.024)**,** supporting H1 and H2. This aligns with TAM, showing that PM enhances both ease and utility of green advertising. Green trust significantly influenced PEOU (β = 0.501, p < 0.001)**,** supporting H4, but not PU (β = 0.140, p =

0.155), leading to rejection of H3. Thus, trust improves comfort in interaction but not perceived usefulness. Both PEOU (β = 0.193, p = 0.009) and PU (β = 0.479, p < 0.001) significantly affected CSB, supporting H5 and H6. PU was the strongest predictor, showing consumer sustainable behaviour is driven more by perceived benefits than ease of use. Overall, results highlight the need for metaverse-based green ads that build trust and deliver clear benefits to promote consumer sustainable behaviour.

Table- 3 summarizes the results

Hypothesis	**Path**	**Full Sample Std β**	**SE**	**T value**	**P value**	**Decision**
H1	PM->PEOU	0.233	0.088	2.642	0.008	Supported
H2	PM->PU	0.258	0.114	2.257	0.024	Supported
H3	GT->PU	0.14	0.099	1.423	0.155	Not Supported
H4	GT->PEOU	0.501	0.081	6.184	0	Supported
H5	PEOU->CSB	0.193	0.074	2.617	0.009	Supported
H6	PU->CSB	0.479	0.073	6.561	0.001	Supported

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

Table 4 shows the mediation results. PM and GT influence CSB indirectly through PEOU and PU. PM affects CSB via PEOU (β = 0.045) and PU (β = 0.123), while GT affects CSB through PU (β = 0.067) and PEOU (β = 0.096). The strongest effect is PM → PU → CSB, highlighting the importance of perceived usefulness. In summary, TAM constructs act as mediators, showing that technology perceptions help explain how trust and metaverse perception lead to consumer sustainable behaviour.

Table- 4 Mediation analysis

Mediation Path	**Indirect effect β**
PM->PEOU->CSB	0.045
GT->PU->CSB	0.067
GT->PEOU->CSB	0.096
PM->PU->CSB	0.123

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of metaverse-based green advertising on sustainable consumer behaviour through the TAM. The findings indicated that the perception of the metaverse and green trust strongly influence PEOU and PU, which subsequently shape CSB. Perceived utility appeared as the most significant predictor, highlighting that consumers prioritize the value and advantages of metaverse-based green advertising in their eco-friendly decision-making. The findings demonstrate that trust reduces complexity and enhances user perceptions, though it does not directly translate into perceived usefulness.

THEORETICAL & PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION & LIMITATION

This research applies TAM in the metaverse, where sustainable behaviour is not often investigated. It introduces green trust to demonstrate how trust can enable sustainability. It connects technology adoption and sustainability to comprehend digital environment consumer behaviour. Marketers and policymakers should depend on metaverse-based green advertising to encourage consumer sustainable behaviour. Immersive metaverse experiences increase digital native engagement, trust, and consumer sustainable behaviour. The paper was limited to Indian gen y and z respondents with self-reported data. Future research can adopt cross-cultural, longitudinal designs and explore AI-driven or gamified metaverse experiences.

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Brand Storytelling Across Channels: Conceptualizing Transmedia Narrative Advertising

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Keywords: transmedia narrative advertising, brand storytelling, narrative persuasion, digital marketing

Description: This conceptual paper develops a theoretical framework explaining how brands strategically configure narratives across media platforms to create persuasive transmedia advertising campaigns.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As consumers increasingly navigate fragmented media environments, brands are moving beyond message repetition toward more complex narrative strategies distributed across multiple platforms. While transmedia storytelling has been extensively theorized in entertainment contexts, its systematic application in advertising remains underdeveloped in marketing scholarship. Existing research on narrative advertising largely focuses on single-channel persuasion, whereas integrated marketing communication emphasizes message consistency rather than narrative complementarity. This conceptual gap limits our understanding of how brands design, structure, and orchestrate interconnected narratives across channels to engage consumers. The central research question guiding this paper is: How do brands strategically configure transmedia narratives across media platforms, and through which mechanisms do these configurations influence consumer responses and marketing outcomes? Addressing this question, the paper conceptualizes transmedia narrative advertising as an advertising approach that distributes distinct yet interdependent narrative elements across platforms, with each medium contributing uniquely to a cohesive brand story. We further ask how different narrative types and channel dependency structures shape consumer cognition, affect, and behavior, and under what conditions these effects are strengthened or weakened. By articulating these questions, the paper aims to provide a coherent theoretical foundation for future empirical research on transmedia narrative advertising.

Summary of Findings

The paper advances four main conceptual insights. First, it defines transmedia narrative advertising and distinguishes it from related concepts such as narrative persuasion, cross-media advertising, integrated marketing communication, and synced advertising. Second, it develops a typology of narrative configuration consisting of four narrative types—heritage, journey, value, and social impact—organized along dimensions of narrative focus and temporal horizon. Third, it introduces channel dependency as a structural design dimension capturing how narrative elements relate across platforms, distinguishing sequential dependency, modular independence, and networked interdependence. Fourth, integrating these elements, the paper proposes a theoretical framework linking narrative configuration to three consumer response mechanisms: forward encoding and backward retrieval (cognitive), affective integration (affective), and transmedia foraging behavior (behavioral). These mechanisms are theorized to produce downstream marketing outcomes at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. The framework further identifies boundary conditions related to narrative sources, brand types, and consumer characteristics that systematically moderate campaign effectiveness. Together, these findings clarify how transmedia narratives work, why certain configurations are more effective than others, and how brands can strategically design multi-platform storytelling experiences.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes several important contributions to marketing theory. First, it introduces transmedia narrative advertising as a distinct conceptual construct, extending transmedia storytelling theory into advertising and branding contexts. Second, it advances narrative persuasion research by shifting the analytical focus from single-channel narratives to multi-platform narrative systems. Third, it contributes to integrated marketing communication research by moving beyond message consistency toward narrative complementarity and structural interdependence across channels. Fourth, the proposed framework offers a theoretically grounded foundation for future empirical research by generating testable propositions linking narrative configuration to consumer response mechanisms and marketing outcomes. From a managerial perspective, the paper provides actionable guidance for designing transmedia campaigns by aligning narrative types with appropriate channel dependency structures and audience characteristics. Overall, this research positions transmedia narrative advertising as a central strategic approach for brands seeking to engage consumers through immersive, coordinated storytelling in contemporary media environments.

References are available upon request.

CAT = LONE RANGER, DOG = AVENGERS? HOW TO USE PET IMAGES TO ENHANCE ADVERTISING PERSUASION

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Keywords: Pet imagery, Self-construal, Entitativity, Product type, Advertising persuasion

Description: This research investigates how exposure to pet images (cats vs. dogs) influences advertising persuasion through self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) under conditions of pet entitativity (single vs. group) and product type (luxury product vs. utilitarian product).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the widespread use of pet imagery in contemporary advertising, limited research has examined how different types of pets—particularly cats versus dogs—systematically shape consumers' psychological mindsets and downstream judgments. Building on theorizing that cats symbolize autonomy whereas dogs embody social connectedness, the present research investigates: To what extent does exposure to cat (vs. dog) imagery activate independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal, and how does this activation influence consumers' responses to congruent advertising appeals? In addition, this research examines two boundary conditions that may qualify

the persuasive impact of pet imagery. First, we proposed that does pet entitativity (a single vs. a group of pets) amplify persuasion such that a single cat enhances independence-aligned persuasion whereas a group of dogs enhances interdependence-aligned persuasion? Second, given that luxury products symbolically reinforce independence and utilitarian products emphasize functional, socially embedded goals, we proposed that are cat images more effective in promoting luxury products, whereas dog images enhance persuasion for utilitarian products? Together, these questions aim to elucidate whether pets function not merely as peripheral design elements but as psychologically meaningful cues capable of shaping consumer cognition, attitudes, and behavioral intentions in pet-unrelated advertising contexts.

Method and Data

Across three experiments, we employed a series of between-subjects designs to examine how exposure to cats versus dogs shapes consumers' self-construal and advertising responses. Study 1 (N = 212) used a two-level pet-exposure manipulation in which participants recalled prior interactions with either cats or dogs. Participants subsequently completed validated measures of independent and interdependent self-construal and evaluated two cellphone advertisements featuring independent versus interdependent appeals. Study 2 (N = 241) adopted a 2 (pet type: cat vs. dog) × 2 (pet entitativity: single vs. group) design. Participants viewed one of four pet-image advertisements and reported ad attitude and purchase intention using established multi-item Likert scales. Study 3 (N = 240) used a 2 (pet type) × 2 (product type: luxury vs. utilitarian) factorial design in which participants evaluated an ad featuring either a car (luxury) or a chair (utilitarian). Across all studies, participants were recruited from online consumer panels and randomly assigned to conditions. Data were analyzed using ANOVA and mediation models with bootstrapping procedures. Together, these datasets provide convergent evidence for the psychological and

persuasive consequences of pet exposure in advertising.

Summary of Findings

Across three experiments, the results consistently demonstrate that exposure to pet images exerts systematic effects on consumers' psychological mindsets and advertising evaluations. Study 1 shows that exposure to cats activates a more independent self-construal, whereas exposure to dogs activates a more interdependent self-construal. These activated mindsets subsequently shape advertising preferences, such that participants prefer ad appeals congruent with the self-construal elicited by the pet type. Study 2 reveals that the persuasive impact of pet imagery is moderated by pet entitativity. A single cat (low entitativity) enhances ad attitude and purchase intention relative to a single dog, whereas a group of dogs (high entitativity) increases persuasion compared with a group of cats. Study 3 further demonstrates that product type conditions the effectiveness of pet imagery: cat images enhance evaluations of luxury products, while dog images strengthen evaluations of utilitarian products. Together, these findings show that pets function as meaningful psychological cues that activate distinct self-construals, with downstream effects on persuasion shaped by visual entitativity and product category.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several theoretical and managerial contributions by demonstrating that pet images serve as psychologically meaningful cues that shape consumer cognition and persuasion. First, it advances the literature on social influence and human–animal interaction by showing that pets—not only human relationships—can activate distinct self-construal mindsets. Exposure to cats evokes independence, whereas exposure to dogs evokes interdependence, extending prior work on pet-related symbolism into the domain of consumer judgment. Second, this research

enriches self-construal theory by revealing that non-human entities can trigger behavioral mindsets that subsequently guide responses to congruent advertising appeals. Third, the findings contribute to entitativity research by illustrating that its persuasive value depends on pet type: low entitativity enhances persuasion for cats, whereas high entitativity enhances persuasion for dogs. Fourth, the research advances understanding of product–cue congruence by showing that pet imagery interacts with product type, with cat images strengthening luxury product evaluations and dog images enhancing utilitarian product evaluations. Collectively, these contributions highlight pets as more than peripheral aesthetic elements; they operate as strategic visual cues capable of shaping consumer attitudes and purchase intentions through psychological congruence mechanisms.

CHARITIES CAN BE COOL TOO: HOW BRAND COOLNESS INFLUENCES COMPASSION AND CHARITY SHOCK ADVERTISING

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Keywords: compassion, shock advertising, brand coolness, negative appeals.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research explores brand coolness in charity shock advertising and compassion within humanitarian aid and animal welfare sectors, using cognitive appraisal theory. Employing mixed-methods – focus groups and an experimental design – the findings reveal that brand coolness fosters compassion, while negative appeals can evoke positive emotions. Mixed-emotional strategies best engage diverse audiences.

It is the first research to measure compassion across two nonprofit sectors, revealing brand coolness as a key driver of emotional responses. Brand coolness, conceptualized for nonprofits, combines authenticity, usefulness, and popularity. Managerially, these insights guide nonprofits and advocacy brands in designing social media campaigns that foster engagement and donations. While negative appeals elicit compassion, a mixed-emotional strategy is recommended to broaden reach and enhance impact across diverse audiences.

By employing a mixed-method research approach, considering two charity sectors, this study seeks to comprehend how emotions and brand perceptions impact users' responses and behavior to nonprofit advertising. Grounded on cognitive appraisal theory, the study objectives are threefold: (1) understand the impact of brand coolness in altruistic nonprofits, (2) measure the effectiveness of shocking campaigns toward different subjects and charity sectors, and (3) examine whether negative advertising appeals elicit positive emotions, specifically compassion.

Method and Data

The first qualitative study employed an online focus group to explore perceptions of brand coolness in altruistic nonprofit organizations. Seven master's students participated in a 45-minute moderated discussion designed to identify coolness characteristics in other-focused charities. Data

were analyzed using MAXQDA, applying thematic analysis to code initial impressions and recurring dimensions of brand coolness.

Study 2 began with a pretest of 64 participants to select appropriate stimuli. Final images were partially manipulated by altering branding across four questionnaire groups. The main study consisted of an online experiment using a 2 (charity sector: humanitarian aid vs. animal welfare) × 2 (brand type: real vs. fictional) between-subjects design. It examined whether compassion is the primary appraisal and whether brand coolness positively influences this emotion and responses to negative appeals. Participants were randomly assigned to view campaigns from UNICEF and ASPCA or fictional counterparts.

Study 3 replicated the qualitative approach to investigate consumer behaviors elicited by shocking campaigns outside the survey context, focusing on reactions to stimuli used in the quantitative phase.

Summary of Findings

This research offers key contributions for academia and practice. It conceptualizes compassion as an interdisciplinary emotional response shaped by brand coolness and shocking charity campaigns on social media. Findings reveal that negative appeals can trigger positive emotions; however, a mixed-emotional strategy is advised to prevent fatigue and engage diverse audiences. The research consolidates brand coolness in nonprofit contexts, emphasizing usefulness, authenticity, and popularity as drivers of favorable outcomes and reputation. Additionally, celebrity and peer endorsements significantly enhance campaign effectiveness. Future research should explore their role in negative appeals, long-term exposure effects, and implications for brand recall and engagement.

Key Contributions

This research offers significant insights with implications for theory and managerial practice. From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the literature on emotional-based advertising and digital consumer behavior by demonstrating, through the cognitive appraisal theory, that shocking charity campaigns can fruitfully elicit compassionate responses toward both human (child) and non-human (animal, cat) victims, especially when the campaign is endorsed by celebrities or peers. Indeed, this is the first study to measure compassion across two nonprofit sectors with distinct targets. Hence, it offers a novel understanding of compassion as an emotional response influenced

by brand coolness and charity shocking advertising, which is elicited in social media users toward images depicting hurt children or animals. Also, brand coolness is conceptualized and empirically evidenced as a brand perception applicable to nonprofit organizations, particularly by shaping emotional outcomes. Concretely, the study contributes to the marketing literature by identifying a combination of mass and niche cool characteristics that are associated with not-for-profit brands, namely usefulness, authenticity, and popularity.

CONSUMER ENDORSEMENTS IN THE BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS (B2B) CONTEXT: ADAPTING CONSUMER THEORIES AND PROPOSING A RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: B2B endorsements; Endorsement models; Celebrity organizations; Halo effect; Signaling

Description: This conceptual paper develops a framework that explains how endorsements from prominent, high-status "celebrity organizations" influence organizational buying behavior by leveraging three distinct influence mechanisms to affect the Decision Making Unit (DMU).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The core objective of this conceptual paper is to address the gap in existing literature by asking: How do endorsements from prominent, high-status "celebrity organizations" influence organizational buying behavior in the Business-to-Business (B2B) context, particularly considering the multi-person Decision Making Unit (DMU)? Traditional B2C endorsement theories, which focus on individual celebrities and consumer attitudes, are insufficient to explain how institutional endorsements affect the decision-making of organizational buyers who face high stakes, high information demands, and career-related consequences. The paper pursues four objectives: establishing a definition of B2B endorsement centered on celebrity organizations, adapt established B2C mechanisms to the

B2B environment, identify B2B-specific mechanisms (perceived risk, competence, and champion confidence), and develop an integrated conceptual framework and a future research agenda.

Summary of Findings

The paper develops a conceptual framework detailing how endorsements from celebrity organizations influence B2B buyers through three distinct mechanisms. These mechanisms shape three central buyer responses within the DMU:

1. Status-based endorsement signals function as informational shortcuts that reduce uncertainty among organizational buyers. This directly leads to perceived risk reduction (financial, performance, and career risk), which is critical for the internal champion's justification.
2. Cognitive fit refers to the congruence between the endorser’s domain expertise and the vendor's solution. In the B2B context, this central-route processing enhances vendor perceived competence by providing diagnostic, evidence-based justification.
3. B2B parasocial relationships develop between buyers and visible executives through repeated exposure via media (e.g., LinkedIn, webinars). This relational trust strengthens the confidence of internal vendor advocates (DMU champion confidence), enabling them to promote the choice more effectively.

Additionally, Power Distance Belief (PDB), a cultural factor, moderates the impact of status-based cues, suggesting that buyers with high PDB rely more heavily on celebrity organization signals for risk reduction.

Key Contributions

The paper offers three primary theoretical contributions that extend endorsement theory beyond its B2C origins:

1. It introduces a noval celebrity organization construct to capture the institutional form of the halo effect, distinguishing it from individual celebrity or customer referencing. It also introduces the B2B parasocial relationship to explain endorsement effects arising from repeated executive visibility, a dynamic not captured in traditional theory.
2. The paper reconceptualizes the key persuasion outcome mechanisms relevant to B2B by shifting the focus from individual attitude change to organizational decision processes: risk reduction, competence judgments, and champion confidence. This aligns endorsement effects with the high-stakes, multi-person nature of B2B buying.
3. The framework also integrates cultural factors by proposing that Power Distance Belief (PDB) moderates the influence of status-based endorsement signals, providing a more comprehensive, B2B-specific model.

For managers, these findings provide actionable insights for leveraging institutional endorsements, such as strategically aligning endorsement selection with the need for risk reduction or ensuring high cognitive fit in technical markets.

CONSUMER RESPONSES TO BRANDS THAT PROMOTE BODY POSITIVITY: UNVEILING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AI-GENERATED ADVERTISEMENTS

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Keywords: Body Positivity, willingness to pay premium, AI-generated advertisements, psychological empowerment

Description: This study investigates whether, why, and when body-positive advertisements foster positive brand outcomes, identifying psychological empowerment as the key mechanism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

More than 50% of adults from the US, UK, Australia, France and Germany reported experiencing body-image concerns (Pearl et al. 2021). According to a survey carried out in 2022, around 46 per cent of respondents aged 18-24, while about 41 per cent of respondents aged 25 to 34 experienced adverse effects on their wellbeing due to their body image (Statista 2023). Body positivity strives to encourage body acceptance and appreciation by pushing shallow and confined definitions of beauty through inclusive portrayals of a variety of body shapes and sizes (Cohen et al., 2019). At the outset, Artificial intelligence (AI)-generated advertisements have the potential to entirely transform marketing and advertising in years to come (Arango et al. 2023). As a cost-saving measure, a growing number of businesses are using AI-generated influencers rather than real ones to promote their advertising campaigns. In spite of having a huge potential, empirical investigation of (AI)-generated advertisements is still in its embryonic stages. This research integrates two newly emerging areas of advertising research: inclusive advertising using body Positivity and AI-generated virtual influencers. In doing so, this research contributes to the literature and practice in three ways. First, it investigates the impact of body positivity on consumers' purchase intention (PI) and willingness to pay a premium (WTPP) for the brand, a key marketing outcome (Sarkar et al. 2021). The findings will offer marketing firms a better understanding of body positivity and about its employment in their advertising campaigns. Second, this research offers a novel pathway by examining the under-researched psychological mechanism of consumers' psychological empowerment to account for the influence of body-positive content on purchase intention and WTPP for the brand. Third, the study investigates the role of a key psychological factor, i.e., consumers' mindfulness, which could assist marketers in better identifying such people to target with their body positive commercials. Finally, by exploring the boundary conditions of endorser type, endorser type (AI-generated digital character vs. human-like) this study adds to the burgeoning fields of AI-generated advertising.

Research Questions

RQ1 (Main Effect): To what extent do body-positive advertising messages, compared to thin-ideal advertising messages, influence consumers' (a) purchase intention and (b) willingness to pay a premium (WTPP) for the brand?
RQ2 (Mediation): Does psychological empowerment mediate the relationship between body-positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertising and consumers' (a) purchase intention and (b) willingness to pay a premium (WTPP)?
RQ3 (Boundary Conditions): Under what conditions is the effect of body-positive (vs. thin-ideal) advertising on consumers' purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium strengthened or weakened, depending on (a) consumers' mindfulness and (b) the model type used in the ad (AI-generated digital character vs. human-like model)?

Method and Data

We designed three experiments to examine the proposed hypotheses. Using a fictitious brand, study 1 investigates the direct and mediating effects of body-positive advertising messages on consumers' purchase intention. Using a real brand Nike, study 2 examines boundary effects by testing the moderating role of mindfulness on the proposed relationships with WTPP as the dependent variable. Further, it investigates boundary effects by assessing the moderating impact of endorser type (AI-generated digital character vs. human-like model) on the proposed relationships.

Study 1 is a one-factor (advertising message: body-positive vs. thin-ideal) between-subjects design, including two-hundred forty-eight respondents. Participants were recruited from Prolific (prolific.co) through an exchange for $0.80, which included female respondents from USA. Consistent with the hypothesis's prediction, analysis of variance (ANOVA) results reveals that body positive advertising messages had a significant effect on purchase intention ($F_{(1, 247)} = 123.29$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.23$). We found that those in the body positive condition reported greater PI than those in the thin-ideal condition ($M_{bopo} = 4.45$, $M_{thin\text{-}ideal} = 2.15$). The indirect effect of body-positive advertising messages was significant through psychological empowerment on PI (b = 1.90, SE = 0.22, 95% CI = [1.4874, 2.3359]).

Study 2 is a 2 (advertising message: body-positive vs. thin-ideal) X 2 (mindfulness: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design. Three hundred six participants were recruited from Prolific (prolific.co) through an exchange for $1.0, which included female respondents from UK. We used a similar procedure used in Study 1 to conduct the experiment. The main effects and interaction effects were analyzed using ANOVA. The results of this study corroborated the findings of study 1. Further, results found that body-positive advertising messages had a significant effect on WTPP ($M_{bopo} = 4.60$, $M_{thin\text{-}ideal} = 2.07$; $F_{(1, 305)} = 187.11$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.38$). We further conducted a two-way ANOVA to investigate the interaction effects. We found a significant effect of interaction terms body-positive advertising x mindfulness ($F_{(1, 302)} = 15.39$, $p < 0.004$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$) on WTPP. Thus, we could conclude that the effect of body-positive advertising messages on WTPP was pronounced for consumers with high mindfulness.

Summary of Findings

This research contributes to an emerging area of advertising research, i.e., inclusive advertising using body positivity. We suggest that advertisers should consider having an inclusive

advertisement with “completely natural” bodies in their campaigns to empower consumers. The study’s discovery of customers’ mindfulness may help marketers target body-positive advertisements accordingly. Such an understanding will aid marketers in designing body positivity content with the careful consideration of the endorser to empower consumers while promoting brand success. AI-generated influencers have the potential to revolutionize the advertising sector, especially for addressing sensitive issues that require fundamental shifts in individuals’ beliefs. However, we expect that the AI-generated human-like influencer will be more effective than an AI-generated digital character in promoting a body-positive message. This may be because people can more easily relate to and empathize with human-like influencers, who share lived experiences and understand the emotional impact of negative body image.

Key Contributions

Existing literature on body positivity has predominantly focused on the consumers’ psychological dimensions, such as its impact on consumer’s mood (Simon and Hurst 2021; Cohen et al. 2019); self-esteem (Selensky and Carels 2021); body satisfaction (Brown and Tiggemann 2020); affect and well-being (Steven and Griffiths 2020). Despite its strategic potential, marketing literature has largely overlooked the role of body positivity as a key brand communication tool. Therefore, this study contributes to the advertising literature by demonstrating that body positivity advertisements can be regarded as a form of morally conscious advertising (Vadakkepatt et al. 2022), which positively influences consumers; support for the brands. Women often feel pressure to conform to societal standards of beauty, body, and appearance, which can contribute to low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Therefore, as part of responsible marketing, this study demonstrates that brands should embrace and promote diverse, authentic representations of women in media. Furthermore, this study endeavors to investigate the efficacy of body-positive advertisements by AI-generated digital character model (vs. human-like model). Therefore, the study combines two burgeoning fields of advertising research: inclusive advertising employing body positivity and AI-generated virtual influencers. Additionally, this study contributes to theory by exploring a key consumer psychological factor, namely psychological empowerment, that could influence the proposed relationships.

References are available upon request.

Consuming After Ideology: How Advertising Constructed the Flexitarian Consumer

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Keywords: Aesthetic work; Flexitarianism; Advertising; Post-ideological consumption

Description: This study examines how advertising has shaped the emergence of the flexitarian as a consumer category, showing how aesthetic strategies, rather than moral appeals, legitimize hybrid consumption practices within the expanding plant-based marketplace.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper investigates how the flexitarian emerged as a consumer category within the expanding plant-based marketplace. Specifically, we examine the market aestheticization processes through which this category has been constructed, focusing on the role of advertising in shaping consumer identities. As Holt (2012) notes, scholarship on the cultural role of markets often emphasizes ethical and moral appeals, particularly in studies of sustainability and health. While such perspectives are valuable, we argue that an aesthetic lens can offer deeper insights into how ideological shifts are encoded in everyday consumption.

Aesthetics are not neutral or apolitical. As Eagleton (1990, 99, italics in original) asserts, "the aesthetic *is* the ideological." Aesthetic choices, ranging from product packaging (Peng, Eisend, and Chen 2025) and taste (Pomiès and Arsel 2023), to brand organoleptics (Brown 2016), and retail brandscapes (Stevens, Maclaran, and van 't Riet 2025) frame values, aspirations, and norms. Advertising is particularly important in this process because of its capacity to translate social trends into emotionally and culturally resonant forms. As Huff, Burkhardt, and Barnhart (2024) note, advertising links broader social ideals with specific consumption practices through persuasive and pleasurable aesthetic means. It operates not just by informing, but by shaping how consumers feel about a given category, making it appear desirable, contemporary, and intuitively right. This is crucial in cases like flexitarianism, where the category itself is still in formation and its boundaries remaining fluid.

Method And Data

We conducted a historical cultural analysis of vegan advertising from the early 2000s to the present. Our focus was on ads that appear to target a flexitarian audience. This approach

allowed us to trace how aesthetic work (Pomiès and Arsel 2023) has been deployed over time to render flexitarian consumption culturally intelligible and commercially viable.

Data collection focused on Sweden and the United Kingdom, two countries with established vegan markets and growing flexitarian populations. Our dataset included ads from television, print media, and social media platforms, allowing us to capture shifts across multiple media formats and cultural contexts.

Our analysis employed critical visual analysis (Schroeder and Buschgens 2024), a method that examines how visual and textual elements work together to convey ideological meaning. Following Williamson (1978) and Scott (1994), we treated ads as cultural texts that express, reinforce, or contest normative values and consumer identities. Inspired by Krabbe and Grodal (2023), we focused not on product design but on the representational strategies deployed within advertising imagery to construct category-level meaning. In contrast to research that centers consumer interpretation and agency (Pomiès and Arsel 2023), our emphasis was on the structural and formal composition of advertising aesthetics (Dagalp and Södergren 2024).

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal three interconnected aesthetic strategies that have facilitated the expansion of the vegan market by constructing the flexitarian consumer: masking ideology, mobilizing hedonism, and reframing moral/political work. First, ideology is masked by replacing overtly moral or activist language with inclusive, lifestyle-oriented framings that invite participation without ethical confrontation. Second, advertisers mobilize hedonism, centering joy, humor, and indulgence instead of guilt or restraint, to depict plant-based eating as trendy, fun, and socially rewarding. The strategic use of hedonism de-polarizes the vegan-non-vegan binary by emphasizing what is gained rather than what is renounced. It also serves to culturally validate

plant-based eating as fun and aspirational, allowing flexitarian consumers to engage without feeling moral pressure or political tension. Third, moral and political appeals are reframed within familiar cultural aesthetics, such as nostalgic motifs or domestic togetherness, to generate moral legitimacy through emotional ease and visual familiarity. Collectively, these strategies transform veganism from a boundary-marked ideology into an inclusive aesthetic field. They normalize hybrid practices by aligning sensory pleasure with moral aspiration, thereby constructing the flexitarian consumer as both ethically aware and sensually engaged. Advertising thus functions as a crucial cultural intermediary, aestheticizing moral values into forms that feel natural, desirable.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to theory and practice in three key ways. First, Pomiès and Arsel (2023) describe omnivorous consumption as involving ideological boundary work between distinct practices with "hybrid" consumers positioned in between. Our analysis adds texture to this hybrid category by identifying gradations of aestheticized flexitarianism. Instead of a stable middle ground, we observe a spectrum of hybrid performances, enabled by aesthetic cues that make flexibility feel morally sufficient, socially acceptable, and emotionally pleasurable.

Second, Our findings support and extend the ethical value paradigms critique (Holt 2012). Transformation in dietary norms appears to be driven less by explicit ethical appeals and more by aesthetic work that packages plant-based eating in terms of hedonism. This aligns with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982) emphasis on fantasies, feelings, and fun in consumer choice.

Third, the figure of the flexitarian also invites us to rethink the operation of ideology in contemporary markets. Drawing on Eagleton's (1991) assertion that ideology is most powerful

when invisible, we propose the flexitarian as a post-ideological consumer: someone who appears to choose freely, guided by taste and lifestyle, yet whose choice remains deeply structured by market logic.

References are available upon request.

Extended Abstract Template

DOES BRAND USING ANATOMICAL DEPICTION SUFFER MORE AMID PRODUCT-HARM CRISES?

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Keywords: Anatomical depiction, Product-Harm crisis, Simulated disassemblage, Brand responsibility, Brand attitude.

Description: This research demonstrates that anatomical product depictions, by eliciting a mental process of simulated disassemblage, amplify extra negative brand attitudes during product-harm crises by increasing attributions of brand responsibility.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question –Why do exploded-view diagrams, which typically enhance product evaluations, amplify negative impacts during a product-harm crisis? This research proposes that exploded-view diagrams induce not only a positive mental assembly but also a distinct mental

disassembly process that becomes dominant in a crisis context. This mental disassembly makes internal components more salient, leading consumers to attribute product failure to the brand's own internal design flaws. This, in turn, heightens perceptions of brand culpability and results in more negative brand attitudes.

Method And Data – We tested our conceptual model across five preregistered experiments using data collected from a Chinese online panel (Wenjuan.com). Two pre-studies established the psychological foundation of our theory. Moreover, the subsequent three studies tested our core hypotheses in product-harm crisis scenarios.

Summary of Findings – In a product-harm crisis, using exploded-view diagrams (vs. non-exploded views) leads to significantly worse consumer attitudes toward the brand. Mental disassembly and brand culpability attribution play a key serial mediation role in this process: Exploded-View Diagram → Mental Disassembly → Increased Perceived Brand Culpability → Lower Brand Attitude. Moreover, this negative effect is moderated by product positioning, which is significantly stronger when the product is positioned as high-tech.

Statement of Key Contributions – Theoretically, this research provides two contributions. First, we identify and validate simulated disassemblage as a distinct, stimulus-driven cognitive process. This establishes a dual-pathway mechanism in mental simulation, showing how a single visual cue can elicit opposing mental processes (assembly vs. disassembly) depending on the context. Second, we introduce a novel visual-perceptual mechanism to the crisis management

literature, demonstrating how anatomical depictions bias consumers toward internal, controllable attributions (i.e., blaming the brand's design), thus amplifying adverse crisis outcomes.

Practically, our findings provide clear, actionable guidance for crisis management. We advise that during a product-harm crisis, brands - particularly those with a high-tech positioning - should immediately adjust their visual communication to avoid showing internal components. This strategy helps mitigate blame attribution and ultimately protects brand equity by steering consumers away from faulting the company's internal design.

DON'T COME NEAR ME, MR. COCKROACH! HARMFUL SUBSTANCE ANTHROPOMORPHISM AFFECTS PERCEIVED PRODUCT EFFICACY AND ADVERTISING PERSUASION

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Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Sense of drama, perceived product efficacy, Advertising appeal, Advertising persuasion

Description: This paper examines the effects of explicit and implicit anthropomorphism of harmful substances on consumer perceptions of product efficacy and advertising persuasion, highlighting the moderating role of advertising appeals.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketers increasingly anthropomorphize harmful substances (e.g., cockroaches, mosquitoes, pimples, dust mites) in advertising to make invisible threats more vivid and comprehensible. Prior research has largely examined whether anthropomorphism per se influences consumer responses, typically contrasting anthropomorphism with non-anthropomorphism. However, little is known about whether *different forms* of anthropomorphism produce systematically different psychological and behavioral outcomes. Addressing this gap, the present research

distinguishes between *explicit anthropomorphism*, in which harmful substances are portrayed by human actors cosplaying the threat, and *implicit anthropomorphism*, in which harmful substances retain their original appearance but are given human-like facial features. The central research questions are: (1) How do explicit versus implicit anthropomorphism of harmful substances differentially influence consumers' sense of drama, information processing fluency, perceived product efficacy, and advertising persuasion? (2) What psychological mechanism explains these effects? and (3) Under what conditions do the persuasive advantages of explicit anthropomorphism hold or backfire? Drawing on narrative persuasion, visual fluency, and advertising drama literature, this research proposes that explicit anthropomorphism heightens a sense of drama, thereby facilitating information processing and enhancing efficacy perceptions. However, it further asks whether this advantage depends on advertising appeal, particularly whether the product is framed using potency versus natural appeals.

Method and Data

Across four empirical studies employing complementary methods, this research systematically tests the effects of harmful substance anthropomorphism type. Study 1 uses an online experiment (N = 330) with facial cleanser advertisements to examine whether explicit anthropomorphism evokes a stronger sense of drama than implicit anthropomorphism. Study 2 employs a three-condition design (explicit vs. implicit vs. non-anthropomorphism; N = 130) using pesticide advertisements to test perceived product efficacy and to examine sense of drama as a mediating mechanism while ruling out sympathy as an alternative mediator. Study 3 combines survey measures with eye-tracking data (N = 67) to assess processing fluency objectively via total fixation count and total fixation duration, as well as willingness to pay. Study 4 adopts a 2 (anthropomorphism type) × 2 (advertising appeal: potency vs. natural) between-subjects design (N = 203) to test advertising appeal as a boundary condition,

examining perceived product efficacy and purchase intention. Across studies, stimuli span multiple harmful substances (pimples, cockroaches, mosquitoes, dust mites), enhancing robustness and generalizability.

Summary of Findings

The results consistently demonstrate that explicit anthropomorphism outperforms implicit anthropomorphism in promoting advertising effectiveness under most conditions. Study 1 shows that explicit anthropomorphism evokes a stronger sense of drama than implicit anthropomorphism. Study 2 reveals that explicit anthropomorphism increases perceived product efficacy relative to both implicit and non-anthropomorphism conditions, and this effect is mediated by heightened sense of drama rather than sympathy. Study 3 provides convergent process evidence: explicit anthropomorphism leads to higher willingness to pay and facilitates more fluent information processing, as indicated by fewer and shorter eye fixations. Critically, Study 4 identifies advertising appeal as a key moderator. When products are framed with potency appeals, explicit anthropomorphism increases perceived efficacy and purchase intention relative to implicit anthropomorphism. However, when products emphasize natural appeals, the advantage of explicit anthropomorphism disappears or reverses, as implicit anthropomorphism better aligns with consumer expectations that natural products are gentle and less aggressive. Together, the findings show that explicit anthropomorphism enhances persuasion by increasing drama and processing fluency, but only when it is congruent with the product's persuasive framing.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four key contributions. First, it advances anthropomorphism theory by introducing a novel distinction between explicit and implicit anthropomorphism, moving

beyond the traditional anthropomorphism versus non-anthropomorphism dichotomy. This distinction is particularly important for understanding consumer responses to negative or aversive objects, such as harmful substances. Second, the research identifies sense of drama as a central psychological mechanism linking anthropomorphism type to perceived product efficacy and persuasion, demonstrating that dramatic portrayal—not sympathy—drives these effects. Third, by integrating eye-tracking evidence, the study contributes to information processing literature, showing that explicit anthropomorphism enhances visual fluency and reduces cognitive effort during ad processing. Finally, the research highlights advertising appeal as a critical boundary condition, showing that explicit anthropomorphism can backfire when paired with natural appeals. Managerially, these findings provide actionable guidance for advertisers on how to strategically deploy anthropomorphism depending on product positioning. Overall, this research enriches consumer behavior, advertising, and anthropomorphism literatures by clarifying when and why humanizing harmful substances persuades consumers.

HOW MUSICAL KEY INFLUENCES PERCEIVED POPULARITY AND BRAND PREFERENCES

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Keywords: musical key, audio branding, popularity, brand evaluations

Description: This research examines how musical key influences perceived popularity and downstream brand evaluations in audio branding contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketing research has largely overlooked the impact of musical key on consumer preferences. This research explores how musical keys impact perceptions of music popularity and the resulting positive effects on brand evaluations. In today's audio-centric world, marked by podcasts, voice assistants, TikTok trends, and metaverse experiences, advances in audio branding give music an increasingly essential role in engaging consumers (Das, Sandhu, Mondal 2022). With the rise of tools for creating brand-specific music, there is a need to understand how

various musical properties influence consumer responses for effective audio branding. Existing research in marketing has examined how broad musical properties, such as tempo, genre, and instrumentation, affect consumer perceptions. Although these studies examine the influence of music on consumer perceptions, little research has addressed how specific musical keys might shape consumer reactions and brand outcomes. This paper focuses on the key of B♭ major (B♭ major), a key that merits scholarly attention due to its unique combination of physiological, historical, and practical attributes. We propose that music in B♭ major enhances perceived popularity and investigate whether this perception transfers to downstream brand evaluations and under which conditions this effect attenuates.

Method And Data

In Study 1, we examine a secondary data set from Spotify. A secondary dataset from Kaggle was identified as suitable for the purpose of this study. In this dataset, 41,106 songs were compiled between the years 1969 and 2019. Songs were selected from artists that had never previously released a Billboard Hot 100 hit and from genres considered non-mainstream. Using the key and modality of each song, we created 24 dummy variables that correspond with each musical key. A hit song was coded as 1 if the song was featured on the Billboard Hot 100. We conducted logistic regression analyses to examine the effect of musical keys on whether a song became a hit. We then perform a robustness check with an additional dataset using Propensity Score Matching procedures. In Study 2, we replicate the effect of B♭ major in a controlled experiment and extend our findings to downstream consequences for brands. Participants viewed an advertisement for a fictitious hotel resort featuring background music in either the B♭ major or G major key. Finally, in Studies 3 and 4, we identify boundary conditions to the B♭ major

effect relevant to marketing managers.

Summary of Findings

Results from the secondary data analysis demonstrate that music performed in B♭ major is significantly more likely to achieve popularity compared to other musical keys. Preliminary model testing demonstrated a negative effect of all other musical keys when B♭ major served as the indicator variable of comparison. This effect consolidated as the model incorporated more control variables. Study 2 results revealed significant differences in attitudes, visit intentions, brand popularity perceptions, and perceived warmth. Participants in the B♭ major condition reported higher attitudes, visit intentions, brand popularity perceptions, and perceived warmth than those in the G major condition. The indirect effect of musical key through warmth was significant across all dependent variables. Studies 3 and 4 identified managerially relevant boundary conditions. When the product in the marketing communication was positioned as being congruent with B♭ Major, product preferences were enhanced. However, when the product was positioned as incongruent with B♭ Major, preferences were reduced. Similarly, when the message highlighted popularity, preferences increased under B♭ Major, whereas the effect attenuated when the product was positioned as exclusive. Together, these findings demonstrate that musical key influences perceived popularity and downstream brand outcomes, while also identifying when the effect weakens.

Statement of Key Contributions

While emerging studies in marketing have examined the impact of music and audio branding, previous research has been limited in comparing differences across various musical

keys and their downstream impact on consumer preferences. Here, we compare musical keys and examine their impact on consumer perceptions of music popularity and subsequent effects on consumer preferences towards brands paired with the music. Theoretically, we extend previous research on music in marketing and show that musical keys can be linked to affective responses that transfer to evaluations of brands. We show that music performed in B♭ Major can positively affect consumer liking and downstream consequences towards brands paired with that music. Additionally, we provide initial evidence that feelings of warmth may underlie this effect. This extends previous research which has noted that musical keys are capable of evoking affective responses in listeners. Managerially, this work highlights the positive responses for the B♭ major key and suggests that managers should consider pairing new music performed in B♭ Major with products and services in their audio branding, jingles, and background music used in advertising. We also identified boundary conditions to this effect, showing that congruence between music, product, and message characteristics is critical.

References are available upon request.

IF YOU COULD BUY JENNIFER ANNISTON'S SWEATER, WOULD YOU? EXPLORING PURCHASE INTENTIONS FOR SHOPPABLE "AS SEEN IN" ADS IN STREAMING TV

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Keywords: shoppable advertising, expectancy violation theory, media motivations, advertising value, connected TV streaming

Description: Across two studies, the media motivation to seek information and the value of advertising to provide information were positively related to purchase interest for products in "as-seen-in" non-interruptive shoppable ads on connected TV streaming.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Shoppable ads allow consumers to purchase products directly through the ad /platform (Carman 2022) "blurring the line between advertising and distribution" (Plangger et al. 2021, p. 121).When embedded inside entertainment (McGuigan 2018), they're described as selling Jennifer Aniston's sweater (Elliott 2008), resembling product placements you can buy (Rodriguez-Lopez et al. 2024). Past research found, in line with Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT; Burgoon 1993), that shoppable advertising violates viewers' expectations, leading to positive evaluation (e.g., information about new products), but also concerns about interrupting entertainment (Ji et al. 2025). There has not been much research on "as-seen-in" shoppable ads in connected streaming TV, so we explored:

Which factors inform audience purchase interest in products featured in 'as-seen-in' non-interruptive shoppable ads on connected TV streaming?

Based on past research, we predicted that entertainment /information-seeking media motivation would be negatively/positively related to purchasing from shoppable ads (H1, H2). Perceptions of ad informativeness would be positively related to consumers' interest in purchasing from shoppable ads (H3), and shoppable ads would be unexpected, causing an orienting response (arousal; H4) and evaluation (EVT valence; H5); both factors would be positively related to purchase intention of the featured products.

Method And Data

Pilot test survey. Participants (N=513) were recruited from a Qualtrics panel in a U.S. online survey. Media (TV streaming) use motives were assessed (information, entertainment) using 7-point Likert scales. Advertising informativeness was measured by participants' agreement on six items on a 5-point Likert-type scale. We measured participants' interest in purchasing from shoppable ads in streaming: "It would be cool to be able to purchase some of the products (e.g., clothing) on characters in streaming content right from my device."

Experimental living room study. Participants (N=53) recruited from a U.S. community watched sitcom *Modern Family* with commercials on connected streaming TV. "As-seen-in" ads were shown at the end, featuring clothing and jewelry of the main characters. After the show participants completed a survey with media motivation questions (information, entertainment) and ad informativeness. Expectancy violation and valence measures assessed perceptions of the unexpectedness and valence of shoppable ads. Arousal was measured with a single item using the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) scale (Lang et al. 1997). Purchase intentions were measured using a 4-item 7-point Likert scale. Participants shared feedback in an interview.

Summary of Findings

Across a pilot and experimental study, audiences were interested in 'as-seen-in' shoppable ads embedded into entertainment on connected TV streaming. Media motivations related to information-seeking were positively related to interest in purchasing products from these types of ads, whereas entertainment seeking was negatively related in our experimental study. Further, the perception of the value of advertising to offer information about products was positively related to purchase interest in the pilot study. Finally, results of regressions showed that the unexpected nature of these shoppable ads elicited arousal and evaluative responses (expectancy violation valence), both of which were positively related to purchase intentions for the featured products, consistent with Expectancy Violation Theory. Qualitative interviews further revealed curiosity and generally positive reactions toward this non-interruptive ad format, particularly for discovering products seen in entertainment content.

Key Contributions

"As-seen-in" products offer a way for connected streaming TV audiences to discover new products and purchase them directly from the platform and extend prior work on shoppable advertising into TV streaming. The advertising format featured here resembles 'product placements you can buy' after the episode, providing a non-interruptive, entertainment-embedded alternative to traditional advertising formats. There is limited empirical research on this type of advertising format, despite the increased use of ads on connected TV platforms, and this research offers an early empirical look at audience responses to this emerging format. Our exploratory studies show promise for this ad format, particularly for understanding how media motivations and perceptions of advertising value shape purchase interest. Audiences who believe advertising is useful for discovering products and who seek information from TV streaming are a

prime target for shoppable TV ads, suggesting practical relevance for advertisers and platforms experimenting with embedded commerce. Given the novelty of the ad format, the shoppable ads were unexpected, in line with EVT theory. Whether or not people showed positive or negative valence about these unexpected ads related to their interest in purchasing products from the ads, highlighting the potential role of evaluative expectancy violation responses in this context.

References available upon request.

IT CAN'T WORK WELL IF IT'S RETOUCHED: THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL RETOUCHING DISCLOSURES ON PRODUCT EFFECTIVENESS AND PERCEIVED MORALITY OF THE BRAND

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Keywords: digital retouching; disclosures; perceived morality; product effectiveness

Description: In this research, we investigate how the presence of a digital retouching disclosure (digitally retouched versus not digitally retouched versus control) influences consumers' perceptions of how moral the advertised brand is and how well the advertised product will work.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Digital retouching – the practice of digitally altering models in advertisements to better align with body ideals – is widespread in advertising. These alterations can take many forms, including making bodies appear thinner or smoothing skin texture. Even though digital retouching is a common practice in advertising, prior research suggests that exposure to idealized bodies, which are usually digitally retouched, can negatively impact consumers. As a result, some brands have pledged to reduce or eliminate digital retouching while others operate in countries that legally require advertising disclosures when images have been altered. However, there is no universal standard, meaning consumers may encounter advertisements that either disclose that the model featured in the advertisement *has* been digitally retouched or explicitly state that the model featured in the advertisement *has not* been digitally retouched. Despite the growing use of such

disclosures, little is known about how different disclosure types shape consumer perceptions. We propose that disclosing that a model has not been digitally retouched (versus retouched) sends signals to consumers about the morality of the brand, which in turn influences product effectiveness.

Method and Data

To test our hypotheses, we conducted four online experiments with American participants from Prolific Academic (n = 1,171). Across the four studies, we explore how the presence of two different types of digital retouching disclosures (digitally retouched versus not digitally retouched) influence brand morality and product effectiveness in a variety of product types including gym memberships (studies 1A and 1B), a household cleaner (study 2), and an acne cleanser (study 3). Additionally, we tested whether the effects hold regardless of the gender of the model by running study 1A with a female model and study 1B with a male model. Finally, we tested two boundary conditions: whether the product was relevant to consumers' bodies and if the model in the advertisement had idealized body features. To analyze the data, we ran a series of ANOVAs, t-tests, mediation, and moderation analyses (Hayes, 2017).

Summary of Findings

The results of this research suggest that brands are perceived to be less moral when they disclose that the model featured in the advertisement has been digitally retouched (versus not digitally retouched). These lower perceptions of morality lead participants to believe that the advertised product will be less effective when a digital retouched (versus not digitally retouched) disclosure is present. The results hold regardless of the gender of the model or the gender of the participant. Yet, the observed results only hold when the advertised product is relevant to the body. Additionally, the effect of disclosure type on perceived morality of the brand is attenuated

when the model featured in the advertisement has nonidealized (versus idealized) skin. It is important to note that studies 1A and 1B included a control condition in which no disclosure was provided. The results of studies 1A and 1B suggest that neither the digitally retouched disclosure nor the not digitally retouched disclosure led to a significant change in perceived product effectiveness compared to the control condition.

Statement of Key Contributions

The current research makes several contributions to the advertising literature. Prior research on consumer responses to digital retouching disclosures have primarily focused on how such disclosures influence consumers' attitude towards both the advertisement and the brand, as well as perceived authenticity. The current research extends those findings by examining brand morality and product effectiveness. To the authors' knowledge, this research is the first to explore how disclosures impact brand morality and adds to the emerging literature on how brand morality influences product perceptions.

As more countries mandate digital retouching disclosures, this research provides valuable insights for advertisers. While neither the digitally retouched nor the not digitally retouched disclosure conditions significantly differ from the no disclosure condition, there were significant differences between the two disclosure conditions, suggesting that this research is important to advertisers located in countries with mandated digital retouching disclosures. Finally, our research provides actionable guidance for advertisers of body-relevant products. The negative effects of a digitally retouched disclosure only occurred when the model featured in the advertisement had idealized (versus nonidealized) features. This finding suggests that portraying nonidealized models in advertisements can buffer brands from the negative effects of including a digitally retouched disclosure.

LIVE LIKE YOU'RE ALIVE: GRANFLUENCERS AND THE POWER OF LATE-LIFE INFLUENCE IN TOURISM MARKETING

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Keywords: Granfluencers, Tourism marketing, Positive aging, Hope

This study demonstrates that a granfluencer (an older influencer) who defies old-age stereotypes can positively impact consumer attitudes and purchase intentions in the hospitality and tourism context, and hope underpins these effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Older adults are engaging with travel for both recreation and as a pathway to self-expression, emotional renewal and well-being (Laing & Frost, 2017). The unique characteristics of older

adults, including their growing population, make them an attractive segment for the tourism industry. According to the World Health Organization (2024), the world's population is ageing at an unprecedented pace, with those aged 60 years and older projected to comprise 22% of the global population—around 2.1 billion people—by 2050. Compared to just 4% young adults, around 25% of those aged 65 and above embark on solo travel trips (Thoppil, 2024). Moreover, older travelers are time-affluent, financially secure and increasingly motivated by lifestyle enrichment (Chang, Moyle, Dupre, Filep, & Vada, 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to encourage older adults to participate in tourism.

Given these trends and characteristics, leveraging granfluencers—older social media creators—may represent an effective approach to promoting tourism among this demographic. Typically, aged 60 and above, granfluencers have gained prominence on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Brands across sectors are increasingly partnering with granfluencers to reach both older consumers and younger (Casaló, Flavián, & Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020). Despite their growing prominence, academic research has yet to fully examine the influence of granfluencers in tourism contexts. While prior studies have explored seniors' well-being and motivations for travel (Chang et al., 2022), very few have investigated how stereotype-defying portrayals of aging intersect with consumer psychology and branding outcomes in tourism (e.g., Leung et al., 2025). This is a notable gap given the emotional richness of tourism experiences and the industry's increasing focus on inclusive, values-aligned marketing (Ng & Indran, 2022). Granfluencers do not represent a single category. Some granfluencers actively challenge ageing stereotypes by showing vivacity and continued self-expression (Isawasan et al., 2025), while others don't engage in opposing ageism and focus on other general topics. This research draws on social influence theory and affective psychology perspective to investigate whether old-age-defying granfluencers

generate more favourable responses in hospitality and tourism contexts than more conventional portrayals of older adults.

Method and Data

We conducted three experimental studies to examine the effect of granfluencers (old-age-defying vs. non-old-age-defying) on consumer attitudes toward the granfluencer, the brand, and purchase intentions, as well as the underlying mechanism of these effects. The data for all studies were collected from US consumers aged 50 and above through Prolific. Study 1 used a single-factor, two-level design (granfluencer: old-age-defying vs. non-old-age-defying) to test the effectiveness of a granfluencer in a hospitality context (a coffee brand in a café setting). The granfluencer type was manipulated through text and image such that the old (non-old)-age-defying granfluencer was shown challenging old age stereotypes (discussing a neutral topic), and an active (routine) lifestyle picture of the granfluencer was displayed. Study 2 employed a similar experimental design to replicate the findings of Study 1 and examine hope as the underlying mechanism in a tourism context (holiday cruise tour). Using an experimental-causal-chain design (Spencer et al. 2005), Study 3 investigated the causal mediation of hope in a distinct tourism context (i.e., a tourism destination). It conducted two experiments to first examine the effect of granfluencer type on hope (measured) and then test the influence of manipulated hope on attitudes toward the granfluencer, the brand, and purchase intentions.

Summary of Findings

The results of Study 1 showed that a granfluencer who defies old-age stereotypes leads to more favourable attitudes towards the granfluencer and the brand, as well as higher purchase intentions, compared to one who does not defy these stereotypes. Study 2 replicated the

findings of Study 1, except for purchase intention, and confirmed hope as the underlying mechanism of the superior effects of the old-age-defying granfluencer. Finally, Study 3 further established hope as the underlying mechanism of the superior effects of the old-age-defying granfluencer using a causal approach.

Key Contributions

Our research makes several important contributions. First, we extend the social influencer theory by revealing hope as a distinctive emotional mechanism through which influencer effects are transmitted. Prior literature has largely framed influence in terms of informational or normative compliance, typically mediated by constructs such as credibility, similarity or trust. Second, we contribute to theories of aging and representation by empirically demonstrating the impact of portrayals that defy old-age stereotypes on consumer outcomes. Third, we contribute to affective psychology in marketing by specifying the unique role of hope, an emotion that has received comparatively less attention than others, such as nostalgia and joy (Aeron & Rahman, 2025). Hope is forward-looking and motivational, making it particularly relevant to aspirational consumption contexts such as tourism. Fourth, our research also makes a methodological contribution by using both correlational and experimental-causal-chain designs to establish the causal pathway of the influence of a granfluencer.

References are available upon request.

MECHANISMS OF DONATION BEHAVIOR IN THE AGE OF AI: A MULTI-METHOD STUDY OF AI-GENERATED IMAGES IN DONATION ADS

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Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Generative AI, donation ads, marketing communication

Description: Using social listening of real-world online discussions and two experiments, this study examines how mechanisms related to image creation and depiction shape attitudinal and behavioral donation outcomes of AI-generated versus human-generated images in donation ads, identifying perceived creator authenticity as a key mediating mechanism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates the perception of AI-generated versus human-generated images in donation ads. Using social listening and two experiments (a preliminary study and an ongoing main study), we address the following research question: Which mechanisms of image creation and depiction shape attitudinal and behavioral donation outcomes when AI- versus human-generated images are used in donation ads?

Method and Data

To examine mechanisms shaping perceptions of AI-generated images in donation ads, we identified a charity that had tested AI-generated images in online donation ads and documented subsequent user discussions. As users were often unsure whether images were AI-generated, the

data offered unfiltered, organically generated opinions. Using an observational social listening approach (Reid and Duffy 2018), we identified three relevant discussions. Based on more than 1,000 comments, we conducted a two-step qualitative analysis, first using ChatGPT-4o to generate an overview of perceived advantages and disadvantages, then developing a coding scheme and analyzing the data in MAXQDA following qualitative content analysis principles (Miles and Huberman 1994). To empirically test the identified effects, we conducted two experiments using donation ad scenarios that varied the stated image origin (AI versus human).

Summary of Findings

Our analysis of the social listening data revealed four key themes, grouped under image creation and depiction, which served as the basis of our research model. Results of our preliminary study support our assumption that AI-generated images are perceived as less authentic in relation to their creator compared to human-generated images. Furthermore, the authenticity of the creator has a significant mediating effect on charity trust and donation intention. Surprisingly, we found no significant effect of using AI-generated compared to human-generated images in donation ads on the perceived authenticity of the depicted. Moreover, we found no significant mediation between the authenticity of the depicted and charity trust or behavioral outcomes. We observe several significant moderated mediation effects. Data collection for our main study is ongoing. Results will be presented at the conference.

Key Contributions

This study advances research on AI-generated content in marketing communications (Heitmann et al. 2025) by examining AI-generated images in charity donation ads (Lv and Huang 2024). Extending prior work focusing on reactions to ads featuring AI- versus non-AI-labeled images that identified emotional reactions, trust, and ad credibility as mediators between AI-labeling and

outcomes, we focus directly on reactions to the image itself. Specifically, we investigate mediators related to perceptions of both the image's creator and its depicted content. We identify psychological mechanisms through which AI-generated images influence attitudinal outcomes and behavioral outcomes. Combining social listening from a real-world ad with experiments, we conceptualize four mechanisms. We further establish creator authenticity as a key mediator shaping responses to AI-generated images, contributing to research on authenticity in AI marketing (Kirk and Givi 2025). Our findings suggest that while AI images can perform comparably to human images in some contexts, reduced perceived authenticity poses risks for charitable outcomes, highlighting the importance of transparency and careful AI use.

References are available upon request.

REDUCING SUSTAINABILITY SKEPTICISM VIA LESSONS LEARNT FROM MINORITY-OWNED SMES

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Keywords: Minority-owned SMEs (MO-SMEs), sustainability, signaling theory, marketing communication strategy

Description:

We examined marketing communications of Minority Owned SMEs (MO-SMEs) and identified four unique personas used by MO-SMEs in their marketing communications.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions:

RQ1. How do MO-SMEs use marketing communications to develop unique selling propositions and promote their sustainability?

RQ2. What additional nuanced meanings do rhetorical approaches contribute to MO-SMEs' sustainability marketing communication strategies?

Method and Data

We randomly selected 50 B Corp Certified MO-SMEs from B Corp's search site (B Lab 2025b) based on "Ownership" (categories: Black, Immigrant, Indigenous, LGBTQ, Minority, Person with disability, Veteran, Women) and "Location" (category: All). We extracted and analyzed data from the 'Home' and 'About Us' web pages (or their equivalents). We adopted a social semiotic multimodal analysis to capture the nuanced meanings of the MO-SMEs' sustainability marketing communication strategies on their websites. To capture meanings from linguistics or written content, we investigated the modes of style (including language/vocabulary and verbs), calls to action and affordances (external links to more information). Additionally, we captured the wider affordance of communication through the examination of paralinguistic or visual modes via persona, metaphor, and imagery (i.e., rhetorical devices), enabling the emergence of more nuanced meanings (Kenalemang- Palm and Eriksson 2023; Ledin and Machin 2020; Putland et al. 2025). This particular selection of modes allows us to review the MO-SMEs' marketing communication practices against existing practices, i.e., style, actions and affordances and rhetorical devices (Kenalemang-Palm and Eriksson 2023; Lumby and Ngwenyama 2023; Sandberg and Holm 2015; Xu and Tan 2020), as well as contributing to research gaps identified in the literature.

Findings

The four personas that emerged from our analyses are: Nature Hero, Ethnically Rooted, Self-esteem Builder, and Social Augmenter. They illustrate how the MO-SMEs' use of writing style (such as tone, vocabulary, verbs), metaphors, calls to action, affordances, and imagery impacts the success or failure of their sustainability marketing communication practices. We captured the practices for each persona in detail, which enabled us to develop extensive persona-based sustainability marketing communication recommendations, such as: when to use scientification strategies (Kenalemang-Palm and Eriksson, 2023); when metaphors enhance means of persuasion towards sustainable behaviour; which verbs and image editing practices can lead to perceptions of inauthenticity or exploitation; and how calls to action should and should not be used to engage consumers. Additionally, we found that 31 of our 50 MO-SMEs (about 62%) communicate sustainability issues through relatable Calls to Action (CTAs) and that 96% promote their B Corp affiliation, signaling their commitment to sustainability and, consequently, reducing information asymmetry.

Key Contributions

The multimodal content analyses enabled us to answer our research questions and address some of the gaps identified in sustainability marketing communications research, namely: lack of holistic approaches to integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in businesses' strategic communication; investigation of rhetorical devices, consumer-focused calls to action, and affordances on websites for improving practice. Using a signaling and social semiotic theories framework, we expand the triple bottom line theory (focusing on pro-eco-social orientations). The four emerging personas : Nature Hero, Ethnically Rooted, Self-esteem Builder and Social Augmenter, illustrate how the MO-SMEs use of writing style (such as tone, vocabulary, verb; metaphors; calls to actions;

affordances and imagery impact on the success or failure of their sustainability marketing communication practices. These personas allow us to offer a future research agenda (e.g., Developing more sustainability personas as linked to different combinations of the UN's Sustainability Development Goals) revolving around sustainability persona-based storytelling and its theoretical implications for marketing communications. Additionally, we offer extensive (generic and persona-based) managerial recommendations to improve sustainability marketing communications practices for MO-SMEs and beyond. For example, how to use storytelling, verification, certification, partnerships, imagery, vocabulary, and metaphors to convey the company's commitment to sustainability practices.

*References are available upon request

Self-deprecating advertisements enhance consumers' perception of experience-related product attributes.

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Keywords: *self-deprecation, inferences, product experience.*

Description: This research documents an effect whereby self-deprecating advertisements highlighting a brand's own observable flaws prompt compensatory reasoning and enhanced consumers' inferences about unmentioned, unobservable product experience attributes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

1. Research Question

Product attributes differ in evaluability: search attributes can be assessed prior to purchase, whereas experience attributes require direct use. Although experience-related benefits are central to consumer decision-making, traditional advertising often relies on overt self-promotional claims to communicate them. Self-promotion refers to claims that highlight only the positive aspects of a product or brand, and increasingly elicit consumer skepticism. In contrast, self-deprecating advertisements openly acknowledge a product's minor flaws, thereby violating conventional advertising norms (e.g., Listerine's "The taste people hate. Twice a day.").

This research asks whether self-deprecating advertisements that criticize *observable search attributes* (e.g., appearance) can shape consumers' perceptions of *unobservable experience attributes* (e.g., comfort). We propose that such norm-violating messages trigger compensatory reasoning, leading consumers to infer strengths in unmentioned experience-based attributes. In doing so, this research examines whether negative but ambiguous information in advertising can serve as a subtle signal of product experience benefits without incurring the skepticism-enhancing costs of self-promoting advertising.

2. Method and Data

Across four experimental studies, we examine how consumers respond to self-deprecating versus self-promoting advertisements that focus on observable search attributes. Participants were exposed to advertisements for fictitious brands across multiple product categories, including office chairs, coffee, and orthopedic shoes. Advertisement type was manipulated through taglines that either openly criticized or positively highlighted an observable, search attribute (e.g., appearance), while holding all other information constant. In Studies 1–3, participants were asked to

complete the advertisement tagline by adding to it, allowing us to capture consumer inferences. Independent coders categorized these responses as search- or experience-focused, and text-based linguistic analyses assessed the presence of contrastive language indicative of compensatory reasoning. These studies measured inference generation rather than explicit evaluations, providing insight into consumers' underlying reasoning processes captured through their actual behaviour of completing advertising taglines.

Study 4 employed a controlled between-subjects experiment measuring perceived experience-related product benefits directly using Likert scales. Product price was also manipulated to test whether compensatory inferences persist in premium contexts. Together, the studies combine behavioral coding, linguistic analysis, and self-report measures to test the robustness and generalizability of the proposed effect across products, methods, and evaluative contexts.

3. **Summary of Findings**

Across all four studies, self-deprecating advertisements about search attributes consistently increased consumers' inferences about experience-based product qualities relative to self-promoting advertisements. When brands openly acknowledged an observable flaw, consumers were more likely to infer compensatory strengths in unmentioned experience domains such as comfort, effectiveness, or performance.

Text-based analyses of responses in Studies 1-3 revealed that self-deprecating messages elicited greater use of contrastive language (e.g., "but," "however"), suggesting that consumers engaged in active justification and compensatory reasoning. These effects emerged across utilitarian and hedonic product categories and replicated in both inference-generation tasks (Studies 1-3) and direct evaluations

of experience attributes (Study 4). Importantly, Study 4 showed that the effect persisted even when products were offered at a premium price, indicating that self-deprecation does not undermine perceived quality. Instead, self-deprecating messages and high price acted as reinforcing cues, jointly strengthening experience-related perceptions. The findings demonstrate that self-deprecating advertising prompts consumers to "fill in the blanks" by inferring experiential strengths.

4. Key Contributions

This research makes four key contributions to the advertising and consumer inference literatures. First, it extends research on self-deprecating advertising by demonstrating that its effects go beyond brand-level outcomes (e.g., trust or reduced skepticism) to shape product-level perceptions, particularly for experience attributes that are difficult to evaluate prior to use. Second, the research introduces the concept of lateral inferences, whereby consumers infer one specific product attribute from information about another attribute. This form of inference complements existing inductive and deductive models by explaining how consumers "connect the dots" across attributes when faced with partial or negative information. Third, the findings advance compensatory reasoning theory by showing that compensatory inferences can emerge in single-product evaluations, rather than only in comparative choice contexts. Self-deprecating messages alone are sufficient to trigger this reasoning process, even in the absence of competing alternatives. Finally, this research offers a theoretically grounded explanation for how norm-violating advertising can serve as a subtle quality signal. By highlighting minor, observable flaws, brands can credibly guide consumers toward favourable experiential inferences without relying on overt self-promotion, thereby reducing skepticism while enhancing perceived experience attributes.

TESTING THE COGNITION-EMOTION DUAL PROCESS MODEL OF BILINGUAL PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR WITH LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

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Keywords: bilingualism, dual process model, prosocial behavior, large language models/GPT

Description: Using LLMs/GPT, we modeled the cognition–emotion dual-process model of prosocial behavior among bilingual consumers and revealed how language choice shapes emotional resonance and moral reasoning in charitable contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

We examine how language choice activates the cognition–emotion dual-process of prosocial behavior among bilingual consumers. Specifically, we investigate whether the language in which a prosocial message is delivered (e.g., native versus second language) differentially elicits emotional (sympathy-based) and cognitive (inclusion-based) responses, and how these, in turn, influence helping behaviors. While prior studies have shown that native languages heighten emotional intensity and second languages promote deliberation, little is known about how these processes jointly shape prosocial persuasion in real-world advertising contexts.

Building on the dual-process model, we ask: 1) Does presenting a prosocial appeal in a bilingual consumer's native language elicit greater emotional engagement and lead to higher prosocial

behavior? 2) Does presenting the same appeal in a second language evoke greater perceived inclusion or moral reasoning, thereby enhancing prosociality through cognitive routes? 3) Do these affective and cognitive pathways operate in parallel or interact to determine bilinguals' final helping behavior?

By addressing these questions, our research tests the dual-process model into multilingual and marketing contexts, revealing when and why language choice matters in shaping moral persuasion and prosocial behavior.

Method And Data

This research employed a mixed-method approach combining human behavioral data and GPT-based simulations to test how language choice influences prosocial behavior through emotional and cognitive pathways.

Study 1 recruited 308 Mandarin–English bilinguals residing in China via Credamo.com. Participants were randomly assigned to complete the survey in either English (L2) or Mandarin (L1). They read a real donation appeal adapted from WorldVision.com and then completed measures of perceived inclusion of others in the self (IOS; Aron et al. 1992) and sympathy (Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic 2007). The primary behavioral outcome was whether participants volunteered to complete an additional unpaid slogan-evaluation task. Logistic regression and mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 4; Hayes 2018) tested whether inclusion and sympathy mediated the relationship between language and helping behavior.

Study 2 replicated the experiment using GPT-5-mini synthetic bilinguals matched to Study 1 demographics ($N = 308$) but situated in a U.S. context. GPT agents were prompted to read the same appeal and respond to the same scales in JSON format. Simulated results mirrored human findings: English appeals increased helping behavior via greater inclusion, while Mandarin heightened sympathy. Together, the studies demonstrate convergent evidence for a cognition–emotion dual-process model of bilingual prosociality.

Summary of Findings

Across two complementary studies, we examined how language choice influences prosocial behavior through emotional and cognitive pathways among bilingual consumers. Study 1, conducted with Mandarin–English bilinguals in China, revealed a nuanced dual-process pattern. Participants reading the donation appeal in Mandarin (their native language) reported higher sympathy, consistent with the emotional salience of one's first language. However, those reading the same appeal in English (their second language) were significantly more likely to volunteer for an unpaid helping task, mediated by heightened perceived inclusion of others in the self. These results indicate that native language enhances emotional engagement, whereas second language activates broader moral identification and action-oriented cognition.

Study 2 replicated these effects using GPT-5-mini bilingual simulations with identical demographics but a U.S. context. Synthetic participants again showed higher helping likelihood in the English condition and stronger sympathy in the Mandarin condition. Together, these studies provide convergent evidence that prosocial behavior among bilinguals can be driven by two distinct mechanisms—emotion and cognition—and that language choice determines which

process predominates. The findings advance the dual-process model of moral decision-making and demonstrate the promise of large language models for scalable behavioral replication.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions to the study of language and prosocial behavior in global marketing contexts. First, it advances theory by extending the cognition–emotion dual-process model into bilingual communication research, showing that language choice (native vs. second language) can differentially activate emotional versus cognitive pathways to drive prosocial behavior. While prior research emphasized the emotional intensity of native languages, our findings demonstrate that second languages, particularly English, can foster broader inclusion that also promotes helping behavior.

Second, this work provides empirical and methodological innovation by integrating human behavioral experiments with GPT-based simulations. The convergence of findings across real and synthetic participants offers a new framework for validating psychological theories using large language models (LLMs) as scalable, low-cost replications of human cognition and moral decision-making.

Third, the research offers actionable insights for global advertisers and nonprofits, highlighting language choice as a strategic lever for cross-cultural persuasion. By identifying when and why certain languages elicit sympathy versus inclusion, our findings inform the design of linguistically adaptive campaigns that engage diverse audiences. Collectively, this work bridges behavioral science, computational linguistics, and international marketing to advance theory and practice.

References are available upon request.

THE CONDITIONAL VALUE OF COMPREHENSIVENESS - THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SOCIO-TECHNICAL SUCCESS FACTORS ON MARKETING PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT SYSTEM OUTCOMES

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Keywords: marketing analytics, comprehensive marketing performance measurement systems, data-driven decisions, marketing performance

Description: The survey-based regression analysis shows that comprehensive marketing performance measurement systems improve marketing performance only indirectly, through enhanced intra- and inter-channel measurement insights, and only when companies achieve high socio-technical MPMS maturity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Managers hold a normatively ambivalent stance towards marketing performance measurement. While most chief marketing officers (CMO) see data-driven marketing as “very important” or “important”, many are unsure if comprehensive marketing performance measurement systems (MPMS) are beneficial for their companies and are often disappointed in MPMS results. This raises a critical managerial dilemma: should firms respond to disappointing MPMS outcomes by adding more measurement methods or by strengthening their underlying socio-technical capabilities?

Comprehensive MPMS in this study are defined as utilizing multiple measurement methods, namely attribution, marketing mix modeling (MMM), experiments and user surveys. This definition aligns with Homburg et al. (2012), who conceptualise comprehensive MPMS in terms of breadth, cause-and-effect orientation, and strategic alignment. Comprehensive MPMS can provide additional performance insights individual methods cannot provide and validate findings across different measurement methods.

To answer scholarly calls for more quantitative research on the MPMS and its marketing performance relationship, the authors surveyed marketing measurement experts to research (i) under which conditions comprehensive MPMS are positively related to the ability to measure marketing performance and (ii) if the ability to measure marketing performance is positively related to marketing effectiveness & efficiency.

Method and Data

A pre-structured questionnaire was deployed on Prolific between April and May 2025. Participation was conditional on respondents being actively involved in marketing performance measurement and correctly answering a screening quiz question. Three attention checks were also embedded throughout the survey.

The final sample structure consists of 129 respondents. The vast majority of participants were based in the US (79%, n=102), with the UK accounting for the next largest group (18%, n=23). The sampling strategy targeted a diverse range of company contexts.

Subsequently, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using the SPSS PROCESS macro (model 8) to test the hypothesized relationships between comprehensive MPMS and (i) the ability to measure the marketing performance, and (ii) marketing effectiveness and efficiency, while accounting for the moderating role of socio-technical MPMS maturity, operationalised as a latent construct capturing seven success attributes: data and project

ownership, data-driven culture and collaboration, measurement expertise, a strategic MPMS plan, cross-validation and calibration, endogenous and exogenous data availability, and the measurement tech stack. Comprehensiveness was operationalized as the number of measurement methods employed (attribution, marketing mix modeling, experiments, surveys), whereas the ability to measure marketing performance captured both intra-channel and inter-channel performance insights.

Summary of Findings

The study delineates the conditions under which comprehensive MPMS contribute to marketing performance. The results indicate that the performance implications of comprehensive MPMS are not universally observed. The positive relationship between comprehensiveness MPMS and the ability to measure marketing performance only holds when MPMS maturity (the latent variable that consists of the seven socio-technical MPMS success factors) is medium or high. Measurement expertise and cross-validation and calibration are identified as the most critical socio-technical success factors. Hence, the paper indicates that isolated capability building (focusing only on specific socio-technical success factors) is no substitute to a holistic capability building approach of all seven researched socio-technical success factors. Furthermore, the findings indicate spillover effects between socio-technical success factors (as a result of this interrelationship, the latent variable "MPMS maturity" was created), which is critical for managers because it further implies that improving one capability in isolation is unlikely to unlock the full benefits of a comprehensive MPMS. In addition, the findings provide relational evidence that comprehensive MPMS can improve marketing performance, but only if both intra- and inter-channel measurement are ensured and a high MPMS maturity is achieved.

Key Contributions

Our study expands on previous literature that focused on conditional factors of MPMS comprehensiveness, e.g., exogenous factors or firm size, by providing a comprehensive company-endogenous socio-technical lens for a comprehensive MPMS approach in the context of combining multiple measurement methods. The findings add nuances to studies that argue that isolated MPMS measures (e.g., metrics selection) can significantly improve MPMS. Large investments required to achieve MPMS maturity also explains why only a small percentage of companies have been able to realize the true potential of MPMS.

For managers, the study demonstrates that investing in additional measurement methods alone is unlikely to improve marketing performance unless companies simultaneously develop the underlying socio-technical capabilities required to transform data into robust insights. By empirically showing that MPMS maturity is a critical boundary condition, the study offers clear guidance on investments, prioritising capability building over tool expansion, and avoiding the comprehensiveness paradox that leads to analysis paralysis and disappointing MPMS outcomes if the underlying socio-technical foundations are not sufficiently developed. Hence, managers should prioritize internal capability building and delay tool expansion until socio-technical foundations achieve moderate-to-high maturity.

References are available upon request.

THE IMPACT OF FIGURE-GROUND REVERSAL (FGR) IN BRAND LOGOS ON BRAND ATTITUDE

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Keywords: figure-ground reversal, brand logos, brand attitude, engagement, aesthetic appeal, eye-tracking, multi-method.

Description: This research examines the strategic use of figure-ground reversal in brand logos and the conditions for its positive effect on engagement, aesthetic appeal, and brand attitudes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Figure-ground reversal (FGR) is a perceptual phenomenon in which alternating one's visual attention between the positive (figure) and negative (ground) space in a visual design reveals perceptibly distinct objects. In marketing, it is a notable characteristic of many firms' brand logo designs (e.g., FedEx). Because brand logos are one of the most salient and important components of a brand's identity, and they are often consumers' first exposure to a brand, firms

spend significant resources to design and promote their logos. Effective logos help build brand equity by improving brand attitude, and the extent to which consumers like the design elements of a brand logo significantly impacts brand attitude. Surprisingly, given the importance of brand logos and the relative popularity of FGR in brand logo design, empirical studies of FGR logos have been limited. Recognizing this gap, we systematically investigate whether, why, and under what circumstances FGR logos enhance brand attitudes.

Method and Data

To study our research questions, we conduct a multi-method investigation that includes six pre-registered studies and a supplemental secondary data analysis. The studies include live bidding, incentive-compatible willingness-to-pay, eye-tracking, and multiple boundary condition experiments.

Summary of Findings

Across our series of studies we demonstrate that FGR logos reliably improve brand attitudes. These effects occur because FGR logos increase consumer engagement and perceived aesthetic appeal. When viewers detect a hidden image in the negative space of a logo, they naturally shift their visual attention back and forth, triggering deeper processing. This engagement makes the logo feel more aesthetically pleasing, which in turn enhances brand evaluations. However, the research also reveals important boundary conditions. The positive effects of FGR disappear if consumers fail to visually identify the hidden element or cannot semantically connect it to the brand. In other words, figure-ground reversal alone is not enough. If the hidden image is unidentified or feels unrelated to the brand's identity, the engagement process breaks down and the logo loses its advantage. This mechanism distinguishes FGR from

other forms of visual ambiguity, such as incomplete logos, which rely less on semantic interpretation. Overall, this research shows that FGR logos can be powerful branding tools, but only when designers prioritize clarity and meaning. Designers should aim for accessible ambiguity. Logos that are easy to decode and closely aligned with brand identity generate stronger engagement, greater aesthetic appeal, and more positive brand attitudes.

Key Contributions

Our research contributes to marketing theory and practice along multiple dimensions. First, while previous research has studied various visual marketing phenomena and logo design elements, including shape, symmetry, dynamics, cropping, active white space, interstitial space, color, naturalness, incomplete typeface, and balance, the use of figure-ground reversal remains understudied. In fact, recognizing this important gap and the opportunity for potential research, Hagtvedt (2011) explicitly called for future investigations into FGR logos. Second, we examine FGR as a unique form of visual ambiguity and illuminate its distinctive underlying process relative to other visually ambiguous logo designs. Specifically, we identify and empirically demonstrate the essential roles of visual identification and semantic interpretability in moderating the effect of FGR logos on engagement, aesthetic appeal, and brand attitude. Finally, we offer marketing practitioners and branding creatives key insights and actionable guidance on effective strategies for FGR adoption in brand logo design.

TURNING CONSUMERS INTO COLLABORATORS: THE ROLE OF SETBACK DISCLOSURE IN ENCOURAGING CO-CREATION

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Keywords: *Value co-creation, Setback disclosure, Passion, Kickstarter*

Description: Setback disclosure, a strategy where brand narratives reveal past challenges, significantly increases consumer co-creation by enhancing perceived brand passion.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Value co-creation with consumers is a vital strategy for brands seeking consumer engagement and retention (Ranjan and Read 2016). By inviting consumers to participate in shaping products, services, and experiences (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004), brands gain insights and foster psychological ownership, strengthening consumer loyalty and advocacy (Ranjan and Read 2016). Despite the growing importance of consumer co-creation, our understanding of its antecedents remains limited. Prior work has identified individual-level drivers, such as consumers' self-efficacy and perceived benefits (Dong & Sivakumar, 2017), or contextual facilitators like the service environment (Jeon et al. 2016). However, less is known about how brand-initiated communication can strategically drive consumer co-creation.

Traditionally, brands emphasize a competent and confident image to reinforce consumer trust (Aaker et al. 2012), assuming that acknowledging weaknesses may undermine consumer support. Such projection of strength, however, overlooks the potential value of vulnerable communication. This research addresses this gap by examining whether brand narratives that disclose challenges or setbacks can strategically foster consumers' co-creation by enhancing their perception of the brand's passion. By shifting attention from individual and contextual drivers to brand vulnerable communication strategy, this work advances understanding of how brands can transform passive consumers into active collaborators.

Method And Data

Through four experiments, we test whether setback disclosure increases consumer co-creation by enhancing perceived brand passion. We test this effect across attitudinal (willingness to co-create) and behavioral (idea contributions, financial investment) measures. We also test whether this effect is moderated by brand market performance and positioning:

setback (vs. achievement) disclosure increases consumer co-creation for high-performing and functionally positioned brands, but backfires for low-performing or aspirational brands.

To demonstrate external validity, we will complement the experimental evidence with real-world behavior. We have web scraped archival data from 32,906 U.S. based start-up projects on Kickstarter (https://www.kickstarter.com/), a crowdfunding platform where consumers pledge financial support to cocreate with startups. Our dataset covers a 15-year period from 2010 to 2024, and for each startup's fundraising campaign, we have gathered detailed narrative descriptions along with key campaign-level and category-level controls, including video presence, number of updates, word count of the campaign pitch, staff pick designation, fundraiser's prior experience, campaign duration, etc., following Soublière and Gehman (2019). After classifying whether a startup campaign involved setback disclosure or not, we will conduct panel regression analyses to examine whether a startup's setback-disclosure in its campaign influenced consumers' financial support, as reflected in the fundraising outcomes of the campaign.

Summary of Findings

Across four experiments, we find that a brand's setback disclosure fosters consumer co-creation by enhancing perceived brand passion. Study 1 (AsPredicted #217304; $N = 218$) showed that setback (vs. achievement) disclosure significantly increased the volume of ideas consumers contributed ($p < .001$), an effect mediated by brand passion rather than brand warmth. Study 2 (AsPredicted #202217; $N = 195$) replicated this effect using financial investment ($p < .001$) and co-creation intention ($p = .023$) as outcomes, further validating the passion mechanism.

Studies 3 and 4 unveiled boundary conditions. Study 3 ($N = 426$) revealed that market performance moderates this relationship: setback disclosure increased mini-bond investment for high-performing brands but backfired for low-performing ones (interaction: $p < .001$).

Study 4 ($N = 423$) identified brand positioning as a moderator (interaction: $p = .009$). Setback disclosure increased mini-bond investment when the brand was positioned as functional, but not when the same brand was positioned as aspirational. Finally, our proposed archival analysis of 32,906 Kickstarter campaigns aims to corroborate these experimental findings with real-world financial support data.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions to the literature on branding and consumer co-creation. First, while prior work has identified individual-level drivers of co-creation like self-efficacy (Dong & Sivakumar, 2017) or contextual facilitators like the service environment (Jeon et al. 2016), we shift the focus to brand-initiated narrative strategies. Specifically, we introduce setback disclosure as a reputationally vulnerable yet emotionally resonant communication tool that inspires co-creation by signaling brand passion. Second, we demonstrate that brand passion mediates the effect of setback disclosure on co-creation across multiple studies, providing evidence for an emotional contagion mechanism in brand-consumer dynamics. Third, we show that this effect is contingent on brand context: setback disclosure motivates co-creation only when the brand is perceived as high-performing and functionally positioned. These findings help reconcile inconsistencies in prior work on transparency and trust in branding.

For practitioners, our findings highlight how emotionally honest storytelling can drive tangible consumer engagement. Many brands are hesitant to disclose setbacks for fear of appearing weak. However, our work suggests that when executed strategically, such disclosures can strengthen relationships with consumers and increase their willingness to co-create value with a brand. With setback disclosure, brands can transform reputational vulnerability into a strategic advantage.

Note: References are available upon request.

WHEN EMOTIONAL DAMAGE CLINGS TO BRANDS AFTER DEBUNKING FALSE INFORMATION: SPECIFIC COUNTER-EMOTIONS AS ANTIDOTE

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Keywords: Brand attitudes, Misinformation, Appraisal theories of emotion, Counter-emotions

Description: Pairing brands that have been emotionally damaged by misinformation with specific (vs. non-specific) counter-emotions improves brand attitudes toward these brands more, however, only in conjunction with debunking the false information.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Even after debunking false information, negative emotions elicited by the information can cling to brand attitudes (Fitzsimons and Shiv 2001). Counter-conditioning (de Jong et al. 2000; Raes and De Raedt 2012) recommends presenting the brand to consumers while eliciting positive emotions, yet is silent about which positive emotion is most effective.

Building on appraisal theories of emotion (Clore et al. 1994) we introduce two constructs: For each negative emotion there exists a positive emotion with a similar cognitive appraisal structure (Ortony et al. 1990). We call these *specific counter-emotions* (e.g., social joy and sadness; sensory pleasure and disgust). Feeling both concurrently would seem unlikely, if not impossible. When oppositely valanced emotions have different cognitive structures we call them *non-specific counter-emotions*.

We propose H1: Positive counter-emotions improve negative brand attitudes more when they are specific rather than non-specific.

When experiencing positive counter-emotions…

H2a (averaging): …an associative mechanism (Rescorla and Wagner 1972) gives more weight to more surprising experiences; specific (vs. non-specific) counter-emotions being more surprising.

H2b (negation): …a propositional mechanism (De Houwer et al. 2020) corrects brand attitudes from previously experienced negative emotions when the mechanism classifies them as invalid. Specific (vs. non-specific) counter-emotions are more likely classified as invalid.

Method and Data

In two preregistered experiments, respondents saw collages of images that expressed other consumers' feelings toward a particular brand. At Stage 1 (initial emotions) collages showed two brands with neutral images, and two different brands with the same negative (i.e., damaging) images, disgusting in Experiment 1 (N=1336); saddening in Experiment 2 (N=976). At Stage 2 (counter-emotions) collages showed a neutral and a damaged brand with sensory pleasure images, and a neutral and a damaged brand with social joy images.

We introduced Stage 2 with either of two cover-stories. The "include" story conveyed that images from both stages were informative of consumers' feelings. This should favor an averaging mechanism (H2a). The "exclude" story encouraged to ignore Stage 1 because supposedly some of the previously seen Stage 1 images had been posted by bots and were thus fake. This should favor a propositional negation mechanism (H2b). Finally, respondents evaluated each brand on attitude scales.

Both experiments support H1: When brands had initially been paired with disgust (in Exp. 1, sadness in Exp. 2), respondents rated them more positively when the subsequent pairing was with the specific counter-emotion than with the non-specific counter-emotion. These results emerged only for respondents with *exclude instructions,* supporting H2b.

Summary of Findings

We investigated how brands can effectively respond to emotional damage resulting from misinformation. We initially established emotional brand damage by pairing brands with disgust or sadness. In a pilot experiment and two pre-registered experiments, we tested specific counter-emotions as an anti-dote to cure the brand. In fact, subsequently pairing these brands with specific (vs. non-specific) counter-emotions improved brand attitudes toward these initially damaged brands more (H1),

however, only when the initial misinformation was flagged as "fake" using exclude instructions (H2b, Experiments 1 and 2). Unexpectedly in Experiment 2 initially neutral brands also profited from specific counter-emotions.

The results suggest that when negative emotions triggered by false information damaged a brand, it can be effective to elicit specific counter-emotions in the presence of the brand (H1), but ―importantly― only in conjunction with explicitly debunking the false information (H2b). Merely eliciting counter-emotions (H2a) may not leverage the advantage of emotion specificity.

Key Contributions

First, we add to research on brand management and misinformation. We demonstrate that even after debunking false information, there remains an emotional damage to the brand that can be mitigated by using counter-emotions in brand communication. Counter-emotions persuade more when they are specific (vs. non-specific). The advantage of specific counter-emotions emerges when perceivers attempt to actively ignore the false information (after debunking). Second, we contribute to literature on emotions. We introduce the concept of specific counter-emotions. It follows appraisal theories of emotions, yet, is novel. Third, our research is related to learning brand associations in line with conditioning experiments. Past research has frequently found that counter-conditioning was ineffective. There is currently little understanding of why and when counter-conditioning works. The emotion-specificity of counter-emotions and active debunking are novel faciliating moderators suggesting it may be too simplistic to conceptualize counter-conditioning solely in terms of the opposite valence of conditioned stimulus and unconditioned stimulus.

Because misinformation can target any "brand"—firms, nonprofits, government agencies, individuals, and even ideas or activities—our findings offer practical guidance for brand managers,

policy makers and media outlets. They indicate which counter-emotions to deploy and show these tactics work only when paired with explicit debunking.

References are available upon request.

Retailing, Sales Management, and Personal Selling

BEYOND SINGULAR TRAITS: A DUAL-TRAIT PERSPECTIVE ON SALES PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: sales performance, competitiveness, cooperativeness, trait symmetry

Description: Using Job-Demand Resources (JD-R) Theory, this research conceptualizes the trait symmetry of competitiveness and cooperativeness, two important personal characteristics for salesperson success, and then shows empirical evidence that it positively impacts objectively-measured sales performance, with supportive leadership enhancing this effect and role ambiguity reducing it.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Competitiveness has historically been an important trait for salespeople. However, industry experts say that competition among salespeople can "go too far" (HBR, 2017). On the other hand, cooperativeness puts more emphasis on relationships and teamwork. Both cooperation and competitiveness are important concepts in the sales and relationship marketing literatures. Importantly, they are studied separately. Competitiveness has been found to positively impact sales performance via coachability (Shanahan et al, 2013) and work group cohesion (Pappas et al, 2023). Cooperation is a fundamental concept in relationship marketing research (e.g., Palmatier et al., 2006), and in sales literature, it is positively associated with coworker collaboration (Yilmaz & Hunt, 2001). However, there is no research investigating how the symmetry of these two characteristics may influence significant workplace outcomes.

We propose that symmetrical levels of competitive and cooperative traits, conceptualized in the present research as trait symmetry, comprise an important personal resource that can positively affect job performance, as viewed through the lens of Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory. In the present research, the trait symmetry construct is operationalized and examined in a study of a B2B sales firm to provide empirical evidence for this relationship, with supportive leadership and role ambiguity presented as initial moderators.

Method and Data

Data collection

The study was conducted at a large U.S. company that sells financial services to other businesses through its inside salespeople. We emailed the survey to 287 salespeople (across 48 sales teams), which yielded 215 complete responses (75% response rate).

Measures

The competitiveness trait (COMP) was measured with four items from Spence and Helmreich (1983). The cooperativeness trait (COOP) was measured with five items from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006). The symmetry of the two traits was calculated using the following equation: $\frac{1}{(1+|COMP-COOP|)}$. This approach begins with the absolute difference between the two measures (e.g., Habib & Zurawicki, 2002) and bounded between 0 and 1 to be intuitive.

Items from Northouse (2013) measured each salesperson's perceptions of their manager's supportive leadership, with interrater assessment (R_{wg} score=.81) justifying team-level aggregation (e.g., Lariviere et al., 2016). Role ambiguity was assessed with items from Rizzo et al. (1970). Salesperson performance was measured with company archival data, using a performance indicator of conversions, including inputs (the number of client phone contacts) and outputs (the number of sales closed), following Bolander et al. (2021). Control variables include gender, age, salesperson experience, and role conflict measures (Rizzo et al., 1970).

Summary of Findings

Analysis

To account for salespeople nested within sales managers, mixed effect modeling was the primary analysis method. The model included trait symmetry as the independent variable, with

two interaction terms. Supportive leadership (level-2) and role ambiguity (level-1) were included as moderators to test the conditional effects of trait symmetry on salesperson performance.

Main effect

H1 predicts that trait symmetry is positively associated with salesperson performance. The results in both the main effect model (B = .03, $p < .05$) and the full model (B = .03, $p < .05$) support H1. This finding suggests that salespeople with symmetrical levels of competitiveness and cooperativeness attain higher conversion-based sales performance.

Interactive effects.

H2 predicts that team-level supportive leadership strengthens the positive trait symmetry-performance relationship. The interaction term is positive and statistically significant (B = .07, $p < .05$), supporting H2. These results suggest that supportive leadership creates an environment in which salespeople with symmetric traits can thrive. H3 predicts that role ambiguity weakens the positive trait symmetry-sales performance relationship. The interaction term is negative and statistically significant (B = -.05, $p < .05$), aligning with H3. These results suggest that role ambiguity diminishes the performance benefits of a symmetrical trait profile.

Key Contributions

This paper establishes the symmetry of competitiveness and cooperativeness as a construct relevant to sales performance, providing two primary contributions to theory. First, using Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory as a guide, we conceptualize trait symmetry as a personal resource and provide B2B sales evidence that it positively predicts sales performance. This satisfies a need for more research on trait symmetry, such as introversion-extraversion symmetry in salespeople (Grant, 2013), and mirrors real-world personality complexity as

salespeople possess levels of both characteristics. Furthermore, this provides a bridge between the sales literature on competitiveness and the relationship marketing literature on cooperativeness, as no known literature examines these traits together. Second, we explore initial moderating factors of this trait symmetry and find that supportive leadership strengthens the sales performance benefit, while role ambiguity diminishes it. This builds on JD-R theory by demonstrating that the performance effects of this symmetry depend on job resources and demands at both the salesperson and sales manager levels.

For managers, these insights can help companies improve their hiring and staff development processes to optimize their sales force. This may include adding or adapting tools such as pre-employment personality assessments, behavioral interview questions, or role plays, to assess both traits.

BREAKING OR FULFILLING EXPECTATIONS: HOW SALESPERSON TYPICALITY SHAPES CONSUMER RESPONSES TO INCREMENTAL VS. RADICAL INNOVATIONS

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Keywords: Salespeople Typicality, Attire, Product Innovation, Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), Schema Incongruity

Description: Building on Schema Incongruity and Expectancy Violations Theories (EVT), this study investigates how product type (incremental vs. radical) and salesperson style (typical vs. atypical) jointly influence customer expectancy violations, authenticity, and purchase behaviour.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

When purchasing new products, consumers face substantial uncertainty and rely on salespeople's advice to reduce perceived risk. Although prior research emphasizes demonstrations and explanations as trust-building tools (Panagopoulos, Rapp, and Ogilvie 2017; Holahan, Sullivan, and Markham 2013), little is known about how salesperson appearance shapes trust. This research argues that its effectiveness depends on whether the product represents incremental or radical innovation. For incremental innovations, which create moderate incongruity (Green, Gavin, and Aiman-Smith 1995; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), consumers remain receptive to novel cues. In this context, an atypically dressed salesperson elicits interest and curiosity rather than suspicion, generates positive expectancy violations, enhances perceived authenticity, and increases purchase likelihood relative to typically professional salespeople that triggers perceptions of strategic persuasion (Arndt et al. 2019). Contrarily, radical innovations create extreme incongruity, making product features difficult to understand and increasing consumers' need for reassurance (Lee, Chu, and Roy 2024). In this context, an atypical salesperson induces confusion rather than interest and curiosity, whereas a typically professional salesperson provides familiar cues that foster trust and make detailed explanations appear helpful. Consequently, atypical salespeople trigger negative expectancy violations, reducing perceived authenticity and purchase likelihood. Finally, this study argues need for uniqueness (NFU) moderates these effects: consumers high in NFU (Snyder & Fromkin 1977; Tian et al. 2001) prefer atypical salespeople across innovation types, whereas those low in NFU favor typical salespeople due to their preference for familiarity and predictability.

Method and Data

We conducted a scenario-based experimental method in this research. Our scenario presented a realistic sales encounter in which participants were asked to imagine themselves interacting with a salesperson while evaluating a product. We adapted materials from Babin, Boles, and Darden (1995) and leveraged our own design to create two versions of the salespersons' appearance (typical vs. atypical) and Lee, Chu, and Roy (2024) to manipulate two innovation levels of the car (radical vs. incremental). This paper also acknowledges that its generalizability is limited to one product category.

We employed a 7-point Likert scale, varying from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Three items adapted from Mugge and Dahl (2013) and four items adapted from Babin, Boles, and Darden (1995) were used as manipulation checks for perceived product innovativeness (radical vs. incremental) and salesperson types (typical vs. atypical), respectively. We adapted two items from Yang and Mundel (2021) to measure the expectancy violations and five items from Linan, Lee, and Chun (2023) to assess salespeople's perceived authenticity. Additionally, 12 items were from Dörnyei and Lunardo (2021) to determine customers' need for uniqueness, and a purchasing scenario mimicking a real context. Lastly, demographic information was collected.

Summary of Findings

Manipulation checks were successful. Two-way ANOVAs indicated that for an incremental product, an atypical salesperson generated higher levels of Positive Expectancy Violation (PEV) ($M = 4.60$) compared to a typical salesperson ($M = 2.35$). Contrarily, for a radical product, an atypical salesperson elicited significantly higher Negative Expectancy Violation (NEV) ($M = 5.72$) than a typical salesperson ($M = 4.11$).

Among consumers with a high NFU, an atypical salesperson elicited significantly higher PEV

levels (M = 16.00) for an incremental product, compared to a typical salesperson (M = -6.12), $F(1, 192) = 4.72$, $p = .030$, whereas an atypical salesperson and a typical salesperson elicited similar PEV levels for a radical product, $F(1, 192) = 0.02$, $p = .890$. For consumers with low NFU, a typical salesperson elicited lower NEV for an incremental product, while for a radical product, an atypical salesperson elicited higher NEV.

Regression results showed PEV positively and significantly increased authenticity ($\beta = 0.0796$, $t = 17.92$, $p < .001$), while NEV reduced it ($\beta = -0.0796$, $t = -17.92$, $p < .001$). Authenticity has a positive and statistically significant effect on Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.6008$, $t(344) = 17.61$, $p < .001$).

Key Contributions

Past work mainly explored how innovative products and salespeople independently influence sales outcomes, but this research addresses a significant gap by investigating the combined influence of product type and salesperson style to produce PEV, moderated by customers' NFU. Based on EVT and the Schema Incongruity, for incremental innovations, atypical salespeople generate higher PEV, enhancing perceived authenticity and purchase intention. In contrast, for radical innovations, atypical salespeople elicit a NEV by imposing simultaneous interpretive uncertainty from both the unconventional product and their attire, intensifying perceived risk. These effects are moderated by consumers' NFU. High-NFU consumers respond positively to atypical salespeople promoting incremental innovations, whereas low-NFU consumers react negatively to atypical salespeople across both innovations.

Managerially, sales managers can assign atypical salespeople to sell incremental innovations for high NFU consumers, whereas for low NFU consumers, typical salespeople should be prioritised to sell radical innovations. To identify high NFU customers in sales encounters, salespeople can

observe cues such as wearing customised products or clothes in unusual styles (Knight & Young Kim 2007; Calderón Urbina et al. 2021). Communication cues can also directly probe customers' NFU; for example, when asked to give reasons for being concerned about products, high NFU consumers tend to use less conventional reasons, which lead to unique choices (Simonson and Nowlis 2000).

References are available upon request.

BREAKING STEREOTYPES: INVESTIGATING PSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVERS OF FEMALE STUDENT'S APPLICATION INTENTION FOR B2B SALES JOBS

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Keywords: Sales management, Recruiting, Gender, Belongingness, Diversity

This paper examines the relationships between six psychological motivators and students' application intention and test whether gender moderates these relationships.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Attracting talent, especially females, to B2B sales roles remains challenging. While a growing body of research has begun to explore psychological processes in career contexts and in shaping individuals intention to apply for a job, studies have rarely considered the simultaneous influence of multiple psychological processes in one study and how these differ between genders. Our study addresses this gap and incorporates both internal self-perceptions and context-related concerns enabling a more holistic understanding of early-stage applicant decision-making. Specifically, this study asks: *Do psychological drivers (i.e. self-perceptions and context-related concerns) influence students' application intentions for B2B sales positions—and does gender moderate these effects?*

Grounded in the self-determination Theory, we examine the relationships between six psychological determinants suggested as important by prior research (i.e., belongingness, job-related self-efficacy, gender norms, work-family conflict, fear of failure, and fear of rejection) on student application intentions for B2B sales roles and test applicant gender as a potential moderator.

Method and Data

To examine the effects, we collected data from business students at a major German university through an online survey. Our final sample included 211 participants (average age: 25.7 years; 55.5% females). We used established scales to measure the constructs of our framework and adapted them where necessary to fit the specific job advertisement context. All scales met psychometric quality standards (e.g., Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$).

Summary of Findings

Our analysis revealed three key effects. First, perceived belongingness is positively related to application intention, revealing that perceived belongingness is a robust driver of application intentions in male-dominated sales roles, regardless of applicant gender. Second, we find that gender moderates the effect of gender norms on application intention, such that the relationship is significantly weaker for female than for male applicants. And third, gender also moderates the effect of fear of rejection, with the negative effect on application intention being stronger for female than for male applicants. These patterns highlight the importance of considering when and for whom psychological processes matter in recruitment.

Key Contributions

This study's contribution are threefold. First, the study contributes to theory by consolidating perspectives on psychological barriers to applying and identifies belongingness, gender norms, and fear of rejection as important determinants. We also find that gender moderates the relationship between gender norms and application intention as well as the relationship between fear of rejection and application intention. These findings demonstrate that internalized social expectations and interpersonal concerns deter female students from applying to B2B sales roles.

Second, we provide strong evidence that perceived belongingness is a robust driver of application intentions in male-dominated sales roles. The finding shows that its influence persists even when

examined alongside multiple competing psychological processes. Gender did not moderate this relationship, suggesting that in high-stakes career entry contexts, belongingness may operate as a universal motivator.

Third, our results suggest that sales organizations should design recruitment messages and processes that foster belongingness and address psychological barriers, thereby motivating applications from students.

Together, these findings advance recruitment theory by clarifying the relative weight of multiple psychological processes, refining our understanding of gender contingencies, and highlighting universal versus context-bound drivers of application intentions. In doing so, it links psychological theory with pressing managerial challenges in sales talent acquisition.

BRIDGING THE INTERFACE OF SALES AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF BOUNDARY SPANNERS

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Keywords: information technology, sales, interface, boundary spanning, cross-functional collaboration, digital transformation

Description: Our paper investigates the role of boundary spanners at the interface of sales and information technology organizations and their effects on information technology project performance, relationship performance, and, subsequently, sales performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

For a successful digital transformation of the sales organization, information technology (IT) and sales organizations must cooperate closely, yet this cooperation often fails. To understand why, we focus on intra-company boundary spanners who act as focal coordinators at the organizational interface between sales and IT organizations. Specifically, we aim to better understand this "*Most Valuable Player of technology implementations*" (Zoltners et al., 2022, p. 111) and uncover the effects they have on the interface. First, we analyze their role to better understand how they contribute to the interface and pose the research question:

> *What are the key activities of boundary spanners at the interface of sales and IT organizations?*

Second, we focus on their effect on the interface of sales and IT organizations. Specifically, we expect that they have an effect on the relationship between the organizations as well as on the performance of IT projects and therefore ask:

> *What are the effects of boundary spanners at the interface of sales and IT organizations on relationship performance and on IT project performance?*

Method and Data

We use a two-study design to answer our research questions. In a preliminary qualitative study, we first clarify the tasks and behaviors of boundary spanners. We conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with sales and IT professionals as well as boundary spanners in 13 firms. By applying a theories-in-use-approach, we identify the key activities of boundary spanners at the interface of sales and IT organizations. Moreover, we integrate theoretical propositions derived from our

interviews and information processing theory to create a conceptual model on the effect of boundary spanners on the interface.

Second, we subsequently test our conceptual model with a cross-sectional survey of 205 sales managers. We apply structural equation modelling in STATA to test our hypotheses. We adapt established scales for our variables and assess all constructs using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Moreover, we ensure the robustness of the results by correcting for endogeneity using the Gaussian copula method (Park and Gupta 2012) and by validating our focal predictor boundary spanners and our focal outcome sales performance with objective data.

Summary of Findings

Our findings from the preliminary study show that boundary spanners at the interface of sales organizations and IT organizations are knowledgeable coordinators who engage in requirements and project management and thereby balance the needs of the sales organization with the restrictions of the IT organization.

Moreover, we demonstrate that boundary spanners promote sales performance via an operational and a relational path, but that this effect is context dependent. On the operational path, boundary spanners improve IT project performance (i.e., the ability to execute projects on time, within budget and with the agreed scope) only when the relationship between the sales organization and the IT organization is highly formalized (i.e., the interface is governed by guidelines and rules). On the relational path, boundary spanners improve relationship performance (i.e., the perception of employees that the relationship is productive and worthwhile) between the sales organization and the IT organization. They also exert a stronger influence in highly formalized environments. Overall, we show that boundary spanners are

beneficial for sales performance and are thus a useful addition to the interface of sales and IT organizations.

Key Contributions

Our study makes three contributions to sales research. First, we introduce the interface of sales and IT organizations as an underexplored research domain in the digital transformation of sales organizations. By investigating the role and impact of boundary spanners at the interface, we show that boundary spanners shape the success of digital transformations in the sales organization. We moreover show how they shape success at the interface: by managing requirements and IT projects.

Second, we extend previous conceptual research on boundary spanners by empirically exploring their effects on performance. We demonstrate that boundary spanners improve relationship performance and IT project performance at the interface, which subsequently improves overall sales performance. We therefore clarify the mechanisms through which boundary spanners improve sales performance.

Third, we develop a nuanced view regarding the effect of boundary spanners at the interface. We show that boundary spanners are not uniformly beneficial; instead, their effect depends on contextual factors. We distinguish a relational and an operational pathway and analyze the conditions under which each pathway becomes influential. This offers actionable guidance for executives deciding when to rely on boundary spanners during the digital transformation of sales organizations.

BRIDGING TRUST AND LOYALTY: THE INTERPLAY OF BRAND, MANUFACTURER, AND STORE TRUST ACROSS PRODUCT TYPES

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Keywords: Relationship marketing, multi-level trust, brand loyalty, cross-category analysis

Description: This paper examines how trust in brands, manufacturers, and stores jointly influences brand loyalty across diverse consumer goods categories.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand loyalty—typically measured through repeat purchases or purchase intention—remains a critical outcome of marketing activities due to its strong association with profitability and cost efficiency (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Russel-Bennett & Parkinson, 2015). Traditional models highlight satisfaction and customer-based brand equity (CBBE) as primary drivers, with brand experience further reinforcing these effects (Brakus et al., 2009). Beyond utility-based perspectives, trust has emerged as a key relational factor that reduces perceived risk and fosters enduring relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Oliveira et al., 2017). Cue utilization theory also suggests that manufacturer reputation and store interactions shape consumer perceptions (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003; De Wulf et al., 2001). Evidence from organic food and private label research indicates that trust in manufacturers and stores significantly influences purchase intention (Ladwein & Romero, 2021; Konuk, 2020). These findings point to the need for extending existing brand loyalty models by incorporating manufacturer- and store-related antecedents. Accordingly, this study addresses two gaps: (1) how trust in brands, manufacturers,

and stores jointly affects brand loyalty, and (2) whether these effects vary across seven product categories—four FMCG and three DCG—differing in functional versus preference-driven decision contexts.

Method and Data

This study develops an extended conceptual framework to examine how satisfaction, trust, and loyalty interrelate across three adjacent entities: brand, manufacturer, and store. Building on prior research, the model integrates established antecedents—such as brand promotion, product features, and experiential factors—with trust transfer mechanisms between manufacturer–brand and store–brand relationships. Hypotheses address both direct effects (e.g., brand experience on brand perceived quality and brand loyalty) and cross-entity influences (e.g., store trust on brand trust), positioning satisfaction and trust as mediators linking early evaluations to loyalty outcomes.

To empirically test the framework, data were collected via a structured questionnaire targeting Japanese consumers aged 20–59. The survey covered four product categories representing fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and durable consumer goods (DCG), each split into utilitarian and preference-based items: PET bottled tea vs. canned beer, detergent vs. fabric softener, household vs. entertainment appliances, and compact cars vs. SUVs/high-end vehicles. Responses were screened based on purchase recency to ensure data quality, yielding approximately 1,133 valid cases per category (except SUVs/high-end cars, excluded due to low sample size). Reliability and validity were confirmed (Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.70, CR ≥ 0.70, AVE ≥ 0.50). This dataset enables comparative analysis of loyalty formation across diverse consumption contexts.

Summary of Findings

The structural model demonstrated good fit (CFI ≥ 0.90, RMSEA ≤ 0.10, SRMR ≤ 0.10), confirming the hypothesized relationships. Satisfaction strongly drives brand loyalty, both directly and indirectly through trust, while store loyalty exerts only a minor effect except in compact cars. Trust in the manufacturer significantly influences brand trust, whereas store trust has negligible impact. Brand satisfaction is primarily shaped by perceived quality, which depends on product features and brand popularity; brand experience plays a minimal role. Manufacturer expertise and benevolence positively affect trust in the manufacturer, while merchandise lineup is the most influential factor for store satisfaction.

Category-specific patterns reveal that perceived value and store-related factors (staff interaction, incentives) matter more for durable consumer goods (DCG) than fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). FMCG store satisfaction hinges on merchandise assortment, while DCG satisfaction reflects multiple factors. Preference-driven categories (beer, entertainment appliances) show stronger effects of word-of-mouth and reviews on brand popularity, and manufacturer expertise dominates trust formation. Compact cars differ: brand popularity outweighs product features in quality perception, and store loyalty strongly impacts brand loyalty.

Overall, strategies should emphasize manufacturer and brand trust, tailoring approaches by product type. Future research should explore causal dynamics and reciprocal relationships using longitudinal designs.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances research on consumer loyalty, trust, and brand management in three keyways. First, it extends traditional brand loyalty models by introducing a trust transfer

mechanism from manufacturers and stores to brand trust, offering a more integrated framework that captures interrelationships among these entities. Second, it highlights contextual variation in loyalty formation, demonstrating that drivers of loyalty differ across product types and purchase motivations. For example, brand satisfaction dominates loyalty formation for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), whereas manufacturer trust plays a more critical role in durable consumer goods (DCG) categories such as compact cars. Third, the study provides managerial relevance across diverse product contexts by identifying which antecedents—such as perceived quality, manufacturer benevolence, or store incentives—are most influential in shaping loyalty. These insights enable brand managers, manufacturers, and retailers to design targeted strategies that align with consumer expectations in both utilitarian and preference-driven purchases. By bridging theoretical gaps and offering actionable guidance, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how trust and satisfaction interact to foster loyalty across multiple levels and product categories.

CREATING CONNECTIONS: THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP OF TOUCH-POINT NATURE ON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND BEHAVIOR IN OMNI-CHANNEL RETAIL

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Keywords: Physical, Digital, and Human Touchpoints, Customer Experience, Omnichannel Retailing, Information Integration Theory (IIT).

Description: This article analyzes whether interdependent relationships exist between the most useful physical, digital, and human touchpoints (TPs) and how they affect customer experience (CX) and repurchase intention (RPI) differently in omnichannel retail, and additionally examines the role of utilitarian vs. hedonistic motivated consumers in these relationships.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

For omnichannel firms, useful TPs are crucial for facilitating CX. However, how strongly one TP relates to another and vice versa, and how strongly reciprocity shapes CX across journeys, is unexplored. Existing research neglects reciprocal TP effects, leaving firms at risk of missing synergies, misjudging TP roles, or allocating resources inefficiently. Empirical studies focus on direct behavioral outcomes of individual TPs, show mixed findings on whether TPs affect behavior directly or through CX (e.g., Anderl et al. 2016; Siqueira et al. 2020), and contradictory insights. We address existing research gaps in two studies. Study 1 uses a longitudinal design to examine whether reciprocally linked physical, digital, and human TPs influence each other and how they affect CX and RPI. Additionally, the role of utilitarian vs. hedonistic motivated consumers for such relationships is explored. Study 2 provides a boundary condition check using an independent cross-sectional sample. We address strong calls in literature and

close research gaps by answering two research questions: Do reciprocal relationships exist between the most useful physical, digital, and human TPs across consumers' journeys, and do they reciprocally affect CX and RPI at omnichannel firms differently? How do these relationships differ for utilitarian vs. hedonistic consumers?

Method and Data

Based on several pre-tests, we selected six of the 15 highest-selling omnichannel fashion retailers and identified one physical, one digital, and one human TP as proxies for TP natures (Herhausen et al. 2019). For the main study, three surveys were conducted at three four-month intervals, recruiting regular omnichannel shoppers from an existing panel (N=542).

We use established Likert-type scales: three items assessed the usefulness of each TP (physical stores, websites, social media; Childers et al. 2001; Han et al. 2020) and four items assessed CX (cognitive, physical, affective, social dimensions; Gahler et al. 2023; Stein and Ramaseshan 2020). Three items captured RPI in wave three (Chiu et al. 2012; Maxham III and Netemeyer 2002). Hedonic vs. utilitarian motivation was measured with fun-vs.-task questions (e.g., Kaltcheva and Weitz 2006). Age, gender, and internet expertise were covariates. Reliability, validity, CMV, endogeneity checks, metric invariance, and within-person variance stability were satisfactory for latent moderated structural equation modeling with Mplus. Several stability checks support our conceptualization.

For study 2, a new sample (N=321) was used to ensure that findings do not merely reflect a sampling effect, to avoid bias due to analyses of the same data, and to strengthen the generalizability of our insights.

Summary of Findings

This study extends previous research and supports omnichannel assumptions. Studies have

shown contradictory direct, partially mediated, or fully mediated TP effects, while we emphasize that analyzing CX reveals full mediation of reciprocally linked major physical, digital, and human TPs on RPI. Study 1 shows stronger reciprocal links between stores as major physical TP and digital/human TPs than vice versa; the strongest reciprocal total effect is that of websites as digital TP (e.g., supporting literature; Von Briel 2018). This stems from strong reciprocity between digital and human TPs, possibly indicating a digital–social pattern for omnichannel shoppers. Both firm-controlled TPs are stronger than human TP (enhancing contradictory insights; Baxendale et al. 2015). Study 2 supports the importance of TPs' reciprocity. Cross-sectional studies tend to overestimate or overlook the role of TPs, as shown in Study 2, where TP effects are stronger for the physical TP, and the reciprocal total effect of the human TP disappears. Additionally, physical TP affects RPI via CX strongly for hedonists, and digital TP more for utilitarian motivated consumers. Human TP is surprisingly more predictive for utilitarians, offering orientation, clarity, and reducing cognitive efforts through personalized, flexible responses (Vannucci and Pantano 2020).

Statement of Key Contribution

We offer new insights into the interdependence of the most useful TPs and their reciprocal effects on CX and behavior across consumer journeys. Scholars proposed analyses to understand the reciprocal relationships of TPs and their role in CX (Becker and Jaakkola 2020; De Keyser et al. 2020). In Study 1, we argue that major TPs reciprocally shape each other and CX differently, unlike cross-sectional studies, such as Study 2, which analyzes identical TPs independently. Such studies dominate, and we examine the consequences of omitted reciprocity: theoretical overlooking of combined TP effects on mental reactions and practical misjudgments of individual TPs as a competitive advantage.

We contribute novel theoretical rationales by referring to IIT, which explains how information cues are observed, interpreted, and integrated into broader mental reactions leading to observable responses (Anderson 1971). IIT has been applied to simultaneous cue presentation but does not preclude cue integration over time. However, as IIT logic suits sequential information processing in an omnichannel context, we extend this well-established theory to model reciprocal, temporal cues integration in omnichannel context.

Additionally, we consider shopping motives, arguing that utilitarian vs. hedonistic consumers value reciprocally linked TPs differently and provide insights into consumer groups.

References are available upon request.

DOES IT FEEL LIKE AI? THE IMPACT OF AI-GENERATED FOOD IMAGES ON CONSUMERS

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Keywords: AI-generated images, visual authenticity, food marketing

Description: This paper shows that replacing real food photography with AI-generated images can undermine perceived naturalness, nutrition value, and purchase intention, especially for unhealthy food products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Advances in generative artificial intelligence enable marketers to create highly realistic food images at scale. In food marketing, visual cues are particularly influential because they shape perceptions of healthiness, naturalness, and value. While AI-generated images promise efficiency gains, concerns remain regarding their perceived authenticity. Prior research on visual

authenticity suggests that consumers rely heavily on cues of naturalness when evaluating food products, especially in health-related contexts. However, empirical evidence on how AI-generated versus real food images affect nutritional evaluations and downstream behavioral intentions is still limited. This research investigates whether AI-generated food images are evaluated differently than real photographs and examines the psychological mechanism underlying these effects. Specifically, we propose that perceived naturalness mediates the impact of AI-generated imagery on nutrition value and purchase intention and that this mediation process is contingent on whether the food is healthy or unhealthy.

Method and Data

The study employed a between-subjects experimental design with a 2 (image type: real vs. AI-generated) × 2 (dish type: healthy vs. unhealthy) factorial structure. A total of 120 consumers were recruited online. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Each participant saw a single food image corresponding to the assigned condition. Image type was manipulated by presenting either a real food photograph or an AI-generated image depicting the same dish, while dish type was manipulated by presenting either a healthy (e.g., fresh, nutritious) or unhealthy (e.g., indulgent, high-calorie) food item. After viewing the image, participants evaluated the product and completed a questionnaire measuring perceived naturalness, perceived nutrition value, and purchase intention, followed by basic demographic questions. All dependent variables were measured using established multi-item scales adapted to the food context and assessed on 7-point Likert scales. Sample items included “This food looks natural” (perceived naturalness), “This food seems nutritionally valuable” (perceived nutrition value), and “I would consider buying this product” (purchase intention).

Summary of Findings

Across analyses, AI-generated food images led to systematically less favorable responses than real food images. Specifically, AI-generated images resulted in lower perceived nutrition value and reduced purchase intention relative to real images, while healthy dishes were generally evaluated more positively than unhealthy ones. With respect to perceived naturalness, AI-generated images were perceived as substantially less natural than real images. Mediation analyses revealed that this reduction in perceived naturalness represents the central mechanism underlying the negative effects of AI-generated imagery. Lower perceived naturalness, in turn, was associated with decreased nutrition value and lower purchase intention, resulting in an overall negative indirect effect of AI-generated food images on consumer evaluations. Moderation analyses further showed that this negative indirect effect varied by dish type. The detrimental impact of AI-generated images on perceived naturalness (and consequently on nutrition value and purchase intention) was particularly pronounced for unhealthy foods. Together, these findings indicate that deviations from real photographic imagery toward AI-generated visuals can undermine perceived naturalness and downstream evaluations, especially in indulgent food contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature on AI-generated content and visual authenticity by demonstrating that deviations from real photographic food imagery toward AI-generated visuals systematically reduce consumer evaluations. Theoretically, the study advances understanding of how AI-generated images influence food-related judgments by identifying perceived naturalness

as a central psychological mechanism linking visual representation to nutrition value and purchase intention. By establishing a moderated mediation framework, the findings show that the negative impact of AI-generated imagery is not uniform but depends on dish type, with particularly strong effects for unhealthy foods. This extends prior research on authenticity and food perception by highlighting that synthetic realism does not substitute for perceived naturalness in consumer decision-making. From a managerial perspective, the results caution against the uncritical adoption of AI-generated food images in marketing communications. While AI imagery offers efficiency and scalability advantages, it may undermine perceived naturalness and downstream evaluations, especially in indulgent food categories. Managers should therefore carefully align the use of AI-generated visuals with product positioning and consumer expectations, reserving real photography for contexts in which authenticity, naturalness, and value perceptions are critical.

References are available upon request.

DOES VERBAL MIRRORING MAKE THE SALE? THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES AND TIMING

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Keywords

adaptive selling, verbal mirroring, salesperson interactions, sales conversion, NLP

Description

This paper examines verbal mirroring as a dynamic, multidimensional form of adaptive selling and, using NLP on 7,961 inbound sales call transcripts, finds that mirroring is differentially correlated with sales conversion depending on linguistic feature and timing within the interaction.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates whether and when verbal mirroring of customers' linguistic features relates to sales conversion. Prior research suggests several mechanisms through which mirroring could influence sales outcomes. By increasing similarity, it may foster processing fluency, conversational harmony, empathy, and rapport, which in turn can enhance trust, likeability, and persuasiveness while reducing purchase resistance. However, mirroring may also backfire if it appears insincere or distracts salespeople from addressing substantive customer needs. The overall association with sales conversion is therefore theoretically ambiguous. We thus examine whether mirroring sentence complexity, speech rate, and sentiment is correlated with higher sales conversion (RQ1).

We further argue that timing plays a crucial role. Early mirroring may help establish rapport but risks being perceived as manipulative. In the middle of the conversation, more accurate mirroring could support conversational flow, yet attention to needs may limit its impact. Late mirroring might reinforce alignment, although it could also appear unnecessary. We therefore ask whether the effectiveness of verbal mirroring depends on its timing within the conversation (RQ2).

Method and Data

We analyse transcripts of inbound sales calls from a large U.S. health insurance provider offering Medicare Advantage plans. The dataset comprises all inbound sales calls handled during one week in December 2022. After excluding calls shorter than two minutes or with fewer than three conversational turns, the final sample comprises 7,961 calls from 294 salespersons. Using NLP, we extracted linguistic measures based on timestamps and speaker

labels. Our depended variable sales conversion indicates whether the customer enrolled in a plan and was captured based on a dictionary approach. Sentence complexity was measured via an adjusted Flesch score, speech rate as words per second, and sentiment using a Distil-BERT model. Verbal mirroring for this dimension was measured in three steps: extracting feature values per turn, calculating salesperson deviation from their baseline, and assessing similarity to the customer's preceding turns. Mirroring was operationalized as the interaction between change and similarity. For the first research question, metrics were averaged across the whole call. For the second research question, they were aggregated by conversation thirds. We estimated multilevel logistic regressions with salesperson-level random intercepts and controlled for general linguistic variability using transformer-based sentence embeddings (e.g., BERT, MPNet, RoBERTa).

Summary of Findings

Verbal mirroring shows systematic associations with sales conversion that differ by linguistic feature and timing. Across all call-level models, verbal mirroring of sentence complexity and sentiment is positively related to sales conversion ($p < .05$). For instance, when a customer uses more complex phrasing and the salesperson adapts in a similar way, or when a customer expresses excitement and the salesperson mirrors this positivity, conversions become more likely. By contrast, mirroring speech rate shows no significant effect. With regard to verbal mirroring over time, the results are more nuanced. Early mirroring of sentence complexity (T1) is negatively associated with conversion across all models ($p < .05$), suggesting that closely aligning with the customer's linguistic complexity too early can reduce sales conversion. By contrast, sentiment mirroring is positively correlated with conversion early and mid-call over all models (T1–T2, $p < .05$–$.001$). For instance, when a customer shows

excitement at an early stage and the salesperson mirrors this enthusiasm, conversions are more likely. Mirroring of speech rate, however, remains unrelated to outcomes throughout the conversation. Notably, all mirroring effects persist even after including the control variable, highlighting that mirroring contributes explanatory value beyond general linguistic variability.

Key Contributions

This study advances adaptive selling research by investigating how salespeople verbally mirror customers' linguistic features in sales conversations. Prior research has largely relied on self-reported measures and experimental scenarios, offering limited insight into actual marketplace interactions. To address this gap, we analysed 7,961 sales calls from a major U.S. health insurance provider and apply NLP to capture verbal mirroring across three dimensions: sentence complexity, speech rate, and sentiment. Rather than assuming that adaptive selling is uniformly beneficial, its association with performance depends on both the linguistic feature and the timing within the conversation.

For academe, these findings enrich adaptive selling theory by shifting attention from general adaptation to specific, dynamic communication strategies. We emphasize that effective adaptation is contingent and multidimensional, highlighting the importance of temporal dynamics in salesperson–customer interactions. Methodologically, we introduce a scalable approach that integrates machine learning, NLP, and multilevel modelling to examine adaptive selling in field data, thereby overcoming key limitations of previous literature. For practice, the results enable firms to move from generic adaptation advice to evidence-based communication strategies. Training programs can focus on when and how to mirror customers effectively, and AI-based tools can be used to monitor interactions and provide real-time feedback.

ENTICE & EMBRACE: PROSPECT-REFUGE THEORY IN RETAIL SERVICESCAPES

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Keywords: Servicescape, Interior Prospect-Refuge, Fascination, Store Exterior and Interior, VR Experiments

Description: Using Prospect-Refuge theory from environmental psychology, this study examines the relationship between consumers' evaluations of a store's interior and exterior, highlighting combinations that lead to more favorable assessments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – In many services, production and consumption occur simultaneously in the same environment. Therefore, in physical evidence, the aesthetics of the servicescapes hold particular significance, especially in facility-driven services (Turley & Fugate, 1992). While a survey reported in Baker et al. (2020) found that 95% of retail customers consider store front exteriors crucial to their shopping experience, few studies have conceptualized or explored store front impact on customer attitudes or behaviors, despite the increasing importance of store exteriors in retail experience design. Shopper evaluations of retail interiors may be intertwined

with assessments of exteriors, with shoppers considering the overall aesthetic combination. However, a lack of empirical evidence hinders a focused understanding of this relationship and restricts theory development in this area. Based on the theoretical framework of prospect-refuge theory from environmental psychology, this study explores how prospect-oriented vs. refuge-oriented servicescape designs influence consumer perceptions of visual beauty. Specifically, it investigates whether prospect elements are more impactful on exterior designs and refuge elements on interior zones. Additionally, it examines servicescape type (utilitarian vs. hedonic), gender (hypothesizing that males favor prospect, females refuge), and store type (high- vs. low-involvement) as moderators of these perceptions.

Method And Data– Given the limited exploration of the inquiries, two distinct study approaches are suggested to provide a thorough and rigorous explanation of the phenomenon. The first study is an online experiment, where simulated 3D walk-through videos of various servicescapes are used as a stimulus to elicit responses. A careful selection process, guided by three experts, is employed to develop multiple servicescape videos, developed with the help of 3D visualization experts. Following Stamps (2011), prospect and refuge aspects are manipulated by altering three environmental properties: horizontal area, elongation, and height. Based on a pre-test, it was decided to consider fashion and grocery retail interior as utilitarian type and spa as a hedonic servicescape. Accordingly, separate videos for utilitarian and hedonic stores, showing the exterior of the servicescape for 1 minute and then the interior for the following 1 minute, are presented randomly to respondents recruited from the online platform *Prolific*. To simulate the effect of prospect and refuge evidently, it is planned to conduct a 3D immersive study (study 2), using 3D goggles and a joystick in a pre-defined VE servicescape. The study participants will be recruited from post-graduate students.

Summary of Findings – The initial analysis (using MANOVA) for study 1 showed that respondents preferred prospect dimensions for store exterior (in terms of a significantly higher

level of perceived fascination) and refuge dimensions for store interiors (in terms of a significantly higher level of perceived safety, visitability, and store preference). Also, when it comes to the moderation effects of store type (utilitarian vs. hedonic), while prospect exteriors are preferred both for utilitarian and hedonic servicescapes, when it comes to hedonic stores, refuge interiors are preferred over prospect ones. We ensured that both genders were equally represented in the study, in order to test the gender effect hypothesized. However, gender did not show any significant effect on the prospect and refuge dimensions. The VR study (study-2) is in the design stage, and the findings are expected to provide support to the findings identified in the 1st study.

Statement of Key Contributions – The importance of store exteriors in consumer evaluations of servicescapes has been acknowledged in existing literature (eg, Bloch & Kamran-Disfani, 2018; Baker et al, 2020, etc.). This study seeks to fill this gap by introducing the Prospect-Refuge theory as a guiding principle for servicescape designs. Baker et al (2020) report from a survey of retail customers in which 95% of the respondents agree that the storefront is a critical factor in their evaluation of their shopping experience. Our study therefore contributes to the emerging literature on store exteriors and develop a theoretical platform for future exploration. The expected research outcomes aim to make significant contributions to both theory and practice. Finally, the findings are expected to guide managers in designing store exteriors that attract and invite potential customers and interiors that encourage extended browsing. Furthermore, they can help managers tailor design configurations based on store type (utilitarian vs. hedonic) and customer gender.

"*References are available upon request*."

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SALES COACHING BY SALES MANAGERS IN B2B SERVICE FAILURE AND RECOVERY

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Keywords: Sales Coaching; Sales Manager; Salesperson; Service Failure and Recovery; B2B

Description: The study brings together two knowledge streams, Service Failure and Recovery, and Sales Coaching, and advances the understanding of the role of sales coaching by sales managers in B2B Service Failure and Recovery.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Service Failure and Recovery (SFaR) situations can occur in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer contexts; however, B2B SFaR has been studied to a relatively lesser extent (Baliga et al., 2021a; Oflac et al., 2021). The extant literature on service recovery outcomes has also primarily focused on customers, ignoring employee outcomes (Johnston & Michel, 2008). Such employees are mostly salespersons, often at the receiving end of the complaining customers, who get adversely impacted in terms of their mental health by the stress caused during SFaR (Baliga et al., 2025; Bitner et al., 1994). Past authors have emphasized the need for adequate procedures for imparting 'knowledge, skills, and abilities or sales coaching in SFaR. This connection between coaching and SFaR remains unexplored. No study has yet empirically examined the efficacy of different sales coaching styles (Badrinarayanan et al., 2015) and how they relate to different salesperson types and sales manager characteristics in SFaR. Hence, the key research questions for this study are: *What is the role of sales coaching in B2B SFaR? What are the key sales manager coach characteristics and sales coaching styles that determine the effectiveness of coaching in B2B SFaR?*

Method And Data

Following the explorative nature of the research question, an interpretive approach using a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews was adopted (Cartwright et al., 2022; van Burg et al., 2020), combined with 1-on-1 Critical Incident Technique for conducting interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Gioia et al. (2013) was used to organize and analyze the transcripts. To achieve a balanced representation of perspectives and for triangulation, senior B2B salespersons and sales managers were targeted globally through snowballing and from the author's

network (Geiger, 2017; Suri, 2011; Wigger & Shepherd, 2020). In total, 23 interviews were conducted and analyzed for this study. The average ticket size (and hence the revenues at risk) of each account managed by a salesperson varied from a few hundred thousand dollars to multi-million dollars. Once there was a recurrent replication of responses during the execution and analysis of the interviews, we concluded that we had reached data saturation and stopped recruiting further interviewees (Hennink et al., 2017). As a process of ensuring conscious reflexive practice, a journal was maintained that captured any assumptions, emotions, feelings, and reactions through the data collection and analysis process.

Summary of Findings

The study advances prior research on sales manager characteristics (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2008) and identifies sales manager-coach characteristics in B2B SFaR. We illustrate six such characteristics: big-picture thinking, selling experience, involvement, empathy, adaptability, and relational capital. The study answers researchers' call for more “research on coaching in sales leadership” (Rapp et al., 2021, p. 45) and how coaching can improve problem-solving and better remedial measures (Badrinarayanan et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Onyemah, 2009; Shannahan et al., 2013). The study explores and identifies two sales coaching styles (direction and facilitation) and how they relate to different salespersons in SFaR. The study also makes an incremental contribution in terms of a more granular and nuanced classification of B2B recovery mechanisms. We illustrate eight mechanisms: root-cause analysis, co-recovery, monitoring, acknowledgement, proactive, expertise, phased resolution, and resource change. Finally, we inquired from the interviewees in SFaR situations that based on the coaching conversations and the specific recovery mechanisms applied by them, what was its impact on them and their

customers. The interviewees emphasized that the coaching conversations helped them in terms of improved confidence levels, better mental health and well-being, and satisfied customers.

Statement of Key Contributions

The research has significant practical implications. We recommend decision makers (i.e., sales leaders/chief commercial officers and senior human resource managers) hire new sales managers in light of specific characteristics that enable them to lead and coach salespersons. For existing sales managers, we recommend investments in suitable interventions and development programs for them to acquire and imbibe specific coaching characteristics. We recommend that sales managers be trained on the specific coaching styles that would work for different salesperson types. Organisations are recommended to build a strong coaching culture and institutionalize 1-1 coaching. We suggest structured coaching sessions at pre-determined and regular frequency (e.g., once a fortnight for 30 mins) and to expand the canvas of coaching conversations beyond quota and revenue discussions by incorporating SFaR situations. We suggest firms build a playbook where each unique service failure gets documented with a description of how it was dealt with and discussed during coaching conversations.

FEELING THE STRAIN: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE REGARDING HOW EMOTIONS AFFECT TRUST IN BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

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Keywords: emotions, relational norms, trust, relationship stage, empathy

Description: This paper investigates through experiments how the under-fulfillment of relational norms evokes emotional reactions that mediate the erosion of trust in business relationships, and tests how contextual and individual factors moderate the emotional mediation process.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Background and Research Question

Trust is central to effective business relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997), yet the mechanisms through which it weakens or endures are varied. While traditional research emphasizes cognitive and structural explanations, recent studies highlight the importance of emotional processes unfolding between boundary spanners (Palmatier et al., 2006, 2007; Harmeling et al., 2015; Forkmann et al., 2022). Emotions may influence judgment, decision-making, and relational interpretations (Pham, 1998; Gross, 2002; Slovic et al., 2007; So et al., 2015), but their role in business relationship governance remains under-theorized and empirically under-researched. Relational Norm Theory (Macneil, 1980) offers a foundation for understanding how performance and interaction expectations shape collaboration. When under-fulfilled, such expectations may signal relational strain and evoke negative emotions that erode trust (Harmeling et al., 2015). Yet little is known about whether norm types differ in emotional impact, when emotions are most consequential (Dwyer et al., 1987; Jap and Ganesan, 2000; Scheer et al., 2010), or how boundary spanner traits such as empathy toward their organization or emotion regulation affect these processes. This study addresses such gaps by examining contextual and individual moderators of the emotional pathway linking norm under-fulfillment and trust. It offers thus a more nuanced view of trust erosion in business relationships.

Method and Data

We conducted an experimental study of 2 [type of relational norm: performance vs. interaction] x 2 [severity of the under-fulfillment: mild vs severe] x 2 [relationship stage: early vs. mature] factorial design by simulating realistic interorganizational scenarios. Participants were 518 managers across industries recruited via Prolific. They were presented

with vignettes describing business relationship scenarios in a business relationship. All vignettes were pretested for realism, clarity, and internal validity.

Participants assessed emotional reactions and trust in their partner organization after reading the scenarios. Negative emotions were assessed via the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988), and trust via items from Palmatier et al. (2007). Relational performance and interaction norms were adapted from Narasimhan et al. (2008) and Paulssen et al. (2016), respectively (9-point Likert scale). Empathy towards their organization was measured using a modified version of the Salespeople's Empathy Scale (Stock and Hoyer, 2005), and emotional regulation via cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression subscales from Gross and John (2003).

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that negative emotions play a key mediating role between relational norm under-fulfillment and trust. Across conditions, violations of performance norms evoke significantly stronger negative emotional reactions than violations of interaction norms, revealing the greater emotional weight attributed to outcome-related expectations. Performance norm breaches generated a sharper decline in trust, underscoring their important role in maintaining relational stability (Narasimhan et al., 2008).

Relationship stages significantly moderated these emotional effects. Under-fulfillment of performance norms triggered intense negative emotions in early-stage relationships, where partners lack relational experiences and rely more heavily on early behavioral signals to infer partner reliability. In contrast, the emotional impact of interaction norm breaches remained similar across relationship stages. This finding adds to relational Lifecycle Theory (Dwyer et al., 1987) by suggesting that early-stage violations—when trust is tentative and expectations are still crystallizing—provoke stronger emotional responses.

Individual characteristics also shaped relational outcomes. Boundary spanners with high empathy toward their organization experienced significantly stronger negative emotional reactions and a more pronounced decline in trust, indicating that empathy—while often beneficial—may heighten vulnerability to emotional strain when relational expectations are violated. Cognitive reappraisal and emotional suppression did not mitigate emotional response or trust erosion. This suggests that relational breaches in interorganizational contexts may be perceived as systemic accountability violations, limiting the effectiveness of individual-level emotion management.

Key Contributions

This study advances business relationship research in several important ways. First, it provides robust experimental evidence that emotions serve as a mechanism linking relational norm violations to trust erosion in business relationships.

Second, it demonstrates that not all relational norms carry equal emotional weight. Performance norm violations produce stronger emotional and trust-related consequences than interaction norm breaches, challenging the assumption that social relational failures are most damaging. This finding highlights the functional-predictive importance boundary spanners assign to performance reliability in interorganizational exchanges.

Third, by resolving conflicting perspectives on the effect of relationship stage, the study shows that in early-stage relationships performance norm violations are particularly susceptible to emotional reactions. Norm violations in this formative period shape trust levels more strongly than in mature relationships, signaling the need for careful relationship management. Moreover, this study reveals certain individual characteristics such as empathy are having an attenuating impact on relational breaches.

Overall, our contributions underscore the importance of practical organizational interventions—such as early alignment meetings, post-incident debriefs, and structured emotional support processes—to manage emotional ruptures in business relationships effectively.

References available upon request.

FIRST-LINE SALES MANAGER BETWEEN PEOPLE, CUSTOMERS, AND BUSINESS: ROLE DEMANDS AND PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS.

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Keywords: First-Line Sales Management, Role Demands, People Management, Customer Management, Business Management

Description: Using a two-step approach combining scale development and structural equation modeling, the author develops and validate three scales capturing the perceived demands of FLSMs in their people, customer, and business management roles, and test how these demands affect FLSMs' job performance conditional on their role confidence.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sales managers play a pivotal role in driving organizational performance (Anderson and Oliver 1987; Deeter-Schmelz, Kennedy, and Goebel 2002). This is particularly true for first-line sales managers (FLSMs), as high-performing FLSMs show to significantly increase the performance of the sales organization of up to 33 percent (Schmitz, Betz, and Huckemann 2016). In practice, FLSMs influence performance in multiple ways because they perform a wide array of tasks (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Solomon 2006; Singh 1998). One can distinguish an FLSMs' role in three areas of obligation: Being a people manager, a business manager and a customer manager (Schenk and Dickie 2017).

Yet it remains unclear to what extent the perceived demands inherent in those three FLSM roles actually influence FLSMs' performance. Deepening our understanding is therefore crucial to mitigate potential negative individual and organizational consequences while fully leveraging the potential of each FLSM. This lack of research is particularly significant for two reasons. First, researchers have not yet established measures that capture the components of FLSMs' roles in a way that allows the role-specific demands to be analyzed in detail. Second, this has hindered a deeper examination of the drivers of role-related demands and their performance consequences for FLSMs.

Method and Data

We conduct two studies. After deriving detailed definitions of the three FLSM roles, Study 1 develops measures to capture the perceived demands associated with each role. To identify three distinct constructs, each corresponding to one of the three FLSM roles, we followed a common scale development process.

In a first step, we developed an initial pool of 40 items, building on extensive sales management literature research. Next, to ensure content validity, four academic sales experts assessed the initial item-set for general relevance and representativeness within FLSM tasks. After that, we conducted a preliminary study with nineteen experts to assess validity and to carry out an initial item allocation. Lastly, tested whether the content-based item-allocation shows statistical consistency and factor loadings on the three role constructs as expected (n = 189).

Subsequently, in Study 2 (n = 245), we aim to enable a more nuanced understanding of how role-specific demands affect FLSMs' performance. Therefore, study 2 follows a two-step approach: we first validate the three role-based scales from study 1. Subsequently, using structural equation modelling (SEM), we apply them to investigate the implications of FLSM's

role demands on FLSMs' job performance, contingent on our moderator variable FLSM role confidence.

Summary of Findings

Today, research on FLSMs is underrepresented, although FLSMs hold a crucial boundary-spanning position (Reid et al. 2017; Schrock et al. 2016). Despite their centrality, systematic and research-based understanding of the multifaceted nature of their role is missing (Plank et al. 2018). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that addresses all three FLSM role domains explicitly and simultaneously. Thus, the present study helps to bridge this gap, contributing to previous research through adding new insights into the FLSM role.

Our study has two outcomes. First, our three developed measurement scales allow the assessment of perceived demands associated with each FLSM role. Their structure mirrors assumptions in practitioner-oriented work regarding the composition of the FLSM role (Zoltners, Sinha, and Lorimer 2012; Schenk and Dickie 2017). Second, SEM results show that perceived people management demands reduce FLSM job performance ($\beta = -.232$, $p < .01$), perceived customer management demands increase it ($\beta = .234$, $p < .05$), and perceived business manager demands have no effect ($\beta = .126$, $p > .05$). Additionally, the results indicate a buffering role of FLSMs' role confidence , with confident FLSMs performing better than their less confident peers when facing role-related demands.

Key Contributions

We contribute to research on first-line sales management by explicitly addressing the threefold structure of the FLSMs' position. Accordingly, we respond to the need to deepen our understanding on how FLSMs perceive their role (Plank et al. 2018) and associated demands. Unlike other studies analyzing FLSMs' responsibilities, we try to take a holistic perspective, instead of focusing on individual sub-areas (Flaherty 2011). Therefore, our research advances

the sales literature through four main contributions. Specifically, we (1) provide a theoretically sound definition of the three FLSMs' roles, (2) develop scales to measure FLSMs' perceived demands within each role, (3) offer a concise short scale, and (4) provide insights on the effects of the perceived role demands on job performance.

Furthermore, our study offers a simple but powerful way for organizations to discover in which roles FLSMs individually perceive the most demands in their daily work. By elucidating the complexity of the FLSM's threefold role, we help upper sales management to investigate and better understand how their organizations can more effectively tailor development initiatives to similar groups of FLSMs. Furthermore, our results emphasize that the employee occupying the FLM position must be well suited to the role and its associated responsibilities.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: MINING WEBSITE LANGUAGE TO PREDICT B2B CUSTOMER BUYING POTENTIAL

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Keywords: text mining; natural language processing (NLP); machine learning; buying potential; customer prioritization

Description: Adopting an empirics-first approach and machine learning, this paper shows that linguistic and structural signals embedded in B2B customer websites provide incremental, interpretable information for predicting customer buying potential beyond traditional firm-level indicators.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In competitive B2B markets, firms must allocate scarce resources toward potential customers with the highest expected value. Effective customer prioritization is therefore a central driver of sales performance. While firms invest heavily in data to support these decisions, information for evaluating buying potential is often costly, incomplete, or limited to coarse indicators such as firm size or industry. As a result, firms frequently misallocate sales effort and incur avoidable acquisition costs and missed revenue opportunities.

Customer websites represent a widely available yet underutilized source of firm-level information. Through carefully crafted textual content, customer firms signal their value propositions, priorities, and positioning to external stakeholders. Yet, customer websites have received limited attention as a data source for customer prioritization in B2B sales. Prior research using website text has focused on identifying broad topics or themes, offering limited insight into whether and how linguistic signals embedded in websites reflect economically meaningful differences across customer firms.

We address this gap by asking whether customer website text contains predictive signals that can be used to assess customer buying potential. Specifically, we examine whether linguistic and structural features extracted from B2B customer websites provide information beyond traditional indicators when prioritizing customers in B2B sales contexts.

Method And Data

We partnered with a major global insurance provider to construct a unique dataset linking B2B customer website text to realized sales revenue. Among the firm's B2B customers, 2,672 customer firms (approximately 68% of the customer base) maintained a public website. For these firms, we collected the complete website text and matched it to the total annual sales revenue generated with the focal firm, which serves as our measure of customer buying potential. After applying standard data screening procedures, our final estimation sample comprises 1,777 customer firms.

Following an empirics-first approach, our analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we draw on prior research to identify theoretically derived linguistic and structural signals in customer website text that may reflect underlying firm characteristics relevant to buying potential. Second, we apply natural language processing to extract interpretable linguistic features from website

text using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC). Third, we employ a Random Forest model to assess the predictive value of these features, allowing for non-linear relationships while providing transparent measures of variable importance.

To support the interpretation of our findings in Study 1, we analyze a second, independent dataset of 945 firms linking linguistic signals to broader indicators of firm success.

Summary of Findings

Our findings show that linguistic and structural signals embedded in B2B customer websites predict customer buying potential. Incorporating website-derived signals into predictive models improves the accuracy of buying potential estimates relative to models relying solely on traditional firm-level indicators.

Importantly, the linguistic signals most predictive of customer buying potential correspond closely to indicators commonly associated with firm success, such as market power, future orientation, customer centricity, or professionalism. This correspondence underscores that signals associated with firm success also relate to differences in buying potential.

In addition, our validation analysis shows that the same linguistic signals identified as predictive of buying potential are also correlated with measures of customer firm success in a separate dataset. This convergence supports the interpretation that website language reflects stable firm characteristics rather than idiosyncratic communication choices.

Together, these findings demonstrate that B2B customer websites constitute a valuable and scalable data source for assessing buying potential of prospective customers. Rather than serving merely as marketing artifacts, websites embed signals that can inform customer prioritization decisions in B2B sales contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to search on customer prioritization and data-driven sales management. First, we extend the literature on customer buying potential by introducing unstructured customer website text as a novel, externally observable data source. Adopting an empirics-first approach, we show that publicly available website data contains predictive signals that complement traditional firm-level indicators.

Second, we advance understanding of how linguistic signals reflect customer firm characteristics. By identifying interpretable language patterns associated with higher buying potential, we demonstrate that website text captures information that structured data cannot readily observe.

Third, our findings provide rare validation that linguistic signals predictive of buying potential are also associated with indicators of firm success, strengthening confidence in their substantive interpretation.

For managers, this research offers a scalable, low-cost framework for improving customer prioritization. By integrating website-based linguistic signals with traditional indicators, sales organizations can allocate resources more effectively, identify high-potential customers earlier, and reduce inefficiencies in sales planning and execution.

IMPLEMENTING AI AND VR IN SALES NEGOTIATION TRAINING: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR IMMERSIVE LEARNING

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Keywords: Immersive Negotiation Training, AI, VR, Sales Training, Technology Adoption

Description (1 sentence): This paper proposes design principles for AI- and VR-enabled immersive negotiation trainings in sales organizations, emphasizing emotionally intelligent interactions and adaptive, motivating learning experiences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sales negotiations are among the most critical and complex tasks in B2B selling, yet they remain difficult to train effectively. Conventional training methods, such as role-plays, are costly, time-intensive, and difficult to scale, while standardized programs rely on repetitive scenarios that fail to replicate real-world negotiations. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality (VR) enable immersive negotiation trainings (INT) that offer realistic and emotionally responsive learning experiences. Despite their potential to transform sales training environments, research remains limited in explaining how immersive technologies can be successfully implemented and which psychological, technological, and organizational barriers may impede their effective adoption by sales professionals. Therefore, this study investigates how INT tools should be designed to foster both intention to use and actual usage among B2B sales professionals. Specifically, we examine which functional and non-functional design requirements create realistic and motivating learning experiences. We further investigate how expectations of potential users differ from the experiences of actual users, and how these discrepancies help explain adoption barriers in early-stage immersive technologies. By integrating these insights, we provide a framework to guide INT design, adoption and future research in high-stakes sales training.

Method And Data

We employed an exploratory qualitative research design integrating three complementary data sources to examine requirements for immersive negotiation training (INT) adoption in B2B sales. First, we conducted a systematic analysis of the INT tool landscape, identifying 210 AI-and VR-

enabled negotiation tools through extensive online searches. Based on literature-derived criteria, immersion potential, applicability to B2B negotiations, and organizational scalability, we filtered the sample to six market-ready tools, which were analyzed through feature mapping and hands-on testing by experienced researchers. Second, we conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with B2B sales professionals who had extensive negotiation experience but no prior exposure to INT. These interviews captured expectations and desired characteristics of immersive training formats. Third, we conducted five in-depth interviews with sales professionals who had completed an AI- and VR-based immersive negotiation training, focusing on their actual usage experiences and the perceived learning outcomes. Our data collection followed established qualitative procedures. The coding was conducted independently by multiple researchers and iteratively refined across data sources to identify recurring patterns and contrasts between expectations and experiences. This multi-source triangulation enabled the derivation of practice-relevant insights into the functional and non-functional requirements for effective INT adoption, and the essential requirements for an effective INT design.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal two complementary pathways for effective design and adoption of INT in B2B sales. First, adoption hinges on emotionally intelligent interactions embedded within a trusted training environment. Trainees engage more when AI-driven avatars display empathy and context-sensitive responses, with the perceived humanness of AI- and VR-based agents emerging as a central mechanism. While non-users often anticipate interactions to be artificial and emotionally shallow, experienced users frequently report higher-than-expected realism in dialogue and affective cues. A critical precondition for such emotional interaction is the

perception of psychological safety, enabling users to interact openly without fear of evaluation or negative consequences. Trust in system reliability, secure data handling, and the analytical competence of AI further reinforces behavioral intention to use INT. Second, adaptive and motivating learning experiences are critical: Sales professionals expect training that adjusts to their skill level, context, and negotiation goals. The customization of content, alignment of difficulty levels to users' requirements, and individualized feedback support users' heterogeneous learning profiles. Further, hedonic aspects, such as enjoyment and interactivity, complement functional learning features, and foster sustained participation. Notably, the current INT landscape reveals strong performance in analytical capabilities and adaptability but notable gaps in perceived humanness and motivational features.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to sales training and technology research in four ways. First, it advances negotiation training research by shifting attention from training outcomes to the conditions under which immersive negotiation training (INT) is actually adopted and used in B2B sales organizations. By distinguishing "initial intention for first action" from "bridges to usage," the study addresses a gap in sales technology research, where behavioral intention is often treated as a proxy for real engagement. Second, the study extends established technology acceptance perspectives to immersive, socially embedded training settings by identifying trust and perceived humanness as central determinants of sustained usage. For instance, we show that INT adoption hinges on psychological safety and credible humanlike interaction with AI-driven avatars, factors that remain underdeveloped in dominant acceptance models. Third, the study offers an empirically grounded framework translating salespeople's expectations and

experiences into functional and non-functional design requirements for INT. Finally, the study provides actionable design guidance by specifying two pathways: emotionally intelligent interactions in trusted environments and adaptive, motivating learning experiences. Based on our study's findings, these features likely facilitate a scalable implementation of INT in complex B2B negotiation contexts.

References are available upon request.

LEAD-SOURCE DIFFERENCES IN B2B CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

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Keywords: B2B customer journey; lead source; customer acquisition; CRM

Description: This paper examines how different lead sources shape B2B customer journeys by influencing the customers' transition intensity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Business-to-business firms face the sales lead black hole, where leads take a prolonged time to advance or drop out before converting. Understanding how customers make purchase decisions has long been a core concern in marketing. While the classic purchase funnel model assumes strictly sequential and unidirectional stage transitions, the customer decision journey (CDJ) framework accounts for possible transitions between any two stages, underscoring customers' non-sequential movements.

Although existing studies have investigated a variety of CDJ stages, common themes consistently emerge, including need recognition, information search, evaluation, and purchase. Prior research has largely focused on final conversion or examined stage transitions

at the aggregate level, revealing only overall patterns and failing to capture individual customers' likelihood of transitioning between stages or the time spent in each transition. As a result, little is known about where and why leads stall before converting.

This study focuses on paid search and paid social media leads and examines their stage transitions within the CDJ to identify roadblocks that hinder conversion. Specifically, we ask how different lead sources shape customers' progression readiness from intermediate stages and their conversion to purchase, compared with traditional salesperson-generated leads.

Method And Data

We collected data from a large B2B SaaS firm, capturing salespersons' interactions with potential business customers through an integrated CRM system. To focus on new customer acquisition, we restrict the sample to first-time purchase opportunities with no prior purchase history. The data span multiple years and include detailed records of lead information, transaction outcomes, and customer- and salesperson-level characteristics organized at the daily level.

The CDJ is operationalized as four stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation, and purchase. The need recognition stage is defined as the point at which business customers are first entered into the SCRM system as leads. The information search and evaluation stages are identified from salespersons' diaries using a fine-tuned GPT-4o model trained and validated through manual coding. The purchase stage is confirmed by the presence of an order number with detailed information.

To estimate customers' progression through the CDJ, we apply a multistate model based on a continuous-time Markov chain (CTMC). This framework tracks individual-level transitions across stages, captures both sequential and non-sequential movements, and estimates the likelihood and timing of stage transitions while accounting for customer-,

salesperson-, and time-level controls.

Summary of Findings

Using a daily panel dataset from a SaaS provider, our results reveal systematic differences in how lead sources shape customer progression and conversion across the CDJ. Compared with traditional salesperson-generated leads, paid search leads exhibit higher transition intensities from need recognition to intermediary stages, including information search and evaluation, indicating greater progression readiness from need recognition.

Paid social media leads show a different pattern. Relative to salesperson-generated leads, paid social media leads exhibit higher transition intensities from information search to evaluation, reflecting greater progression readiness from the information search stage. These findings suggest that different digital lead sources facilitate advancement at distinct intermediate milestones in the decision journey.

However, both paid search and paid social media leads demonstrate consistently lower conversion likelihoods compared to salesperson-generated leads. Specifically, they show reduced transition intensities when moving from intermediary stages to purchase, indicating lower likelihoods and longer times needed for conversion. Overall, relative to salesperson-generated leads, paid search and paid social media leads facilitate faster progression through intermediate stages but are less effective at converting to purchase from downstream stages.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances extant literature in several ways. First, we extend the customer decision journey literature by moving beyond theoretical frameworks to empirically model two categories of outcomes: progression and conversion. By applying a multistate model based on a continuous-time Markov chain, we estimate individual customers' likelihood and timing of transitions between CDJ stages, capturing the dynamics of customer progression

and offering a comprehensive view of conversion as the culmination of these transitions.

Second, we contribute to the lead management literature by distinguishing between the progression readiness of leads from paid search and paid social media. Given the prominence and high costs of these advertising channels, understanding their unique strengths along the CDJ helps firms address the sales lead black hole and enhance marketing ROI. We show that paid search leads exhibit greater progression readiness from need recognition, while paid social media leads demonstrate greater readiness from information search.

Finally, our findings highlight that both digital lead types exhibit lower conversion compared to traditional salesperson-generated leads, underscoring the need to balance digital advertising with salesperson referrals and to manage customer progression and conversion in a stage-contingent manner.

MANY-OBJECTIVE OPTIMIZATION FOR CUSTOMER SEGMENTATION IN SUPERMARKETS

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Keywords: Customer segmentation, many-objective optimization, NSGA-II, supermarket retailing.

Description: This paper studies supermarket customer segmentation using a many-objective optimization approach, showing how different segmentations emerge when customer benefits, firm value, shopping criteria, and store and private-label attitudes are optimized at the same time.

ABSTRACT

This study uses a many-objective NSGA-II approach to segment supermarket customers by

combining customer benefits, firm value, shopping criteria, and store and private-label attitudes. Based on survey data from 1,717 consumers, the results reveal clear trade-offs and provide managers with flexible segmentation options.

INTRODUCTION

Customer segmentation plays an important role in retail marketing because it allows firms to group customers based on similar needs, behaviors, or attitudes. For supermarkets, where competition is strong and products are often similar in price and quality, segmentation is one way to design strategies that affect customer satisfaction or loyalty (Dhanushkodi et al. 2025). For this purpose, traditional techniques like k-means or hierarchical clustering have been previously applied in both research and practice. However, even though these approaches are useful and promising, they focus on optimizing a single goal, like the internal cluster similarity (Rungruang et al. 2024).

In most of the marketing literature, segmentation has been performed from either a customer perspective or a firm perspective. The customer perspective may focus on customer benefits, satisfaction, or shopping preferences, while the firm perspective may focus on firm profitability, customer loyalty or retention (Kasem, Hamada, and Taj-Eddin 2024). However, managers rarely deal with these aspects alone, since in reality they have to balance customer benefit and firm value at the same time, while taking into account potential issues such as shopping criteria or broader attitudes towards the store and private labels. Most of the existing marketing segmentation research does not combine these different perspectives.

The aim of this paper is to address this gap by applying an optimization approach to supermarket customer segmentation using many objectives. Particularly, using an NSGA-II optimizer, segmentation is modeled as a Pareto problem with four objectives: customer benefit,

firm value, shopping criteria and customer attitudes towards store and private labels. The contributions of this study are twofold: a) This is the first study to perform supermarket customer segmentation using many-objective optimization, and b) it demonstrates the trade-offs between these four objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In retail marketing, traditional descriptive segmentation methods have been reported to classify customers based on their characteristics such as demographics lifestyle, or psychographic profiles. These approaches offer managers a simple way to identify groups like young families, senior customers or value-conscious customers (Quach and Lee 2021). Another common practice is to perform segmentation based on customer benefits, where customers are grouped based on the benefits they seek from products or services. In supermarkets, this may include low prices or product quality in order to link marketing actions to consumer needs (Kasem, Hamada, and Taj-Eddin 2024).

Despite these advances, most segmentation methods in marketing remain single-objective. For instance, k-means clustering aims to minimize within-cluster variance, by grouping customers who are as similar as possible based on selected characteristics. However, this limits the analysis in one only perspective. Characteristics regarding firm value like purchase frequency or loyalty are often examined separately. This separation can lead to segments that are meaningful in terms of customer similarity but provide little guidance for managers who must balance customer and firm goals at the same time.

Recent research has begun to address customer segmentation as an optimization problem using metaheuristics (Lappas, Xanthopoulos, and Yannacopoulos 2023). For example, Ghavidel, Yadollahzadeh-Tabari, and Golsorkhtabariamiri (2024) used a cuckoo search based clustering algorithm for customer segmentation, revealing that metaheuristics achieve more refined

clusters, while Kuo, Alfareza, and Nguyen (2023) used a genetic algorithm combined with possibilistic fuzzy c-means to optimize the centers of each cluster, offering very promising results. Similarly, Zervoudakis and Tsafarakis (2025) used flying fox optimizer, a self-tuning optimization algorithm, to create customer segments. While the studies mentioned above shift towards the use of computational intelligence techniques to explore the search space of clusters, most contributions still focus on single-objective formulations, typically minimizing within-cluster variance or maximizing cohesion. However, even though metaheuristics are applied, mixed-purpose characteristics like demographics and behavioral variables are included into one objective making sometimes hard to create optimal clusters that are both interpretable and align with different managerial goals.

To overcome these challenges, multiobjective optimization has been proposed as a framework that addresses market segmentation as a multi-criteria problem, where different characteristics can be grouped at the same time. For example, Liu et al. (2010) proposed a market segmentation approach based on multiobjective evolutionary algorithm. The authors demonstrated that the proposed method can approximate a set of Pareto-optimal solutions, giving managers a set of alternative segmentations that balance the competitive objectives of both customer benefit (e.g. satisfaction and perceived value) and firm value (e.g. loyalty and profitability). By addressing customer segmentation as a Pareto problem, trade-offs become visible, which helps managers in the decision-making process. Moreover, Aktaş et al. (2024) applied an NSGA-II in a multiobjective segmentation problem within the retail operations settings. The authors showed how NSGA-II can handle conflicting objectives more efficiently than traditional clustering, especially when decision-makers need to balance performance metrics. Furthermore, Maddah, Ben Abdelaziz, and Tarhini (2021) proposed a multiobjective evolutionary algorithm that considered firm-side objectives like profitability and customer-side

ones like satisfaction and diversity of preferences. Their results demonstrated that a multiobjective approach can generate a Pareto-optimal set of solutions that balance competing marketing goals more effectively than traditional methods.

Moreover, beyond customer benefit and firm value characteristics, recent studies highlight the importance of attitudes towards store and private labels and shopping criteria in shaping supermarket behavior (Steenkamp 2024). Attitudes toward private labels and store, are relevant as retailers attempt to strengthen their brand identity and build trust.

The present study advances this view by considering at the same time customer benefit, firm value, shopping criteria and attitudes towards store and private labels using many-objective optimization.

METHODOLOGY

Data

The dataset used in this research was obtained through a telephone survey carried out on a random sample of residents in a large European metropolitan area. Interviews were conducted by the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing facilities of a local university. A structured electronic questionnaire was used, designed for telephone administration. In total, 1,717 respondents provided complete information.

To evaluate customer segmentation from a many-objective optimization perspective of four objectives, the dataset variables were grouped into four categories, each corresponding to each objective. The first dimension of *customer benefit* included the criteria that guide customers when selecting products in supermarkets. The respondents answered six questions in a 5-point Likert scale from “Not important” to “Extremely important” and it included the importance respondents assign to price (M=4.06, SD = 0.83), quality (M= 4.11, SD = 0.77), packaging (M= 2.44, SD = 1.02), promotional offers (M= 4.09, SD = 0.89), origin of products (M= 3.56, SD =

1.02), and brand (*M*= 3.04, *SD* = 1.04). These variables reflect the benefits customers seek directly from their purchases and are very important for understanding consumer value perceptions. The second dimension of *firm value* was included to capture the value that customers bring to retailers. Respondents provided their answers in the form of discrete numerical values regarding the frequency of supermarket visits per month (*M* = 5.43, *SD* = 3.92), the number of different supermarkets a customer shops at (*M* = 2.25, *SD* = 1.31), and the average expenditure per shopping (*M* = 52.14, *SD* = 36.71). Together they represent loyalty, shopping habits and spending capacity which are very important indicators for firms.

The third dimension, it included the factors influencing customers choosing a supermarket (*shopping criteria*) in a 5-point Likert scale from "Not important" to "Extremely important" and it included the importance respondents assign to prices (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.91), product variety (*M* = 3.78, *SD* = 0.93), quality (*M* = 4.11, *SD* = 0.8), convenience of location (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = 0.99), pleasant atmosphere (*M* = 3.11, *SD* = 1.03), service quality (*M* = 3.49, *SD* = 1), functional store layout (*M* = 3.18, *SD* = 1.04), reputation (*M* = 3.05, *SD* = 1.04), and promotional offers (*M* = 4.12, *SD* = 0.89). These criteria represent how customers perceive the retail environment and what drives their choice between competing supermarkets.

The fourth and final dimension included *attitudes towards store and private label products*. First, satisfaction with store-branded products was evaluated in a five-point Liker Scale from "Very dissatisfied" to "Very satisfied" (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.73). Moreover, a 7-point Likert scale for measuring attitude toward private label products from "Totally disagree" to Totally agree" was used (*M* = 4.56, *SD* = 1) (Burton et al. 1998). The scale showed high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .89). Finally, a 5-point Likert scale for measuring attitude toward store was used (*M* = 4.05, *SD* = 0.6), also having a high internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .91).

By organizing the data into these four objectives, we are allowed to apply many-objective

optimization approaches where both consumer-side and firm-side perspectives are integrated.

Optimization model

In this paper, the segmentation problem is formulated as a many-objective optimization problem. In traditional clustering, the objective is to typically minimize clustering objective like the Within-Cluster Omega Squared (WCOS) as proposed by Liu et al. (2010), which measures how tightly customers within a cluster fit with another. Extending this idea, we minimize the WCOS separately for each of the four groups of characteristics, so that the homogeneity of clusters is evaluated in terms of customer benefits, firm value, shopping criteria and attitudes towards store and private labels. As a result, the optimization problem addressed in this research is expressed as:

$$\min[f_1(\text{customer benefits}), f_2(\text{firm value}), f_3(\text{shopping criteria}), f_4(\text{attitudes})]$$

where each f_i represents the WCOS calculated on the corresponding group of data.

Since no single clustering solution can minimize all four objectives at the same time, the concept of Pareto dominance is applied, according to which a solution *A* dominates a solution *B* if *A* is not worse than *B* across all objectives, and better in at least one. As a result, the outcome of a multiobjective or many-objective optimizer is not one best solution but a set of Pareto-optimal solutions that represent different trade-offs among the different objectives. Multiobjective optimization typically considers two or three goals at once, while many-objective optimization extends this framework to four or more simultaneous goals.

To ensure that the generated clusters are meaningful in practice, a constraint is introduced according to which no more than 20 segments should be created. This prevents the creation of many small clusters that would be very hard for managers to handle (Liu et al. 2010).

NSGA-II

The many-objective segmentation problem was solved using a Non-dominated Sorting Genetic

Algorithm II (NSGA-II) which has been widely used by researchers for optimizing multiple objectives. NSGA-II combines elitism, non-dominated sorting and crowding distance to approximate a Pareto-optimal set. Elitism ensures that the best solutions are kept across generations, non-dominated sorting organizes solutions into Pareto layers, and crowding distance maintains diversity to prevent premature convergence.

In this research, each potential segmentation scheme is represented as a chromosome using a graph encoding, where nodes correspond to customers and edges determine cluster membership. This representation allows flexible partitioning and avoids the limitations of center-based encodings. More information can be found in the work of Liu et al. (2010).

The initialization process combines a set of mixed strategies. Particularly, the first four solutions are generated by applying a k-means algorithm on each of the four groups of data, providing informed starting points that already minimize WCOS in the corresponding objective. The remaining solutions in the initial population are created randomly, to ensure diversity in the search space. In our experiments, a population size of 200 was chosen with a mutation rate of 0.05. The algorithm ran until 30,000 function evaluations were reached, and keeps a maximum of 50 non-dominated solutions.

RESULTS

Figure 1 illustrates the parallel plot of all non-dominated solutions found by NSGA-II. In this plot, each line is one possible way to split the market. The four vertical axes are the four objectives and lower numbers on each axis mean that the clusters are more consistent inside. The thin blue lines are all the solutions, while the thick coloured ones highlight the best solution for each objective. Regarding firm value (second axis), it has the widest spread, going from about 0.38 up to 0.54. When clusters have a low WCOS in firm value, customers in each group spend and visit the supermarket in similar ways. These solutions have most of the times high

values on the rest of the objectives, which was expected since heavy and loyal customers are not always the same people who want the same product benefits or have the same store attitudes. The red line is the best solution for the second objective. Customer benefit (first axis) is between 0.46 and 0.55 of WCOS values. Based on Figure 1, customer benefit tends to move against firm value, since when customers are grouped well by the benefits they look for (e.g. price or quality), their spending patterns inside these groups become more mixed. The green line is the best solution for this objective. Shopping criteria (third axis) has WCOS values between 0.46 and 0.54. It usually improves together with customer benefit. The trade-off in this axis is again with firm value. The yellow line is the best solution for this objective. Finally, attitudes towards the store and private labels (fourth axis) is between 0.44 and 0.55. It usually improves together with shopping criterion and customer benefit. The purple line is the best solution for this objective.

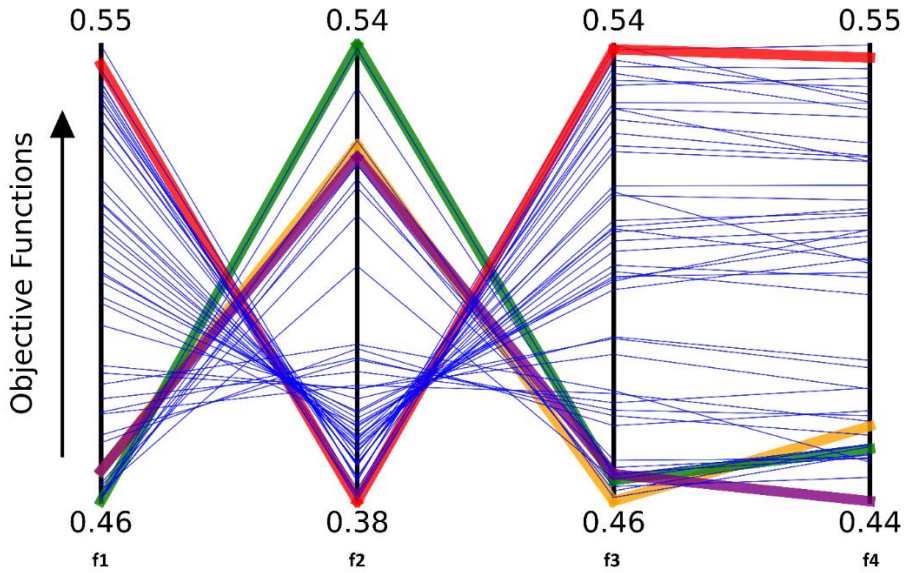


Figure 1: Parallel plot of non-dominated solutions

It is clear that no single segmentation can be optimal across all four objectives at the same time. Firm value tends to conflict with customer benefit and shopping criteria, while attitudes towards store and private labels are more aligned with those two than with firm value. As a result,

managers may face a trade-off since focusing on loyal and heavy spenders might result in ignoring differences in customer benefits or attitudes, whereas targeting segments built on benefits or attitudes may reduce precision in capturing high-value customers. The strength of the Pareto set is that it does not return a single answer but instead offers a range of different solutions that balance objectives differently. This allows decision makers to select the segmentation that fits better their strategic goals.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to address customer segmentation as an optimization problem using many objectives. By applying an NSGA-II we demonstrated that segmentation can be expressed as a Pareto problem where customer benefit, firm value, shopping criteria and attitudes towards store and private labels are optimized at the same time. We showed that instead of seeking one best solution, our approach generates a set of non-dominated alternatives that highlight the trade-offs between conflicting objectives. The results confirm that firm value tends to conflict with other objectives like customer benefit, shopping criteria and attitudes towards store and private labels.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that supermarkets should not rely on a single fixed segmentation model. Instead, NSGA-II provides a set of possible segmentations, each balancing objectives in different ways. For example, managers who prioritize loyalty and high spending may focus on solutions where firm value is optimized, even if benefit differentiation is weaker. Conversely, managers interested in focusing on customer benefit or attitude-driven segments, can adopt solutions with the best possible firm value for a stronger alignment with customer needs. This flexibility is especially useful in supermarkets where strategies often change depending on market conditions.

A limitation of this study is that we did not apply a decision-making procedure to select among

the Pareto-optimal segmentations, leaving the final choice entirely to managerial judgment. Future research could integrate multicriteria decision-making methods such as ELECTRE III to guide the selection of the most appropriate segmentation according to strategic priorities.

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TRACING INTERNAL KNOWLEDGE FLOWS IN B2B SALES: A NOVEL APPLICATION OF MAIN PATH ANALYSIS TO CRM DATA

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Keywords: main path analysis, intraorganizational learning, B2B sales, CRM analytics, value co-creation

Description: This study introduces a novel network-based approach to uncovering how selling knowledge accumulates and diffuses within B2B sales organizations by applying Main Path Analysis to CRM deal data.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sales research typically emphasizes individual-level drivers of performance. However, less is known about how selling insights, routines, and experiential knowledge diffuse across a sales organization. This study investigates how *selling knowledge transfer internally across deals and which engagements shape the evolution of collective learning within a B2B salesforce.*

Drawing on intraorganizational learning and value co-creation theory, we conceptualize knowledge transfer as a relational, path-dependent process facilitated by repeated collaboration among salespeople. We apply Main Path Analysis (MPA) to CRM data to trace how knowledge flows internally. Originally developed to map the evolution of ideas in citation networks, MPA helps identify influential sequences of sales deals that reflect knowledge transfer within the organization.

Method and Data

The analysis uses CRM records from a U.S.-based B2B technology firm, focusing on 102 closed-won deals over a three-month period. Each deal is represented as a node in a directed network. Arcs are drawn between deals when the same salesperson is involved in both, with directionality based on deal chronology. This structure models potential knowledge transfer through recurring involvement by salespeople.

MPA was conducted using the Search Path Link Count (SPLC) algorithm to identify the most structurally influential sequence of deals. These linkages highlight where collaboration likely facilitated the accumulation and reuse of selling knowledge.

Summary of Findings

The main path comprises 17 deals that collectively structure internal knowledge diffusion. These deals were not necessarily the most profitable, but were central within the collaboration network.

Qualitative review of CRM entries revealed four thematic clusters: (1) opportunity discovery, (2) strategic alignment, (3) co-creation and differentiation, and (4) replication and efficiency.

Early deals emphasized exploration and sensemaking. Mid-path deals involved cross-functional coordination. Later engagements featured customized, high-value solutions followed by more routinized selling behaviors. Knowledge flows were uneven, shaped by recurring collaboration rather than evenly distributed across the team.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes two key contributions. First, it introduces Main Path Analysis as a novel method for analyzing CRM data, offering a longitudinal, behavioral lens on how selling knowledge evolves within organizations. This extends the tool's use beyond bibliometrics and demonstrates its value in sales research.

Second, it contributes to sales theory by modeling internal learning as a dynamic, socially embedded process. The findings shift attention from individual performance to the relational structures through which knowledge develops and circulates. Managerially, the results offer guidance on identifying learning-intensive deals, uncovering informal knowledge brokers, and designing enablement strategies aligned with internal knowledge flows.

References are available upon request.

NATURE'S TOUCH: INTEGRATING BIOPHILIC DESIGN IN MODERN RETAIL STRATEGIES

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Keywords: biophilic design, diversive exploration, positive retail outcomes, Habitat Selection Theory, evolutionary psychology

Description: Guided by Habitat Selection Theory, this research shows that biophilic design (e.g., live plants) increases consumer purchases and affiliation with employees through promoting diversive exploration, with effects attenuated in grocery stores where survival-relevant resource cues are already salient.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Biophilic design, the incorporation of natural elements (e.g., live plants) into built environments, may shape consumer behavior by signaling the abundance of resources needed for survival. Guided by Habitat Selection Theory (HST), which posits that humans are predisposed to prefer environments containing resource abundance cues, this research examines how biophilic design applied in retail environments increases two outcomes: consumer purchases and affiliation with store employees. We propose diversive exploration, defined as consumers' pursuit of novelty and new experiences, as the underlying process. Specifically, consistent with HST's information-gathering stage, we expect biophilic design to promote diversive exploration, which in turn

facilitates “settlement-like” behaviors in retail contexts, including purchasing and affiliating with store employees. In addition, this research examines how store type moderates the effects of biophilic design. We argue that the biophilic design effect depends on whether the products sold are immediately needed for survival. In stores that sell consumer staples that are immediately necessary for survival (e.g., grocery stores), the products themselves provide salient and direct resource cues, reducing the incremental informational value of biophilic design. Accordingly, we predict that the positive effects of biophilic design on diversive exploration and positive retail outcomes will be attenuated in such contexts.

Method and Data

Study 1 ($N = 166$) was a two-cell (biophilic, control) field experiment conducted in a women’s clothing boutique across 20 business days (10/condition). A live plant wall was positioned near the store entrance for the biophilic condition, and mannequins served as the control. Proportions of purchase (sales/visitors) and consumer-initiated affiliation (approaches/visitors) served as dependent variables. In Study 2, online participants ($N = 259$) viewed either a biophilic or minimalist store interior and reported measures of purchase and affiliation intentions. In Study 3, undergraduate participants ($N = 475$) watched VR walkthroughs of the biophilic Doha Airport indoor garden or the traditional Jeddah Airport gates and moving walkways. They reported purchase and affiliation intentions and the proposed mediator, diversive exploration intentions. Pleasure and arousal from the Mehrabian-Russell model were also measured as alternative mediators. Study 4 ($N = 275$) stimuli were pretested and equal in design factor and interior design effort. This online experiment also assessed perceived green values as an alternative mediator. Study 5 ($N = 563$) employed a 2 (biophilic, control) × 2 (grocery, discretionary retail), between-subjects design. Online participants reported diversive exploration intentions, purchase

and affiliation intentions, perceived congruency, and covariates including design factor and interior design effort.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed that biophilic design increased proportion of purchase (B = .79, p = .052) and consumer-initiated affiliation (B = .77, p = .043). Study 2 showed that biophilic design increased purchase intentions ($M_{biophilic}$ = 4.94 vs. $M_{minimalist}$ = 4.33; p = .003) and affiliation intentions ($M_{biophilic}$ = 4.90 vs. $M_{minimalist}$ = 4.51; p = .050). Study 3 found that diversive exploration positively mediated the effect of biophilic design on purchase (b = .55, *95%CI* = [.3509, .7454]) and affiliation intentions (b = .59, *95%CI* = [.4176, .7809]). Moreover, diversive exploration carried a larger indirect effect than pleasure or arousal. Study 4 showed that diversive exploration had a larger indirect effect than perceptions of green values on purchase ($b_{Contrast}$ = .21, *95% CI* = [.0009, .4276]), but not on affiliation intentions ($b_{Contrast}$ = .16, *95% CI* = [-.0193, .3380]). Finally, controlling for design factor and interior design effort, Study 5 showed that diversive exploration intentions only mediated the effect of biophilic design on purchase (b_{IMM} = .13, *95% CI* = [.0087, .2556]) and affiliation (b_{IMM} = .20, *95% CI* = [.0133, .3964]) intentions for discretionary retail stores.

Key Contributions

This research advances our understanding of retail atmospherics by testing an evolutionarily grounded explanation for how, why, and when biophilic design influences consumer responses. First, it introduces HST to marketing research and conceptualizes biophilic design as cues of resource abundance that can motivate purchasing and consumer-employee affiliation. Second, across five studies, this research provides convergent evidence that biophilic design increases these positive retail outcomes. Third, this research identifies diversive exploration as the

underlying mechanism, such that biophilic design motivates consumers to engage in diversive exploration, which in turn increases purchasing and affiliation. Fourth, by pretesting stimuli to ensure they were equal in perceived design factor and interior design effort, this research strengthens causal inference and reduces the likelihood of a simple “more décor” explanation. Finally, this research demonstrates a theoretically driven boundary condition by showing that the effect of biophilic design was attenuated in grocery stores where products themselves provide survival-relevant resource cues. Managerially, this research provides valuable insights for practitioners by demonstrating the sales and relational benefits of biophilic design. At the same time, we highlight that biophilic design is more impactful in discretionary retail settings, rather than grocery stores.

OMNI-CHANNEL AND BRAND EQUITY: BIBLIOMETRIC AND SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Keywords: Omni-channel, Brand Equity, PRISMA, systematic review.

Description: Bibliometric analysis and systematic review on the relationship between omni-channel and brand equity in the XXI Century.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In a highly competitive world, businesses have been forced to develop new strategies oriented to strengthening brand-consumer ties and fostering lasting brand loyalty. One of those strategies, omni-channel, has transformed business communication by integrating multiple channels, enabling fluid, meaningful interactions with audiences and improving communication between the physical and digital worlds.

The existing literature about the relationship between omni-channel and bran equity suggest that a greater adoption of an omni-channel strategy is likely to be linked to higher brand equity for

businesses. In other words, brand equity, understood as how a customer perceives a brand based on loyalty, reputation, perceived quality, and symbolic associations, can be severely impacted by how the businesses communicate with their customers. However, there is a lack of information about the mechanisms underlying the relationship between omni-channel and brand equity.

As a first step in a research program aimed at better understanding this relationship, this research proposes to address the question on How has the production of scientific documents been in the field of omni-channel as a commercial communication strategy in relation to brand equity? Thus, its primary objective is to analyze research trends on omni-channel as a commercial communication strategy and how it relates to the development of brand equity.

Method And Data (Not Applicable For Nonempirical Papers)

A bibliometric analysis and systematic literature review was carried out. To perform the bibliometric analysis, the Scopus database was used, known for its wide coverage and access to high-quality research. The analyzed journals were linked to topics such as consumer behavior, companies, and marketing, among others. The span of information ranged from 2000 to 2024. In these years, 1544 academic articles on omni-channel, brand equity, or consumer perception were identified.

Data were analyzed using the Biblioshiny app. Biblioshiny allows the construction of bibliometric indicators such as the level of annual production by country, productivity by

author, the Lotka coefficient, the documents with the highest citations, and the journals with the highest number of publications in the subject of study and the highest number of citations. In addition, VOSviewer was used to visualize bibliometric networks. Finally, the PRISMA protocol was selected to report the findings of the literature research; as a result, 15 records were included in the final review.

Summary of Findings

Results show an exponential growth of post-2020 research, led by China, India, and the US, highlighting customer experience, consumer behavior, and operational challenges in technology integration and empirical measurement as the main thematic clusters. It is concluded that omni-channel strengthens brand equity through consistent communication but requires significant technological investment.

The keyword co-occurrence analysis and the thematic clusters identified confirm that omni-channel has transcended the logistics and commercial fields to become a transversal concept encompassing consumer behavior, brand experience, engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty. In particular, the cluster linked to "consumer behavior" reflects the centrality of the customer as a key factor in business decision-making. At the same time, other groups, such as "technology and e-commerce", emphasize the importance of digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and automation in building brand equity.

Findings confirm that at the intersection of organizational design, relationship marketing, and personalized experience lies the omni-channel strategy. From this perspective, the value of a brand is understood as a dynamic construction influenced by technological, emotional, and

symbolic factors, particularly among consumers who value personalization, ease of access, and trust.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper contributes to the literature in at least three ways. First of all, it explores the relationship between omni-channel marketing as a strategy that improves communication between businesses and customers and consolidates brand equity. The academic literature has focused on analyzing other elements that can contribute to building brand equity; however, this is one of the few papers that explores omni-channel as one of these elements.

The second contribution of this research is to map, using biometric indicators and visualization tools, the co-occurrence networks and main tendencies in academic research on omni-channel and brand equity. This contribution is significant because it allows us to map the study's landscape in these topics and future research lines.

Third contribution of this research is the qualitative review of the 15 selected papers that address the specific relationship between omni-channel and brand equity as a strategy to build a brand based on customer’ needs satisfaction. Through the detailed analysis of these papers, this document contributes to the current literature by identifying hypotheses regarding the mechanisms underlying this relationship and how commercial and communication strategies in an omni-channel environment can become in a crucial tool to promote brand equity in companies. Finally, future research should address empirical sectoral gaps and omni-channel impact attribution models.

ORIGIN LABELING ENHANCES RETAILER SUSTAINABILITY PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS

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Keywords: origin labels, country-of-origin, state-of-origin, sustainability perceptions

Description: This paper examines the influence of origin labels (both country-of-origin and state-of-origin) on consumer evaluations, showing that both types of labels boost sustainability perceptions, but state-of-origin labels have a stronger effect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

While there is a substantial body of research on origin labeling (Usunier, 2006), review papers suggest that there needs to be more research on the topic due to numerous emerging gaps. The first gap is incorporating a better understanding of new factors that evolve due to changing global conditions (Gürhan-Canli, Sarial-Abi, & Hayran, 2018; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Another gap is the need to examine origin labels in more realistic contexts, with so much of prior research just mentioning an origin through text in survey-based analysis (Fischer & Zeugner-Roth, 2017). Additionally, the origin labeling literature has predominantly focused on country-of-origin labeling, leaving another gap in the literature to understand how consumers may have differing responses to more micro-level origins, such as states or provinces (Jung, Jones, Haugtvedt, & Banerjee, 2020). Our research questions address each of the gaps in the origin

labeling literature while also examining how origin labeling can signal retailer sustainability through product assortment. Using realistic advertisements, in retailer store layouts, and combining both self-report and physiological measurement across four studies, our research showcases the relevance of sourcing local products to improve retailer sustainability perceptions and purchase behavior.

Method and Data

Study 1 Method. A panel of 200 US adults (58% women, M_{age} = 40.46, *SD* = 14.25) participated in the study via Prolific in exchange for a small cash incentive. All participants completed an online implicit attitude test (IAT) conducted using the IATgen software (Carpenter et al., 2019). In the study, respondents were asked to classify words and images that were shown in the middle of their screens across four categories: (1) local words, (2) international words, (3) sustainability-related words, and (4) non-sustainability words.

Study 2 Method. One-hundred and twenty-one undergraduate business students (M_{age} = 22.18, *SD* = 3.89; 58.5% female) from a university in the US participated in this study in exchange for a small cash incentive. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (origin label: present, absent) manipulated through an advertisement. During the study, participants were connected to physiological measurement equipment (specifically, galvanic skin response technology).

Study 3 Method. Two-hundred and ninety-eight U.S. adults from Prolific (M_{age} = 45.93, *SD* = 15.84; 51.5% female) participated in this study in exchange for a small cash incentive.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (origin label: country-of-origin, state-of-origin, absent) manipulated through an advertisement.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 Findings. Findings from this study revealed that respondents categorized stimuli quicker when we paired local words with sustainable words than when local words were paired with non-sustainable words. Hence, this study corroborates the implicit belief that labels signaling a local origin are perceived as more sustainable.

Study 2 Findings. This study's findings corroborate evidence from our prior studies in showing the positive effects of origin labeling,. We also provide further evidence for the influences of origin labeling on sustainability perceptions, such that individuals whose home location is represented by an origin label feel that retailers carrying such labeled products take more measures to be sustainable.

Study 3 Findings. We first show that origin labeling (whether country-of-origin or state-of-origin) leads to more positive retailer evaluations and product evaluations. Findings also show that all types of origin labeling led to greater sustainability perceptions of the retailer and the products they carry, although state-of-origin labels tend to be slightly more effective than country-of-origin labels. We then provide evidence for the explanatory mechanism of sustainability perceptions in showing mediation through both retailer sustainability perceptions and product sustainability perceptions.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research makes several important contributions to academia in the retailing literature. First, we examine how origin labeling on products for both micro and global origins can cue renewed interest by consumers and provide a competitive advantage for retailers. Second, our research provides a more realistic overview of consumer responses to origin cues in retailing contexts using a multi-method approach that does not solely rely on self-report measures, thereby providing more realistic information about consumer perceptions of sustainability initiatives in retailing. We also provide clear indications for retailers as well. Our results clearly demonstrate the value of having a locally-sourced product assortment. Retailers should, when possible, actively source products from the local area around the store and promote these products as such. We also show that origin-cues cue sustainability, even when consumers are not aware they do, because consumers have established associations between origin labeled products and sustainability. This finding should encourage retailers to identify as often as possible the origin of their products and communicate this information to consumers, especially when products are locally sourced within a retailer's country, state, or other local region.

Extended Abstract

PERCEIVED BIAS THREAT: CONCEPTUALIZING HOW FEAR OF APPEARING RACIST SHAPES INTERRACIAL SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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Keywords: Perceived bias threat, Cross-race service encounters, Frontline employees, Interracial interactions

Description: This conceptual research introduces perceived bias threat (PBT) as a novel construct capturing frontline employees' situational concern that their actions may be perceived as racially biased during cross-race service encounters, and develops a theoretical framework outlining its antecedents, moderators, and behavioral consequences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the United States more racially and ethnically diverse than ever before (U.S. Census Bureau 2024), cross-race interactions have become an integral feature of everyday life. Despite their frequency, these interactions remain mentally taxing, requiring greater cognitive effort than same-race interactions (Richeson and Shelton 2007). In the present research, we focus on a relatively underexplored consequence of this dynamic: the psychological burden on racial-majority individuals concerned that their actions may be perceived as racially biased, regardless of their intent.

We introduce perceived bias threat (PBT), a situational concern that one's behavior might be viewed as racist. Preliminary evidence (e.g., Goff, Steele, and Davies 2008) points to a consistent pattern: when race is *salient* and *social stakes are high*, White individuals often engage in compensatory or avoidant behaviors to reduce the risk of appearing biased.

Despite these initial insights, literature remains fragmented and lacks a unified conceptual foundation. We aim to address this gap by formally defining PBT, delineating it from related perspectives, and outlining its implications for understanding behavior in interracial service encounters. In doing so, we provide a novel lens on how concerns about appearing biased, rather than being biased, can shape service interactions between customers and employees.

Summary of Findings

This conceptual research introduces PBT, a novel construct defined as a situational concern among frontline employees that their actions may be perceived as racially biased during cross-race service encounters, regardless of their actual intent. Unlike stereotype threat, which centers on fears of confirming negative stereotypes about one's own group and involves competence-related concerns (Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002), PBT shifts focus to external social perception and warmth-related identity concerns such as fairness and moral judgment.

The proposed framework identifies two primary antecedents: interaction sensitivity (emotionally charged encounters like service failures) and decision-making ambiguity (situations requiring discretionary choices without clear policies). Moderating factors operate at cultural (regional anti-bias norms), organizational (diversity training, psychological safety, audience composition), and individual levels (motivation to avoid prejudice, interracial experience, conflict avoidance).

PBT produces variable behavioral outcomes distinct from stereotype threat's typical disengagement pattern. Employees may exhibit avoidant behaviors (physical or psychological distancing), compensatory responses (overaccommodation, enhanced service recovery), or procedural adherence (defaulting to scripts to avoid discretionary decisions). These responses reflect impression-management anxiety rather than explicit bias. By conceptualizing PBT, this research advances understanding of dominant-group behavior in diverse marketplace settings and offers guidance for promoting equitable, authentic service delivery.

Statement of Key Contributions

While existing research has examined prejudice, aversive racism, and stereotype threat, PBT fills a critical gap by shifting attention from stable attitudes or competence-based concerns to situational concerns about warmth and fairness in interracial service encounters. This research advances understanding of dominant-group behavior in these contexts and contributes to both theory and practice as follows.

First, we extend identity threat theory by conceptualizing PBT as an indirect identity threat, externally oriented toward impression management, thus distinguishing it from stereotype threat’s direct identity threat centered on self-evaluation. Second, we enrich services marketing literature by linking PBT to concrete behavioral outcomes in frontline work, showing how it can produce both avoidant and compensatory behaviors. Third, we develop a conceptual framework that specifies antecedents, moderators, and consequences of PBT, creating a foundation for empirical measurement and hypothesis testing.

From a practical standpoint, PBT explains why well-intentioned employees may respond counterproductively in racially sensitive encounters, not due to bias itself, but due to concern about appearing biased. Recognizing PBT helps companies design targeted interventions:

service guidelines that reduce decision-making ambiguity, diversity training that builds confidence, and psychological safety climates that reduce defensive behaviors.

References are available upon request.

SALES MANAGER CHANGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SALESPERSON PERFORMANCE: AN EXAMINATION ACROSS HIRING SOURCE, SALES EXPERIENCE, AND ORGANIZATIONAL TENURE

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Keywords: Sales Manager Change, Hiring Source, Sales Performance, Organizational Tenure

Description: This study examines the influence of sales manager change on salesperson performance and investigates how this change is moderated by salesperson organizational tenure, the new manager's hiring source (internal vs. external), and the new manager's sales experience.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Sales managers are essential to the selling functions of an organization in order to organize, control, and motivate salespeople. Zoltners, Sinha, and Lorimer (2012) found that 92% of salespeople under top performing Sales Managers either met or exceeded their performance expectations, in contrast with 50% of salespeople under average sales managers achieved either poor or below average performance. While sales managers are an integral part of salesperson success, when a sales manager change occurs, it can possibly cause disruptions for those salespeople who reported to that manager, prompting them to accept or adapt to this change. Given the importance of sales managers in influencing salesperson related job functions and performance, relatively little research has focused on the impact of sales manager change on salespeople. This article uses event systems theory (Morgeson et al., 2015) and the theory of sales shocks (Hartmann et al., 2024) to contend with sales manager change and its impact on salesperson performance. This article also focuses on relevant sales manager constructs such as hiring source (promoted or hired externally), organizational tenure, and sales experience, and salesperson constructs such as organizational tenure, sales experience, and performance to comprehend this phenomenon.

Method And Data

We conducted our study with field data from 385 sales managers and 1590 salespeople from a financial services company in Asia. We collected sales manager/salespeople dyadic data that included quarter wise target details (FY 2021 until FY23). As clarified by the company, quarterly targets are based on goal sheets based on acquisitions in value and volume terms, adequate post disbursement documentation (PDD) and ensuring the non-performing assets are kept standard. Other data includes sales experience, organization tenure and hiring source. Finally, based on

exclusion criteria we used information on 271 sales representatives who report to 168 sales managers, or approximately 1.6 sales representatives per manager (min: 1; max: 13).

All variables were obtained from the company's human resources records and are entirely objective. The dependent variable, *performance*, was assessed based on quarterly targets as a percentage. The *sales manager change* variable was coded as 0 = no manager change and 1 = manager change. The *sales manager hiring source* variable was coded as 0 = internally promoted sales manager and 1 = externally hired sales manager. The remaining key predictors, *organizational tenure*, *sales experience*, and *manager sales experience*, were measured annually as continuous variables.

Summary of Findings

Across the models tested, the results reveal a more nuanced picture of sales manager change. The analysis revealed important differences based on the characteristics of the incoming manager. Salespeople paired with externally hired managers perform up to 11% worse than those assigned to managers promoted from within, highlighting the performance advantages of promoting from within. In addition, the new manager's sales experience plays a nuanced role. Highly experienced managers amplify the performance of longer-tenured salespeople but do not enhance the performance of early-tenure employees. These findings demonstrate that managerial change has significant and multifaceted consequences for salesperson performance, shaped by the alignment between salesperson tenure and the hiring source of the incoming manager.

Statement of Key Contributions

We contribute to the literature of sales managers in the following ways. We explore the positive and negative aspects of sales manager change on salesperson performance. Next, we highlight the

importance of organizational experience and how a change of sales manager can affect salesperson performance. Lastly, our study focuses on whether the new manager is promoted from inside the team or hired from outside the team, has a significant difference in impact on salesperson performance.

This research provides helpful managerial recommendations in two broad areas. First, the impact of the change in sales manager on salesperson performance provides nuanced insights into how characteristics such as hiring source can impact performance. Second, clarity may be provided to senior leadership and talent acquisition teams to fill a vacancy within or hire externally.

This article has several theoretical implications. First, this article supports event systems theory in that events/shocks/changes can lead to new behaviors and features at different levels of an organization. Second, this article extends event system theory and sales shock literature to include the construct of hiring source. Detailing whether a manager is hired externally or promoted from within has significant implications for salespeople.

SALESPERSON FRAUD: DISENTANGLING THE CONDITIONAL EFFECTS OF SALES PERFORMANCE TRAJECTORIES

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Keywords: Sales management; salesperson fraud; ethics; sales momentum; salesperson performance

Description: Using longitudinal objective fraud records from a global insurance company, the authors show that sales performance growth reduces salesperson fraud risk, but that this effect depends on how growth depends on social, temporal, and situational growth characteristics.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Salesperson fraud poses severe risks to firms' performance, customer relationships, and reputation. Prior research has examined a broad set of individual and organizational drivers of salesperson misconduct, including performance pressure, yet empirical work has largely focused on pressure arising from sales failure. While this work has generated important insights, it leaves an open question: How does sales performance growth, rather than failure, shape salesperson fraud risk? This question is particularly relevant in sales contexts, where autonomy, performance-based compensation, and limited supervision heighten both pressure and opportunities for misconduct.

Sales performance growth represents a central signal in sales organizations, shaping evaluations, expectations, and resource allocation. However, growth is not a uniform experience. Depending on how growth unfolds, it may generate positive performance momentum that eases perceived pressure or fail to do so when growth does not provide reliable signals about future performance. In particular, the social, situational, and temporal characteristics of growth, such as peer outperformance, product breadth, and early, salient spikes, shape the extent to which salespeople perceive their performance as sustainable and controllable, thereby influencing subsequent fraud risk.

We address this gap by examining how sales performance growth trajectories shape subsequent salesperson fraud risk.

Method And Data

We cooperated with the compliance department of a major global insurance company to obtain objective records of salesperson fraud. The firm tracked severe fraud, including embezzlement, intentional deception, and document forgery. These records were linked to detailed salesperson-level performance data drawn from the firm's sales, finance, operations, human resources, and compliance systems. Our longitudinal dataset comprises 4,488 yearly observations nested within 1,126 salespeople observed over a five-year period, of whom 99 engaged in documented fraud. This setting provides a rare opportunity to study salesperson fraud using objective behavioral data rather than self-reports or experimental proxies.

We operationalize sales performance growth as year-over-year changes in sales outcomes and capture distinct characteristics of the growth trajectory. Specifically, we examine social characteristics (growth relative to peers), situational characteristics (the breadth of products

through which growth is achieved), and temporal characteristics (the velocity and salience of growth, reflected in early-year growth and performance spikes).

Using panel regression models with longitudinal salesperson-level data, we estimate how sales performance growth predicts fraud in the subsequent year and how this relationship is contingent on characteristics of the growth trajectory. We address robustness by examining alternative temporal lags and model specifications to account for potential endogeneity.

Summary of Findings

Our findings show that sales performance growth generally reduces salesperson fraud risk. However, this effect depends on how growth unfolds. Growth reduces fraud risk most strongly when it generates clear and reinforcing signals of positive performance momentum.

Specifically, fraud risk declines when growth is characterized by high early-year velocity or pronounced performance spikes, as early and salient success reinforces positive expectations of performance. Growth that reflects strong performance relative to peers further strengthens this effect, suggesting that social validation enhances the momentum generated by growth.

In contrast, growth that is narrowly concentrated within a limited product range weakens the fraud-mitigating effect of performance growth, as success tied to a narrow product range appears less transferable across different selling situations, leaving salespeople more vulnerable to perceived pressure.

Together, these findings demonstrate that performance growth is not uniformly protective against fraud. Growth trajectories that provide strong social, situational, and temporal signals of positive performance momentum reduce fraud risk, whereas growth that lacks such signals may fail to do so. More broadly, growth mitigates fraud risk when it credibly signals

repeatable success and confidence in future performance. Growth that appears fragile or context-specific fails to relieve pressure and may increase fraud risk.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to research on salesperson misconduct and sales performance dynamics in several ways. First, we extend the literature beyond its predominant focus on performance pressure arising from sales failure by introducing sales performance growth trajectories as a novel lens on fraud risk. Drawing on momentum theory and performance pressure theory, we show that growth can serve as a protective force against fraud, but only when it generates reliable momentum.

Second, we advance a process-oriented perspective by demonstrating that the effects of performance growth depend on its underlying social, situational, and temporal characteristics. By distinguishing between reinforcing and constraining growth trajectories, we offer a more nuanced understanding of how performance signals shape salespeople's expectations of future performance.

Third, our use of objective, longitudinal fraud records provides rare behavioral evidence on the dynamics of serious salesperson misconduct.

For managers, our findings highlight the importance of monitoring not only whether salespeople grow but how they grow. By identifying growth patterns that fail to generate sustainable momentum, such as growth concentrated in a narrow product range, managers can intervene proactively to reduce fraud risk before it materializes.

SHELF OCCUPANCY AS SCARCITY CUE: LEVERAGING PERCEIVED SCARCITY TO ENHANCE SMALL DISCOUNTS

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Keywords:

Small discounts, shelf occupancy, perceived scarcity, purchase intentions, retail merchandising

Description:

This research demonstrates that displaying products on “not-full” shelves enhances the effectiveness of small discounts by signaling perceived scarcity, thereby increasing purchase intentions primarily when discount depth is limited.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers increasingly face margin pressures and often rely on small discounts to stimulate sales. Industry reports and marketplace observations indicate a clear shift toward smaller price cuts across categories (Repko and Thomas 2021; Holman and Case 2021). Yet, research consistently shows that small discounts frequently fail to increase purchase intentions and may even backfire by lowering consumer demand (Grewal et al. 1996; Lichtenstein et al. 1991; Cai et al. 2016; del Rio Olivares et al. 2018). Prior work has largely focused on enhancing the perceived magnitude of discounts through "stretching" tactics, but these approaches are often ineffective when discount depth is small because the offer or sale price is not contrasted with the regular price (Biswas and Blair 1991; Chen and Rao 2007; Grewal et al. 1996). Building on this limitation, we ask whether retailers can make small discounts more effective by changing the context rather than the numeric discount itself. Specifically, we investigate whether shelf occupancy functions as a demand-based scarcity cue that enhances the persuasiveness of small discounts. Drawing on scarcity theory (Cialdini 1985; Lynn 1992) and prior shelf-based scarcity research, we examine whether displaying discounted products on "not-full" shelves increases purchase intentions by heightening perceived scarcity, and whether this effect depends on discount size, such that it is strongest for small discounts and attenuated when discounts are moderate.

Method and Data

We conducted three experimental studies examining how shelf occupancy and discount size jointly shape consumers' purchase intentions (PI), and we test perceived scarcity (PS) as the

underlying psychological mechanism. Across studies, participants (recruited via Amazon MTurk) were randomly assigned to pictorial shopping scenarios in which shelf occupancy (full vs. not-full) and discount size (small vs. moderate) were manipulated. Study 1 tested the main effect of shelf occupancy under a small discount. Participants viewed apples offered at a 5% discount displayed on either a full or a "not-full" shelf and reported PI using a three-item scale. Study 2 replicated this design with a different product and different discount (canned soup, 10% discount) and measured PS to test mediation. Study 3 employed a 2 (discount size: small vs. moderate) × 2 (shelf occupancy: full vs. not-full) between-subjects design using dish soap, examining whether the effect of shelf occupancy depends on discount magnitude. Across studies, standard attention and manipulation checks were included, and results were robust to exclusions.

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, results provide converging evidence that shelf occupancy enhances the effectiveness of small discounts by signaling scarcity. Study 1 shows that under a small discount, products displayed on "not-full" shelves generate higher purchase intentions than those displayed on full shelves, supporting the notion that shelf depletion operates as a scarcity cue (H_1). Study 2 identifies the psychological mechanism underlying this effect. "Not-full" shelves increase perceived scarcity, which in turn increases purchase intentions. Mediation analyses confirm that perceived scarcity fully mediates the relationship between shelf occupancy and purchase intention (H_2). Study 3 introduces discount size as a boundary condition. While moderate discounts increase purchase intentions overall, the effect of shelf occupancy emerges only when discounts are small. Specifically, "not-full" shelves increase purchase intentions under small discounts but have no effect under moderate discounts, indicating that deeper price cuts overshadow shelf-based scarcity cues (H_3). Together, these findings demonstrate that shelf

occupancy functions as a scarcity cue primarily when discounts are small, clarifying both the mechanism and boundary conditions of its influence.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the marketing and retailing literature by identifying a cost-effective merchandising tactic that enhances the effectiveness of small discounts, a problem of critical importance for retailers operating under margin pressure. While conventional wisdom assumes that deeper discounts are necessary to drive purchase intentions, our findings demonstrate that displaying products on “not-full” shelves can amplify the impact of small discounts by signaling scarcity. From a managerial perspective, this offers retailers a low-cost mechanism to increase purchase intentions without relying on margin-eroding price reductions. Beyond its practical relevance, this work advances academic understanding of how visual merchandising cues and discount depth interact to shape consumer decision-making. Prior research has largely examined price promotions and scarcity cues independently. In contrast, our studies show that shelf occupancy functions as a demand-based scarcity signal that both mediates and moderates the effect of discount depth on purchase intentions. Specifically, depleted shelves heighten perceived scarcity and increase purchase intentions primarily under small discounts, while deeper discounts reduce reliance on such contextual cues. Taken together, these findings offer clear guidance for managers seeking to align discount depth with shelf presentation, while also extending theory by clarifying the psychological mechanism and boundary conditions through which shelf occupancy and price promotions jointly influence consumer responses.

References are available upon request.

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR AI ADOPTION IN B2B PRICING PROCESSES: A DEPENDENCY MODEL

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Keywords: AI Adoption, b2b Pricing, Dependency Model, Socio-Technical Systems.

Description: This paper develops a dependency model based on expert interviews and literature to explain how interrelated technological, organizational, and human factors enable successful AI adoption in b2b pricing processes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Embedding AI into business processes is increasingly seen as a source of competitive advantage for firms (Krakowski, Luger, and Raisch 2023), prompting a growing body of research on the determinants of successful AI adoption. However, adoption factors and their relative importance are highly context-dependent, requiring domain-specific investigations. B2b pricing is inherently complex, involving multiple departments, vast amounts of information, and personal relationships between salespeople and customers (Alnakhli, Inyang, and Itani 2021; Leung et al. 2019; Peesker, Ryals, and Kerr 2024). Pricing requirements are rising, for example due to emerging business models (e.g., software-as-a-service) (Ghili and Yoon 2024). These developments create both opportunities and challenges for firms, intensifying pressure to adopt more sophisticated pricing approaches. Although AI's potential to enhance b2b pricing processes is documented in literature (e.g., Moradi & Dass, 2022), research on AI adoption in b2b pricing remains scarce. AI adoption research is available for various business contexts, with specifics for each context (e.g., Kanti, Sadia, and Suchismita

2022; Maldonado-Canca et al. 2024). Against this background, the following research question is addressed: *What are success factors for AI adoption in b2b pricing?*

Method And Data

This study follows a qualitative, exploratory research design to investigate success factors influencing AI adoption in b2b pricing. Given the novelty of the topic and the scarcity of prior research explicitly addressing AI in b2b pricing, the research applies an inductive, multi-method approach combining a systematic literature review with expert interviews. First, the authors conducted a structured literature search across Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore. Because AI adoption research specific to pricing is limited, the scope was expanded to related fields such as marketing and sales. The final search string combined AI-related terms with adoption determinants and business domains (pricing, sales, marketing) and targeted publications from 2020–2024. After removing duplicates, 834 articles remained. Screening abstracts reduced this to 26 articles that directly addressed adoption determinants, and a full-text analysis further narrowed the set to 10 studies. These were analyzed to identify adoption factors and their positioning within established theoretical frameworks. Second, ten semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with professionals working in sales, pricing management, and pricing consulting across diverse b2b industries. Interviews took place between August 2024 and February 2025, lasted on average 44 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed. Data analysis followed an inductive coding process.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that successful AI adoption in b2b pricing depends on an interplay of technological, organizational, human, and environmental drivers. On the technological side, organizations must perceive a clear relative advantage from AI, supported by strong data management practices and adequate IT infrastructure. In addition, transparency and explainability emerge as pivotal requirements, as users need to understand and justify AI-

supported price recommendations, particularly in customer-facing negotiations. Organizational drivers include management support, which is necessary not only for resource allocation but also for enabling experimentation and iterative improvement of AI solutions. Furthermore, adoption is shaped by decision responsibility structures: firms must clarify when AI recommendations can be overridden and who ultimately holds authority. Business process compatibility, especially incentive alignment between sales objectives and AI-supported pricing goals, represents another critical success factor. Human drivers primarily concern user acceptance and user training, highlighting that employees require both skills and confidence to apply AI outputs in practice. Finally, environmental factors manifest through increasing price pressure and information overload, pushing organizations toward decision support systems that can handle complex pricing inputs more effectively. The dependency model emphasizes that adoption success arises from combinations of these factors: for example, management support remains insufficient without aligned incentives and trust-building mechanisms. Overall, AI adoption in b2b pricing is best understood as a socio-technical transformation requiring organizational readiness and willingness for change.

Statement of Key Contributions

Theoretically, the study advances understanding of AI adoption by integrating the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework with Socio-Technical Systems (STS) theory and Activity Theory (AT), thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of adoption dynamics in a complex managerial domain. While TOE clarifies adoption conditions across technological, organizational, and environmental dimensions, STS highlights the need for alignment between technical solutions and social structures. AT adds explanatory depth by showing how contradictions between algorithmic authority and human judgment can trigger organizational learning, especially in pricing contexts where human expertise and relationship management remain central. Methodologically, the research

contributes by combining a systematic literature review with expert interviews to develop a dependency model that makes interdependencies between adoption drivers explicit. This model provides a theoretically grounded basis for subsequent configurational approaches, such as Qualitative Comparative Analysis, to identify sufficient combinations of success factors. Practically, the study offers guidance for managers implementing AI in b2b pricing, emphasizing the importance of management commitment, robust data foundations, IT capabilities, transparent and explainable solutions, and user involvement through training and acceptance-building measures. Importantly, the study demonstrates that AI adoption success in b2b pricing is contingent on structural and behavioral alignment rather than on technical sophistication alone.

References are available upon request.

THE DARK SIDE OF CONFIDENCE: HOW SALESPERSON COMPETITIVENESS AND COMPETITIVE CLIMATE SHAPE CUSTOMER VALUE CO-CREATION AND COMMITMENT – DYADIC STUDY

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Keywords: Salesperson Competitiveness, value co-creation, commitment, self-efficacy, psychological climate

Description: This paper examines how salesperson trait competitiveness and competitive psychological climate shape customer value co-creation behaviors and relationship commitment, highlighting the contingent (double-edged) role of salesperson self-efficacy using matched salesperson–customer dyadic data.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how salesperson trait competitiveness and competitive psychological climate impact customer participation, citizenship behaviors, and commitment to the salesperson. Prior studies have largely focused on either individual customer traits or firm-level service practices (Yi and Gong 2013; Groth 2005), overlooking the interplay between salesperson competitiveness and the indications sent by the firm's competitive psychological climate. Trait competitiveness is associated with extra effort and stamina among salespersons (Houston, Bettencourt, and Wenger 2002); however, its relationship with customer-centered outcomes remains underexplored. Similarly, the sales organization’s competitive psychological climate, which encompasses employees' shared perceptions of how competition and performance are emphasized, can signal to salespeople which behaviors are valued, thereby shaping their orientation toward customer engagement. (Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005; Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey, 2013). This study also investigates the extent to which self-efficacy moderates the main effects (Bandura 1997; Spreitzer 1995)

Method and Data

The sample for this study comprises salespeople and customers recruited through a matched-survey design across multiple companies with a business-to-business sales focus. The final sample consisted of 233 usable salesperson-customer dyads. All constructs were measured using published scales. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. MPlus 8.8 statistical software was used to evaluate the proposed hypotheses of the study, which includes both the direct and the moderating effects. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the measurement model. After establishing the measurement model, the structural model was estimated. The two-stage approach better suits the analysis of the study. In the final step, after confirming the linear model, the moderating variable self-efficacy was included in the analysis.

Summary of Findings

The study's findings showed that salespeople's trait competitiveness and the competitive psychological climate were positively related to both value co-creation behaviors (customer partnership and citizenship behaviors) and customers' commitment to the salesperson. Customers' Value co-creation behaviors were found to have strong relationship with customers' commitment to salespeople, reinforcing the notion that relational investments are reciprocated through deeper engagement and loyalty.

The results also revealed an important nuance regarding salespeople's self-efficacy. Findings showed that while salespeople's trait competitiveness is generally beneficial, its effects are not uniformly beneficial when salespeople exhibit high self-efficacy. When high levels of salespeople's' trait competitiveness are combined with strong self-efficacy, the salesperson–customer interaction appears to shift towards a reduction in customers' willingness to participate in value co-creation. In contrast, salespeople's self-efficacy does not impact the relationships between salespeople's psychological climate and value co-creation behaviors or customers' commitment.

Key Contributions

This study enriches the academic marketing discipline by integrating salesperson trait competitiveness, competitive psychological climate, and self-efficacy into the Relational Exchange Theory (RET) framework. While existing research has separately examined salesperson dispositions or organizational climate, our findings demonstrate how these factors jointly influence customer participation and citizenship behaviors, which, in turn, strengthen commitment to the salesperson. By showing that competitiveness can both drive value co-creation and, when combined with high self-efficacy, reduce the positive effects, we extend the literature on salesperson traits as "double-edged" constructs. This nuance adds depth to understanding value co-creation processes in business-to-business exchanges and underscores the conditions under which salesperson traits facilitate or hinder relational outcomes.

This research offers valuable implications for firms, particularly those with relationship-based sales models. Sales managers can use these insights to refine recruitment and training practices by balancing the motivational benefits of competitiveness with the relational safeguards of empathy and customer orientation. HR leaders can also apply these findings to design incentive systems that foster healthy, competitive climates without encouraging overly aggressive behaviors. Finally, professional associations and training bodies can draw on this research to enhance their development programs that build salesperson self-efficacy in ways that channel competitiveness toward collaborative, long-term value creation.

THE PRICE OF HEALTHY FOODS? RECONCILING THE PERCEPTION-REALITY GAP.

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Keywords: Lay-beliefs, Healthy = Expensive Intuition, the Nutri-Score

Description: This research investigates whether the Nutri-Score labels trigger a healthy = expensive intuition among consumers and compares these perceptions against actual market data to determine how health cues and price structures interact to shape food choices.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research question

Consumers frequently rely on intuitive lay beliefs to navigate complex food environments, particularly the healthy = expensive heuristic that links nutritional quality to higher costs (Haws et al., 2017; Jo & Lusk, 2018). While policy-backed labels like the Nutri-Score (NS) are designed to simplify decision-making and steer shoppers toward healthier options (De Temmerman et al., 2021; Julia et al., 2018), they operate within a marketplace where the actual relationship between health and price is empirically contested and metric-dependent (Carlson & Frazao, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Primavesi et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2013).

This research systematically evaluates the interplay between Nutri-Score labeling, consumer intuition, and market reality. We investigate whether favorable Nutri-Scores activate a healthy = expensive inference that persists even when full price information is available; determine the

label's relative decision weight in realistic multi-attribute choice settings; and benchmark these consumer perceptions against large-scale retail data.

Method and Data

Across three studies, we combine experimental manipulation, choice modeling, and market data analysis to trace the healthy = expensive intuition. Study 1 employed a 2 (Nutri-Score: A vs. E) × 2 (Price: present vs. not present) between-subjects experiment with consumers in Belgium and the Netherlands. We analyzed the perceived expensiveness of brand-neutral mock-ups to test whether favorable Nutri-Scores drive price inferences. Study 2 embedded the label in a multi-attribute choice-based conjoint (CBC) task. Using a Hierarchical Bayes multinomial logit model (Allenby & Rossi, 2005; Sermas & Colias, 2014), we estimated the decision weight of the Nutri-Score relative to price, weight, and energy (kcal) under health-goal and control conditions. Finally, Study 3 benchmarked these perceptions against reality using a scraped dataset of over 7,000 products from two major Western European retailers. We imputed missing health scores via random forest classifiers (Breiman, 2001) and derived brand-value metrics using the TrueSkill algorithm (Herbrich et al., 2006). Multilevel regression models with category-specific random intercepts were then used to determine whether favorable Nutri-Scores systematically predict higher within-category retail prices across different metrics (€/kg vs. €/kcal).

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, we identify a systematic yet qualified link between Nutri-Score labels, price perceptions, and market reality. Study 1 demonstrates that the Nutri-Score triggers a healthy = expensive inference, but strictly under limited information. A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 476) = 13.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 \approx .028$: while Nutri-Score A products

were perceived as significantly costlier than E-labeled alternatives when price was hidden (ΔM = 0.54, $p < .001$), this effect vanished when prices were visible ($p = .248$).

Study 2 confirms that the label is a central decision driver. In multi-attribute choices, Nutri-Score consistently held the highest relative importance (31–39%), significantly outweighing price (19–24%) and calories (14–21%), $F(3, 1101) = 272.71$, $p < .001$.

Finally, benchmarking these perceptions against retail data (Study 3) reveals a metric-dependent reality: multilevel models show products with favorable Nutri-Scores (A/B) are significantly more expensive per kilocalorie (β_{NS} = –0.15 to –0.19, both $p < .001$) yet significantly cheaper per kilogram (β_{NS}= 0.02–0.03, $p < .001$ and $p = .009$). Thus, the consumer intuition in Study 1 is confirmed when comparing products on a €/kcal basis, but not when using the common €/kg metric.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions to lay beliefs, health labeling, and food pricing. First, it refines the healthy = expensive intuition by showing that favorable Nutri-Scores act as price cues under limited information, yet this inference largely dissipates when price is visible (Chan & Zhang, 2022; Haws et al., 2017; Jo & Lusk, 2018). Second, we extend multi-attribute decision-making research by demonstrating that Nutri-Score retains substantial decision weight in realistic settings, often outweighing calories and price, even without explicit health goals. This confirms that the label's influence is behaviorally relevant rather than perceptual noise (Godden et al., 2023; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973).Third, we contribute to food pricing literature by using NS to examine whether healthier products (A/B) are systematically priced higher than less healthy ones (D/E). By documenting that price differences depend on the metric used (per-kg vs. per-kcal), we

show that metric sensitivity extends to the granular product level (Carlson & Frazao, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Primavesi et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2013). Taken together, the studies show that the healthy = expensive pattern primarily reflects a context-dependent inference from simplified health cues, and that whether it appears in market data depends on the price metric used (€/kg vs. €/kcal).

References are available upon request.

THE SURPRISING BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF CUSTOMER-TO-STORE TRANSITIONS IN B2B SALES

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Keywords: sales management, B2B relationship management, customer relationships, sales resource allocation, sales channels

Description: Our paper examines Customer-to-Store transitions in B2B sales and shows that shifting customers from sales and service via inside sales to physical stores differentially affects financial relationship outcomes depending on customers' prior sales growth and buying complexity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As B2B firms face increasing pressure to scale sales operations while preserving profitability within customer relationships, many reconsider how they allocate sales resources. This challenge is particularly salient for lower-value business customers, who often account for the majority of a firm's customer base. In response, firms increasingly implement Customer-to-Store transitions (C2Ss), shifting selected customers from proactive inside sales to reactive service via physical stores. Such C2Ss promise cost reductions while maintaining face-to-face interaction. Despite growing managerial relevance, research provides little guidance on whether and when such transitions create or destroy relational and financial value. Prior work emphasizes the efficiency of inside sales but highlights its limitations in complex B2B contexts requiring trust and high-quality interaction. At the same time, research on service divestment and relationship disruption cautions that reducing personalized sales support may signal relationship downgrading, erode commitment, and increase churn. This tension creates a critical disconnect between managerial optimism and academic caution, leaving firms uncertain about C2Ss' consequences.

We address this gap by conceptualizing C2Ss as transformational relationship events (TREs) that reshape customer relationships. Our study examines how C2Ss affect the selling firm's revenues with transitioned customers, conditional on prior sales growth and buying complexity.

Method And Data

To empirically assess whether and when C2Ss resolve or exacerbate the tension between efficiency and relationship preservation, we leverage a natural field experiment conducted by

the German B2B unit of a Fortune 500 telecommunications firm. To reduce cost-to-serve among lower-value business customers while maintaining face-to-face access, the firm piloted a C2S by reassigning selected customers from proactive inside sales to reactive service via physical stores. Importantly, the transition altered only the sales channel, leaving products, prices, and contractual conditions unchanged.

Our final sample comprises 3,509 transitioned customers and 5,095 matched control customers who remained in inside sales. We observe both groups over five years, two pre- and three post-transition, using ERP data that capture annual revenue from simple (standardized, low-complexity) and complex (customized, consultative) offerings, yielding 43,020 observations. We operationalize relational contingencies using pre-transition sales growth and buying complexity, allowing us to isolate how customer expectations shape the consequences of C2Ss.

We estimate causal effects using difference-in-differences (DiD) analyses on a propensity-score matched sample, supported by fixed effects to absorb time-invariant customer heterogeneity. To strengthen identification, we perform several robustness checks and examine effects over time with staggered DiD models.

Summary of Findings

Our findings show that C2Ss affect the level and composition of customers' sales revenue with the selling firm. On average, transitioning customers from inside sales to physical stores reduces revenue from simple offerings by 6.8%, while increasing revenue from complex offerings by 12.2%. These opposing effects explain why total revenue changes remain modest, yet mask substantial reallocations across both revenue domains.

Importantly, the effects of C2Ss are highly contingent on customers' relational expectations. Customers with strong pre-transition sales growth, indicating expectations of continued relationship development, experience significantly weaker gains in complex offerings, suggesting that C2Ss disrupt relational continuity in growth-oriented relationships. In contrast, customers with high prior buying complexity benefit disproportionately from the transition: store-based interactions amplify already prevalent complex sales while accelerating disengagement from simple, low-involvement purchases. Time-staggered analyses further reveal that these effects persist and intensify over three years, indicating that customers gradually adapt their buying behavior to the new channel structure rather than reacting only temporarily.

Overall, the results demonstrate that C2Ss do not uniformly erode or enhance performance. Instead, they reconfigure relationships toward complex value creation, conditional on the alignment between store capabilities and customer expectations.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research provides the first empirical investigation of C2Ss, a channel transition in which firms reassign existing customers from proactive inside sales to reactive sales and service via physical stores. The study makes four key contributions to B2B marketing and sales literature. First, it conceptualizes C2Ss as a distinct relational phenomenon and reframes physical stores as relational assets rather than purely transactional channels. Second, it embeds C2Ss within the literature on transformational relationship events, demonstrating that such channel shifts fundamentally reshape customer relationships and revenue structures. Third, it shows that the effects of C2Ss are contingent on customers' buying task complexity and relational expectations, with heterogeneous impacts that persist and intensify over time. Fourth, it

challenges prevailing assumptions in service divestment and relationship disruption research by revealing that C2Ss can yield positive outcomes when store capabilities align with customer needs. Collectively, these contributions advance understanding of channel transitions as strategic relationship interventions.

From a managerial perspective, the findings guide the design of profitable hybrid sales systems. Managers can leverage C2Ss to increase efficiency and profitability by reallocating suitable customer segments, particularly lower-value but complex customers, to stores, while avoiding C2Ss in growing relationships where relational downgrading would destroy value.

UNCOVERING DRIVERS OF SUPERMARKET SATISFACTION: AN EXPLAINABLE MACHINE LEARNING APPROACH

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Keywords: customer satisfaction, supermarket retailing, store image, retail analytics, explainable AI.

Description: This paper develops an explainable machine learning framework that uses an optimized Random Forest and SHAP analysis to predict supermarket customer satisfaction and identify the key brand-level drivers behind it.

ABSTRACT

This study proposes an explainable machine learning framework for predicting supermarket

customer satisfaction using an optimized Random Forest and SHAP analysis. Based on survey data from 1,716 customers, the model explains over 70% of satisfaction variance and shows that brand perceptions matter more than operational factors.

INTRODUCTION

In an era of abundant choice and low switching costs, retailers face declining customer loyalty and increasing difficulty in differentiating themselves. Customer satisfaction has a central role in retail marketing and is tied to outcomes that matter to managers, like repeat visits, customer retention and loyalty (Dubrovski 2001). Considering the supermarket sector, where many similar products in terms of characteristics and prices can be provided to customers, satisfaction becomes one of the few areas where retailers need to stand out. Therefore, it is important to understand which factors of the in-store experience influence customer satisfaction (Siebers, Zhang, and Li 2013).

Despite the importance of customer satisfaction prediction, most studies rely on traditional statistical techniques (e.g. linear regression models), which assume that each predictor affects customer satisfaction in a direct way. However, this approach does not always capture the actual drivers for satisfaction (Aldunate et al. 2022). For this reason, more recent research has focused on applying Machine Learning (ML) to predict customer satisfaction. However, even though these models perform better, they do not explain how specific predictors contribute to the outcome (Dhanushkodi et al. 2025).

The aim of this study is to build a predictive model of customer satisfaction that combines high accuracy with interpretability, allowing for a clear understanding of how individual factors influence the outcome.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding customer satisfaction, the expectancy - disconfirmation theory is one of the most widely used frameworks, according to which customers form expectations before a shopping experience and then compare them to what actually happened (Lin and Lekhawipat 2016). When the experience exceeds expectations, a positive disconfirmation is observed which often leads to higher satisfaction. If the experience is worse than expected, a negative disconfirmation occurs which usually results in dissatisfaction (Wang and Zhou 2023).

Another relevant research stream focuses on retail service quality. This approach examines how customers evaluate different dimensions of their experience while shopping. Some dimensions relate to service characteristics like product quality, variety, prices and offers, while others address service-related factors like the layout of the store, its atmosphere, ease of access, and the helpfulness of the staff (Shamim, Abid, and Ahmad 2024).

Recent research has focused on predicting customer satisfaction using ML. For example, in the work of Dhanushkodi et al. (2025), satisfaction is predicted by training a Support Vector Machine (SVM) and a Multi-Layer Perceptron (MLP) classifiers on customer recency, frequency and monetary features, with both models achieving an accuracy of 99%. The authors suggest that such high-accuracy models help managers, segment customers effectively and apply target marketing strategies, like prioritizing “best customers” for retention offers, re-engaging at-risk ones and optimizing inventory and promotions based on the patterns of the model. Zaghloul, Barakat, and Rezk (2024) compared numerous ML models like Logistic Regression, SVM, Random Forest (RF), Gradient Boost Classifier (GBC) and MLP to predict customer satisfaction using order, delivery and payment features. RF achieved the best performance with an accuracy of 92%. Wangkiat and Polprasert (2023) also reported RF as the best performing model. Finally,

Stylianou and Pantelidou (2025) compared logistic regression, RF, K-Nearest Neighbor, XGBoost, and LightGBM, with RF and XGBoost achieving the highest performance.

However, existing work in marketing stops at reporting the performance metrics of the predictors (e.g. accuracy for classifiers or R^2 for regressors). While these models can identify which customers are satisfied or not, they often leave unanswered the most important managerial question of why the model reached those predictions. This lack of explainability is a significant gap because without knowing which features drive satisfaction, managers cannot use the predictive power in targeted actions.

To fill this gap this work extends previous ML approaches by incorporating explainability through SHapley Additive exPlanations (SHAP) (Kim and Kim 2022) to identify the most influential predictors of customer satisfaction in the supermarket sector. The analysis is based on survey data capturing customer evaluations of store attributes using a RF regressor whose hyperparameters are optimized through a Computational Intelligence (CI) algorithm, and particularly Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO).

DATA

Our data were collected through a telephone survey of a random sample drawn from the population of a large European metropolitan area. The survey was conducted by the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing facilities of a local university. Our sample includes 1,716 respondents who provided complete data.

The dependent variable is *overall customer satisfaction* measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Very dissatisfied” to “Very satisfied”, which has a mean score of 3.96 (*SD*=0.63), indicating that the average respondent is moderately satisfied.

The predictors include two conceptual sets of variables. The first set consists of nine store

evaluation criteria, assessing different aspects of the supermarket on a five-point Likert scale from “Very bad” to “Very Good”. Particularly, Q1_1 assessed perceptions of supermarket prices(*M*=3.84, *SD*=0.82), Q1_2 evaluated product variety (*M*=4.13, *SD*=0.71), Q1_3 focused on product quality (*M*=4.24, *SD*=0.64), Q1_4 measured their satisfaction with store layout (*M*=3.89, *SD*=0.79), Q1_5 concerned ease of access, which had the highest mean of 4.31 (*SD*=0.77), Q1_6 assessed the existence of special offers (*M*=3.97, *SD*=0.78), Q1_7 captured service quality (*M*=4.09, *SD*=0.75), Q1_8 examined the store atmosphere (*M*=3.94, *SD*=0.76), and finally, Q1_9 addressed the reputation of the store (*M*=4.12, *SD*=0.73). The second set of predictors captures broader evaluative perceptions. Q2_1 asked respondents to rate the overall quality of the store on a five-point Likert scale, from “Very bad” to Very good” (*M*=4.10, *SD*=0.64). Q2_2 measured the degree to which the store is liked (*M*=4.02, *SD*=0.66) on a five-point Likert scale from “I do not like it at all” to “I like it very much”. Finally, Q2_3 captured the overall opinion of the store (*M*=4.04, *SD*=0.66) on a five-point Likert scale from “Very negative” to “Very positive”.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION

Linear Regression Benchmark

As a baseline model, a Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was fitted using the twelve predictors to predict overall satisfaction. The model achieved an R^2 value of 0.58, indicating that approximately 58% of the variance in customer satisfaction was explained. Regarding the error metrics, the model had a Mean Absolute Error (MAE) of 0.28 and a Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) of 0.41. Regarding the coefficients, the strongest positive association was observed for the overall opinion of the store (Q2_3) (β=0.38), followed by store likability (Q2_2) (β=0.21) and store quality (Q2_1) (β=0.19). Some predictors had small positive effects, like the product quality (β=0.03) and offers (0.02) while others showed slightly negative coefficients like product

variety (β=-0.01) and service quality (β=-0.01). However, the predictive capabilities of the MLR are constrained by its assumptions of linear relationships between predictors and outcome, which limit its ability to capture complex, non-linear interactions common in retail contexts.

Random Forest

The RF regressor is an ensemble learning method that builds many decision trees during training and combines their results to produce one final output. Even though it is sensitive to hyperparameter tuning, it reduces overfitting and can model non-linear relationships (Weinhold et al. 2020). When applied to the present dataset using its default hyperparameters, the RF regressor achieved an R^2 value of 0.55, slightly lower than the MLR model. Its MAE and RMSE values of 0.25 and 0.40 respectively are similar to those of the MLR model.

Fuzzy Self-Tuning PSO - Optimized RF

To increase the performance of RF, a hyperparameter optimization process was applied, using the Fuzzy Self-Tuning PSO (FST-PSO) algorithm as proposed by Nobile et al. (2018). FST-PSO is an advanced version of PSO that integrates fuzzy logic to adjust the behavior of the swarm dynamically. In traditional PSO, the movement of each particle is controlled by fixed parameters that balance exploration and exploitation. In contrast, FST-PSO uses fuzzy rules to automatically tune these parameters according to the current state of the swarm, making it an adaptive optimizer that does not require user intervention. For more details see Nobile et al. (2018).

In our implementation, each particle represents a vector of RF hyperparameters. Although PSO is designed to perform in continuous search spaces, the hyperparameters of RF include a mix of continuous, integer and categorical values. To address this, each particle of the swarm is pre-processed before entering the objective function. Elements corresponding to integer hyperparameters (e.g. number of trees) are rounded to the nearest integer, while for categorical

hyperparameters (e.g. criterion) the continuous value is first rounded and then mapped to the corresponding level of category. For example, the first vector element is the number of trees (*n_estimators*), an integer between 2 and 1000. The *criterion* element comes next, which measures the quality of splits, mapped to an integer value between 0 and 3, where 0 corresponds to “squared_error”, 1 corresponds to “absolute_error”, 2 to “friedman_mse” and 3 to “poisson”. In a similar way, the rest of the RF hyperparameters are selected based on the RandomForestRegressor — scikit-learn 1.7.1 documentation (2025).

During the optimization process, FST – PSO explores the search space to adjust the hyperparameters in order to maximize the predictive performance of RF on the test set. The optimization process was repeated 10 times, until 50,000 function evaluations are performed. The optimized RF substantially outperformed its default counterpart, achieving an R^2 metric of 0.72 and an adjusted R^2 metric of 0.71, explaining more than 70% of the variance in customer satisfaction. A 10-fold cross validation verified the generated results (R^2=0.70). Error metrics also improved, with MAE reduced to 0.16 and RMSE to 0.35.

The feature importance analysis revealed that Q2_3 (overall opinion of the supermarket) was the most influential predictor with an importance of 0.41, followed by Q2_2 (store likability) at 0.26 and Q2_1 (store quality) at 0.203. Among the first set of criteria, Q1_6 (special offers) had the highest importance (0.03), while other characteristics like price, service and atmosphere had smaller contributions. This suggests that perceptions of store identity and quality play a greater role in customer satisfaction prediction than individual operational attributes.

SHAP Analysis

SHAP analysis is an explainable Artificial Intelligence (AI) method based on Shapley values from cooperative game theory (Kim and Kim 2022). It quantifies how much each predictor

contributes to a model's output, both for individual predictions and on average across the entire dataset. The SHAP summary plot of the optimized RF model is first generated, which is a bar plot that ranks the predictors by their mean absolute SHAP values, which represent their average influence. In our case, Q2_3 followed by Q2_2 and Q2_1 emerge again as the most influential predictors. Regarding the first set of questions, the SHAP ranking revealed that price is the most important one, followed by special offers, in contrast to the RF model rankings.

The SHAP beeswarm plot (Figure 1) is then generated, which demonstrates how each predictor influences satisfaction across all observations, consistent with the summary ranking. Each dot represents a single observation positioned horizontally according to its SHAP value and colored by the feature's value (blue = low, red = high). Figure 1 demonstrates that higher values of Q2_3 and Q2_2 push the predicted satisfaction above the mean predicted satisfaction (3.98), whereas lower values reduce it.

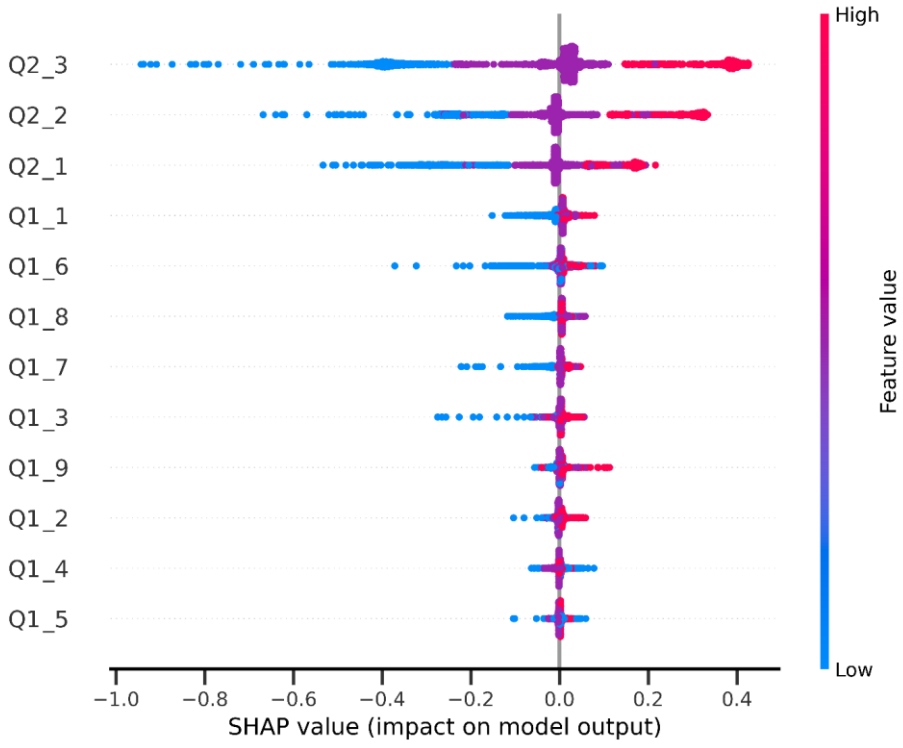


Figure 1: SHAP beeswarm plot

SHAP dependence plots are then generated, which investigate potential interactions between predictors and their effect on the model output. For example, in the dependence plots for Q2_3 (overall opinion) it was revealed that when the score of an individual is 5 the impact on satisfaction is always positive. When the score is 4, the effect is highly dependent on the Q2_1 or Q2_2 responses. Particularly, it was revealed that moderate Q2_1 or Q2_2 scores tend to increase satisfaction when Q2_3 is 4, while high Q2_1 or Q2_2 scores tend to decrease it, meaning that high ratings may raise expectations so much that any minor shortcoming in the experience may create disappointment. Individuals with a score of 3 which also have moderate Q2_1 and Q2_2 have a slightly negative contribution to the model, while values of 1 and 2, which are linked with low Q2_1 and Q2_2, strongly decrease satisfaction. This interaction pattern reveals that Q2_3 effects are non-linear and conditional on other variables.

CONCLUSIONS

This study developed, evaluated and analyzed a predictive framework for supermarket customer satisfaction by combining a RF regressor with hyperparameter optimization through a FST-PSO optimizer achieving an improved predictive performance, over 70% of the variance.

A key contribution of this research is the integration of SHAP analysis to fill the gap between predictive capabilities and managerial interpretability. By integrating explainable AI into customer analytics, managers get both robust predictions and transparent reasoning. The findings highlight that brand level perceptions, such as overall opinion, store likability, and perceived quality, matter more than operational improvements. While features like prices, special offers and store atmosphere do still contribute, the analysis revealed that the holistic impressions of the customers are more influential in satisfaction. This aligns with expectancy-disconfirmation theory and retail service quality research, while extending them by empirically demonstrating

that holistic, affective evaluations outweigh functional factors in shaping satisfaction. In doing so, the study advances marketing theory by highlighting the primacy of relational and emotional dimensions in supermarket contexts, where operational differentiation is often limited. Managers should recognize that investments in store image, reputation, and overall customer experience may yield stronger satisfaction gains than incremental changes in pricing or promotions. Moreover, managing expectations is as important as improving the service quality, since the interaction patterns from the dependence plots revealed that extremely high ratings in other domains such as overall quality can make customers more sensitive to minor flaws. Furthermore, service quality remained a critical loyalty factor, since despite being ranked below the top three variables, the individual SHAP analysis revealed that for certain customers even moderate service rating decreases satisfaction. Finally, price and special offers play a supportive but strategic role since while not being the strongest predictors, they remain important in a sector where product differentiation is limited. Aligning pricing strategies and promotions can enhance impressions and therefore satisfaction.

Beyond these domain-specific insights, this research illustrates how combining machine learning with SHAP-based explainability advances both theory and practice. For scholars, it demonstrates that interpretable AI can uncover non-linear interaction patterns that enrich conceptual models of satisfaction. For managers, it transforms “black-box” predictions into actionable intelligence, enabling resource allocation to the factors that matter most for different customer segments. This differentiation allows managers to move from uniform strategies to targeted ones, where promotions and offers are directed toward customers who value them most, while tailoring store experience strategies to customers whose satisfaction depends on brand perceptions. A limitation of this research is its reliance on self-reported survey data, which may be affected by bias or

transient emotional states of the customers. Future research could explore integrating generative AI tools with SHAP to enhance managerial recommendations and develop personalized customer engagement strategies.

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WHEN REASSURANCE BACKFIRES: THE PARADOX OF INFLATION MESSAGING IN RETAIL

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Keywords: Inflation, retailing, price guarantees, economic threat, bulletproof glass effect

Description: This research shows that inflation-related price guarantees such as “Inflation Stop” can paradoxically reduce consumer spending by heightening perceived economic threat, but reframing them with neutral wording mitigates these negative effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers frequently use reassurance messages such as “Inflation Stop” or “Price Freeze” during times of high inflation to signal stability and consumer protection. However, it remains unclear whether such inflation-related guarantees achieve their intended effect or whether they may inadvertently trigger consumer anxiety and defensive behavior. This research addresses three central questions: (1) How do inflation-related price guarantees influence consumers’ purchasing

behavior, particularly basket size? (2) What psychological mechanisms explain these effects? and (3) How can retailers design inflation-related price communications to prevent unintended negative consequences?

Drawing on the bulletproof glass effect (Brough et al., 2022), which posits that protective cues can paradoxically heighten perceptions of threat, we argue that explicit mentions of "inflation" may act as semantic triggers that remind consumers of economic instability. Based on this theoretical framework, we formulate three hypotheses: H1, inflation-related price guarantees decrease basket size (i.e., the number of items purchased); H2, this effect is mediated by perceived economic threat; and H3, the negative effect can be mitigated when the message omits explicit references to inflation.

Method and Data

The hypotheses were tested across two experimental studies using a controlled virtual supermarket environment. Study 1 examined the psychological mechanism underlying the effect of inflation-related price guarantees. Participants completed a grocery shopping task under either a control condition (no signage) or a treatment condition displaying an "Inflation Stop" sign modeled after a real supermarket campaign. Basket size and perceived economic threat were measured. Mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of the inflation-related guarantee on basket size through perceived economic threat. This supports the hypothesis that such signage reminds consumers of economic instability, thereby evoking threat perceptions and leading them to purchase fewer items. Study 2 tested a moderation effect by altering message framing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: control (no signage),

inflation-related guarantee (“Inflation Stop”), or neutrally framed guarantee (“Price Stop”), which avoided explicit mention of inflation and thus did not activate related threat associations. An ANOVA confirmed that basket size was significantly lower in the inflation-related condition but not in the neutral framing condition. Thus, the negative effect was mitigated when explicit references to inflation were removed, demonstrating that linguistic framing moderates the relationship between reassurance cues and consumer behavior.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, results consistently demonstrate that inflation-related price guarantees can backfire. In Study 1, exposure to an “Inflation Stop” sign significantly reduced basket size and total spending compared to a control condition, indicating a defensive consumer response. Mediation analysis confirmed that this effect was driven by heightened perceived economic threat—participants who saw inflation-related messaging reported feeling more economically threatened, which in turn led to smaller shopping baskets. Study 2 replicated these results and extended them by testing message framing. When the explicit reference to “inflation” was replaced with more neutral language (“Price Stop”), the negative effect on basket size disappeared. This suggests that the problem is not reassurance messaging per se, but rather the salience of inflation-related terminology. The inflation-related wording increased perceived economic threat, indicating that it served as a cue of instability rather than reassurance. Together, these findings reveal a paradox in inflation communication: messages designed to reassure can trigger threat perceptions and reduce spending, while subtle linguistic reframing can preserve consumer confidence and purchasing behavior.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four primary contributions. First, it challenges the dominant assumption and prevailing retail practice that price guarantees universally foster trust and spending by showing that, in inflationary contexts, reassurance cues can paradoxically reduce consumption through increased threat salience. Second, it introduces the "bulletproof glass effect" to marketing and retail communication, demonstrating how defensive signals—intended to convey safety—can instead amplify consumers' sense of economic threat. Third, the paper enriches crisis communication and framing literature by providing empirical evidence that subtle linguistic variations (e.g., omitting the term "inflation") can substantially alter consumer behavior. This underscores the critical role of semantic cues in shaping psychological responses under economic stress. Fourth, the study offers actionable implications for practitioners: retailers should avoid overt inflation references in price guarantees and instead use neutral framings that convey stability without evoking economic insecurity. By bridging theory and practice, this research responds to a recent call by Dekimpe and van Heerde (2023) for empirical work on consumer responses to retailer communications in high-inflation environments, thereby advancing both academic understanding and managerial strategy for marketing in volatile economic conditions.

References are available upon request.

When Robots Flatter: How Authenticity is Affected in Technology-Mediated Retail Interactions

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Keywords: *Retailer Brand Authenticity, Service Robots, , Flattery, Agent Authenticity, Artificial Intelligence*

The current article investigates how sales agent type (robot vs. human) and flattery affect agent authenticity, shopper purchase intention, and retailer brand authenticity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand authenticity has received a considerable amount of attention over the past 25 years due to its potential to leverage positive consumer responses and due to the increasing demand for authenticity by consumers worldwide (e.g., Södergren 2021). More recently, service robots have gained importance in frontline contexts, driven by their convenience as well as functional and experiential benefits (Belanche et al. 2020). While adopting robots at the frontline may lead to more efficient interactions with customers (Larivière et al. 2024), prior research highlights negative customer responses (Lee and Yi 2025). It thus remains unclear, whether the use of robots in customer interactions benefits or hurts their brand-related performance outcomes.

Despite its increasing relevance, authenticity research has largely overlooked how interactions with service robots affect authenticity perceptions, especially when coupled with persuasion behaviors such as flattery. Addressing this gap, our research examines how sales agent type (robot vs. human) and flattery jointly affect perceptions of agent authenticity, shopper purchase intention and retailer brand authenticity.

Method and Data

We conducted an online 2 (agent type: human vs. robot) × 2 (flattery: absent vs. present) × 2 (purchase motive: utilitarian vs. hedonic) between-subjects experiment to answer our research question. To measure perceived agent authenticity, purchase intention, and perceived retailer brand authenticity we used well-established multi-item scales and adapted them to our context. All scales showed good psychometric properties.

Our final sample consists of 432 consumers from Germany (59.3% women; average age, 32 years). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions.

Summary of the Findings

Our results provide support for the negative effect of flattery on agent authenticity (standardized estimate= -.26; p<.001). We found marginal support for the negative effect of agent type on agent authenticity. We also found support for the positive interaction effect of agent type and flattery on agent authenticity (standardized estimate=.10; p<.05). Post-hoc analyses showed that flattery mitigates the negative effect of robots on agent authenticity and are perceived as authentic as human agents when they engage in flattery.

For the moderation effect of purchase motive on the relationship between agent type and agent authenticity, results showed a negative and significant estimate. Post-hoc analyses showed that shoppers with a utilitarian purchase motive perceive robot sales agents as authentic as human sales agents.

The moderated mediation analysis for the interaction between agent type and flattery showed that the indirect effect of sales agent was significant in the no flattery condition on purchase intention and brand authenticity. Similarly, the interaction between purchase motive and agent type showed that the indirect effect of agent type through agent authenticity was significant in the hedonic condition on purchase intentions and brand authenticity.

Further, we found support for the positive effects of agent authenticity on purchase intention (standardized estimate= .58; p<.001) and retailer brand authenticity (standardized estimate= .34; p<.001).

Overall, our results suggest that agent authenticity mediates the effects of sales agent on brand authenticity and purchase intention, depending on situational factors (i.e., flattery and purchase motive).

Key Contributions

This research contributes to organizational frontline and authenticity literature by uncovering the joint effects of agent type, flattery, and purchase motives in shaping agent authenticity perceptions, purchase intention and retailer brand authenticity. Specifically, we find that replacing human sales agents with robot sales agents does not always harm authenticity perceptions; instead, the effects depend on the purchase motive of the sales interaction. By explicitly accounting for hedonic versus utilitarian purchase motives, our study extends prior research on sales interactions and brand authenticity by linking frontline agent characteristics to downstream brand-level outcomes.

In addition, our findings offer recommendations for retail managers who consider the adoption of robot sales agents. While robots may increase efficiency, their effect on perceived authenticity is contingent on emotional aspects of the sales interaction. Our findings assist retail managers in deploying robots without harming authenticity perceptions of the agent and the retail brand.

Overall, this study bridges the gap between organizational frontline research and brand authenticity studies by providing novel insights on how technology adoption in retail settings and its interaction with emotional factors affects brand outcomes of retailers.

References are available upon request.

Services and Customer Experience

ART OF WAITING: CHILDREN'S DRAWN EXPERIENCES IN SERVICE CONTEXTS

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Keywords: Children, waiting, consumer socialization, services, time perception

Description: This paper examines how children experience and make sense of waiting in service contexts through analysis of their freehand drawings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Waiting is a routine feature of children's everyday market encounters, yet research on service waiting overwhelmingly centers on adults. This paper asks: How do children experience, interpret, and represent waiting in service contexts, and how do these representations vary across stages of consumer socialization? Building on consumer socialization theory, we conceptualize waiting not as neutral elapsed time but as a lived, embodied, and socially organized experience. We focus on how children depict affect, time, space, social roles, and fairness in common service settings such as retail checkouts, healthcare waiting rooms, and leisure queues. By foregrounding children's own representations, the study seeks to clarify how patience, rule awareness, and temporal understanding emerge developmentally, and how

service design shapes children's emotional responses to waiting. In doing so, the paper also addresses a broader question of how waiting operates as a formative consumer experience that intersects with emotion regulation, perceptions of justice, and family consumption dynamics.

Method and Data

The study adopts an arts-based, child-centered qualitative design using freehand drawings as the primary data source. Data were collected at a European public science event during an interactive activity titled "The Waiting Game." Children were invited to respond to an open prompt, "Please draw a waiting situation", using crayons and paper. The final dataset consists of 103 usable drawings created by children aged 4 to 12. Drawings were grouped into developmental stages (Perceptual, Analytical, Reflective) following John's consumer socialization framework. Many children offered brief, informal explanations of their drawings, which were recorded as contextual notes. Analysis focused on six dimensions: context, time cues, social presence, emotion and body language, coping strategies, and spatial organization. Independent coding and iterative comparison were used to identify patterns while remaining attentive to children's own visual and verbal cues.

Summary of Findings

Findings reveal a clear developmental arc in how waiting is experienced and represented, moving from embodied, to contextualized, to moralized forms of waiting. Younger children emphasize affective and bodily states, often depicting boredom, distress, or hunger with minimal contextual detail. Middle-childhood drawings situate waiting within recognizable service environments and emphasize process visibility, such as counters, doors, and clocks. Older children increasingly highlight procedural justice, explicitly depicting queue-jumping, rule violations, and fairness concerns. Across stages, context and service design strongly shape affect: calm is associated with visible sequence and clear endpoints, while frustration clusters

around ambiguity and perceived rule-breaking. Time is rarely depicted as clock minutes alone; instead, children externalize duration through posture, queue length, and spatial layout. Notably, many drawings show neutral affect and limited coping strategies, suggesting that waiting is often tolerated unless contextual features trigger emotional escalation.

Key Contributions

This paper makes four main contributions. First, it extends consumer socialization theory by specifying how patience, time management, and fairness emerge as consumer competencies across developmental stages. Second, it reframes waiting as lived experience, demonstrating how children visually externalize pre-reflexive temporality through embodied and spatial cues. Third, it clarifies the boundary conditions of symbolic consumption perspectives, showing that identity and branding matter primarily in select, highly symbolic waiting contexts. Fourth, it contributes methodologically by validating freehand drawing as an age-appropriate and theoretically generative method for service research with children. Managerially, the findings shift attention from “problematic” child behavior to service design, emphasizing that clarity, fairness, and visible progress, rather than entertainment, are central to improving children’s waiting experiences in both physical and digital service environments.

BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC: KEYWORD ANALYSIS AND TOPIC MODELING

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Keywords: service-dominant logic (SDL), keyword analysis, topic modeling, latent dirichlet allocation (LDA), bibliometric analysis

Description: This study examines the topics that the service-dominant logic (SDL) concept focuses on in marketing literature and their temporal trends bibliometrically, using keyword analysis and latent dirichlet allocation methods.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The SDL approach embraces a service-based understanding where value-creation process is achieved in collaboration with consumers. Therefore, SDL approach represents a paradigm shift in marketing science from the goods-dominant logic (GDL) approach to focused on service and value creation. With this transition, the concept of SDL is rapidly gaining prominence in

marketing literature through increasing academic studies. Therefore, systematically examining the concept of SDL and revealing its focus areas and their temporal trends is crucial for understanding this transformation in the field of marketing. In this context, bibliometric analysis emerges as a suitable method for revealing the structural characteristics of the field. Although SDL focused bibliometric studies have been conducted in this context, there is a gap in the literature regarding the topics focused on by SDL concept and the examination of the temporal changes in these topics. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to fill this gap by answering the question, "What topics does the concept of SDL focus on in the marketing literature, and how have these topics changed over time?" through comprehensive topic modeling and trend analysis. With this aim, keywords analysis and LDA methods were used to examine the topics and development of the concept of SDL in the marketing literature.

Method and Data

The current research was obtained from Web of Science, focusing on the highest-quality marketing research (Q1) that includes the concept of SDL. Search terms (("service dominant logic" OR "service-dominant logic" OR "sd logic" OR "s-d logic" OR "service-dominant" OR "service dominant")) and internal-external criteria (data set, search terms, language, publication type, journal field, and journal percentiles) were determined to suit the research objectives. The initial search yielded 2,595 results focused on the SDL concept. After applying internal and external criteria, a dataset was created with the remaining 542 articles. Twenty articles from 2025 and one duplicate article (DOI and WoS Number) were excluded from the dataset, and analyses were performed on a total of 521 articles.

First, keyword analysis was used to identify the terms focused on by the SDL concept, followed by topic modeling using the LDA method. Finally, the temporal changes of the emerging topics

were determined. To ensure the consistency of the results, LDA was run with multiple iterations (n=100) and clustered using the k-medoid approach. R codes published on OSF were used throughout the analyses (https://osf.io/wukfd/). In addition, all R codes and analyses used in the current study are available along with the dataset (https://osf.io/u84xq/).

Summary of Findings

A total of 2,350 unique terms underwent preprocessing prior to keyword analysis. In this context, 11 terms at the extremes were excluded from the list because they were common research terms and included existing research terms. Then, common word groups and words/word-groups under a single concept were combined into a single term. However, similar terms with high frequency were evaluated separately so as not to distort the research results. Finally, words that appeared only once were removed. Analyses were performed on the remaining 495 terms after this elimination.

According to the keyword analysis results, some of the most frequently repeated words were “qualıty, behavıor and management” and “technology and socıal-medıa” In addition, the terms “Pls-Sem and scale development” were found to be in the medium-high frequency range.

The silhouette value was used to select 12 topic clusters (TC). Furthermore, the correlation results revealed that the LDA model matched perfectly ($r = 0.999$, $p < 0.001$). Results showed that the topics “AI & Digital Marketing” (TC4), “Decision-making & Engagement” (TC11) ($p<.001$) and “Customer Engagement & Social Media” (TC3) ($p<.01$) showed a statistically significant increasing trend. The clusters themed “Marketing Theory & Exchange” (TC12) ($p<.001$), “Price” (TC6) and “Sales” (TC9) ($p<.01$) were found to show a decreasing trend.

Key Contributions

This study presents bibliometric analysis findings that include keyword analysis and topic modeling methods to determine the thematic development and research trends of SDL concept in the field of marketing.

The first striking finding is increasing trend in research on TC4, TC11, and TC3 topic-clusters. This finding coincides with the discourse that AI, digital marketing and social-media are transforming service ecosystems. Keyword analysis also reveals this situation, with terms such as “technology and socıal-medıa” appearing frequently. Furthermore, the findings confirm that the concept of customer-engagement or engagement is the primary mechanism for value-creation. Another striking finding is the decreasing trend in TC12. This indicates that the theoretical debates shaping SDL are beginning to diminish and that scientific discourse is shifting towards applied and empirical approaches. Keyword analysis confirms this situation with the frequencies of the terms “Pls-Sem and scale development”. In addition, decline in TC6 and TC9 topics indicates a shift away from traditional marketing topics and classic views of co-creation. In conclusion, this study reveals that SDL approach has begun to focus on applied topics rather than theoretical research and is shifting towards technology-focused research topics rather than traditional marketing topics.

References are available upon request.

COMPENSATING SERVICE ROBOT FAILURES: THE ROLE OF VOICE ANTHROPOMORPHISM

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Keywords:

Service robot, service failure, service recovery, voice, social support

Description:

This paper shows that service robot voice and monetary compensation jointly influence service marketing outcomes and that this joint effect is mediated by perceived social support.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Service robots are becoming increasingly important. A rising number of companies across various industries are adopting service robots. Despite their growing adoption, service robots are still prone to failures, which makes effective service recovery strategies essential (Liu et al. 2023). Service recovery (e.g., monetary compensation) plays a critical role in mitigating the negative impact of service failures on customer satisfaction. However, like other recovery strategies, the effectiveness of recovery strategies may depend on the service robot involved (Choi et al. 2021). Previous research on service robot failures has highlighted the importance of anthropomorphism in robot design (e.g., Barone et al. 2024; Cheng 2022). However, studies that explicitly examine the role of anthropomorphism in the context of *service recovery* remain limited. To date, no study has investigated the interaction of anthropomorphic design features and monetary compensation—a critical gap considering the importance of both anthropomorphism and (monetary) compensation in service robot interactions. To address this gap, we examine the joint effects of monetary compensation and service robot anthropomorphism based on voice on downstream, interaction-focused marketing outcomes.

Method and Data

Across three randomized between-subjects online experiment, we test whether the positive effect of monetary compensation (vs. no monetary compensation) interacts with service robots' anthropomorphic (vs. non-anthropomorphic) voice. In Study 1, we establish the hypothesized interaction effect on a downstream marketing outcome (i.e., attitude toward brand). In Study 2, we replicate this effect and add to the generalizability of our findings by varying the

degree of monetary compensation, by using a different type of service robot, and by employing a male robot voice instead of a female one as in Study 1. In Study 3, we again replicate our findings, combining the study designs of Studies 1 and 2. In addition, we show that the effect holds for a different service outcome (i.e., customer satisfaction with the service robot) and shed light on the underlying mechanism of the hypothesized interaction effect (i.e., customer perceptions of received social support). To further assess the distinct role of voice as a non-physical design feature in contrast to other ways to anthropomorphize a service robot (i.e., appearance), we conducted two extension studies.

Summary of Findings

We show across five studies that monetary (vs. no monetary) compensation following service failure and anthropomorphic (vs. non-anthropomorphic) voice jointly influence marketing outcomes in that customers evaluate an anthropomorphic voice more positively than a non-anthropomorphic one when no monetary compensation is provided. This effect is mediated by customer perceptions of received social support. In two extension studies, we show that show that there is no interaction between voice-based and appearance-based robot anthropomorphism and that anthropomorphism based on the service robot's physical appearance does not produce the same interaction effect as observed for voice-based anthropomorphism. Our findings align with research indicating that customers tend to prefer anthropomorphism in service interactions (e.g., Barone et al. 2024).

Key Contributions

We offer two key contributions to theory and practice. First, we respond to requests for more studies on service robot failure and recovery (e.g., Choi et al. 2021; Mir et al. 2023) by showing that the effectiveness of recovery depends on service robot anthropomorphism and adding to the respective stream of research. We find that voice anthropomorphism leads to

improved evaluations when no monetary compensation is provided, while voice anthropomorphism has no effect when monetary compensation is offered.

Second, we extend the literature on service robot anthropomorphism by emphasizing the critical yet underexplored role of voice. While prior marketing research on service robots has largely concentrated on physical design features to elicit perceptions of anthropomorphism, the auditory dimension of robot design has received far less attention even though voice plays a central role in human communication (Oleszkiewicz et al. 2017; Scherer et al. 2003).

Overall, our research is valuable for companies in hospitality, food service, and retail, where service robots are frequently deployed to address labor shortages or enhance customer experiences. Our findings suggest that these companies should employ anthropomorphic voice in interactions with service robots where service failure and recovery are likely to occur.

References

References are available upon request.

CONSUMERS IN CRISIS:

REFRAMING CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN MARKETING THROUGH A CONSUMER VULNERABILITY LENS

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Keywords: Crisis theory; dementia; palliative and end-of-life care; homelessness

Description

Marketing literature has largely focused on exogenous crises and firm-centric brand threats. This paper extends this exploring crisis through three case studies: dementia care, homelessness, palliative and end-of-life care and the lens of consumer vulnerability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper positions crisis as both a lens and a context through which to examine the multifaceted nature of consumer vulnerability. How consumers respond to challenges arising from within, and how marketers might adapt their strategies to better support them is pivotal to the paper. Crises, whether exogenous (e.g. natural disasters, pandemics) or endogenous (e.g. personal health issues, family bereavement), often magnify the barriers consumers face in accessing goods, services, and support.

Drawing on crisis theory, also known as crisis intervention theory (Caplan, 1964), a psychological framework that seeks to understand and address how individuals respond to acute stressors or traumatic events, we explore how consumer vulnerability evolves during crises and how these dynamics influence consumer decision-making. The theory emphasizes the interplay of individual differences, cultural norms, and systemic factors in shaping responses to crises. Traditionally applied in psychological and social intervention contexts, crisis theory underscores the importance of tailored, empathetic support. However, its principles have yet to be integrated into the marketing discipline, particularly in the context of understanding and addressing personal crises. This paper aims to bridge this gap by extending the application of crisis theory to the realm of marketing and offering actionable insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Method and Data

This paper draws upon three studies and a 360-degree methodology which collects data from multiple stakeholders including both consumers and providers.

Study 1. The aim of this study is to examine experiences of current care and support services among dementia patients and their families and identify unmet needs in a north-west region of the UK. 33 narratives covering the journey from first needing dementia services onwards are considered from patients (n=5) and their family carers (n=28), accessed via a collaborating partner.

Study 2. The aim of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of consumers exposed to homelessness. The work was undertaken in collaboration with a residential service provider. Unstructured interviews were conducted with management (n=2), frontline staff (n=3), and residential service users (n=20).

Study 3. The aim of this study is to systematically evaluate all aspects of the services provided by a hospital based Palliative Care Unit. Data was collected from 29 service users using in-depth face-to-face interviews.

In each study the Trajectory Touchpoint Technique (TTT) (Sudbury-Riley et al., 2020) was used to enable systematic data collection. Narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were subjected to in-depth thematic analysis, using the 7 aspects of the TTT (Spiggle, 1994).

Summary of Findings

Each study presented a distressing landscape, patients and their network struggling to cope with the circumstances they found themselves in.

Common factors contributing to this state in *study 1* included lengthy delays in accessing support, being overwhelmed by information without practical guidance/support, and a lack of awareness about services availability. Persistent unmet needs during service use stemmed from insufficient connectedness and consistency and from practical constraints. Post-service use, participants highlighted a need for ongoing opportunities to check in and go back over information received.

In *study 2*, the effects of understaffing, the need for early intervention and peer support, obstacles to developing and/or utilizing certain skills, and the appearance of some shared spaces were powerful resource constraints.

And in *study 3*, resource conflict related to communication obstacles including misperceptions of service providers and misunderstandings regarding the terminology used by professionals. Information dissemination regarding services available was patchy and often presumed a level of health literacy not shared by service users. Stresses associated with whom and how to access services were frequently articulated, compounded by ingrained perceptions of service access including the criteria applied in accessing residential care for instance. And an overwhelming sense of fear of making judgement errors on complex health problems families and friends felt ill-equipped to comment upon.

Key Contributions

We argue that understanding the intersection of crisis and consumer vulnerability is critical to both the firm and consumer for several reasons. First, crises reveal the systemic inequities and barriers that underpin consumer vulnerability, providing opportunities to address them more

effectively. Second, they underscore the importance of designing responsive and inclusive market systems that adapt to the diverse needs of consumers during times of uncertainty. Finally, they challenge the marketing and public policy communities to extend their focus beyond transactional relationships to consider the broader societal implications of crisis management and vulnerability mitigation.

Through this exploration, we contribute to the growing literature on consumer vulnerability by situating it within the dynamic context of crisis whereby people are in vulnerable situations. This approach not only deepens theoretical insights but also offers practical guidance for creating more empathetic, adaptive, and resilient marketplaces. By understanding how crises shape and are shaped by firms, we can move closer to fostering systems that support individuals not just in moments of stability but in times of profound challenge, upheaval and change.

References are available upon request

Designing Customer-Centric Human-Robot Journeys:

A Multilevel Mixed-Methods Approach to Service Innovation

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ABSTRACT

Social robots are reshaping service landscapes by introducing new touchpoints and dynamics across the Customer Journey (CJ). Existing Customer Experience (CX) and Service Marketing models often overlook their distinct roles. This paper presents the Human-Robot-Journey (HRJ), a framework grounded in CX theory and service design, developed through a systematic literature review, a field study in public libraries with surveys (n=148), and interviews (n=65). HRJ maps how social robots impact pre-, during-, and post-contact service phases, offering a multi-level structure encompassing personas, the experience environment, and CJ stages. It guides customer-centric service innovation through robot-assisted experience design in complex ecosystems.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical Contributions: The Human-Robot Journey Radar (HRJR) framework advances CX and service marketing theory by framing the customer journey as a human–robot co-experience, highlighting the need for a multi-dimensional view of the customer journey, emphasizing the interplay between effort, attitudes, and satisfaction in robot-mediated services. It advances service marketing literature with a novel perspective on service innovation. Robots are shown as co-designers of service, enabling value creation across pre-, during-, and post-contact phases, in line

with service-dominant logic positioning customers and robots as co-creators of experience (Helkkula 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2016).

Findings indicate that traditional CJ and CX frameworks need adaptation for robot-mediated services. Robot autonomy and responsiveness shape key touchpoints across pre-, during-, and post-interaction phases. Moreover, the HRJ framework highlights the importance of considering affective and cognitive attitude as correlated, suggesting that customer experience in robot-mediated contexts may require additional planning of the journey to ensure positive outcomes across phases.

Practical Contributions: The HRJR framework provides a transferable tool for service providers, retailers, and public institutions to design and evaluate robot-supported customer journeys, aligning technology with CX goals. Social robots should be viewed as strategic levers for service innovation, enabling new journey structures, hybrid touchpoints, and emotionally enriched experiences (Li and Larivière 2023; Rossi et al. 2020). By treating robots as service innovators, organizations can test novel value propositions, extend relational depth, and foster differentiated experiences in competitive service markets. Specifically for the practical application the following recommendations can be concluded based on the study results: (1) Leverage emotional attitude dimension: Design robot interactions to maximize entertainment, joy, and overall enjoyment. (2) Close the cognitive attitude gap: Use informational cues or and ensure frictionless navigation, task completion, and interaction flow. (3) Strategically sequence touchpoints. Identify where human versus robotic interventions should be deployed to bridge cognitive gaps.

INTRODUCTION

Social robots[1] are experiencing significant growth with revenues projected to exceed $180 billion by 2030 and annual growth rates of 20–25%, according to Holtermann and Schimroszik (2025). They are increasingly recognized as transformative technologies in service industries (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2023; Holtermann and Schimroszik 2025; IMARC Group 2024; Kulkarni and Bansal 2023; Statista Market Insights 2024), offering not only novel customer experience possibilities but also strategic response to pressing labor shortages. In service contexts, the absence of staff impacts key service elements, diminishing positive elements of the customer experience at the point of sale. Reflecting this, social robots are increasingly deployed in service settings, such as libraries and retail, to address labor shortages and enable novel customer touchpoints and experiences. Early adoption often occurs in low-complexity environments with limited variability and stakeholder interdependence (Zou, Brax, and Rajala 2018).

Research on social robots and their integration within human-robot interaction (HRI) has gained significant importance across multiple domains (Huang et al. 2021; Krämer and Manzeschke 2021; Kurosu 2022; Rosén, Lindblom, and Billing 2022; Zawieska and Sorenson 2023). However, much of this work is driven by technological or ethical perspectives, leaving service marketing questions comparatively underdeveloped, particularly regarding how robot touchpoints reshape customer experiences across the customer journey (CJ).

While adoption is increasing, conceptual work on how social robots reshape the customer journey and influence customer experience (CX) remains limited. A holistic approach is needed to integrate social robots effectively into service encounters. Existing CJ and CX models provide valuable

[1] A clear distinction is needed between service robots in general and social robots; social robots are part of service robots but are specifically designed for relational and dialogue-oriented tasks (Roth and Klicic 2024).

frameworks for service innovation, but overlook the role of non-human actors in co-creating hybrid experiences.

Addressing this gap, the Human-Robot Journey Radar (HRJR) integrates social robots into a multilevel CX framework, offering both theoretical contributions and practical guidance for robot-supported service design in public libraries and retail contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Experience and the Customer Journey

Customer Experience refers to customers' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings across the entire CJ (Homburg, Jozić, and Kuehnl 2017; Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Schmitt 1999). The CJ structures customer interactions into pre-, during-, and post-contact phases, with CX emerging as a multidimensional construct shaped by physical, emotional, and social touchpoints (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Schmitt 2009; Verhoef et al. 2009).

While widely adopted, most CJ models treat touchpoints as human-only, overlooking the multi-actor nature of service experiences involving non-human agents. The integration of social robots transforms CX dynamics and calls for an adapted CJ, a Human–Robot Journey (HRJ). Traditional CJ models rarely account for the active, co-creative presence of social robots within service encounters, nor do they systematically integrate them as distinct actors influencing customer perceptions, emotions, attitudes and behaviors.

Technology in Services: Social Robots and HRI

Definitions of social robots vary across disciplines, but converge on their capacity for social interaction, understood as exchanges between humans and machines (B. Duffy 2003; Baraka, Alves-Oliveira, and Ribeiro 2020). Drawing on Baraka et al. (2020), key dimensions include physical embodiment and social capabilities (Blut et al. 2021; Roth and Klicic 2024; Sarrica,

Brondi, and Fortunati 2020). Additional dimensions include autonomy, physical embodiment, and functional capabilities such as interaction and communication with beings (Baraka, Alves-Oliveira, and Ribeiro 2020; Bendel 2022). In service contexts, these attributes enable robots not only to execute tasks but also act as communicative, relational partners that shape the overall service experience (Li and Larivière 2023; Rossi et al. 2020; Tsai et al. 2022).

Recent service research has increasingly conceptualized AI-based agents (like social robots) as active actors that shape customer perceptions, emotions, and relationship outcomes, particularly in customer care contexts. (Huang and Rust 2021, 2024) argue that interactive AI can moving beyond automation toward "feeling AI", enabling emotionally responsive interactions and influencing customer well-being and relationship formation across journey stages. Additionally, studies highlight that, social robots go beyond self-service tools by actively shaping emotional atmospheres, influencing customer flow, and providing social signal within service spaces that can change both, the perceived service quality and efficiency of the encounter (Blut et al. 2021; Roth and Klicic 2024; Sarrica, Brondi, and Fortunati 2020). Advances in AI and falling costs further accelerate adoption (Holtermann and Schimroszik 2025). These results reinforce the need to embed non-human agents more explicitly into customer journey and customer experience framework.

Despite this, integration into CJ models remains underexplored. Existing digital CX frameworks rarely consider robots as co-creators, while HRI research remains technology-driven and neglects service marketing implications. Therefore, this paper addresses two gaps: 1) the lack of an empirically grounded framework for social robot integration into CJ phases in service settings; 2) the need for a service-oriented way to describe and evaluate robot roles as catalysts of service innovation.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: HUMAN-ROBOT-JOURNEY RADAR

Building on this gap, the HRJR is introduced as a multilevel, customer-centric framework integrating service-dominant logic with interdisciplinary empirical insights. It adapts traditional CJ models (Lemon and Verhoef 2016) and service design principles (Baraka, Alves-Oliveira, and Ribeiro 2020) to technology-mediated encounters providing an empirically grounded framework for robot-integrated service journeys. Moving beyond isolated design features, it captures both direct human–robot interactions and extended Human–Robot Journeys (HRJs), positioning robots as intermediaries, facilitators, or amplifiers within multi-actor service experiences.

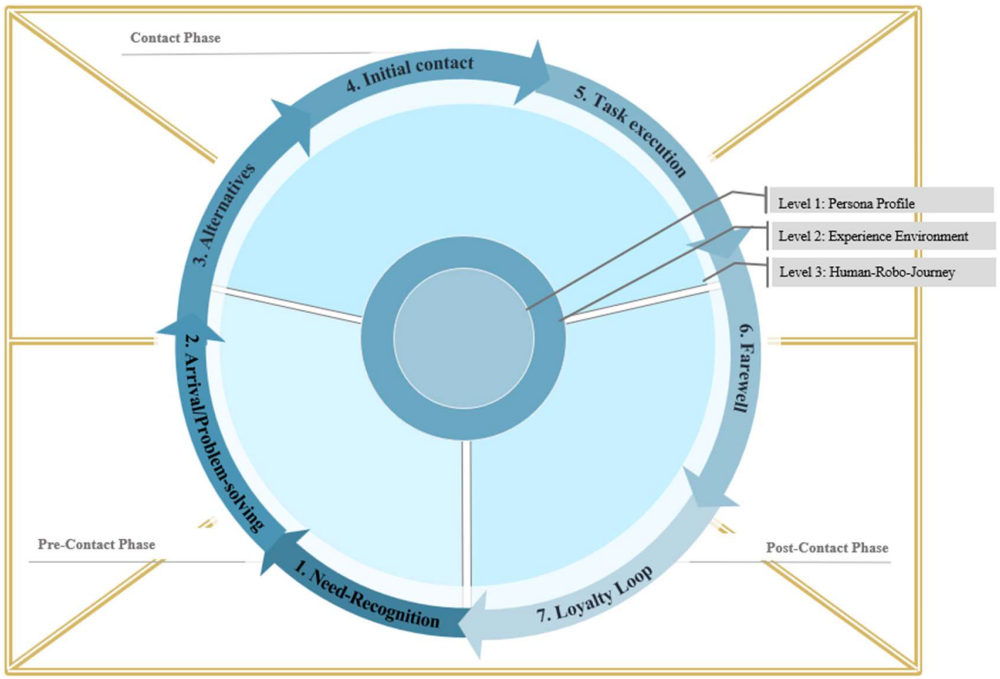


Figure 1: HRJR for Experience Creation (Source: Own illustration)

The conceptual framework is informed by a systematic review of over 120 publications on CJ and CX, which revealed transferable patterns and conceptual gaps regarding non-human actors and service delivery, visualized as a multidimensional radar chart (Figure 1), mapping persona

attributes, environmental parameters, and journey phases. Interdisciplinary metrics, from customer satisfaction[2], emotional engagement up to spatial affordance, support systematic HRJ mapping.

Level 1: Personas: The HRJR is grounded in customer personas capturing socio-demographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics, which inform expectations toward technology and guide the alignment of robot features and service roles across use contexts.

Level 2: Experience Environment: Social robot integration into CX is limited if the environment is not carefully designed (level 2). Spatial layout, atmosphere, and robot presence shape interaction quality, alongside technical factors like network stability and navigation. Robots also introduce unique sensory parameters (e.g., movement, sound, visibility) that affect experience effectiveness and perceived value. Thus, environment design becomes a key mediator of HRJ outcomes.

Level 3: Service Journey Phases: The heart of the HRJR framework is the adaptation of the three-stage service consumption model (Wirtz and Lovelock 2016) and embeds it in robot-mediated contexts (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Kuppelwieser and Klaus 2021). This staging logic is consistent with recent marketing work conceptualizing AI as a journey actor that can recognize and respond to customer emotions and thereby shape relationship outcomes along the journey (e.g., Huang and Rust 2021, 2024). Those insights are enriched by service experience theory (Helkkula 2011 9; e.g., Leonard L. Berry, Lewis P. Carbone, and Stephan H. Haeckel 2002) and Service-dominant logic (Lusch and Vargo 2014; Vargo and Lusch 2004).

Pre-contact phase: Early touchpoints shape expectations before direct encounters (Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Verhoef et al. 2009). In HRJ, social robots act as attention triggers, provide information, and reduce perceived risks through personalized recommendations.

[2] Satisfaction is defined here as a result of a single consumption experience, resulting in a direct and immediate response to that experience (Wirtz and Lovelock 2016, p. 77).

Contact / Service encounter phase: Core service delivery occurs often as a co-created experience (e.g., Helkkula 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016). Robots act as service co-performers (e.g., greeting, navigation, recommendation) or mediators (e.g., assessing needs before human transfer). *Post-contact / post-service encounter phase:* Beyond purchase, customers evaluate experiences cognitively and emotionally, potentially resulting in continued engagement (McColl-Kennedy, Cheung, and Ferrier 2015). Social robots can initiate follow-up interactions (e.g., collecting feedback, keep lending history), reinforce both satisfaction and relational bonds. In HRJ contexts, social robots can extend the customer relationship by keeping communication channels open beyond the human encounter.

By embedding these three stages, HRJR structures the analysis of robot-mediated touchpoints across the CJ (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Leonard L. Berry, Lewis P. Carbone, and Stephan H. Haeckel 2002). and enables phase-specific assessment of emotional and cognitive experience dimensions. This paper focuses on the service encounter as the critical phase of human–robot interaction, while post-service evaluations capture satisfaction, attitudes, and reuse intentions.

METHODOLOGY

To empirically validate the HRJR, a multi-phase mixed-methods approach was employed, to assess the analytical usefulness, practical relevance, and empirical traceability of its journey stages in real-world settings. The field studies (FS) were conducted in German public libraries, chosen as low-complexity, public environments suitable for controlled, yet real-world interaction testing[3]. Across all three field studies, the same service scenario (book recommendations and read-aloud activities)

[3] The low complexity environment and public space public libraries were used as testbeds, which allowed controlled testing of HRI without disrupting highly interconnected workflows (Jha 2023, pp. 9–13). Libraries serve as exemplars of service scenarios, where customer interactions are centered around information provision and guidance (Jha 2023; Shahzad, Khan, and Iqbal 2024).

was implemented in public library settings. FS1 and FS2 used Pepper in a Wizard-of-Oz configuration, where the robot was physically present but responses were provided in real time by library staff via microphone, while participants perceived the system as autonomous. FS3 employed autonomous configurations of Pepper, Temi, and Nao, using an AI-based interaction system with a rule-based fallback decision tree. The primary manipulation concerned the level of robot autonomy, while tasks and context were held constant.

Field Study	N Qualitative N_{total}=65 Quantitative (N_{total}=148)	Time period	Autonomy	Robot(s)	Task
1	Qualitative: 45 Quantitative: 65	01/15/2024–01/20/2024	Wizard-of-Oz	Pepper	Book recommend-dations, read-aloud activities
2	Qualitative: 20 Quantitative: 56	03/04/2024–03/10/2024	Wizard-of-Oz	Pepper	
3	Quantitative: 27	02/03/2025–02/07/2025 and 02/17/2025–02/22/2025	autonomous configuration	Pepper, Temi, Nao	

Table 1: Comparative overview of data collection (Source: Own elaboration)

Data were collected via semi-structured qualitative interviews only in the first two field studies (N_{total}=65), whereas quantitative data were collected in all studies (N_{total}=148). FS1-2 used a Wizard-of-Oz set-up[4] with the humanoid robot Pepper to stimulate advanced and personalized book recommendations and read-aloud interactions, while FS3 employed autonomous Pepper, Temi, and Nao in real-world conditions. HRJ phases were assessed using post-interaction questionnaires measuring perceived effort, affective and cognitive attitudes, satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to recommend. Data analysis for the qualitative interviews (e.g., personalization, engagement, barriers) followed thematic coding. Descriptive and inferential statistics of

[4] Field Studies 1 and 2 used a Wizard-of-Oz setup in which staff remotely delivered Pepper's responses to simulate advanced personalization, whereas Field Study 3 employed fully autonomous robots under real-world conditions.

quantitative data was was conducted using SPSS. Correlation analyses examined links between effort, attitudes, satisfaction, and loyalty, assessing whether the HRJR conceptual dimensions are reflected in measurable customer responses.

Across the three field studies (conducted on-site in public libraries), all participants were library visitors. For FS1 (n=65) and FS3 (n=27), the sample included a broad age range (FS1: 12–85; FS3: 25–78), gender was recorded (FS1: 42.2% female / 57.8% male; FS3: 70.4% female / 29.6% male), and participants reported library usage frequency (FS1: most commonly "several times per month," 41.5%; FS3: "several times per month," 63.0%). Prior robot use was measured in all studies and was relatively low (FS I: 20.0% "yes"; FS2: 25.5% "yes"; FS3: 18.5% "yes").

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following section illustrates how the framework's structure captures relevant dynamics in robot-mediated customer experience.

1. Journey Phases: Contact, and Post-Contact Experience Pattern

Consistent with the HRJR and supported by the three field studies, customer experience varies meaningfully across journey stages. Interviews revealed distinct patterns in robot-mediated touchpoints: during book recommendations (contact phase), participants valued concise information and genre guidance (n=19) but missed personalization compared to human staff (n=6). While read-aloud interactions supported decision-making (n=10) yet suffered from monotone voice (n=7) and interaction delays (n=4). Satisfaction was driven by ease of use (n=11), enjoyment (n=21), and engaging gestures (n=23), but reduced by transparency gaps (n=17), opaque decision-making (n=11), and limited personalization (n=6). Attitudes ranged from positive affective responses (amusement, stimulation, and friendliness; n=13), to negative evaluations, when robots

were perceived as inefficient or emotionally unresponsive, underscoring phase-specific experiential dynamics.

2. Effort, Attitude & Satisfaction: impact of robot autonomy

Effort: Participants reported lower perceived effort in FS1 (M=5.46, on a 7-point scale: 1=high effort, 7=low effort), compared to autonomous interactions (FS3: M=4.26). Effort was lowest in the WoZ setting due to personalization and immediate responsiveness, which reduced cognitive and operational load. In FS2, however, effort dropped further (M = 3.93), likely caused by systemic errors and response latencies, underscoring the critical role of the service environment (Layer 2) in the HRJR.

Affective vs. cognitive attitude divergence: Across all studies, affective attitudes toward the robot were generally positive, with the WoZ setup showed the highest ratings (Mrange: 5.42-5.71). Participants highlighted entertainment value, joy and perceived interaction quality as key positive aspects. Autonomous robots showed slightly lower affective responses, indicating that affective evaluation in robot services may be sensitive to perceived personalization and naturalness of interaction. In contrast, cognitive evaluations of the robots' functional capabilities were moderate, particularly in autonomous conditions after service encounter, measured in FS3 (Mrange: 3.60-4.00). In FS1, cognitive attitudes reveal higher perception of robots' capabilities (M=4.66-4.83). This journey gap between emotional attitude and functional assessment indicates that while the customer enjoyed interaction, they may perceive limitations in robot performance.

Satisfaction, and loyalty intention: Satisfaction scores followed the same pattern, highest in WoZ condition (FS1: M=4.75-5.00) and moderate in autonomous settings (FS3: M=3.07-4.58).

However, loyalty[5] intention remained relatively stable across studies (FS1: M=5.69; FS2: M=5,76; FS3: M=5.37), and willingness to recommend (NPS, 10-point scale) showed only minor declines for WoZ interactions (FS1: M =6.85; FS2: M=6.65) but a slightly larger gap towards the autonomous interaction (FS3: M=5.19). These results suggest that even when functional performance or effort perception are less favorable, strong affective engagement and pre-existing positive expectations can sustain loyalty and advocacy intentions.

Interestingly, loyalty intention and willingness to recommend remained relatively stable across all conditions. Although the system was largely stable despite latencies in FS2 in a WoZ setup, a slight decline was still observed during fully autonomous interactions. This highlights the importance of the third layer of the HRJR framework. This may indicate that positive emotional experiences can buffer functional shortcomings in service delivery. These insights reinforced the need to consider spatial and technical variables as integral to customer experience, thereby supporting the third level of the HRJR framework.

3. Interplay between effort, attitudes, and satisfaction

Especially in FS1 the correlation analysis indicates that perceived effort does not significantly predict satisfaction with the robot (r=.22, p=.088), which is supported by results from study 3. In study 2, effort unexpectedly shows a positive association with satisfaction (r=.44–.52, p<.01) This effect may stem from systemic errors causing response latencies, leading participants to perceive higher engagement with the robot as rewarding rather than burdensome. Hence, results should be interpreted with caution. Taken these together, effort plays only a marginal and context-dependent role in predicting satisfaction.

[5] Measured on 10-point scale; 1=completely unlikely, 10= completely likely

By contrast, affective and cognitive attitudes emerge consistently as the strongest correlates of satisfaction across all three studies. On the affective side, participants' enjoyment (affective2; r=.525; r=.538, r=.432 p<.004), the perception of having had a good experience (affective3; r=.66; r=.623; r=.646; p<.001), and overall liking of the experience (affective4; r=.58, r=.468, r=.456; p<.001) are all significantly associated with higher satisfaction. On the cognitive side, perceived advantages (r =.797; r=.663, r=676, p<.001), perceived functions (r=.64, r=.485, r=.582; p<.001), and perceived abilities of the robot (r=.605, r=.563, r=.646; p<.001) also show robust positive relationships with satisfaction.

Furthermore, satisfaction itself demonstrates strong correlations with loyalty intentions. Specifically, satisfaction is positively associated with the likelihood of reusing the robot in future library visits (r=.553, p<.001) and with willingness to recommend the robot to others (NPS; r=.555, p<.001). Taken together, these findings suggest that while effort plays only a marginal role, both affective and cognitive attitudes are central in shaping satisfaction. Satisfaction, in turn, functions as a key mediator that translates positive into behavioral intentions such as reuse and recommendation. These results were replicated in field study two and three and highlights the robustness of affective and cognitive pathways for customer experience in HRJ, while effort appears contingent on contextual framing rather than acting as a universal pain point.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study introduces the Human-Robot-Journey Radar (HRJR), a multilevel framework for designing and analyzing customer experiences in robot-mediated services. Unlike HRI- or technology-centered models, HRJR adopts a service-marketing perspective and emphasizes the sequential design of customer journey phases with robots as co-performers across touchpoints, service environments, and persona–role alignment in hybrid human–robot experiences.

Grounded in three field studies in public libraries, findings show that affective and cognitive attitudes drive satisfaction and loyalty, while perceived effort plays a minor role. Emotional engagement is central in semi-automated contact phases, whereas post-contact evaluations reveal functional gaps in autonomous settings. The HRJR supports service design by aligning robot roles, touchpoints, and context with customer expectations and is informed by a systematic review of over 120 CJ and CX studies. Future research should test the HRJR in more complex settings and validate its predictive power experimentally. Addressing ethical issues such as privacy, transparency, and embodiment remains essential. As service robotics advances, HRJR offers a conceptual foundation for aligning robot roles with customer journeys and translating technological novelty into sustainable service value.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Items		Field Study 1	Field Study 2	Field Study 3
CES	CES: How much personal effort did you have to invest to complete your task with the robot?	x	x	x
Ea1	Attitude_affective1: To what extent was your experience with the robot entertaining?	x	x	x
Ea2	Attitude_affective2: To what extent did your experience with the robot bring you joy?	x	x	x
Ea3	Attitude_affective3: To what extent did you have a good experience with the robot?	x	x	x
Ea4	Attitude_affective4: To what extent did you enjoy your experience with the robot?	x	x	x
Ec_1	Attitude_cognitive1: has few capabilities. / has many capabilities.	x	x	x
Ec_2	Attitude_cognitive1: offers few advantages. / offers many advantages.	x	x	x
Ec_3	Attitude_cognitive1: performs few functions. / performs many functions.	x	x	x
CSAT	CSAT: How satisfied were you with the experience you had with the robot?	x	x	
SAT1	Satisfaction: I liked the service provided.	x	x	x
SAT2	Satisfaction: I was dissatisfied with the service provided.	x	x	x
SAT3	Satisfaction: I was satisfied with the service provided.	x	x	x
LOY	Loyalty: How likely are you to use the robot again during your next library visit?	x	x	x
NPS	NPS: How likely are you to recommend the experience with the robot to a friend, colleague, or another library user?	x	x	x

Table 2: Field Study Questionnaire Structure

DO AI CHATBOTS CREATE HAPPY CUSTOMERS? MEASURING SATISFACTION, WOM, AND LOYALTY

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Keywords: Chatbot adoption; Artificial intelligence; Customer experience; Satisfaction; Loyalty;

Description: Based on a PLS analysis of survey data from 176 respondents, this study examines how chatbot usability and responsiveness shape customer experience and demonstrates that usability is the primary driver of satisfaction and loyalty outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the growing adoption of chatbots in e-commerce and online service environments, there remains limited understanding of how chatbot shape customer experience and subsequent relational outcomes. Prior research has yielded mixed findings regarding customer responses to chatbot interactions, particularly when compared to human-delivered services. Some studies emphasize chatbot efficiency and availability, others report lower satisfaction and negative

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perceptions, underscoring the need to identify the conditions under which chatbots can effectively enhance the customer experience.

This study addresses this gap by focusing on two key chatbot attributes: usability and responsiveness, which represent functional qualities of AI-driven service systems. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model, the research investigates how these dimensions influence customer experience through both extrinsic value (e.g., usefulness and efficiency) and intrinsic value (e.g., enjoyment and engagement). Furthermore, it examines how this experience translates into satisfaction and, in turn, affects recommendation intention, word-of-mouth, and loyalty.

The central research question guiding this investigation is: How do chatbot usability and responsiveness influence customer experience, satisfaction, and loyalty-related outcomes in an e-commerce context? The study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which chatbot design contributes to relationship-building and to offer practical insights for organizations seeking to leverage chatbots for fostering long-term customer relationships.

Method And Data

This study employs a quantitative research design using an online questionnaire distributed via social media platforms and personal networks. A total of 176 valid responses were collected. The sample shows a balanced gender distribution (49% men, 51% women). Most respondents are between 25 and 34 years old, followed by the 35–44 and 18–24 age groups. The majority of participants hold a Master’s degree and are primarily located in the Casablanca and Rabat regions.

All constructs were measured with validated scales adapted from prior literature, using five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Chatbot

usability was measured with six items, and chatbot responsiveness with four items. Customer experience was operationalized through two dimensions: extrinsic value and intrinsic value. Customer satisfaction, recommendation intention, word-of-mouth, and loyalty intention were also assessed using established multi-item scales.

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a method well-suited for examining complex relationships among latent constructs and for prediction-oriented research.

Summary of Findings

An exploratory factor analysis was first conducted using SPSS, followed by structural model assessment with SmartPLS. All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted values exceeding the recommended thresholds. High R^2 values for the endogenous constructs indicate strong explanatory power of the model.

The structural model results show that chatbot usability has a strong and significant positive effect on both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of customer experience. In contrast, chatbot responsiveness does not significantly influence either dimension of customer experience. These findings suggest that ease of use plays a more critical role than response speed in shaping users' perceptions of chatbot interactions, reinforcing insights from the Technology Acceptance Model.

Unexpectedly, neither intrinsic nor extrinsic value significantly affects customer satisfaction. This result contrasts with prior marketing literature, which positions perceived value as a direct antecedent of satisfaction. However, customer satisfaction emerges as a key driver of relational outcomes. Specifically, satisfaction strongly and positively affects loyalty intention,

recommendation intention, and word-of-mouth. Overall, the results indicate that while chatbot usability enhances customer experience, satisfaction remains the central mechanism through which chatbots foster loyalty and advocacy outcomes.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study extends the literature on AI chatbot adoption beyond its antecedents to examine its consequences—specifically, its impact on customer satisfaction, recommendation intention, word-of-mouth, and loyalty intention. It advances the field by conceptualizing loyalty toward the chatbot as a service interface, distinct from brand-level loyalty. The findings reveal that usability is the primary driver of positive customer experience and loyalty-related outcomes, whereas responsiveness lacks a significant direct effect. These results offer key theoretical and managerial insights, underscoring usability as the critical design priority for chatbots intended to foster customer satisfaction, advocacy, and long-term loyalty.

EXPERIENCE TAILORING TYPOLOGY: INTEGRATING DIGITAL TOOLS FOR REFUGEE HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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Keywords: Well-being, digital health, refugees, typology

Description: This study presents the Experience Tailoring Typology of digital tool use and integration for refugee health and wellbeing, answering the call for research to deepen the understanding of marketing in health, particularly in diverse vulnerable markets.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the growing emphasis on the wider role of marketing in society, empowering vulnerable populations, such as refugees, to better participate in increasingly complex marketplaces is an urgent priority. According to the United Nations117.3 million individuals are forcibly displaced, as of mid-2025 (UNHCR,2025). Typically from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, different to the host country, refugees face unique challenges - language, complexities of user interfaces, cultural mismatches, and issues relating to trust (Bhandari et al. 2022; Streuli et al. 2021) - often resulting in inequitable health and well-being outcomes. Although traditionally high-touch, health and well-being services have nevertheless seen rapid and widespread adoption of digital technology that offers flexibility and reach, transforming the delivery of health and well-being services. However, the use of digital tools and their potential for equitable health and well-being outcomes among refugees remains

under-researched with fragmented scholarship across different literatures (Mancini et al. 2019). To address this gap, we pose the following research question:

RQ: How are digital tools integrated for refugees' health and well-being during their resettlement journey?

Method and Data

This research used a scoping review drawing on data from an earlier systematic review (Bakri et al. 2024). The initial study followed PRISMA guidelines where data were extracted from six databases: Web of Science, EBSCO, PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO and CINAHL over the years 1995-April 2024. From the initial cleaning, we identified articles that carried the terms refugee(s) or asylum seeker(s), which yielded 649 articles. After cleaning and screening of full-text articles, 77 remained in the refugee dataset. An abductive thematic analysis was conducted (Sætre and Van de Ven, 2021), allowing the authors to identify core areas of classification to organise the phenomenon of interest (following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013), namely digital tool use by refugees (end-users), healthcare producers and providers.

Summary of Findings

Three key dimensions explaining the integration of digital health tools in refugee health and wellbeing emerged from the thematic analysis of the literature: *resettlement service journey* (two stages of presettlement, and resettlement and integration); *tool type and integration* (e.g. apps, websites, patient portals or immersive technology) and *agency* (e.g. individual, proxy and collective agency). From these identified dimensions, we adopt a typology method to provide a new integrative and explanatory view of the uses of digital tools in refugee health and well-being (Jaakkola, 2020). The typology organizes and differentiates the complex variations of how digital tools are integrated and utilized at the individual (end-user) and

provider/producer levels in shaping the health and wellbeing outcomes of refugees. Five types of experience tailoring are identified. Each type explains the distinguishing dimensions and key practices that account for different levels, drivers and outcomes of marketplace participation and co-creation of value for micro-level actors in refugee health. These five types are: *reactive tailoring*, *assisted tailoring*, *exploratory tailoring*, *empowered tailoring*, and *provider-facilitated co-tailoring*.

Statement of Key Contributions

We answer the calls for research that examines the diversity of human experience in service that addresses the needs of vulnerable consumers and broadens understanding of the role of marketing in health, specifically for refugee communities (Mende et al. 2024; Moorman et al. 2024). Through our conceptual typological framework, we follow a strengths-based approach (Davey et al., 2024) highlighting the capabilities of refugee communities and their potential to leverage digital tools for wellbeing outcomes. Few studies have examined digital tools as enablers of transformative health service experiences and facilitators of service inclusion among refugees (Orsingher et al. 2024). Additionally, our experience tailoring typology provides a critical lens to examine the different configurations in meaningfully integrating digital tools, and the interplay among actors in promoting the health and wellbeing of refugees across the resettlement service journey. For practice, the typology provides producers/providers a greater understanding of how the five types of approaches could lead to improved health and wellbeing outcomes. The typology can be used as a structured framework to alter or extend service design and delivery for improved service inclusion.

Note: References are available upon request.

EXTENDING TRANSFORMATIVE SERVICE RESEARCH: HOW COMMERCIAL SERVICES SHAPE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

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Keywords: Spiritual Services, Transformative Service Research, Spiritual Well-Being, Consumer Spirituality

Description: This paper extends transformative service research by demonstrating how spiritual well-being is created and experienced in spiritual services and how these experiences are shaped by the commercial nature of service provision.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Transformative service research (TSR) has significantly advanced knowledge on how services enhance consumer well-being, yet prior research has largely focused on physical, social, and financial dimensions, leaving spiritual well-being comparatively underexplored. This omission is notable given the growing societal relevance of spirituality and the marketplace's increasing role as a key arena for spiritual experiences. Addressing this gap, the present research is guided by the following overarching research question: How is spiritual well-being created and experienced in

spiritual services? To unpack this question, the study focuses on three interrelated issues. First, it investigates how spiritual well-being is experienced and articulated by consumers. Second, it explores the practices through which spiritual well-being is enabled. Third, it examines how commercial aspects of service provision shape consumers' experiences of spiritual well-being.

Method and Data

To address the research questions, this study employs a netnographic approach, which is well suited for examining spirituality, as spiritual experiences are frequently articulated in online communities outside formal institutions, providing access to naturally occurring consumer conversations and lived experiences. The empirical context comprises commercial spiritual retreats led by a globally known spiritual teacher. These retreats are framed as spiritual experiences while operating as commercial services, making them a suitable context for examining spiritual well-being in market-based settings. The dataset consists of consumer discussions on Reddit, where retreat participants share detailed reflections on their experiences and prospective attendees seek advice. Data analysis followed an iterative, interpretive process, moving between theory and data to develop codes and consolidate them into overarching themes.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that spiritual well-being in spiritual services unfolds across four dimensions of connectedness: connectedness with the self, with others, with the environment, and with a transcendent other. These dimensions are enabled through five types of spiritual practices, i.e., social, embodied, discursive, empowering, and pragmatic. While participants report heightened levels of connectedness, the findings show that spiritual services can also negatively affect spiritual well-being, as participants may experience ruptures in connectedness following the service encounter. Moreover, the study demonstrates that the commercial character

of service provision plays a constitutive role in shaping consumer experiences. Considerations of value for money and the provider's perceived profit orientation influence how spiritual services are evaluated. For prospective consumers, these commercial aspects can create barriers to access and raise questions of legitimacy, whereas for participants they often enhance perceived value and strengthen commitment to the experience.

Statement of Key Contributions

The study makes three key contributions with relevance for both marketing theory and practice. First, it demonstrates that spiritual well-being in services unfolds across four dimensions of connectedness, thereby integrating spiritual facets that extend existing TSR conceptualizations of well-being. Importantly, these dimensions are shown to be ambivalent, as spiritual services can both enhance and disrupt well-being. Second, the research identifies five types of spiritual practices through which these outcomes are produced, contributing a practice-based understanding of how transformative service experiences are designed and enacted. Third, the study highlights the constitutive role of commercial considerations, such as value for money and the service provider's perceived profit orientation, in shaping consumer evaluations, legitimacy perceptions, and commitment. Together, these insights inform the design and management of transformative services while advancing theory on spirituality in market-based contexts.

FROM SAFETY TO ENGAGEMENT: MEASURING SAFE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AND WELL-BEING IN OMNICHANNEL RETAIL

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Keywords: Safety; Customer experience; Omnichannel; Well-being; Customer engagement; Scale development; Retail; NCA, IPMA.

Description: This study develops and validates multidimensional scales for Safe Customer Experience (SafeCX) and customer well-being in omnichannel retailing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In omnichannel retailing, customer safety significantly shapes perceptions of well-being and influences retailer performance. This study develops and validates multidimensional scales for Safe Customer Experience (SafeCX) and customer well-being across five studies and seven phases. Twelve SafeCX dimensions are identified as essential to enhancing safety across touchpoints. The results show that SafeCX positively impacts customer engagement, measured by share of wallet and share of time, with well-being acting as a key mediator. All dimensions contribute meaningfully to outcomes, underscoring the importance of maintaining high well-being. The formative SafeCX scale, which can be adopted as either a full 48-item or a condensed 12-item version, contains 12 critical safety dimensions that constitute essential considerations for managers, as well as key concepts for researchers dedicated to customer safety considerations. The findings offer strategic guidance for retailers investing in safety to drive performance and engagement.

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the nature of safe customer experience perception in omnichannel retailing?

RQ2: What is the nature of customer well-being perception in omnichannel retailing?

RQ3: How do customers' SafeCX perceptions relate to their well-being and retailer performance?

RQ4: Which dimensions of SafeCX are critical for outcomes such as customer well-being and engagement?

Method and Data

We used Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis to refine and develop the scales, and PLS-based analysis for model validation and path analysis using the SmartPLS software.

Summary of Findings

The application of NCA and IPMA in this research provides retail managers with clear guidance on prioritizing SafeCX dimensions. NCA helps identify critical ("must-have") dimensions that are essential for achieving outcomes, while IPMA highlights which dimensions hold the greatest importance for enhancing customer well-being and engagement. For example, IPMA indicates that SafeCX dimensions such as social inclusiveness, anxiety prevention, security cameras, and safe employees should be top priorities. These tools enable managers to strategically allocate resources and set realistic targets for performance, ensuring that customer well-being exceeds the necessary threshold for driving share-of-customer engagement.

The NCA estimates in this study demonstrate that each of the twelve SafeCX dimensions plays a vital role in delivering customer well-being and engagement. The results underscore the importance of maintaining a high level of well-being, showing that falling below an average of 50% in customer well-being is insufficient for achieving strong engagement. To maximize profitability, it is crucial for managers to ensure that well-being levels exceed 99%. This strategic resource allocation across the SafeCX dimensions is essential for achieving long-term success in omnichannel retailing.

Key Contributions

This research advances customer experience (CX) theory by introducing and empirically validating the concept of SafeCX in omnichannel retail. Drawing from means–end chain theory, it positions SafeCX as a foundational driver of customer well-being and downstream engagement outcomes. The multidimensional SafeCX scale integrates 12 dimensions across physical and digital touchpoints, contributing to a more holistic understanding of how perceptions of safety shape CX. This study also conceptualizes customer well-being as a psychological mediator, extending prior well-being frameworks by incorporating both individual and community-level safety concerns. The dual-scale development across five studies provides methodological rigor, offering robust measurement tools for future empirical testing. Additionally, the use of

conditional importance-performance map analysis (cIPMA) in conjunction with NCA offers a novel method for prioritizing CX elements.

For omnichannel retailers, this research offers actionable insights to enhance customer safety and well-being across touchpoints. The validated SafeCX scale allows managers to measure customer perceptions across 12 distinct dimensions, from physical safeguards like emergency exits and spatial distancing to digital aspects like personal data safety. The study shows that perceptions of SafeCX significantly influence customer well-being, which in turn drives financial (share-of-wallet) and social (influence intention) engagement. The inclusion of cIPMA provides a practical diagnostic tool for identifying underperforming SafeCX areas that require immediate attention, offering retailers a data-driven prioritization strategy. By treating customer well-being as a mediating lever, managers can better understand how safety translates into tangible business value. The tools and insights presented empower decision-makers to design safer, more supportive environments that increase customer retention and advocacy.

References are available upon request.

HOW CONSUMERS RESPOND TO AI CHATBOTS' CONVERSATIONAL CONTENT

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Keywords: artificial intelligence, customer service, online chat, chatbots, language

Description: This research investigates what AI chatbots should say in service interactions by examining three categories of conversational content and shows that chatbots' conversational content can positively or negatively impact service outcomes, depending on how authentically they represent AI chatbots' abilities.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms increasingly employ AI chatbots to deliver online customer service. This research investigates what these chatbots should say in service interactions by examining consumers' responses to chatbots' use of three categories of conversational content: informational (e.g., the order is ready), normative (e.g., hello), and relational (e.g., how are you). We argue that chatbots' use of these content categories can enhance or diminish service outcomes, depending on how each category affects perceptions of the chatbots' type authenticity. Type authenticity is the extent to which a chatbot is perceived as a representation of its category (Newman, 2019). In the customer service context, consumers expect chatbots to have the abilities to deliver information and mimic interpersonal interactions, but not the ability to build or maintain

interpersonal relationships (Gray & Wegner, 2012). Accordingly, compared to using only informational content, chatbots using informational and normative content should be perceived as higher in type authenticity, which should increase service outcomes. However, chatbots inclusion of also relational content should be perceived as lower in type authenticity, which should decrease service outcomes. Besides, we explore when these effects arise by examining two moderators: the presence of anthropomorphic cues (avatar and name) and service interaction resolution (success vs. failure).

Method and Data

In seven experimental studies, we investigate how, why, and when chatbots' use of the three categories of conversational content influence consumers' type authenticity perceptions and service outcomes, such as satisfaction, using a variety of customer service tasks and conversational content. Across studies, we examine the effects of successively including three conversational content categories, starting with informational content and then progressively adding normative and relational content categories. Study 1 tests the main effect of a chatbot's conversational content on service outcomes. Study 2 replicates the main effect by using incentivized outcomes and a within-subjects design. Study 3 compares consumers' responses to chatbots' and human agents' use of different conversational content categories. Studies 4a and 4b replicate the proposed main effect and test whether type authenticity perceptions mediate the relationship between chatbots' conversational content and service outcomes. Finally, Studies 5 and 6 examine potential boundary conditions for the observed effect. Study 5 tests the effect of presenting chatbots with anthropomorphic cues such as a humanlike avatar and name. Further, Study 6 tests the effect of interaction resolution (success vs. failure) as another boundary condition.

Summary of Findings

Our findings demonstrate that compared to using only informational content, AI chatbots' use of both informational and normative content increases authenticity perceptions and, ultimately, service outcomes. However, compared to using informational and normative content, chatbots' use of informational, normative, and relational content decreases authenticity perceptions and, ultimately, service outcomes. In addition, our results confirm that consumers react more positively when a human agent uses relational content, but react more negatively when a chatbot includes the same relational content, compared to when either of these agents use only informational and normative content. Further, these effects are moderated by the presence of anthropomorphic cues (humanlike avatar and name) and by service interaction outcome (success vs. failure). The negative effect of a chatbot's inclusion of relational content on service outcomes is weakened when the chatbots is presented with anthropomorphic cues. In addition, the positive effect of a chatbot's inclusion of normative content on service outcomes is weakened when the service interaction results in failure.

Key Contributions

This research provides novel insights that are both conceptually meaningful and managerially relevant. This research examines chatbots' conversational content, a fundamental yet understudied aspect of chatbot design in text-based service interactions. Specifically, we contribute to literature on customer service chatbots by developing and testing a conversational content framework. In addition, this research contributes to the literature on AI service agents by exploring the underlying reasons for consumers' responses to chatbots' use of different conversational content. We introduce type authenticity as a new construct that helps understand how consumers evaluate and form opinions about chatbots and, more broadly, AI service agents.

By doing so, we offer a new perspective for defining and understanding these agents. Our findings suggest that AI service agents may be evaluated more favorably when designed in relation to consumers' standards for AI rather than humans.

From a managerial perspective, our findings provide clear and actionable guidance for firms, chatbot designers, and conversation designers seeking to enhance consumer perceptions and satisfaction. The conversational content framework we introduce offers an easy-to-implement design tool for shaping chatbot interactions. In addition, our findings clarify when different conversational content categories are most appropriate, helping firms adopt conversational strategies that improve service outcomes.

References are available upon request.

HOW HIGH-FIDELITY HEALTHCARE AVATARS AMPLIFY THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF HEALTHCARE SERVICE FAILURES ON PATIENT TRUST

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Keywords: Digital Human Avatar; Patient Trust; Expectation Violation; Signaling Theory

Description: This study investigates how highly realistic digital human avatars in healthcare intensify the negative effects of service failures on patient trust.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Healthcare providers are rapidly adopting digital human avatars (DHAs) to communicate with patients, answer questions, and support care delivery (Sung et al., 2023; Miao et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2024). Many of these systems are designed to look highly human-like. The assumption is if an avatar looks real, patients will trust it more. However, healthcare interactions are fragile by nature. Errors, delays, and misunderstandings are very hard to avoid. What remains unclear is how patients react when these failures come from a highly realistic digital agent rather than a basic chatbot.

Prior research highlights the benefits of anthropomorphism in digital health, such as higher engagement and perceived warmth (Silva et al., 2023; Oliveira et al., 2024). Other work shows that service failures reduce trust. However, to the best of our knowledge, these two streams are hardly examined together. This creates an important gap. Specifically, do realistic healthcare avatars actually increase risk when things go wrong?

This study asks whether a service failure caused by a high-fidelity healthcare DHA leads to a sharper drop in patient trust than the same failure caused by a low-fidelity chatbot. It also examines why this happens and when the effect is strongest. Building on signaling theory and expectation-confirmation theory, we argue that realistic avatars create very high expectations (Connelly et al., 2011; Orth et al., 2010; Lankton & McKnight, 2012). When these expectations are violated, the emotional and cognitive reaction is more severe. The study therefore seeks to uncover the hidden costs of realism in high-stakes healthcare technologies.

Method and Data

The research consists of two experimental studies designed to test the proposed relationships, following prior experimental work on avatar-based services and trust (Miao et al., 2022; Oliveira et al., 2024). Study 1 examines whether avatar realism intensifies the negative effect of service failure on healthcare trust and whether this effect operates through perceived expectation violation. A 2 (agent fidelity: high-fidelity DHA vs. low-fidelity chatbot) × 2 (service outcome: success vs. failure) between-subjects design was used. Participants were recruited from online consumer panels and randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

Participants first reported baseline healthcare trust and were then introduced to a simulated healthcare assistant. They interacted with the assistant to obtain information about medical costs. The interaction ended with either a correct response or a clear service failure. Trust was measured again after the interaction, along with perceived healthcare expectation violation. Analysis of covariance was conducted using baseline trust as a control.

Study 2 focused only on service failures and examined failure severity as a boundary condition. Using a 2 (agent fidelity) × 2 (failure severity: minor vs. severe) design, participants experienced either a small informational error or a serious and dismissive medical response. Moderated mediation analysis was used to test whether failure severity strengthened the indirect effect of avatar fidelity on trust.

Summary of Findings

The findings from both studies strongly support the proposed avatar brittleness effect, extending emerging research on the risks of highly human-like AI in service contexts (Sung et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2025). In Study 1, service failures led to a significant decline in healthcare trust across conditions. However, the drop in trust was substantially larger when the failure came from a high-fidelity healthcare DHA rather than a low-fidelity chatbot. This result shows that realism, while beneficial in successful interactions, becomes a liability when performance falls short.

Mediation analysis revealed that this effect occurs because realistic avatars generate higher expectations. When these expectations are violated, patients experience stronger negative reactions. Perceived healthcare expectation violation partially explains why trust erodes more sharply following failures by high-fidelity DHAs.

Study 2 further demonstrates that failure severity plays a critical role. While minor failures reduced trust modestly, severe failures produced dramatic trust losses when delivered by high-fidelity avatars. These severe failures violated both functional expectations, such as accuracy and competence, and social expectations, such as empathy and professionalism. In contrast, low-fidelity chatbots triggered weaker expectations and therefore smaller trust losses. Together, the results show that the more human an avatar appears, the more fragile patient trust becomes when things go wrong.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to research on digital health and artificial intelligence. First, it introduces and empirically demonstrates the avatar brittleness effect in a healthcare context. The findings show that high-fidelity digital human avatars can amplify the negative consequences of service failures rather than protect against them. This challenges the common assumption that greater realism always leads to better outcomes.

Second, the study explains why this effect occurs by identifying perceived healthcare expectation violation as a key psychological mechanism, consistent with expectation-disconfirmation theory and signaling perspectives (Connelly et al., 2011; Schwarz & Zhu, 2015; Oliveira et al., 2024). Realistic avatars act as strong signals of competence and care. When these signals are contradicted by poor performance, patients feel both functionally and socially let down. The study also identifies failure severity as an important boundary condition, showing that risks are greatest in high-stakes medical situations.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer clear guidance for healthcare managers. Investments should prioritize functional accuracy and reliability over visual realism. High-fidelity avatars should be used cautiously and primarily in low-risk tasks, while complex and sensitive interactions should remain with human professionals. Overall, the research advances a more responsible and realistic approach to deploying human-like AI in healthcare services.

References

References are available upon request.

HUMANNESS SOCIAL CUES IN TEXT-BASED CHATBOTS: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

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Keywords: customer experience, experience dimensions, text-based chatbots, anthropomorphism, empathy

Description: This study investigates the effect of incorporating humanness social cues into text-based chatbots on six dimensions of customer experience.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed CX. Today's customers have heightened expectations, demanding omnichannel accessibility, real-time support, and highly personalized experiences. To meet these demands chatbots, are increasingly being used by companies. We focus on text-based chatbots (TBCs), which are designed to converse and interact with users through natural written language. Unlike other systems that can leverage advanced forms of communication such as facial expressions, voices, and movements, TBCs are limited to written interaction. This limitation can make communication challenges more pronounced. Building on the Computers Are Social Actors (CASA) Theory, this study investigates the role of endowing TBCs with anthropomorphism and empathy cues in shaping CX.

Specifically, our objectives are to: (1) extend CASA to the context of TBCs by testing the effects of anthropomorphism and empathy on CX; (2) provide one of the first analyses quantifying the relative impact anthropomorphism and empathy across the six CX dimensions: affective, cognitive, physical, relational, sensory and symbolic; and (3) identify which CX dimensions are most sensitive to each cue, revealing whether different forms of humanness activate distinct experiential mechanisms.

METHOD AND DATA

To empirically evaluate the proposed model, data were collected through a survey published on the Prolific platform, with 1,013 participants from the United States. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and participants were reminded they must have previously interacted with a TBC. Although a total of 1,013 responses were collected, some were incomplete, were completed too quickly, or exhibited patterned answering and were therefore

excluded from the analysis. As a result, the final sample comprised 805 individuals. Individuals were asked to rate statements about their perceptions of the last interaction with a TBC using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All scales were adapted from validated sources.

First, multiple statistical post-hoc procedures were applied to assess the potential impact of Common Method Bias (CBM). Second, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated. Finally, the conceptual model was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. Smart-PLS software, which uses Partial Least Squares (PLS), was used to analyze the data and assess the relationships in the model.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings show that both anthropomorphism and empathy are significant predictors of CX in TBCs context; however empathy consistently emerges as the dominant driver across all dimensions. This suggests that customers value emotional understanding over human-like characteristics of TBCs. While anthropomorphic features may make TBCs seem friendlier, they cannot replace the need for emotional connection. Overall, the results underscore that effective AI-driven interactions in marketing must extend beyond functional efficiency to address the emotional and social aspects of CX.

The findings also highlight that anthropomorphism and empathy impact CX dimensions differently. For anthropomorphism, the relational dimension is most strongly affected. This suggests that anthropomorphic cues are most effective in signaling social presence, while their impact on other dimensions remains comparatively small. In contrast, empathy emerges as the dominant driver across the model. Its strongest effects are observed on the affective and cognitive dimensions, indicating that empathetic chatbots substantially enhance users' emotions and decision-making processes. Additionally, empathy significantly improves

sensorial and physical experiences, making interactions feel more engaging and effortless. Relational outcomes improve moderately, suggesting that empathy strengthens social bonds but may be constrained by the text-based format of TBCs. Finally, the symbolic dimension shows only small effects.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to the literature on CX and TBCs. First, it adapts a pioneering multidimensional CX scale to the context of TBCs, enabling a more nuanced assessment of CX across six dimensions: affective, cognitive, physical, relational, sensorial, and symbolic. This provides a valuable tool for future research on AI-mediated service interactions. Second, the study shows that both anthropomorphism and empathy positively affect all CX dimensions, albeit to varying degrees. This finding reinforces the importance of conceptualizing CX as a multidimensional construct. The findings demonstrate that empathy has a stronger impact than anthropomorphism across all dimensions, highlighting its central role in shaping how users perceive chatbot interactions.

From a managerial perspective, the findings demonstrate that empathy should be prioritized in TBCs design. Investments in natural language processing, sentiment detection, and adaptive dialogue can therefore provide greater returns than focusing solely on anthropomorphic features such as avatars. By evaluating CX at the dimensional level, firms can identify which aspects benefit most from empathy-driven interventions and allocate resources more strategically within omnichannel strategies.

LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO ENHANCE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE: A RETENTION FRAMEWORK ACROSS THE RELATIONSHIP LIFECYCLE

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Keywords: Customer relationships, user experience, relationship duration, and customer loyalty

Description: This study examines how AI-driven personalization and engagement enhance customer experience. Grounded in Flow Theory, it proposes a framework linking AI-enabled experiences to stronger customer loyalty, advocacy, and retention.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research addresses a key research question: How does AI-driven personalization and engagement influence customer experience by fostering flow states, and in what ways do these AI-enhanced experiences affect customer loyalty, advocacy, and retention across different stages of the customer lifecycle (exploration, maturity, and decline), ultimately contributing to long-term firm performance?

Method and Data

To evaluate the framework, the study draws on empirical evidence from digital service contexts where AI-enabled interactions are prevalent, such as streaming platforms, e-commerce, and online education. Customer experience, loyalty, advocacy, and retention are examined across different customer lifecycle stages (exploration, maturity, and decline) to capture heterogeneous effects over time. Data are analyzed using multivariate techniques to assess relationships among AI-driven personalization, flow states, and retention outcomes, allowing for comparisons across lifecycle stages and strengthening the robustness of the proposed framework.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that AI-driven personalization and engagement significantly enhance customer experience. These AI-enhanced experiences positively influence customer loyalty and advocacy, which in turn improve retention. Importantly, the impact of AI on retention is not uniform across the customer lifecycle. AI-driven experiences are particularly influential during the exploration and maturity stages, where immersive and personalized interactions strengthen emotional bonds and sustained engagement. Overall, the results demonstrate that AI contributes to firm performance not merely through efficiency gains but by shaping meaningful, experience-based relationships with customers over time.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes important contributions to both theory and practice. It advances customer experience management literature by positioning AI-enhanced customer experience as a central

mechanism linking AI-driven personalization and engagement to retention outcomes. Next, it enriches digital and services marketing research with a psychological perspective that explains how and why AI-driven experiences foster loyalty across customer lifecycle stages. Additionally, the study offers strategic insights for firms and policymakers by reframing AI as an experiential capability rather than a purely operational tool. Collectively, the research deepens theoretical understanding of AI's role in relationship building while providing actionable guidance for managing long-term customer engagement in AI-mediated environments.

"References are available upon request."

NO HARD FEELINGS: THE PROTECTIVE POWER OF AI EMPATHY DURING SERVICE INTERACTION FAILURES

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Keywords: AI empathy, Voice assistants, Service failure, Customer satisfaction, Verbal aggression.

Description: This is an experimental study investigating the role of AI Empathy in consumer-AI interactions using three different methodologies (survey research, sentiment analysis from text, prosodic emotion analysis from vocal expressions).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Conversational AI is rapidly transforming frontline service delivery. Voice assistants (VAs), powered by large language models and affective computing, are increasingly employed in high-stakes industries such as banking to handle tasks traditionally performed by humans (Wirtz et al. 2018; Liu-Thompkins et al. 2022). Yet, despite improvements in accuracy and efficiency, AI-led service encounters remain vulnerable to process breakdowns, which frustrate customers, undermine satisfaction, and often elicit hostility (Sun et al. 2022; Riquel et al. 2021). Past research highlights empathy as a cornerstone of effective service delivery (Wieseke et al. 2012), but whether *AI-delivered empathy* can meaningfully improve customer experiences—particularly when failures occur—remains an open question (Heirati et al. 2025; Lv et al. 2022). This study investigates the role of AI empathy in shaping customer satisfaction and verbal aggression during service failures, while also introducing new methodological opportunities to study customer emotions dynamically and in real time.

Method and Data

We conducted a 2 (AI Empathy: empathic vs. non-empathic) × 2 (Service Interaction Failure: present vs. absent) between-subjects experiment in a simulated banking scenario. 394 participants (M_age=39.6, 42% male) were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Participants acted as customers contacting a bank's VA regarding a missing transfer of $500. Interactions were powered by Hume AI's empathic voice interface (EVI), a real-time, voice-to-voice conversational model that detects users' emotional expressions through their voice and responds with adaptive speech (Brooks et al. 2023; Cowen et al. 2019).

In the empathic condition, the VA actively recognized emotional signals in the participant's voice and responded with supportive and validating language, dynamically adjusting tone and prosody. In the non-empathic condition, the VA remained polite and professional but withheld explicit emotional acknowledgement. Service failures were manipulated by prompting the VA to repeatedly misunderstand user responses at predetermined points in the conversation, before ultimately resolving the issue. All participants completed post-interaction measures of mind perception (Gray et al. 2007), social presence (van Doorn et al. 2017), satisfaction (Anderson et al. 2004), and verbal aggression (Buss & Perry 1992), while EVI simultaneously captured utterance-level emotional expression data throughout the exchange.

Summary of Findings

Main Results

Our findings show that when no service failure occurred, empathic and non-empathic VAs performed comparably. However, when a failure occurred, customers interacting with an empathic VA reported higher satisfaction (M=4.34 vs. 3.36) and lower verbal aggression (M=3.79 vs. 4.22) than those in the non-empathic condition.

These effects unfolded through a sequential mediation mechanism: empathic VAs were attributed greater mind perception, which in turn enhanced their social presence. Higher social presence then predicted greater satisfaction and reduced aggression. For satisfaction, the indirect effect of AI empathy through mind perception and social presence was significant (b=.21, SE = .06, 95% CI[.10, .34]). For verbal aggression, the indirect effect was likewise significant, and negative (b=–.15, SE=.05, 95% CI[–.26, –.07]). In both cases, direct effects were nonsignificant, indicating full mediation.

Beyond Self-Report: Dynamic Emotion Analyses

While self-reported satisfaction and aggression capture participants' reflections after the interaction, our design also enabled analysis of emotional expressions in real time.

Sentiment Analysis of User Speech

Transcripts of participant utterances were analyzed using the AFINN lexicon (Silge & Robinson 2016). Results revealed that participants interacting with the empathic VA expressed significantly more positive sentiment (M=0.20) than those in the non-empathic condition (M=–0.16; $p<.001$) (Figure 1). This suggests that empathic AI not only improves retrospective evaluations but also shifts the semantic tone of customers' language during the interaction itself.

Prosodic Emotion Analysis of Vocal Expressions

Leveraging EVI's emotion recognition (Brooks et al. 2023), we examined the trajectory of anger during service failures. As expected, anger levels spiked at the moment of failure for participants in the non-empathic VA condition, with a significant positive increase over message sequence (b=.00077, SE=.00027, p=.004, 95% CI[.00025,.00130]). Strikingly, in the empathic VA condition, this anger spike did not occur; the regression slope was flat and nonsignificant (b=–.00019, SE=.00027, p=.474, 95% CI[–.00071, .00033]). Participants' vocal expressions remained stable, showing no surge of anger during the failure episode (Figure 2). This novel finding demonstrates that AI-delivered empathy can prevent the escalation of negative emotions in real time, effectively neutralizing the emotional cost of service breakdowns.

Together, these analyses extend our conclusions beyond self-report to show how empathic AI tangibly alters the emotional dynamics of service encounters. They also highlight the methodological innovation of combining survey data with utterance-level emotion measurement, setting a new benchmark for ecological validity in human–AI interaction research.

Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to the emerging literature on AI empathy and customer service. First, contrary to prior research suggesting that humanlike features can sometimes backfire and lower satisfaction in high-frustration contexts (Crolic et al. 2022; Tsai et al. 2021), we provide causal evidence that AI empathy consistently improves satisfaction and reduces misbehavior, especially under failure conditions. Rather than being a "nice-to-have," AI empathy is revealed as an essential protective feature in high-stakes service contexts.

Second, we introduce real-time emotion analysis as a methodological innovation. Whereas prior research has largely relied on self-reports or scripted chatbot interactions (Lv et al. 2022), our work shows how emotion recognition at the utterance level provides richer insight into customers' dynamic affective states. This enables a new class of behavioral evidence for how empathic AI regulates emotions during service encounters.

Finally, we contribute to the literature on service recovery (Huang & Rust 2024; Bove 2019) by showing that AI-delivered empathy can act as a buffer against double deviations, mitigating both dissatisfaction and hostility when the AI itself causes the failure. In doing so, we position AI empathy not as an optional enhancement but as a strategic safeguard for organizations adopting conversational AI at scale.

By combining survey evidence, sentiment analysis, and vocal emotion trajectories, this work shows that empathy is both a psychological mechanism and a real-time regulator of customer emotions in AI-led service encounters. As conversational AI becomes ubiquitous, embedding empathic capacities may be critical to ensuring emotionally intelligent and constructive digital service interactions.

References are available upon request.

PARTNERSHIP IN COLLABORATION: EXPLORING CONSUMER RESPONSES TO DIFFERENT ROBOT ROLES IN HUMAN-ROBOT COLLABORATION

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Keywords: Service robot, Human-robot collaboration, Robot role, Hierarchy level

Description: This study investigates the impact of different robot role in HRC on consumer behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The rise of emerging technologies like AI has driven the widespread use of service robots in marketing. Replacing humans entirely with robots may cause negative effects, such as consumers' identity threats and reduced service authenticity. However, humans and robots have complementary strengths, and human-robot collaboration (HRC) can leverage these advantages for better service outcomes. As a result, HRC is increasingly adopted across industries, with the collaborative robot market expected to reach USD 2.14 billion in 2024 and a 31.6% CAGR over the next five years.

HRC is applied in sectors such as retail, hospitality, healthcare, and customer service, benefiting

organizations and consumers by reducing costs, improving efficiency, enhancing consumer experience, and increasing employee productivity. For example, in retail, collaborative robots help employees engage customers and improve in-store experiences.

Robots are often assigned social roles through names or language, such as “servant,” “partner,” or “leader,” which influence consumer behavior. Prior research has focused on binary consumer-robot interactions, showing that consumer responses vary with the robot’s role. Yet, as HRC becomes widespread, understanding robot roles within human-robot teams is critical. This study investigates the impact of different robot role in HRC on consumer behavior, extending beyond previous consumer-robot studies.

Method And Data

We conducted two experiments to examine how different robot roles shape consumer responses in human–robot service teams. Study 1 focused on two roles that have received consistent attention in prior research: partner vs. subordinate. A total of 228 Credamo participants imagined visiting a travel agency where they interacted with a service team composed of a human employee, Lili, and a service robot, Xiaoming. The robot introduced itself either as Lili’s subordinate or as her partner. Participants then reported their purchase intention, perceived authenticity (mediator), perceptions of the robot’s role (manipulation check), and demographics. Study 2 extended this inquiry by manipulating hierarchy level, comparing a partner robot with a leader robot. Two hundred participants evaluated a clothing store scenario involving the same service team, except that the robot was positioned as Lili’s leader in the leader condition. Measures paralleled Study 1, with the addition of perceived effectiveness, a competence-based

construct that complements authenticity.

Summary of Findings – 200 words

Study 1 found a significant effect of robot role on purchase intention. Participants in the partner condition reported higher purchase intention (M = 5.58, SD = 0.97) than those in the subordinate condition (M = 5.26, SD = 1.04; F(1,226) = 5.588, p = 0.019). Perceived service authenticity also differed significantly, with higher authenticity in the partner condition (M = 6.06, SD = 0.65) than in the subordinate condition (M = 5.83, SD = 0.87; F(1,226) = 4.852, p = 0.029). Mediation analysis (PROCESS Model 4) showed a significant indirect effect of authenticity on purchase intention (Effect = 0.140, 95% CI [0.016, 0.329]).

Study 2 examined partner versus leader roles. Purchase intention was marginally higher in the partner condition (M = 5.77, SD = 0.81) than in the leader condition (M = 5.51, SD = 1.01; F(1,198) = 3.901, p = 0.050). Perceived effectiveness differed significantly ($M_{partner}$ = 5.98, SD = 0.77; M_{leader} = 5.66, SD = 1.08; F(1,198) = 5.513, p = 0.017), whereas perceived authenticity did not ($M_{partner}$ = 6.02, SD = 0.67; M_{leader} = 6.02, SD = 0.64; F(1,198) = 0.000, p = 1.000). Mediation analyses (PROCESS Model 4) showed no indirect effect of authenticity (Effect = 0.000, 95% CI [–0.055, 0.052]) but a significant indirect effect of effectiveness (Effect = 0.214, 95% CI [0.044, 0.427]).

Statement of Key Contributions

First, this research contributes to the literature on service robots and robot roles. Previous studies have mainly focused on the impact of the robot's role in the consumer-robot interaction (Ha et al., 2021; Lei et al., 2024; Teng et al., 2024). However, our research goes beyond the binary

interaction between consumers and robots, connecting HRC with consumers and enriching the understanding of the impact of robot roles in the era of HRC. Second, our research contributes to the literature on human-robot collaboration. This study responds to the recent calls for exploring consumers' reactions to HRC (Huang et al., 2024; Le et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Previous research focused on the impact of the models or cues of HRC, and found that different cues of HRC can improve consumers' service satisfaction and increase their willingness to accept chatbots (Le et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024). Our research integrates the literature on robot roles and explores the impact of different relationships between robots and employees. This enriches the understanding of HRC from the perspective of the employee-robot relationship.

PICTORIALS THAT MEASURE:
A SEMIOTIC APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING PICTORIAL SCALES

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Keywords: pictorial scales, scale development, semiotics, mobile surveys, customer experience

Description: A semiotics-grounded, three-step scale development procedure shows how pictorial (graphical) scales can replace long text-based item batteries while preserving validity and improving mobile survey efficiency and experience.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Survey-based marketing research increasingly occurs on mobile devices, yet many established multi-item measures are long, text-heavy, and poorly aligned with fast, visually driven interfaces. This mismatch can intensify survey fatigue, reduce completion, and limit researchers' ability to capture timely feedback. Pictorial scales—items and/or response options expressed through graphical signs such as icons—promise faster, more engaging measurement, but the flexibility and creativity in pictorial design can also increase misinterpretation and

threaten reliability and validity. To avoid ambiguous interpretations, pictorial scale designers must encode meaning in the graphical elements in a way that ensures scale users can accurately decode it. Achieving this requires a clear understanding of how to design pictorial scales.

Therefore, this paper asks: How can marketing researchers develop pictorial (graphical) scales in a systematic, theory-grounded way that (1) preserves the psychometric rigor of validated text-based instruments and (2) improves efficiency and respondent experience?

Method and Data

We first synthesized prior approaches to pictorial measurement by conducting a systematic review of pictorial scale development procedures across survey-based disciplines. From 3,227 articles screened in 72 journals, 28 papers reported explicit design and validation steps that could inform best practices. Integrating these insights with semiotic theory, we propose that successful pictorial measures must satisfy three interdependent quality pillars— (1) syntactic (well-designed), (2) semantic (meaningful), and (3) pragmatic (usable and useful)—and we illustrate how to operationalize these pillars when translating an existing text-based scale into a pictorial alternative: (1) pictorial generation (archetype selection, iterative design process, and consistency tests), (2) pictorial selection (association, sorting, and known-group tests), and (3) pictorial validation (usability and usefulness tests).

We demonstrate the process with a case study on customer experience (CX), a six-dimensional construct with a validated 18-item text-based scale. Across seven studies with 1,473 participants in total, we combined user drawings, large-scale icon searches, and iterative designer input to build an icon pool; removed icons that were not consistent or semantically clear; and then benchmarked a six-icon pictorial CX scale against its text-based counterpart in mobile and

field settings using confirmatory factor analyses, validity tests, and response-time and satisfaction metrics.

Summary of Findings

Our findings are manifold. Conceptually, we translate semiotics into actionable measurement guidance by specifying three quality pillars—syntactic (well-designed), semantic (meaningful), and pragmatic (usable and useful)—and translate them into a three-step process covering pictorial generation, selection and validation. Methodologically, we provide a multimethod blueprint that complements established text-scale development paradigms: it links concrete design choices and decisions (pictorial archetype selection, representation, and valence consistency) to diagnostic tests (pictorial associations, sorting, and known-groups) and then to psychometric validation (pictorial scale usability and usefulness). Empirically, we demonstrate that pictorial scales can be both rigorous and practically superior in mobile contexts in a case study on CX, achieving substantial time savings and improved respondent experience while preserving the construct's nomological role.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research advances marketing measurement by offering, to our knowledge, the first comprehensive and theory-grounded guidelines for developing pictorial scales which are purpose-built for mobile, visually driven contexts. The guidelines integrate semiotic theory with a comprehensive review of pictorial scale development and complement established text-scale procedures (e.g., Churchill 1979), while advancing the agenda to improve construct measurement (e.g., Boettger et al., 2017). Our procedure can be applied to many marketing constructs typically measured with long batteries (e.g., brand personality, engagement, service quality), enabling

shorter, more inclusive instruments that can broaden participation among low-literacy and mobile-first respondents.

Without sacrificing rigor, we offer a practical solution for different stakeholders, addressing declining response rates and survey fatigue. For for-profit firms such as retailers, it enables mobile-optimized, faster research with higher completion and lower dropout, yielding timelier insights and reduced costs. Survey platforms and research agencies can operationalize the design rules and validation steps to build pictorial question types and icon libraries that enhance respondent experience and data quality. Accessibility advocates also benefit because visual-first measures suit younger respondents, seniors, and people with limited reading proficiency, thereby broadening participation and representativeness.

References are available upon request.

SOUNDS WARM? THE PHONETIC EFFECT OF A BRAND'S POST TRANSGRESSION APOLOGY ON CONSUMER FORGIVENESS

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Keywords: sound symbolism, brand apology, consumer forgiveness, phonetics, warmth perception

Description: This research examines how the phonetic structure of brand apologies influences perceived warmth and consumer forgiveness following brand transgressions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

When brands commit transgressions, apologies are a commonly used recovery strategy to repair damaged consumer–brand relationships. Prior research has largely focused on whether an apology is offered and on the semantic content of apology messages, such as expressions of empathy or responsibility. However, an overlooked aspect of apology effectiveness lies in the *sound* of the words themselves. Drawing on sound symbolism theory, which posits that phonetic properties of language carry meaning independent of semantics, this research asks whether the phonetic composition of a brand apology influences consumer forgiveness. Specifically, the research investigates whether apologies dominated by voiceless consonant sounds (e.g., "Excuse us") are more effective in eliciting forgiveness than apologies dominated by voiced consonant sounds (e.g., "We regret"). Building on prior findings linking voiceless sounds to softness, femininity, and warmth, this research further examines whether perceived warmth serves as the psychological mechanism underlying this effect. The central research question is: *Can the mere sound of a brand's apology, independent of its meaning, shape consumer warmth perceptions and forgiveness following a brand transgression?*

Method And Data

This research employs a multi-study experimental approach consisting of two pretests and one main study. Pretest 1 establishes foundational sound symbolism associations by having participants listen to isolated lists of voiceless versus voiced consonant sounds and rate them on semantic differential scales (e.g., small–large, feminine–masculine). Pretest 2 validates the selection of two real-world apology phrases: "Excuse us" and "We regret". This demonstrates that they are perceived as equivalent in meaning, formality, empathy, and responsibility while differing in phonetic composition.

The main study uses a between-subjects design in which participants experience a restaurant service failure scenario and then listen to one of the two apology messages. Perceived warmth is measured using established warmth items, and consumer forgiveness is assessed with a direct forgiveness measure. Mediation analysis is conducted to test whether warmth explains the relationship between apology sound and forgiveness.

Summary of Findings

Across studies, results provide converging evidence that the phonetic structure of a brand apology significantly influences consumer forgiveness through perceived warmth. In the main study, mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples revealed a significant indirect effect of apology sound on forgiveness via warmth (b = .31, boot SE = .11, 95% CI [.13, .55]). Specifically, participants who heard the voiceless apology ("Excuse us") perceived the brand as significantly warmer than those who heard the voiced apology ("We regret") (b = .99, SE = .24, $t(203) = 4.09$, $p < .001$).

Perceived warmth, in turn, positively predicted consumer forgiveness (b = .31, SE = .07, $t(202) = 4.80$, $p < .001$), indicating that warmer brand impressions translated into a greater willingness to forgive the service failure. Importantly, this mediation effect remained robust after controlling for alternative explanations, including perceived severity of the failure.

Supporting pretests further demonstrated that voiceless consonant sounds are systematically associated with traits such as smaller size, femininity, and lightness relative to voiced consonants (all ps < .05), validating the proposed sound symbolism mechanism. Together, these findings show that even when apologies are equivalent in semantic meaning, formality, empathy, and responsibility, subtle phonetic differences exert a measurable and consequential impact on warmth perceptions and consumer forgiveness.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several important theoretical and managerial contributions. Theoretically, it extends sound symbolism theory into the domain of brand apologies, demonstrating that phonetic cues influence consumer forgiveness independently of semantic content. By identifying warmth as a mediating mechanism, the research integrates sound symbolism with the broader literature on warmth, gendered language, and forgiveness in consumer–brand relationships. Additionally, by using real apology phrases rather than artificial or manipulated syllables, this research enhances the external validity of sound symbolism findings and addresses a key limitation of prior work.

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer actionable guidance for firms and public relations professionals. Apology effectiveness can be improved not only by *what* brands say, but also by *how* their words sound. Strategically incorporating voiceless sounds into apology statements represents a low-cost yet impactful tool for improving service recovery outcomes and restoring consumer trust. More broadly, this research underscores the importance of subtle linguistic design in crisis communication and brand relationship management.

*References are available upon request.

THE DESIRABILITY-OPPORTUNISM EFFECT: CONSUMERS' BYPASSING BEHAVIOR IN ON-DEMAND PRODUCT FEATURES

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Keywords: Fraud triangle; opportunistic behavior; moral disengagement.

Description: This study proposes and examines the desirability-opportunism effect: the tendency of consumers with high purchase intent to exploit opportunities for opportunistic behavior, particularly when they can rationalize their actions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

On-demand product features (ODFs) restrict access to embedded functionalities behind paywalls, allowing firms to monetize products after purchase. While prior research (Garbas et al., 2023; Schaefers et al., 2022) shows that consumers often resist such models and perceive them as unfair, less is known about how consumers respond when they become aware of opportunities to bypass access restrictions. This study shows how motivation, opportunity, and rationalization jointly explain consumers' bypassing intentions. Drawing on the fraud triangle framework (Cressey, 1953), we propose the desirability-opportunism effect, suggesting that consumers with high motivation to use ODFs (reflected in strong purchase intent) are particularly likely to exploit bypassing opportunities, particularly when they can rationalize their behavior. By shifting attention

from consumer acceptance of ODFs to opportunistic responses, this research addresses an important but underexplored consequence of access-based business models.

Method and Data

The research employs a mixed-method design. An exploratory qualitative pre-study draws on online forums, consumer reviews, and social media discussions to document the existence of bypassing behavior in automotive ODF contexts. Two subsequent studies test the proposed framework quantitatively. In both studies, U.S. car owners evaluated an ODF scenario using a two-stage design in which purchase intent was measured before respondents learned about a potential bypass opportunity. Study 1 tests the baseline desirability-opportunism effect, while Study 2 replicates the effect and incorporates rationalization as both a direct predictor and a moderator. Across studies, relevant individual-difference covariates were included to rule out alternative explanations. These included respondents' age, their involvement with cars (Zaichowsky, 1985), their technology anxiety (Meuter et al., 2005), and their preference for tangible products ("Would you prefer to read a book in its physical or digital form?").

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, higher purchase intent for ODFs consistently predicts stronger intentions to bypass access restrictions once an opportunity is revealed, providing robust support for the desirability-opportunism effect. Study 2 further shows that rationalization plays a critical role, as consumers who perceive bypassing as justifiable, or who believe that others would engage in similar behavior, report stronger bypassing intentions. Importantly, rationalization amplifies the desirability-opportunism effect, strengthening the positive relationship between purchase intent

and bypassing. Together, the findings demonstrate that motivation, opportunity, and rationalization jointly explain opportunistic consumer behavior in ODF settings.

Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to theory and practice. First, it introduces the desirability-opportunism effect, linking consumers' motivation to use a service with their opportunistic behavior when an opportunity to bypass access restrictions arises and can be rationalized. By integrating the fraud triangle framework (Cressey, 1953), the study shows how motivation, opportunity, and rationalization jointly explain consumers' bypassing intentions, advancing research on access-based services, ODFs, and consumer misbehavior beyond prior work focused primarily on fairness perceptions or economic incentives (Garbas et al., 2023; Schaefers et al., 2022).

Second, the study highlights the role of rationalization as both a direct driver of opportunistic behavior and as a moderator enhancing the link between purchase intent and bypassing. By distinguishing between self-focused and other-focused rationalization, we provide a nuanced understanding of how consumers justify ethically ambiguous behavior.

For practitioners, the findings underscore a double challenge of ODFs: while high purchase intent signals revenue potential, consumers may simultaneously seek and exploit bypassing opportunities, potentially compromising safety, data security, and profitability. Finally, the research informs policy considerations by emphasizing the importance of consumer education, clear digital rights guidelines, and preventive measures in contexts where unauthorized access poses safety or security risks.

References are available upon request.

THE EMOTIONAL TOLL OF REFERRAL REWARDS: UNCOVERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REFERRAL REWARDS, ANTICIPATED EMBARRASSMENT, SELF-IMAGE-CONCERN, AND RECOMMENDATION LIKELIHOOD

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Keywords: Customer referral programs (CRPs), referral rewards, anticipated embarrassment, self-image-concern, recommendation likelihood.

Description: Using four experiments (N=765), this research shows that a referral reward offered only to the recommender negatively affects recommendation likelihood via anticipated embarrassment, and this effect is stronger for customers with high self-image-concern but can be minimized by appropriate reward design (e.g., reward both scheme and choice of reward).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers rate word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations as highly reliable (Barraclough, 2025; Peng et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023). To incentivize WOM, service firms often adopt customer referral programs (CRPs), "a form of stimulated WOM that incentivizes existing customers to bring in new customers" (Schmitt et al., 2011, p. 47). However, developing an effective CRP can pose significant challenges (Dose et al., 2019). A significant portion of CRP research that focuses on the underlying mechanism primarily examines how a referral reward might affect customers' cognitive responses, such as metaperception, perceived costs, and inferred motives toward CRPs (Jin and Huang, 2014; Verlegh et al., 2013; Wirtz et al., 2013). Yet to date, little is known about customers' emotional responses toward a rewarded referral. Only Xu et al. (2023) address how psychological barriers (e.g., conflict, guilt, and discomfort) influence the message and referring. Therefore, we investigate: 1) whether referral rewards unfavorably affect recommendation likelihood via anticipated embarrassment; 2) how recommendation likelihood varies between customers with high self-image and low self-image-concern; 3) whether a reward both scheme improves recommendation likelihood for customers with low self-image-concern; and 4) whether a choice reward improves recommendation likelihood for customers with high self-image-concern.

Method And Data

We employed four experiments (N=765). First, a scenario-based, single-factor (no reward vs. referral reward) between-subjects experiment (N=91) examined whether giving a referral reward to a recommender increases customers' anticipated embarrassment toward a rewarded referral and whether a referral reward has an indirect negative effect on recommendation likelihood via

customers' anticipated embarrassment. Second, a scenario-based 2 (no reward vs. referral reward) × self-image-concern (measured) between-subjects design (N=201) examined whether customers' self-image-concern moderates the effect observed in the first study. Third, a 3 (no reward vs. reward-recommender vs. reward-both) × 2 (low self-image-concern vs. high self-image-concern) scenario-based between-subjects experiment (N=296) investigated whether the unfavorable effect of a referral reward through anticipated embarrassment on recommendation likelihood (observed in the first two studies) can be alleviated by implementing a reward-both scheme. Finally, a between-subjects factorial design with three groups: no-reward, reward-both scheme without choice reward (i.e., giving an option to keep or donate the reward), reward-both scheme with choice reward (N=177) examined how the unfavorable effect of a referral reward through anticipated embarrassment on recommendation likelihood for customers with high self-image-concern can be alleviated by implementing a reward-both scheme with a choice reward.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, a mediation analysis showed that a referral reward significantly increases customers' anticipated embarrassment (b=0.70, SE=0.23, p<0.01), and anticipated embarrassment mediates the negative indirect effect of referral rewards on customers' recommendation likelihood (b=0.36, SE=0.14, 95% CI [-0.66, -0.12]). In Study 2, a moderated mediation analysis (b=-0.17, BootSE=0.07, 95% CI=[-0.30, -0.04]) revealed that self-image-concern moderates the indirect effect of referral reward through anticipated embarrassment on recommendation likelihood. The indirect effect of referral rewards on recommendation likelihood via anticipated embarrassment is stronger for customers with high (vs. low) self-image-concern. Study 3 revealed that the indirect effect of a referral reward with a reward-both scheme (vs. no reward) on recommendation

likelihood via anticipated embarrassment was also moderated by customers' self-image-concern (b=-0.66, BootSE=0.24, 95% CI=[-1.16, -0.22]). For customers with low (vs. high) self-image-concern, a referral reward with a reward-both scheme had no significant (vs. a negative) indirect effect on recommendation likelihood via anticipated embarrassment. In Study 4, a mediation analysis revealed that a referral reward with a reward-both scheme and choice reward (vs. no reward) has a significantly weaker negative indirect effect on recommendation likelihood via anticipated embarrassment for customers with high self-image-concern (b=-0.42, BootSE=0.16, 95% CI=[-0.75, -0.12]).

Key Contributions

This research illuminates the underlying mechanisms of how referral rewards affect customers' recommendation likelihood. We show how and for which types of customers a referral reward might evoke negative emotional responses (i.e., anticipated embarrassment) and how these negative feelings can be alleviated through effective CRP design. This represents a novel contribution to the structural elements of CRPs (Dose et al., 2019; Jin and Huang, 2014). Prior research also revealed conflicting findings regarding the effect of referral rewards on recommendation likelihood (e.g., Ryu and Feick, 2007; Wirtz et al., 2013). We add to CRP literature by revealing that customers' rewarded referral behavior varies depending on customers' self-image-concern.

For managers, we provide strategies for service firms to leverage CRPs while minimizing costs. Managers should consider customers' emotions (e.g., embarrassment) while designing CRPs. Firms can alleviate the adverse effect of referral rewards via anticipated embarrassment on referral likelihood by issuing a reward-both scheme for customers with low self-image-concern and

minimized by issuing a choice reward for customers with high self-image-concern. Although many firms use the same referral marketing strategy for their customers, our research emphasizes the necessity of customer segmentation (depending on customers' self-image-concern) prior to launching a referral marketing campaign.

References

References are available upon request from the corresponding author.

THE HIDDEN COST OF MISALIGNMENT: HOW OFFERING-GOAL INCONGRUENCY IMPACTS PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

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Keywords: offering-goal congruency, psychological comfort, affective commitment, professional service provider

Description: Three preregistered experiments show that when professional service providers promote third-party branded products that do not match consumers' preexisting goals for visiting, consumers derive less psychological comfort and, consequently, less affective commitment, especially when the provider actively discusses the products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Professional service providers increasingly offer third-party branded products in-house (e.g., by having waiting room displays or discussions during consultations). While such offerings may generate incremental revenue, they may also negatively impact consumer perceptions of the provider and the relationship. This research examines how the consumer-provider relationship changes when an in-house product offering is incongruent with the consumer's preexisting goal for the visit. We test whether in-house product offering-goal incongruency (hereafter, offering-goal incongruency) erodes consumers' psychological comfort with the provider, or the sense of

ease, safety, and trust, and whether this decrease in psychological comfort explains downstream reductions in affective commitment, defined as an enduring emotional attachment and desire to maintain the relationship. Drawing on attachment theory, we conceptualize psychological comfort as a relational resource that feeds affective commitment, which benefits long-term consumer-provider relationships. Finally, we test communication method as a moderator of the negative effect of offering-goal incongruency for professional service providers. Specifically, we compare passive exposure (e.g., pamphlets or displays) with active in-person discussion and test whether the negative effects of offering-goal incongruency are amplified when professional service provider support for the product is made salient through direct interpersonal communication.

Method and Data

We report three preregistered, scenario-based experiments. Study 1 (Prolific; $N = 248$) was a two-cell, between-subjects experiment that manipulated offering-goal congruency in the setting of a dermatologist's office. All participants viewed the same waiting room display featuring hair-growth products, but the goal for the visit was either evaluation of a suspicious mole (incongruent) or treatment for hair thinning (congruent). Psychological comfort was captured using a five-item, seven-point scale ($\alpha = .96$). Study 2 ($N = 554$) was a two-cell, between-subjects experiment in a student health center context. Undergraduate participants were told to imagine that they came in due to a sprained ankle and encountered either allergy-relief products (incongruent) or body braces (congruent). We measured psychological comfort ($\alpha = .93$) and affective commitment with a four-item scale ($\alpha = .92$). Study 3 (CloudResearch Connect; $N = 618$; female participants) implemented a 2 (offering-goal congruency: cosmetics vs. sunscreen) ×

3 (communication method: pamphlet, waiting room display, doctor discussion) between-subjects design and again measured psychological comfort (α = .97) and affective commitment (α = .96).

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, offering-goal incongruency reliably undermined consumers' psychological comfort and, in turn, their affective commitment to the professional service provider. In Study 1, offering-goal incongruency decreased consumers' psychological comfort ($M_{incongruent}$ = 3.89 vs. $M_{congruent}$ = 4.56; $p < .0001$). Study 2 replicated the effect of offering-goal incongruency on psychological comfort and further showed that it reduced affective commitment ($M_{incongruent}$ = 3.47 vs. $M_{congruent}$ = 3.72; $p = .047$). Mediation analyses demonstrated that psychological comfort mediated the negative effect of offering-goal incongruency on affective commitment (b = -.20, 95%CI [-.3756, -.0280]). Study 3 showed that the interaction between offering-goal congruency and communication method was significant for both psychological comfort ($F(2,611) = 8.23$, $p = .0003$) and affective commitment ($F(2,611) = 7.47$, $p < .0001$). Pairwise comparisons showed that the negative effect of offering-goal incongruency had the largest effect when the doctor actively discussed the product offering. Moderated mediation analysis results revealed a significant index of moderated mediation (IMM) when comparing the pamphlet and discussion conditions (b = -.75, *95%CI* = [-1.1847, -.3168]), and when comparing the display and discussion conditions (b = -.73, *95%CI* = [-1.1601, -.3029]), but not when comparing the pamphlet and display conditions.

Key Contributions

This research advances understanding of third-party branded products offered by professional service providers and their implications for consumer-provider relationship outcomes. Conceptually, it distinguishes these offerings from classic brand extensions: although the

products carry third-party brand names, consumers can infer provider support because the provider curates and sells them within the service environment. Drawing on attachment theory, the findings extend congruency research by demonstrating that offering-goal (in)congruency impacts not only consumers' evaluations of the offering, but also the consumer-provider emotional bond, which is operationalized as affective commitment. This research further identifies psychological comfort as the underlying mechanism through which offering-goal incongruency undermines affective commitment. Finally, it establishes communication method as a practical moderator. Specifically, the relational costs of offering-goal incongruency are amplified when professional service providers actively discuss the offering, relative to passively communicating about the products via pamphlets or waiting room displays. Collectively, these results suggest that professional service providers should not prioritize offerings that misalign with consumers' preexisting goals and avoid salient interpersonal promotion when alignment is uncertain to protect long-term consumer relationships.

THE IMPACT OF CHAPTER PROGRESS BARS ON PURCHASE INTENTION IN VIDEO-BASED INFLUENCER MARKETING

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Keywords: Interface Design; Influencer Marketing; Consumer Impatience; Purchase Intention; Service Design

One-Sentence Description: This study examines how chapter progress bars in influencer videos reshape consumers' psychological states and reduce purchase intention through heightened impatience.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Video-based influencer marketing has become a dominant form of digital persuasion, yet sustaining consumer attention and converting engagement into purchase intention remains a persistent challenge. Unlike static content, video unfolds over time and requires sustained attention, making viewers particularly sensitive to temporal cues embedded in the viewing interface. One increasingly prevalent interface feature is the chapter progress bar, which segments videos into labeled sections and previews upcoming content. Although designed to enhance navigation and user control, its psychological consequences remain poorly understood.

This study asks: Do chapter progress bars—intended to facilitate content consumption—unintentionally undermine purchase intention by increasing consumer impatience? We propose that chapter progress bars heighten time consciousness by structurally segmenting content and introducing anticipatory cues, thereby inducing a state of impatience during viewing. This impatience, in turn, weakens persuasive effectiveness and reduces consumers' purchase intention toward the promoted product. We further examine efficiency goals as a key boundary condition, arguing that consumers who are more efficiency-oriented are especially sensitive to time-structuring interface cues.

Method and Data

We employ a multi-method research design comprising five studies that combine real-world behavioral data with controlled experiments. Studies 1 and 2 analyze secondary data

from 977 sponsored influencer videos posted on Bilibili, a leading video-sharing platform in China. Consumer purchase intention is inferred from over 181,000 real-time user comments using supervised machine learning techniques, while behavioral indicators derived from comment dynamics are used to capture consumer impatience.

Studies 3a and 3b use laboratory experiments to establish the causal effect of chapter progress bars on impatience, measured through time perception distortions and validated self-report scales. Study 4 tests the mediating role of impatience between chapter progress bars and purchase intention. Study 5 examines efficiency goals as a moderator, assessing whether the negative effect of chapter segmentation is amplified among efficiency-oriented consumers. Across studies, interface conditions are tightly controlled, allowing for robust causal inference.

Summary of Findings

Across five studies, we consistently find that the presence of chapter progress bars reduces consumer purchase intention. Field evidence shows that sponsored videos with chapter segmentation generate significantly lower purchase-related engagement than comparable videos without segmentation. Behavioral analyses further reveal that chapter progress bars increase instability in real-time commenting patterns, indicating elevated consumer impatience.

Experimental results confirm these findings: exposure to chapter progress bars distorts time perception, increases self-reported impatience, and indirectly lowers purchase intention. Mediation analyses demonstrate that impatience is a key psychological

mechanism linking interface design to persuasion outcomes. Importantly, these effects are contingent on efficiency goals. Consumers with moderate or high efficiency orientations experience stronger impatience and sharper declines in purchase intention when exposed to chapter segmentation, whereas consumers with low efficiency goals are largely unaffected.

Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it extends influencer marketing research by highlighting interface design—rather than influencer attributes or message strategies—as a critical yet underexplored driver of purchase intention. Second, it advances the literature on consumer impatience by showing that impatience can arise not only from external service delays, but also from temporal structuring within content itself, offering a new perspective on impatience in immersive digital experiences. Third, it identifies efficiency goals as an important boundary condition, demonstrating that the psychological impact of interface features depends on consumers' motivational orientations. Together, these findings offer actionable insights for service design and digital marketing practice.

TIME IN LANGUAGE: USING TIME-RELATED INFORMATION TO SHAPE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN SERVICE CHATS

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Keywords: time adverbs; customer satisfaction; digital interactions; customer service; perceived caring

Description: This work explores whether including direct time adverbs (e.g., “now,” “soon,” “next”) in frontline chat messages increases customer satisfaction by enhancing caring perceptions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – Live chat has become a central customer service channel, yet many customers remain uncertain about receiving effective resolution within a reasonable time (Leggett 2016; Baun 2023). In chat settings, waiting is not necessarily experienced as purely negative because customers can multitask while the conversation unfolds (Patterson 2022; Freshowrks 2024). What they may seek is reassurance and guidance for time management during the interaction (Thompson 2022). Prior service literature has examined time mostly through actual waiting times in offline settings and, online, through delivery delays or website performance (e.g., Tom and Lucey 1997; Masuch et al. 2024). Less attention has been devoted to how time is communicated in text-based, semi-synchronous service encounters. Given the linguistic nature of chat, this research asks whether subtle time cues embedded in frontline agents' language can improve customer experience. Specifically, we investigate whether the use of direct time adverbs – those answering "when?" and directly modifying the action (e.g., "I will fix it now") – increases customer satisfaction. Further, we examine perceived caring as the psychological mechanism driving this relationship: time-related cues may signal attentiveness and respect for the customer's time investment, thereby increasing satisfaction. We test a positive link between direct time adverbs and satisfaction, and a mediation pathway through perceived caring.

Method and Data – We address the research question through a multimethod design. Study 1 is a field study based on text mining of chat transcripts from a North-European telecom provider. After data cleaning, the final dataset included over 100,000 messages exchanged between human agents and customers. Customer satisfaction was measured via Net Promoter Score (NPS) collected after each conversation. The key independent variable (direct time adverb use) was

operationalized via a top-down dictionary approach, ending in a list of 40 direct time adverbs (e.g., "now," "soon," "next"). Regression models predicted NPS from direct time adverbs use while controlling for conversation characteristics, and linguistic and textual features (e.g., topics, response time, concreteness, question marks, verb tense). An additional interaction test with a "caring language" dictionary was used to probe the proposed mechanism. Study 2 is a preregistered controlled experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to a service chat where direct time adverbs were either present or absent; satisfaction and perceived caring were measured with validated multi-item scales.

Summary of Findings – Across both field and experimental evidence, using direct time adverbs in frontline chat messages is associated with higher customer satisfaction. In Study 1, direct time adverbs use positively predicts NPS, and the effect remains significant after including a broad set of controls. Robustness checks using alternative NPS operationalizations yield consistent results. Evidence also aligns with the proposed underlying mechanism: the field results show a negative interaction between direct time adverb use and caring language, such that when caring is explicitly conveyed through other linguistic means, the incremental benefit of direct time adverbs on satisfaction is attenuated. In Study 2, participants exposed to the present condition report significantly higher satisfaction than those in the absent condition, supporting causality. Mediation analyses further show that direct time adverbs increase perceived caring, which in turn increases satisfaction, indicating partial mediation. Overall, the results demonstrate that small, low-cost linguistic changes – specifically, adding time-related cues – can meaningfully improve customer evaluations of chat-based service encounters by shaping perceptions of the agent.

Statement of Key Contributions – This research makes different contributions. First, it advances service research on time (e.g., Caruelle, Lervik-Olsen, and Gustafsson 2023), by shifting focus

from objective waiting durations to the linguistic communication of time within live chat, a channel that blends synchronous and asynchronous features. Second, it contributes to the growing stream on language in marketing and services (e.g., Packard and Berger, 2021; Herhausen et al., 2023), by adopting a granular syntactic lens. It shows that a specific and often overlooked part of speech – direct time adverbs – can influence customer outcomes. Third, it introduces and positions perceived caring as a key psychological mechanism in service interactions, extending to digital marketing contexts a construct more commonly studied in education and healthcare (e.g., Teven, 2001; Edvardsson and Pearce, 2017). Finally, our results offer clear managerial implications: training frontline agents to include direct time adverbs in their messages can be a practical, scalable, and cost-effective way to enhance customer experience. By underlining how subtle linguistic cues can signal attentiveness to customers' time, this work provides actionable guidance for organizations designing scripts, coaching protocols, and conversational templates in digital customer support.

References available upon request.

WHEN THE TOP TIER STEPS IN: THE IMPACT OF HEADQUARTERS INTERVENTION ON BRAND RELATIONSHIP REPAIR

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Keywords: Headquarters Intervention; Brand Relationship Repair; Strategic Blame Containment; Attribution Theory; Procedural Justice.

Description: This research conceptualizes headquarters intervention as a distinct brand recovery strategy and finds that it enhances customer satisfaction by strategically containing blame for a failure to a localized operational anomaly rather than a systemic brand defect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Beyond what a firm communicates in a brand crisis, what is the strategic impact of who within the organizational hierarchy delivers the response? Specifically, how does direct intervention from corporate headquarters affect brand relationship repair? Existing literature on brand recovery largely treats the firm as a monolithic entity, focusing on the content of its response, while attribution theory research often treats consumer blame as a spontaneous, exogenous process. This research bridges this gap by conceptualizing headquarters intervention as a distinct, firm-driven strategy designed to actively manage consumer

attributions. Drawing on signaling and attribution theories, we investigate whether headquarters intervention is a superior recovery strategy and propose a novel underlying mechanism: strategic blame containment. We theorize that high-level intervention signals commitment and fairness, which in turn enables the firm to guide consumers to re-attribute a failure from a threatening, systemic brand defect to a more manageable, localized operational anomaly, thereby repairing the customer relationship without tarnishing the core brand.

Method and Data

We employ a multi-method approach to provide both externally and internally valid evidence for our framework. In Study 1, we analyze a large-scale archival dataset from "Heimao Tousu," a leading online consumer complaint platform. The final sample includes 154,416 complaint episodes against 865 distinct brands. We use High-Dimensional Fixed Effects (HDFE) regression to isolate the causal impact of headquarters intervention on consumer satisfaction, controlling for unobserved time-invariant firm characteristics and time-varying shocks. Our key independent variable, Headquarters Intervention, is measured using a Large Language Model (LLM) to analyze the text of firm responses and identify involvement from the corporate level. In Study 2, we conduct a pre-registered, two-group (Intervention Source: Headquarters vs. Local) between-subjects experiment with 240 participants. We manipulate the hierarchical source of a recovery email in a brand failure scenario to test the proposed sequential mediation mechanism—procedural justice and blame containment—through which headquarters intervention influences satisfaction.

Summary of Findings

Our findings robustly support the proposed theoretical framework. Study 1's HDFE models provide causal

evidence that headquarters intervention leads to significantly higher consumer satisfaction with brand recovery (H1). Furthermore, we establish critical boundary conditions for this effect. The positive impact of headquarters intervention is stronger for consumers driven by normative goals (e.g., seeking an apology or investigation) than for those with purely instrumental goals (H3). The effect is also amplified for firms with distanced brand architectures (e.g., franchises), which provide a pre-existing "mental firewall" that facilitates blame containment (H4), and in product-dominant industries, where high-level involvement constitutes a greater positive violation of recovery expectations (H5). Study 2's experiment replicates the main effect and provides direct causal evidence for our proposed psychological mechanism. A serial mediation analysis confirms that headquarters intervention enhances perceptions of procedural justice, which in turn facilitates strategic blame containment (i.e., re-attributing the failure to a localized cause), ultimately leading to higher satisfaction (H2).

Key Contributions

This research makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, we conceptualize and provide the first rigorous causal evidence for headquarters intervention as a distinct, hierarchically-driven brand relationship repair strategy, adding a new structural dimension to the crisis management toolkit. Second, we advance attribution theory in marketing by identifying and empirically validating "strategic blame containment" as a novel, firm-managed mechanism. We demonstrate that firms can strategically use their organizational structure to reshape consumer attributions post-failure, reframing them as a manageable outcome rather than a fixed input. We further show that this mechanism is enabled by enhanced perceptions of procedural justice. Third, by systematically delineating the moderating roles of consumer goals, brand architecture, and industry

type, we provide a nuanced contingency framework that links high-level brand strategy with micro-level crisis response effectiveness, offering a valuable diagnostic toolkit for both academics and managers.

Sustainability and Social Responsibility

"Ecological Backlash": Understanding the Causes of Consumers' Discontinuous Sustainable Behavior

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Keywords: Discontinuous sustainable behavior, Expectation-confirmation theory, Self-identity theory, Social-identity theory, Perceived value, Green apparel

Description:

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study examines factors driving consumers' discontinuation of sustainable behavior in green apparel. Using expectation-confirmation theory, we tested how unmet identity-related expectations (green self-identity, green social identity) and value-related expectations (ecological, economic, functional, emotional values from perceived value theory) shape dissatisfaction. A longitudinal design was applied: Phase 1 (N = 589 U.S. green apparel users) measured discontinuation intentions—discontinuance intention, switching intention, negative word of mouth—while Phase 2 (ongoing) tracks actual exit behavior. Results show green self-identity and all value-related expectations significantly predict dissatisfaction, whereas green social identity does not. Dissatisfaction, directly and through distrust, strongly drives discontinuation intentions.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Sustainable consumer behavior refers to actions aimed at reducing environmental harm and minimizing resource use across the product lifecycle (Yan et al., 2024). However, sustaining such behaviors remains challenging. Evidence of "ecological backlash" has emerged across sectors: organic food consumption has declined (Mansoor & Paul, 2022), nearly 18% of U.S. electric vehicle users have returned to gasoline vehicles (Parthasarathy et al., 2023), and green apparel represents only about 10% of the clothing market (Dhir et al., 2021). These patterns suggest that many consumers discontinue sustainable behaviors after initial adoption.

Although prior research explains why consumers adopt sustainable behaviors, less is known about the post-adoption stage, including how consumers evaluate experiences and decide whether to continue or discontinue sustainable consumption (Juhl et al., 2017). There are calls for future research by scholars (White et al., 2019; Elhoushy & Jang, 2023) and the Marketing Science Institute (2024) on quitting behavior and unmet expectations. Given that drivers of adoption may differ from those of continuation (Som et al., 2012), it is necessary to identify the mechanisms that lead consumers to abandon sustainable products.

Grounded in expectation-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1989; Bhattacherjee & Premkumar, 2001), this study addresses:

RQ1: How do identity- and value-related expectation disconfirmations influence green dissatisfaction in green apparel?

RQ2: How does green dissatisfaction affect green distrust and how do these emotions jointly influence discontinuation intention, switching intention, and negative word-of-mouth?

RQ3: Do green dissatisfaction and green distrust sequentially mediate the effects of identity and value antecedents on behavioral intentions?

METHOD AND DATA

To test the proposed relationships, we conducted a two-phase longitudinal study. Phase 1 focused on measuring discontinuation intentions, while Phase 2 (currently ongoing) is designed to track actual exit behavior. Data for Phase 1 was collected at the start of August 2025 from 589 U.S. green apparel users recruited through Prolific Academia, and the analysis was performed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Jamovi 2.7.5.

Existing validated scales were selected and adapted to the context of green apparel. Discontinuous intentions were measured through three constructs: discontinuation intention (Bhattacherjee, 2001), switching intention (Wu et al., 2018), and negative word-of-mouth (Grégoire et al., 2009). The independent variables included identity-related and value-related disconfirmationa. Green self-identity confirmation was measured using four items from Confente et al. (2020), while two items for green social-identity confirmation were adapted from Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) and Lam et al. (2010). Value disconfirmations was captured across four dimensions: ecological (Koller et al., 2011), economic (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Koller et al., 2011), functional (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Koller et al., 2011), and emotional (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Koller et al., 2011). In addition, two mediators were examined. Dissatisfaction was measured using four items from Bhattacherjee (2001), while distrust was measured with three items adapted from Darke et al. (2010). All constructs were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Before testing the structural model, reliability and validity were confirmed following Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2012). All constructs showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81–0.94$; CR = 0.81–0.94), convergent validity (AVE = 0.60–0.85), and factor loadings above 0.70. Discriminant validity was supported (HTMT < 0.85), and model fit was excellent (CFI = 0.952, TLI = 0.946, RMSEA = 0.055, SRMR = 0.05). SEM results showed that low expectation-confirmation for green self-identity ($\beta = –0.26$, $p = .002$), ecological value ($\beta = –0.32$, $p < .001$), economic value ($\beta = –0.33$, $p < .001$), functional value ($\beta = –0.16$, $p = .047$), and emotional value ($\beta = –0.29$, $p = .002$) increases green dissatisfaction (**$H1_a$, $H2_{a,b,c,d}$ supported)**. Whereas green social-identity does not have a significant effect ($\beta = –0.003$, $p = .968$) **($H1_b$ not supported)**. Green dissatisfaction strongly raises green distrust ($\beta = 0.79$, $p < .001$) **(H3 supported)**, which then increases discontinuation ($\beta = 0.65$), switching ($\beta = 0.63$), and negative word-of-mouth ($\beta = 0.65$) intentions (all $p < .001$) **($H4_{a,b,c}$ supported)**. Sequential mediation via dissatisfaction → distrust was significant for all antecedents except green social identity, with indirect effects ranging from –0.08 to –0.17. Green dissatisfaction also influenced outcomes through distrust ($\beta = 0.50–0.52$, all $p < .001$).

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study offers various theoretical and practical contributions, discussed in detail below: **Theoretical Implications:** First, this study provides fresh insights into sustainable behaviors from a post-adoption perspective, a stage that has received limited attention. Second, it extends expectation-disconfirmation theory by incorporating both identity-related (green self-identity, green social identity) and value-related expectations (ecological, economic, functional, and

emotional values), showing how unmet expectations in these dimensions drive dissatisfaction, which in turn affects all three outcomes: discontinuance intention, switching intention, and negative word-of-mouth. Third, the study highlights the mediating role of distrust, enhancing the explanatory power of this theory in understanding discontinuation behaviors. Notably, green self-identity and value-related expectations significantly predicted dissatisfaction, whereas green social identity doesn't play a role in the green apparel context.

Practical Implications: From a managerial perspective, these findings help green apparel brands anticipate and reduce negative outcomes across all three dimensions: discontinuance intention, switching intention, and negative word-of-mouth. Managers can design targeted strategies that align products with consumers' self-identity and perceived values. For example, offering apparel that allows personalization with sustainable materials can let consumers express their environmental values. Marketing campaigns can emphasize ecological, functional, economic, and emotional benefits to reinforce perceived value. Additionally, distrust was identified as a key driver of discontinuation intentions. Managers should build and maintain trust through transparent communication by bridging the gap between expected and actual product outcomes to encourage continuance consumption of sustainable apparel.

References are available upon request.

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE MARKET BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: consumer responsibility, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, relationship marketing

Description: The paper proposes a relational perspective on responsibility where consumers and firms jointly engage in coordinated actions and share accountability for outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Achieving sustainability requires joint effort and responsibility. In markets, both consumers and firms are accountable for the economic, social, and environmental impacts of their choices and

practices. Yet responsibility is often sidestepped, ambiguously distributed, or shifted, resulting in persistent irresponsible behavior (Kim, He, and Gustafsson 2024). “Battles” over who should act responsibly (Gonzalez-Arcos et al. 2021, p. 45) leave market actors struggling to integrate environmental and societal concerns into decisions.

Marketing scholarship often mirrors this divide, conceptualizing responsibility monadically—as belonging to either consumers (e.g., sustainable purchase choices) or firms (e.g., responsible production). As a cure, we introduce co-responsibility to acknowledge the shared obligations of market actors. To this end, we ask: Which tensions arise from a monadic focus on consumers or firms? How can responsibility be conceptualized relationally? And how can marketing tools promote co-responsibility?

Summary of Findings

Based on a systematic literature review following the PRISMA procedure (Moher et al. 2009), we identify four major tensions arising from embracing a monadic understanding of responsibility for sustainability in marketing: competence gap, responsibilization pressure, credibility trap, and value conflict. Introducing the idea of co-responsibility to marketing, we propose that a relational perspective on responsibility can help resolve these four tensions. Unlike individual responsibility, co-responsibility recognizes that outcomes result from interdependent processes (Young 2011), so they are better tackled through collaborative efforts by diverse actors working together and sharing accountability (Atenasio 2019). We define *co-responsibility* as the shared obligation of consumers and firms to participate in coordinated, interdependent actions and accept joint accountability for their collective outcomes. Based on this relational perspective, we derive a toolbox for co-responsibility initiatives, translating co-responsibility from concept to practice. Specifically, the toolbox encompasses design elements

concerning actors (level of interdependence, community embeddedness, sourcing), activities (facilitation vs. implementation, virtuous vs. anti-consumption), and timing (purchase vs. usage phase). Furthermore, we craft propositions showing how each of these elements may improve sustainable outcomes, mediated through four co-responsibility mechanisms and considering several contingency factors.

Key Contributions

This paper advances our understanding of sustainable market behavior by reframing responsibility as a shared, relational construct—co-responsibility—rather than a unilateral burden placed on either consumers or firms. As a result, our study provides several theoretical contributions and has implications for marketing and sustainability managers.

First, we integrate consumer responsibility literature (Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas 2011; Winterich, Reczek, and Makov 2024) with corporate responsibility research (Kim, He, and Gustafsson 2024; Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun 2006), showing how monadic approaches limit effectiveness. Co-responsibility reframes responsibility as a joint endeavor, aligning with calls for meso-level, systemic sustainability interventions (Nenkov 2024).

Second, we position responsibility at the core of relationship marketing theory, traditionally built on cooperation and interdependence (Palmatier et al. 2006; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Similar to how cooperation expands the “value pie” (Jap 1999), co-responsibility enables expansion of social and environmental value.

Finally, we provide a toolbox for managers to design initiatives that foster sustainable outcomes. Managers can use our toolbox to identify the dominant sustainability tension in their context and select the most relevant tools—adjusting actors, activities, and timing.

References are available upon request.

BEYOND BIOLOGY: THE ROLE OF GENDER IDENTITY IN SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Sustainability, gender identity, brand gender schema, gendered marketing

Description: This research explores how gender identity, rather than biological sex, shapes sustainable consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Past research on sustainability mostly relies on biological sex to explain differences in pro-environmental behavior, and often concludes that sustainability is culturally associated with consumer femininity (Brough et al., 2016; Modlinska et al., 2020; Shang & Peloza, 2016). This approach, however, overlooks important psychological differences captured by gender identity categorizations (Fugate & Phillips, 2010; Martin & Gnoth, 2009).

Drawing on gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), this research asks whether gender identity, defined by individuals' varying identification with masculine and feminine traits, offers a more nuanced way to understand sustainable consumption. Rather than placing consumers into fixed "male" or "female" categories, this perspective recognizes that people may simultaneously hold both feminine and masculine traits in different combinations. Moreover, this research

examines whether individuals with different gender identity profiles respond differently to sustainable products, and whether gendered branding cues (e.g., colours, fonts, brand names) help or hinder consumer evaluations in sustainability contexts. Finally, the research investigates the psychological mechanisms through which these effects unfold. By shifting the focus from biological sex to gender identity, this research aims to offer deeper theoretical and practical insights into promoting sustainable consumption.

Method and Data

A series of five experimental studies ($N_{Total} = 1{,}382$) examine sustainable consumption across multiple product categories, including food, household laundry detergent, and apparel. The studies use a multi-method approach that combines implicit and explicit measures, experimental manipulations of brand gender cues, and established scales to assess consumer gender identity.

Study 1 employs an Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) to capture automatic associations between femininity and sustainable products. Studies 2–5 consist of controlled experiments in which brand gender is manipulated through visual and verbal cues such as names, colours, fonts, shapes, and product descriptions. Gender identity is measured using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981) and participants are classified into gender identity profiles (feminine, masculine, androgynous, undifferentiated) using data-driven k-means clustering techniques (e.g., Jain, 2010).

Across studies, outcome measures capture consumer evaluations and purchase intentions related to sustainable products. Mediation analyses are conducted using Hayes' PROCESS macro to examine indirect effects. Relevant covariates, such as dietary preferences, attitudes

toward veganism, and demographics, are included to ensure robustness. This multi-study design allows for systematic examination of gender identity and branding effects while maintaining ecological validity across sustainability contexts.

Summary of Findings

Across five studies and multiple sustainable product categories, the findings consistently show that gender identity provides a more informative lens for understanding sustainable consumption than biological sex. Consumers' internalized gender traits and gendered branding cues shape their willingness to purchase sustainable products. In particular, individuals who identify with high levels of feminine and masculine traits show stronger and more consistent engagement with sustainable options, whereas those low on both dimensions are generally less responsive.

Brand gender cues also matter. Sustainable products positioned with feminine or gender-neutral cues are evaluated more favorably than those framed with masculine cues. These effects do not operate in isolation, but instead unfold through consumers' perceptions of the brand, especially in terms of psychological connection. Masculine branding tends to weaken these perceptions, while feminine and gender-neutral cues strengthen them, thereby shaping evaluations and purchase intentions. Importantly, these patterns emerge across distinct sustainability domains, suggesting that the observed relationships are not product-specific but reflect broader psychological processes. Together, the findings highlight the importance of considering gender identity and gendered branding jointly when seeking to understand and encourage sustainable consumption.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to sustainability and consumer behavior literature by shifting attention from biological sex to gender identity to understand sustainable consumption. Drawing on gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), it advances prior work by conceptualizing gender identity as the coexistence of masculine and feminine traits within individuals and positioning this framework as a more nuanced basis for explaining consumer responses to sustainable products. The research also extends branding literature by questioning dominant assumptions about gendered brand positioning within sustainability contexts and highlighting the importance of considering how consumers interpret brand gender cues. This research also demonstrates the value of data-driven approaches, such as unsupervised machine learning (i.e., k-means clustering techniques), for capturing meaningful variation in gender identity within sustainability research.

From a practical and policy perspective, policies and public campaigns aimed at encouraging sustainable behavior may benefit from moving away from sex-stereotypical messaging and toward more inclusive framing that resonates across diverse gender identities. Similarly, firms can support responsible marketing practices by discouraging the use of rigid gender cues that may unintentionally undermine sustainable goals. By emphasizing inclusivity, care, and moral responsibility, policymakers and marketers can create broader engagement with sustainability initiatives while avoiding the reinforcement of limiting gender norms.

References are available upon request.

BEYOND ORIGIN AND REPUTATION: HOW HARMFUL GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION PRACTICES SHAPE CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

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Keywords: Geographical Indications; Corporate Social Responsibility; Socio-environmental Practices; Consumer ethics.

Description: This study shows that the legitimacy and market viability of Geographical Indications depend on ethical socio-environmental practices, as consumer responses to origin-labeled products are strongly shaped by ethical concerns.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Under what conditions do harmful production practices associated with Geographical Indications affect consumers' purchase intentions?

Method and Data

This study employs a scenario-based, between-subjects experimental design. Data were collected through an online survey administered to 604 coffee consumers. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions, which consisted of a text and figures evoking (i) a GI responsible-practices condition and (ii) a GI irresponsible-practices condition. A pretest was conducted and confirmed successful manipulation. Following exposure to the stimuli, participants reported their attitudes toward the GI practices, ethical concern, and purchase intention using established measures. Hypotheses were tested using conditional process analysis with the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 7).

Summary of Findings

The results provide strong support for the proposed conditional process model. Harmful socio-environmental practices associated with Geographical Indications interact significantly with consumers' ethical concern to shape attitudes toward the GI product. Exposure to harmful practices leads to more negative attitudes, and this effect intensifies as ethical concern increases, supporting H1. Consumer attitude exerts a strong and negative effect on purchase intention, indicating that unfavorable evaluations of the GI product substantially reduce consumers' willingness to buy, thus confirming H2.

The analysis also reveals a significant conditional indirect effect of harmful practices on purchase intention through attitude across all levels of ethical concern, providing support for H3. While harmful socio-environmental practices consistently reduce purchase intention via negative attitudes, the magnitude of this indirect effect grows as ethical concern increases. Consumers with higher ethical concern exhibit the strongest decline in purchase intention when exposed to unethical GI practices. The significant Index of Moderated Mediation further confirms that ethical concern amplifies the negative indirect effect of harmful practices on purchase intention via attitude.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that consumer responses to unethical GI practices depend on individual ethical values, highlighting the central role of ethical concern in shaping how socio-environmental misconduct influences attitudes and purchasing decisions.

Key Contributions

This study makes important theoretical and managerial contributions by extending CSR theory to GIs. The findings demonstrate that the socio-environmental practices associated with GIs shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, positioning GI integrity as a form of institutionalized CSR. When production practices are perceived as harmful, the legitimacy of the GI system is undermined, reinforcing the view that ethical performance is central to consumer evaluation, even in contexts dominated by origin/quality cues. By identifying attitude as a mediating mechanism and ethical concern as a boundary condition, the study advances CSR theory by showing that consumer responses to unethical practices depend on individual moral orientations.

From a managerial and policy perspective, the results underscore the need to embed socio-environmental responsibility into GI governance, registration, and monitoring frameworks.

Incorporating sustainability criteria, performance indicators, and collective oversight mechanisms can help preserve GI credibility and protect responsible producers. For GI stakeholders, particularly in the coffee sector, the findings highlight the strategic value of transparency and ethical signaling in communication and branding. Treating socio-environmental responsibility as a core element of the GI value proposition, rather than a compliance requirement, can strengthen consumer trust, differentiation, and long-term legitimacy in increasingly sustainability-driven markets

Beyond the Message: The Impact of Self-Benefit vs. Environment-Benefit Appeals on Tourist Behaviors

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Keywords: ***Benefit framing, Tourists' sustainable behaviors, Self-benefit framing, Environment-benefit framing.***

Description: This research examines how self-benefit vs. environment-benefit message framing influences sustainable tourism behaviors, including recycling, food conservation, water conservation, and towel reuse.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

RQ1: How does benefit framing (self-benefit versus environment-benefit) influence tourists' sustainable behavioral intentions in tourism contexts?

RQ2: Through what psychological mechanisms does benefit framing affect tourists' sustainable behavioral intentions?

RQ3: Under what conditions does self-benefit framing versus environment-benefit framing become more effective in promoting tourists' sustainable behavioral intentions?

Method And Data

Study 1 recruited 120 Credamo participants to test whether message framing (self-benefit vs. environment-benefit) influences tourists' intentions to recycle in hotels. Participants read a check-in scenario with one of the two messages. Behavioral frequency and personal values were included as covariates, and travel setting (alone vs. with companions) was recorded as a control.

Study 2 replicated the design with 120 Chinese Credamo participants but focused on food conservation in a restaurant context. Framing messages about reducing food waste appeared in menu notes and signage. The study tested framing effects on conservation intentions and examined three mediators: moral elevation, perceived responsibility, and environmental self-identity. Behavioral frequency was a covariate, and travel setting was controlled.

Study 3 examined whether temporal perspective moderates framing effects on hotel water-conservation intentions. The total sample was 320 (Chinese Credamo; British Prolific),

representing cyclical vs. linear time perspectives. Controls included future time perspective and participative efficacy.

Study 4 used a 2 (frame) × 2 (age: 18–35 vs. 60+) between-subjects design with 240 Chinese Credamo participants to study towel reuse. Participants viewed a door-hanger message; age moderation was grounded in socioemotional selectivity theory. Controls included future time perspective, perceived social pressure, and participative efficacy.

Summary of Findings

Across the studies, message framing reliably shaped sustainable intentions. In general, messages that emphasized environmental benefits were more persuasive than those highlighting personal benefits. This effect was not only direct but also explained by clear psychological processes: environment-benefit framing tended to elicit stronger moral elevation, reinforce environmental self-identity, and increase perceived responsibility, with moral elevation emerging as the most influential pathway.

At the same time, the findings show that framing effectiveness depends on audience characteristics. People with a more linear temporal orientation responded more strongly to self-benefit appeals, whereas those with a more cyclical temporal orientation responded more strongly to environment-benefit appeals. Age showed a similar shift: younger adults were more persuaded by environment-benefit framing, while older adults were more responsive to self-benefit framing. Overall, the results suggest that environment-benefit framing is typically the stronger default, but tailoring the frame to temporal perspective and age can improve persuasive impact.

Key Contribution

Message framing is a well-established tool in marketing, with extensive evidence that subtle variations can shape consumer decisions. Despite substantial research, important gaps remain in understanding beneficiary framing, which focuses on whether messages emphasize self-benefit or environment-benefit outcomes. Existing studies have mainly examined formats such as gain vs. loss, prescriptive vs. proscriptive, and promotion vs. prevention, but have rarely investigated how framing messages around different beneficiaries influences consumer response. Self-benefit framing appeals to egoistic motives, whereas environment-benefit framing activates altruistic values. Evidence on their comparative effectiveness is fragmented, with studies favoring self-benefit framing, environment-benefit framing, or finding no difference between the two. These inconsistencies suggest the need to examine additional psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions. This research addresses these gaps by comparing self- and environment-benefit framing in promoting sustainable tourism behaviors. It tests three theoretically grounded mediators, moral elevation, environmental self-identity, and perception of responsibility as motivational pathways linking framing to behaviors. It also examines the role of two novel moderators, temporal perspective and age, in influencing the effectiveness of such message framing.

BRIDGING THE INTENTION–BEHAVIOR GAP: USING INTERMODAL STORYTELLING ON PACKAGING TO ADVANCE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Sustainable Products, Storytelling, Inter-modality, Packaging

Description: Through three experiments and a field study, we show how intermodal storytelling—aligning narrative types with image placement—closes the intention–behavior gap for sustainable products.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Despite growing concern for sustainability, a persistent intention–behavior gap remains, as pro-sustainability intentions often fail to translate into purchases. A key reason is the psychological distance of sustainability benefits, frequently framed as abstract and temporally distant. Drawing on Construal Level Theory (Trope and Liberman 2010) and the Temporal

Doppler Effect (Caruso et al. 2013), this research examines whether intermodal storytelling on packaging—the alignment of narrative type (visionary vs. heritage) and image placement (right vs. left)—can reduce this distance and increase willingness to pay for sustainable products.

This leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the alignment between story type and image placement influence willingness to pay for sustainable products?

RQ2: Do visionary stories benefit more from right-side image placement, and heritage stories from left-side placement?

RQ3: Does text–image alignment increase cognitive absorption, and does this absorption explain higher purchase intent?

Accordingly, we hypothesize that right-side image placement increases willingness to pay for visionary stories (H1), left-side placement is more effective for heritage stories (H2), and cognitive absorption mediates these effects (H3).

Method and Data

This research employs a multi-study design consisting of three laboratory experiments and one field experiment, preceded by a brief marketplace audit. As a preliminary step, we examined 99 sustainable product packages from a Whole Foods Market and found that visionary and heritage stories were most prevalent and differed in baseline willingness to pay (WTP), motivating the experimental focus.

Study 1 used a 2 (story type: heritage vs. visionary) × 2 (image placement: left vs. right) between-subjects design (N = 200; Prolific). Participants viewed mock packaging for organic potato chips and reported WTP, allowing us to test the core interaction and explore a broad set of candidate mediators. Study 2 replicated the design with a different sample (N = 190; undergraduates) and shifted attention to alternative mediators, including affective responses, psychological distance, and narrative processing.

Study 3 focused explicitly on cognitive absorption as a deeper engagement mechanism (N = 160; Prolific), testing moderated mediation effects. Study 4 assessed external validity in a real marketplace. In a winery field experiment (N = 55), participants indicated actual payment for natural wine under the same 2 × 2 design. Although effects were not statistically significant, the directional pattern was consistent with the laboratory findings.

Summary of Findings

Across four main studies, we find consistent evidence that aligning story type with image placement influences consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for sustainable products. Studies 1 and 2 reveal a robust interaction between story type and image placement. For visionary stories, right-side image placement leads to higher WTP than left-side placement, whereas for heritage stories, left-side placement yields higher WTP than right-side placement. These effects replicate across samples and product contexts. Study 2 further shows that joy partially mediates WTP for visionary stories, while temporal distance mediates WTP for heritage stories.

Study 3 identifies cognitive absorption as a key psychological mechanism. While story type and image placement do not directly affect absorption, higher cognitive absorption strongly

predicts WTP. A significant moderated mediation confirms that congruent story–image pairings increase WTP indirectly through enhanced narrative engagement. Study 4 extends these findings to a real marketplace context. The directional pattern mirrors the laboratory results, providing partially supportive evidence of external validity.

Together, the results demonstrate that matching image placement to story type reliably enhances engagement and increases WTP for sustainable products.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research advances understanding of how intermodal storytelling—the alignment of story type and image placement—can help close the intention–action gap for sustainable products. We show that pairing visionary stories with right-placed images and heritage stories with left-placed images increases narrative absorption, which in turn enhances consumers' willingness to pay for sustainable offerings.

Theoretically, the study extends narrative processing and storytelling research in consumer behavior, which shows that narratives shape consumer responses through transportation and self-referencing (Adaval and Wyer 1998; Escalas 2007). We contribute to this literature by demonstrating that text–image congruence on packaging functions as an intermodal cue, complementing prior work on how visual depictions and spatial layout guide choice (Elder and Krishna 2012). The findings also advance sustainability research by identifying a narrative-design mechanism that helps overcome the persistent intention–behavior gap in pro-environmental consumption (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019) and mitigates sustainability-related performance inferences (Luchs et al. 2010).

From a managerial perspective, the results offer a simple, implementable packaging strategy. Aligning image placement with a story's temporal orientation translates sustainability intentions into purchase behavior across product categories, as demonstrated in both controlled experiments and a real-world winery context.

References are available upon request.

CONSUMER REACTIONS TO SUSTAINABILITY FAILURES: AN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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KEYWORDS: Sustainability Failures; Institutional Theory; Pluralistic Logics; Plastic Pollution

DESCRIPTION:

We examine consumer reactions to large corporations' sustainability failures and their implications for consumer trust.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

How Do Consumers React To Sustainability Failures By Large Corporations?

METHOD

We used a qualitative design and compiled data from various news articles, non-profit organizations' websites, online social media, and websites of major players in the beverage industry. Key words such as plastic pollution and sustainability promises were used. Together, we examined 1258 documents that were deemed relevant to our study. We used the archival data on company websites to educate ourselves with the sustainability failure problem and as a cross reference to the public comments available on the newspaper and social media websites. We used public comments as our sample for the current study. The four authors formed into two teams to carefully examine and categorize the data to uncover important trajectories in the customer reactions to sustainability failures. First, each team studied the data individually to tease out the themes in the data. Next, the team compared notes and mapped areas of mutual agreement. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved. Constant comparison method (Strauss and Corbin 1998) was used by alternating between data and literature to develop appropriate themes that allowed us to categorize our findings.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Our results revealed four dominant themes that we term as Accentuating the Dominant Logic, Projecting External Entities as Impediments to Institutional Change, Aligning with Aspirational Logics, and Defiance. Our results provide a glimpse of how consumers structure their rhetoric to force companies to prioritize their sustainability efforts. Sustainability failures have disturbing implications for loss of trust in large corporations' sustainability efforts. Large corporations are perceived as profit-centric and inauthentic in their sustainability efforts. The dominance of commercial logics at the cost of communal logics in the design of organizational strategies may be a precursor to such perceptions. Our findings suggest that large corporations that vouch for sustainability efforts publicly (Coca-Cola's brand promise about environmental sustainability) but emphasize commercial logics at the organizational level may be viewed harshly by customers troubled by the plastic problem.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Our study makes a three-fold contribution to sustainability literature. First, we examine the institutional roots of broken sustainability promises of large corporations and contribute to the pluralistic logics' literature. Sustainability failures are a result of companies' efforts to balance ideological goals of planetary protection and financial performance. Institutional theory explains the imbalance between commercial and communal logics and sheds light on how consumers structure their rhetoric to force companies to prioritize communal logics.

Second, our results help managers of dominant brands facing sustainability failures to gain an understanding of consumer reactions and strategize for potential loss of their customer trust.

Large corporations are perceived as profit-centric and inauthentic in their sustainability efforts. Our findings suggest that large corporations that vouch for sustainability efforts publicly (Coca-Cola's brand promise about environmental sustainability) but emphasize commercial logics at the organizational level may be viewed harshly by customers troubled by the plastic problem.

Finally, our study offers implications for public policy makers interested in channeling their sustainability efforts to planetary wellbeing. Public policy makers can design specific consumer education programs on sustainability behavior change based on the reactions we uncovered.

CORPORATE AND BRAND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY UNDER ONE ROOF? NAVIGATING AUTONOMY, ALIGNMENT, AND STAKEHOLDER ORIENTATION IN HOUSE OF BRANDS FIRMS

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Keywords: Brand Social Responsibility, Brand Architecture, House of Brands, Corporate Social Responsibility

Description: Drawing on 39 interviews across nine multinational house-of-brands consumer goods firms, this paper explores how tensions between corporate brand alignment and product brand autonomy influence the development of brand social responsibility.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms with a house-of-brands (HOB) architecture can position each product brand for a specific market with tailored messaging, enabling the firm to diversify offerings, reach distinct segments, and isolate reputational risk. However, these benefits come with trade-offs, such as additional investments in building awareness and loyalty. While these trade-offs are well documented in branding literature few studies examine how HOB firms develop and communicate social responsibility across their brand portfolios.

In HOB firms, the corporate brand is often less visible, so while sustainability is usually reported at that level, consumers tend to experience and interpret it mainly through the product brands they interact with (Pope & Kim, 2022). Grohmann and Bodur (2015) argued that for brand social responsibility (BSR) consumers are the primary stakeholders, whereas corporate social responsibility primarily serves a broader group of stakeholders. Although product and corporate brands prioritize different stakeholders, few studies consider how this divergence shapes the development of BSR. To address these research gaps, our paper examines two research questions: (1) How do tensions between corporate brand alignment and product brand autonomy influence BSR? (2) How does the prioritization of different stakeholder groups influence BSR?

Method And Data

Given the exploratory nature of this study, we employed a qualitative methodology through multiple case studies. Case study research is frequently used to develop theory and explore phenomena in different contexts (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). The in-depth comparison of similarities and differences across cases and between different units of analysis allows us to suggest explanations for possible trends, patterns, and linkages and thus to contribute to theory (Yin, 2017).

As part of an ongoing study of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) firms, we conducted 39 semi-structured expert interviews across 9 firms. These interviews were complemented by secondary data analysis (documents, reports, and online media). FMCG firms were selected because they frequently employ an HOB strategy. We selected interview partners likely to provide valuable insights, interviewing both corporate and product brand managers in HOB firms.

The data was then coded using a deductive-inductive approach. Preliminary open coding yielded 25 first-order codes, which were jointly reviewed and refined. This process yielded 13 second-order themes capturing important aspects and revealing underlying mechanisms and theoretical patterns (Gioia et al., 2013). Finally, second-order themes were grouped into three categories: “Sustainability Performance,” “Stakeholder Orientation,” and “Product Brand Autonomy.”

Summary of Findings

Preliminary findings show that product brand managers often perceived limited market returns from BSR. They prioritized short-term sales and consumer preferences when evaluating initiatives and believed consumers’ willingness to pay was lower than their stated attitudes suggested, which several managers used to justify scaling back or cancelling sustainability efforts. As a result, many product brand teams with a strongly market-oriented focus and high autonomy showed little interest in developing or communicating BSR.

However, in some firms, product brands are aligned more closely with corporate priorities, adopting a broader stakeholder orientation. In these cases, managers framed sustainability as contributing to corporate goals and expressed satisfaction rather than focusing on short-term outcomes. Here, we observed stronger independent BSR or greater support for corporate social responsibility, depending on the degree of autonomy granted to product brands.

Autonomy then shaped who could act and speak. When autonomy was high, brands tailored BSR to target segments and communicated it confidently. When autonomy was constrained, two dynamics emerged: a push-pull architecture where a reputationally weaker corporate brand sought to leverage stronger product brands’ initiatives, and corporate gatekeeping

where brands were barred from communicating or developing initiatives due to fit concerns and fear of greenwashing spillover across the portfolio.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to social responsibility research by examining how HOB firms coordinate sustainability across corporate and product brands. First, it integrates brand architecture and stakeholder theory by showing that product brands vary in stakeholder orientation, ranging from consumer-focused priorities to broader stakeholder commitments, and that these orientations shape whether BSR is pursued, supported, or avoided. Second, it extends brand architecture theory beyond the classic autonomy-alignment trade-off by identifying sustainability-specific governance dynamics, including push-pull relationships that emerge when corporate and product brands hold unequal reputations, and managerial concerns that greenwashing can spill over within an otherwise risk-isolating portfolio. Third, it develops an autonomy-by-stakeholder-orientation framework that specifies four configurations and the distinct BSR outcomes each configuration produces. Managerially, the framework helps managers determine when to centralize or delegate product brand decision rights and highlights the importance of shifting stakeholder orientation toward longer-term commitments rather than launching additional initiatives. Finally, it clarifies which combinations of stakeholder orientation and degrees of product brand autonomy result in silent, corporate aligned, or more independent forms of BSR.

References are available upon request.

DESIGNING VIDEO GAME EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE ECO-FRIENDLY BEHAVIOR

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Keywords

Sustainable behavior, Commercial video games, Player experience, Behavior change, Screencast Videography (SCV)

Description: This paper explores how specific design elements in commercial video games shape player experiences that may foster eco-friendly behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Promoting eco-friendly behavior remains a persistent challenge, as individuals often struggle to adopt and sustain environmentally responsible practices despite growing awareness of global environmental issues. Digital technologies, and video games in particular, offer immersive and interactive environments capable of shaping user attitudes and behaviors. While existing research has primarily focused on serious games and gamified applications explicitly designed to influence

environmental behavior, considerably less attention has been paid to the motivational and experiential potential of commercial entertainment video games. These games prioritize enjoyment and engagement, yet frequently incorporate complex systems, feedback mechanisms, and consequence-driven interactions that may implicitly influence players' perceptions of responsibility, stewardship, and environmental impact. Accordingly, this study asks: How do specific game design elements in commercial video games shape player experiences in ways that may encourage eco-friendly behavior? By shifting the analytical focus from explicit persuasive messaging to experiential game design elements, the study seeks to extend understanding of how entertainment-oriented digital experiences can contribute to eco-friendly engagement while preserving intrinsic player motivation. The present study focuses exclusively on the environmental dimension of sustainability, without addressing its social or economic dimensions.

Method and Data

Method and Data This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine how player experiences emerge through interaction with design elements in commercial video games. Data were collected using an adapted Screencast Videography (SCV), which captures real-time on-screen gameplay alongside players' spontaneous verbal commentary, allowing access to immersive experiences that are not directly observable through traditional methods. A dual analytical lens was applied: the Octalysis Framework was used to identify and analyse motivational game design elements, while the DDE (Design-Dynamics-Experience) framework guided the analysis of player experiences at emotional (Cerebellum) and cognitive (Cerebrum) levels.

Two eco-focused commercial simulation games were purposefully selected: The Sims 4: Eco Lifestyle (The Sims) and Eco Global Survival (Eco). These games were chosen due to their explicit focus on environmental themes, popularity, and active streaming communities, and because they

represent contrasting sustainability framings (promotion-focused versus prevention-focused). Data consisted of archived gameplay screencasts from Twitch and YouTube Gaming collected over three months. In total, over 1,500 minutes of gameplay and extensive player discourse from 15 streamers were analyzed using an iterative thematic process until analytical saturation was reached.

Summary of Findings

In The Sims, Empowerment of Creativity and Feedback emerged as the dominant motivational core drive. Meaningful choices and immediate feedback, such as visible environmental transformation, fostered Cerebrum experiences of autonomy, alongside Cerebellum experiences of enjoyment. Development and Accomplishment supported by progression indicators (e.g., level-ups, quests, progress bars), strengthening perceived competence and enjoyment. Ownership and Possession was supported through virtual goods and exchangeable points, generating experiences of control, attachment, and responsibility toward environmental assets. Together, these elements reflected a promotion-focused, intrinsically motivating design that encouraged in-game sustained eco-friendly engagement.

In contrast, Eco primarily activated Ownership and Possession through build-from-scratch mechanics, avatars, and virtual goods, generating both control and attachment but also frustration and exploitative tendencies. Development and Accomplishment, driven by fixed action rewards, produced achievement alongside anxiety and boredom due to complex or opaque progression. Social Influence and Relatedness, operationalized through group quests and conformity anchors, fostered cooperation but was frequently oriented toward material gains rather than environmental preservation.

Overall, Eco’s prevention-focused framing shifted attention toward survival and accumulation. Overall, eco-friendly engagement depended less on sustainability themes alone than on how

motivational design elements, experiential dimensions, and regulatory framing were integrated within gameplay.

Key Contributions

This study offers several contributions. First, it demonstrates that commercial video games, beyond serious games or gamified interventions, can effectively engage players with eco-friendly behaviors. By identifying specific game design elements that foster environmental engagement, the research provides theory-building insights into how entertainment-oriented design elements support intrinsic motivation and eco-friendly action.

Second, the study applies Screencast Videography (SCV) to capture real-time gameplay interactions and spontaneous player discourse, offering a rich understanding of how players experience and respond to game elements. This methodological approach contributes to research on gaming experiences, immersive technologies, and user engagement.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer guidance for game designers and the entertainment industry on incorporating environmental content without compromising engagement. Promotion-framed, autonomy-supportive designs that emphasize creativity, feedback, and meaningful choices enhance intrinsic motivation, while careful use of extrinsic rewards avoids undermining eco-friendly intentions.

Finally, the study informs policymakers, conservation organisations, and social marketers on leveraging digital entertainment to scale environmental awareness, bridge theory and practice, and design interventions that foster sustainable behavior globally.

References

References are available upon request.

TITLE: **DEVELOPING NEW FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS**

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Keywords
Refugee Entrepreneurs
Immigrant Customers
Diversity and Inclusion
New Service Development
Customer Interaction

This article examines the role of customer interaction for developing new financial services for refugee and migrant entrepreneurs in the Western New York region of the United States.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The expanding refugee population in the United States represents a newly emerging customer base that is driving increased demand for financial services aligned with their religious beliefs. This article examines the role of customer interaction for developing new financial services for refugee and migrant entrepreneurs in the Western New York region of the United States. It addresses two key gaps in existing literature. First, there is a lack of research on the financial services needs of the growing population of refugee entrepreneurs. Second, few studies have investigated how firms can advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) by addressing the needs of this population. Using a rigorous case research design, we collected data through in-depth interviews with managers, as well as with refugees and recent migrant entrepreneurs. Specifically, we seek to answer the following research question: How do firms interact with their refugee customers, who are small business owners and entrepreneurs, for developing new financial services? Our research is set in the U.S. Business-to-Business (B2B) service sector. As industries continue to evolve and business needs become more complex, the role of innovation in B2B financial services has become increasingly vital.

Method and Data

We adopted a qualitative, hermeneutical approach to collecting data and analyzing empirical materials and interpreting the findings. To ensure internal validity, we employed multiple data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation. As part of the ethnographic process, we observed service development processes in real time and reviewed documents and archival records to facilitate data triangulation. To enhance theoretical validity,

we compared our analysis with existing literature as key themes emerged and seeking new literature where necessary to support interpretation. This iterative process aligns with the abductive approach to qualitative data collection discussed in the literature. We collected data from a financial service firm, Refugee Banking Corporation-RB Corp (a pseudonym). To maintain confidentiality, the participating firm asked us to use a pseudonym. The firm having headquarters in Western New York is part of the financial services industry. Its B2B financial services include business mortgages, working capital loans, equipment finance and leasing, machinery and farm equipment leasing, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) lending, etc. We collected data over two phases from the key informants, that included 6 managers of the participating/partner firm, RB Corp, and 73 business customers who were involved in the service innovation process.

Summary of Findings

The data pattern yields three key research issues related to new financial services and interaction with the refugee and immigrant entrepreneur customers: (a) need and process of interaction with refugee entrepreneurs at various new service development stages, (b) various modes and methods of interaction with refugee entrepreneurs, and (c) key problems in customer interaction with the customers. A detail analysis of these research issues supports our proposition that developing new services which meet the needs of the growing population of refugees, asylum seekers and recent immigrants—while also aligning with customers' religious and cultural beliefs—should be a strategic priority for a firm. Doing so is essential not only for organizational growth and competitiveness but also for advancing the financial inclusion of often-marginalized populations. Another finding worth noting is that after completion of the research project, a total

of 13 new financial service concepts were generated that met refugee entrepreneurs' religious and cultural background. These concepts pertain to various financial services that the participating firm plans to develop. Due to confidentiality requirements stipulated by RB Corp, we are unable to disclose the exact details of these new services.

Key Contributions

Many firms face significant challenges in marketing financial services tailored to the needs of refugee customers. To overcome these barriers, firms must actively interact with the customers, incorporating their input into the development of new financial services. In doing so, this study aligns with and contributes to the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) strategic charter on refugee resettlement and well-being and human rights protection. Our research also contributes to the literature of New Service Development (NSD). Specifically, the study provides guidelines for managers of the service firms seeking to market financial services to refugee entrepreneurs in the U.S. and other developed nations with comparable socio-cultural contexts. In doing so, it promotes active community engagement and reinforces Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles, which are critical pillars for long-term business success. Furthermore, we highlight the important role of policymakers, regulators, and refugee outreach organizations in enabling the smooth flow of financial services to the growing population of refugee entrepreneurs. These efforts are crucial for reducing inequalities, encouraging inclusive marketing practices, and fostering broader acceptance of refugee entrepreneurs who have historically been overlooked in markets for products that respect their religious and cultural values.

"References are available upon request."

FOR ME OR FOR ALL? HOW CONSUMERS' INCLUSION STATUS SHAPES DIVERGENT PREFERENCES FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGN

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Keywords: inclusive design, unified design, DEI, consumer identification, identity signaling

Description: This study examines the divergence in consumer preferences for Unified versus Separate Inclusive Design across inclusion status.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) become increasingly central to corporate strategy, a growing number of firms are adopting inclusive design to better serve previously marginalized consumer segments. These initiatives generally manifest in two distinct forms: Unified Inclusive

Design (UID) and Separate Inclusive Design (SID). UID involves products engineered for universal utility by both excluded and mainstream populations (e.g., ambidextrous mice). Conversely, SID entails developing specialized products tailored to excluded consumers (e.g., left-handed mice), while offering functional equivalents—referred to as SID counterparts—for the mainstream market (e.g., right-handed mice).

Despite the strategic proliferation of these designs, academic understanding of their impact remains nascent. Prior research focusing on SID in the context of inclusive line extensions—such as the expansion of shade ranges in color cosmetics—shows that excluded consumers respond less favorably to these initiatives than mainstream consumers (D'Angelo, Dunn, and Valsesia 2025). However, there is a critical lack of research directly comparing consumer preferences between UID and SID. The present research addresses this gap by investigating how a consumer's inclusion status (excluded vs. mainstream) influences the relative preference for UID versus SID.

Method and Data

To address these research questions, we conducted a total of eleven experiments (eight of which were pre-registered) along with an archival analysis utilizing real-world purchase data.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal that consumer preferences for inclusive design are fundamentally driven by their inclusion status. This status creates a clear divergence in how consumers evaluate and choose between unified and separate design approaches.

Key Contributions

This research offers significant theoretical and practical contributions by demonstrating how inclusion status shapes consumer reactions to UID and SID products. By exploring the under-researched domain of inclusive design within the DEI literature, this study provides actionable insights for managers, suggesting that there is no universally superior approach to inclusive design. Since preferences diverge between mainstream and excluded consumers, firms should move away from the assumption of a single optimal solution.

"References are available upon request."

FROM CONSUMPTION TO CIRCULATION: MULTI-STUDY EVIDENCE ON CONSUMER RESPONSES TO CIRCULAR PRODUCT DESIGN

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Keywords: Circular Economy, Circular Product Design, Scale Development, Innovation, Consumer Perception

Description: This paper develops and validates a consumer-oriented measurement scale for Circular Product Design and examines its effects on product evaluations across incremental and radical innovations.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The successful transition to a circular economy depends not only on designing durable, reusable, and recyclable products but also on ensuring that consumers adopt such circular products. Yet, while research has advanced the technical understanding of Circular Product Design (CPD), the consumer perspective has received far less attention.

First, although consumer demand is widely recognized as a major barrier to circular transitions, insights into how consumers perceive and adopt circular designed products remain fragmented and mostly qualitative. This gap is amplified by the absence of validated measurement instruments for CPD. Thus, through the development of a CPD scale, this research addresses how consumers' perceptions of CPD strategies can be reliably captured.

Second, prior studies often focus on individual design strategies but lack an integrated perspective on how distinct CPD approaches influence consumer evaluations. Building on existing literature to identify the key strategies for achieving CPD, this study addresses the question of whether – and, if so, which – circular strategies enhance consumers' product evaluations.

Third, integrating circularity into product design offers differentiation opportunities but also poses challenges, as additional circular attributes can increase complexity or demand behavioral adjustments, particularly in highly innovative products. Therefore, this study investigates how product innovativeness moderates the effects of CPD and the psychological mechanisms driving consumer responses in this relationship.

Method And Data

Building on prior research, we identified eleven key CPD strategies and integrated them into a unified framework. Following established scale development procedures, we generated eight items per strategy. Twelve academic experts assessed content validity, and items correctly classified by at least ten judges were retained. In an online study (n = 199), participants rated a circular smartphone, and item–total correlations were used to retain the five most reliable items

per strategy. Subsequent exploratory (n = 195) and confirmatory factor analyses (n = 195) confirmed an eleven-factor structure for the final 55-item scale.

Using the validated scale, Study 1 (n = 279) tested CPD's effect on consumers' new product evaluation (NPE). Participants assessed a smartphone featuring three randomly assigned CPD strategies. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the hierarchical construct structure and the impact of CPD on NPE.

Study 2 (n = 1.341) employed a 2 (innovativeness: incremental vs. radical) × 12 (circularity: 11 CPD strategies + linear control) between-subjects experiment. Participants evaluated smartphone concepts varying in innovativeness and CPD strategy. Two-way ANOVAs tested how innovativeness moderates CPDs effect on NPE. PLS-SEM analyses were then applied to the radical circular innovation conditions exploring the underlying psychological mechanisms, modeling perceived relative advantage and behavioral change as mediators of consumers' evaluations.

Summary of Findings

This research provides comprehensive empirical evidence on how CPD shapes consumer evaluations of new products. As a conceptual outcome, it develops a unified CPD framework across two dimensions: Design for Product Integrity and Design for Recycling, including the eleven design strategies of Physical and Emotional Durability, Maintenance, Upgrading, Recontextualization, Repair, Refurbishment, Remanufacturing, Disassembly, Technical Recycling, and Biological Recycling. Building on this foundation, a validated CPD scale was developed to measure consumers' perceptions of these strategies, each operationalized through five items.

Study 1 shows that all eleven CPD strategies, both those enhancing product integrity and those focused on recycling, significantly enhance consumers' overall evaluations of new products. These results underscore the role of circularity in new product development.

Study 2 extends these insights by examining the moderating role of product innovativeness. The results show that while CPD enhances NPE for both incremental and radical innovations, the positive effect is significantly stronger for incremental products. Mediation analyses further reveal two opposing mechanisms underlying the weaker effect in radical circular innovations: perceived relative advantage enhances product evaluations, whereas anticipated behavioral change diminishes them.

Together, these findings demonstrate that CPD generally enhances consumer evaluations, identify conditions under which its effects are strongest, and clarify the psychological dynamics shaping consumer responses to circular innovations.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, the study integrates core CPD approaches into a unified framework spanning Design for Product Integrity and Design for Recycling. Theoretically, it advances the conceptualization of CPD by combining strategies for slowing and closing resource loops within a higher-order structure, enabling systematic comparison. The development of a multidimensional CPD scale allows quantitative assessment of consumers' perceptions of circular design, supporting future empirical research in this area. Managerially, the framework guides CPD application in new product development, while the scale supports assessing perceived circularity and identifying improvement areas.

Second, by demonstrating that CPD strategies enhance consumer product evaluations, the study reinforces the value of circular design and contributes to research on positive consumer responses to sustainable products. Practically, it highlights that CPDs can strengthen product appeal and market success.

Third, results show that while radical circular innovations achieve the highest overall evaluations, incremental products benefit more strongly from added CPD strategies. Theoretically, this demosntrates how product innovativeness moderates CPD's effects. Practically, it positions CPD as a relatively low-risk way to increase the success of incremental innovations.

Finally, by identifying perceived relative advantage and anticipated behavioral change as opposing mechanisms in evaluating radical circular products, the study expands consumer adoption theory and highlights the need to communicate benefits while minimizing perceived behavioral change to improve acceptance of highly innovative circular products.

(References are available upon request.)

FROM STIGMA TO STATUS: HOW LUXURY BRANDING TRANSFORMS CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES IN SECONDHAND MARKETS

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Keywords: luxury branding, branding secondhand products, secondhand product, signaling theory

Description: This research integrates signaling theory with contamination theory to demonstrate that luxury brands function as contamination-reducing mechanisms in secondhand fashion consumption among Generation Z consumers, introducing the construct of "convergent signaling" to explain how this cohort reconciles ethical ambivalence by using luxury secondhand purchases to simultaneously communicate status, sustainability values, and digital identity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The secondhand luxury market has experienced unprecedented growth, with the global market for pre-owned hard luxury goods approaching €21 billion and expanding at approximately 8% annually, driven primarily by younger consumers. This expansion challenges traditional luxury marketing assumptions that exclusivity, pristine condition, and newness constitute the foundation of luxury appeal. Despite substantial managerial interest, theoretical understanding remains incomplete regarding how luxury brand equity functions when products transition to secondhand

ownership. This research addresses this gap by examining how luxury branding influences consumer evaluations and choices in secondhand contexts. Existing frameworks predominantly address primary market consumption, leaving uncertainty about equity preservation in resale contexts. The study investigates whether luxury brand signals overcome contamination barriers and uncertainty in secondhand transactions, particularly across product categories varying in intimacy and contamination sensitivity, and whether platform-mediated trust mechanisms interact with brand equity in shaping secondhand preferences.

Method and Data

Study 1 employed a 2 (Luxury: luxury vs. non-luxury) × 2 (Condition: used vs. new) between-subjects experimental design with 222 participants from Brazil and the United States. Swimwear served as the focal product category, with realistic price differentiation (luxury new $300 vs. used $45; non-luxury new $80 vs. used $12). Dependent variables included purchase intention, perceived quality, value for money, recommendation likelihood, and product likeability. Study 2 utilized a 2 (Luxury: luxury vs. non-luxury) × 2 (Seller Knowledge: known vs. unknown) between-subjects design with repeated measures across six product categories (bags, jackets, one-piece swimwear, bikinis, trunks, speedos). The sample comprised 296 participants, predominantly aged 18-21 years. This mixed design enhanced sensitivity to luxury effects while controlling for individual differences. Participants made binary choices between used and new products and provided quality expectations for each category.

Summary of Findings

Study 2's behavioral choice data revealed substantial luxury advantages for used product selection. Logistic regressions indicated significant luxury effects across multiple categories: handbags (OR

= 2.88, p = .004), jackets (OR = 4.39, p < .001), and one-piece swimwear (OR = 4.37, p < .001). Participants in luxury conditions chose used products 68.2% of the time versus 58.7% in non-luxury conditions (F = 56.14, p < .001, ω^2 = .086). Luxury quality-advantage scores favored luxury brands across several categories, with strongest effects for bags (F = 48.26, p < .001, ω^2 = .137) and jackets (F = 53.44, p < .001, ω^2 = .151). Intimate apparel categories showed weaker effects, suggesting boundary conditions related to hygiene and fit concerns. Study 1 revealed that used products scored significantly higher on luxury perception than new products (F = 9.31, p = .003, ω^2 = .036), suggesting age and wear can function as authenticity markers.

Key Contributions

This research introduces "associative elevation," explaining how luxury brands transform stigmatized secondhand characteristics into desirable attributes through two mechanisms: quality signaling reduces uncertainty about durability and performance, while heritage value reframes age and wear as provenance and authenticity. The jacket category demonstrated a luxury × seller-knowledge interaction, supporting signaling theory predictions that brand cues become most influential when alternative information is limited. Consumers showed 2.88 to 5.31 times higher preference for used luxury items compared to non-luxury alternatives, creating strategic opportunities for sustainable market expansion while maintaining brand equity. For managers, findings suggest prioritizing product longevity and repairability, investing in brand-led authentication programs, and curating provenance documentation that transforms age into heritage value. Communication strategies should position pre-owned luxury as responsible indulgence, reconciling status aspirations with sustainability values.

References available upon request.

Generational Analysis on Sustainable Consumption: A Systematic Literature Review for Theory and Practice Innovation

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Keywords: Sustainable Consumption, Consumer Behaviour, Sustainability, Generational Cohorts

Description: A systematic literature review of 20 years of research papers on Sustainable Consumption through the lens of different generational cohorts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sustainability research is a broad field that encompasses various perspectives across multiple disciplines. Given its tremendous scope, scholars have reviewed diverse operational definitions and terms related to sustainability and its dimensions (Glavič & Lukman, 2007). Areas of analysis include circular economy and consumption (e.g. Camacho-Otero et al., 2018); waste management (e.g.Oluwadamilola et al., 2021; Rotimi et al., 2021), sustainability in the age of digitalization(e.g. Grybauskas et al., 2022), the effects of product/service sustainability attributes on consumers (e.g. Acuti et al., 2022; Majer et al., 2022), sustainable fashion (Busalim et al., 2022; Rotimi et al., 2021) and more recently social sustainability (Alwani & Bhukya, 2025; Govindan et al., 2021; Madanaguli et al., 2022).

The research in sustainability also includes intergenerational cohorts, which have been performed importantly over the past two decades (e.g. Diprose et al., 2019; Djafarova & Foots, 2022; Kamenidou et al., 2020; Liang & Xu, 2018; Lin & Chen, 2022; Nadanyiova et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Park and Lee, 2021; Pencarelli et al., 2020; Sogari et al., 2017; Stanes et al., 2015; Yap & Ng, 2018).

Given the significance of sustainability and intergenerational research, this study conducted a systematic review to establish a thorough understanding of what has been studied on sustainability from the perspective of different consumer cohorts, how they engage with sustainability as a value-laden, identity-relevant phenomenon, and how motivations (e.g., self-expression vs. conformity), brand preferences, emotional attachment, and economic constraints shape behavior across generational lines.

Method and Data

This systematic literature review employed the Theories, Contexts, Characteristics, and Methods (TCCM) framework developed by Paul *et al.* (2019) to logically synthesize what we currently know and how we know it. Our review was also supported by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021), thereby demonstrating the principles that characterize robust systematic reviews (Paul & Criado, 2020).

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol was used to identify articles for inclusion in this literature review (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021). This protocol provides the guidelines for reporting a systematic review in four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Summary of Findings

The review synthesizes 62 peer-reviewed articles examining sustainability from a consumer generational cohort perspective. The literature is concentrated in a limited set of journals, with *Sustainability* accounting for the largest share, while high-ranked marketing and management journals remain underrepresented. Empirically, research is heavily skewed toward younger cohorts: Generation Z (34%) and Millennials (19%), with minimal focus on Baby Boomers and virtually no in-depth examination of Generation Alpha.

Across studies, clear intergenerational differences emerge in sustainability values, motivations, and behaviors. Generation Z and Millennials consistently display stronger pro-environmental attitudes, greater engagement with sustainability discourse—particularly via social media—and higher responsiveness to identity-driven and emotionally framed sustainability appeals.

In contrast, Generation X and Baby Boomers exhibit more pragmatic orientations, prioritizing durability, trust, economic efficiency, and functional value. However, a persistent value–action gap is observed, especially among younger cohorts, indicating that positive sustainability attitudes do not consistently translate into behavior.

Theoretically, nearly half of the studies rely on established behavioral models, most notably the Theory of Planned Behavior, while brand-related constructs and integrative theoretical approaches remain limited. Methodologically, the literature is dominated by quantitative survey-based designs and structural equation modeling. Contextually, studies are concentrated in Europe, Asia, and North America, with apparel and food as the most examined industries. Overall, the findings reveal a fragmented yet actionable body of knowledge, underscoring the need for more theory-driven, cross-generational, and contextually diverse research.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the extant literature on sustainability and consumer behavior by providing an overview of the current scientific knowledge on sustainability across generations through a framework-based study. It organizes and coherently synthesizes information to unveil the theoretical potential within these disciplines and establishes a future research agenda (Paul et al., 2023). In addition, this study brings together two increasingly popular research topics: sustainability and intergenerational studies. As generational cohorts evolve, so do their perceptions of and responses to sustainability. As observed in this review, intergenerational studies are particularly relevant to understanding the factors that shape sustainable consumer behavior.

We propose a future research agenda that focuses on applying less commonly used theories, particularly in underrepresented regions, investigating emotional branding across generations, and examining the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability in various contexts and cross-cultural settings. This work provides a roadmap for researchers and practitioners to translate generational insights and behaviors into practical strategies that foster sustainable consumption and systemic change.

References

References are available upon request.

GREEN SIGNALS: EVOLUTIONARY ROOTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Keywords

Evolutionary Psychology, Green Purchase Intention, Environmental Responsibility, Regulatory Focus, and Sustainable Consumption

Description

In four experimental studies across Malaysia, U.S. and the U.K., this research demonstrates that evolutionary psychology-based cues, particularly family-focused (vs. romantic partner focused) stimuli, lead to higher green purchase intentions driven by higher perceived environmental responsibility, with stronger effects under a prevention-focused mindset.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Environmental sustainability has emerged as a global concern. However, despite the heightened awareness and favorable consumer attitudes toward sustainability, the actual adoption of green products is often overestimated (PWC, 2021) with even environmentally conscious consumers displaying inconsistent green purchase behavior (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). This research posits that developing strategies that follow humans' prehistorical roots can encourage green consumption. Building on Miller's (2009) proposition that consumer behavior can be understood through the lens of human evolution, we examine the cognitive and motivational factors that drive consumer responses to green marketing strategies. Specifically, we investigate whether, how, and under what conditions evolutionary-focused stimuli influence consumers' green purchase behavior?

Method and Data

We tested our hypotheses using different experimental designs and stimuli (visual, narrative, and combined). Study 1A, conducted in Malaysia (N = 150), had a mixed experimental design. Testing the main effect, this study showed that family-focused (relative to romantic partner-focused) cues significantly increase green purchase intentions for both conspicuous and inconspicuous green products. Then, Study 1B replicated the findings using a between-subjects experimental design with U.S. (N = 203) and U.K. (N = 204) samples. Participants were shown a hypothetical advertisement, depicting either an affectionate four-member family or an attractive romantic couple as evolutionary stimuli. Thereafter, participants shared their green purchase intentions and responded to a behavioral proxy for green consumption (usage of discount voucher). Study 1B also tested and ruled out several alternate

explanations (e.g., social identity signalling, social desirability etc.). Subsequently, Study 2 (N = 200 U.S. sample; pre-registered) used a scenario-based experimental design to test the psychological mechanism through perceived environmental responsibility. Finally, Study 3 (N = 200 U.S. sample) used a 2 (family vs. romantic partner cues) × 2 (prevention vs. promotion focus) between-subjects design. Using PROCESS Model 8 (Hayes, 2013), the study showed that the conditional indirect effect of family-focused stimuli on green purchase intentions through perceived environmental responsibility is significantly stronger for prevention-focused messaging.

Summary of Findings

This research demonstrates that evolutionary-rooted stimuli can influence green consumption by activating long-term environmental responsibility. In four experimental studies conducted across Malaysia, U.S., and the U.K., we show that family-focused (or long-term parenting) stimuli increase green purchase intentions relative to romantic partner-focused (or short-term mating) evolutionary cues. These effects hold for different green product types (conspicuous and inconspicuous) and stimuli formats. Our research shows that the effect of evolutionary cues operates through perceived environmental responsibility. That is, family-focused stimuli tend to heighten consumers' sense of responsibility for protecting the environment, thereby increasing their green purchase intention. Furthermore, the indirect effect is conditional upon consumers' dispositional regulatory focus. We show that the impact of family-focused stimuli is significantly stronger for prevention-focused (or loss-framed) than promotion-focused (or gain-framed) messaging. These effects suggest that advertising stimuli, depicting parenting or care-giving cues, are likely to trigger green consumption, especially when they are framed to safeguard future generations.

Key Contributions

In examining the role of evolutionary psychology in shaping consumers' green purchase intentions, we respond to calls for its application in the marketing domain (Lynn et al., 1998; Saad, 2020; Taheran et al., 2024). Previous research has shown how consumers perceive green products – for example, individuals who engage in environmentally friendly behaviors are perceived as more feminine (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, and Gal, 2016), and eco-friendly consumption can signal men's long-term mating value and commitment as partners (Borau et al., 2021). Researchers have suggested that marketers can position products as signals of desirable personality traits, thereby enhancing consumers' attractiveness as potential partners (Miller, 2009). Building on this work, our research examines how consumers respond to green products following exposure to distinct evolutionary-based stimuli. From a managerial standpoint, recognizing the psychological factors that drive green purchase intentions and developing marketing strategies rooted in human prehistoric instincts can be particularly effective in encouraging green purchases. These insights support the development of tailored marketing approaches that resonate with specific consumer profiles, ultimately encouraging adoption of eco-friendly products and contributing to broader sustainability goals.

References

References are available upon request.

HOW COLLECTIVE ATTENTION MODERATES THE RELATION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL ADVOCACY AND BRAND HEALTH

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Keywords: corporate social advocacy, collective attention, brand health, social media engagement

Description: Analyzing 1.8 million tweets from 87 U.S. companies through the lens of collective attention theory, this study demonstrates that social media engagement volume and valence non-linearly moderate corporate social advocacy, revealing that while CSA alone reduces brand health by -2.3%, high engagement volume can buffer this effect, whereas the interplay of volume and valence creates a strategic 'sweet spot' for brand outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Corporate social advocacy (CSA)—taking public stances on controversial socio-political issues—is a high-stakes strategy for modern brands. While 87% of consumers report increased loyalty to brands with a social stance, 88% threaten boycotts based on advocacy (Cone 2017). Managers remain undecided on engagement due to inconclusive literature; extant research shows CSA impacts ranging from negative (Bhagwat et al. 2020) to positive (Park and Jiang 2020), yet lacks comprehensive guidance using actual social media behavior linked to consistent brand health metrics.

Drawing on collective attention theory (Shteynberg et al. 2020), this study investigates how the public's allocation of limited cognitive resources modulates CSA outcomes. It addresses a critical gap: how do volume (visibility) and valence (emotional reaction) of collective attention on social media change the impact of CSA on brand health? This study posits that social media engagement does not merely reflect public opinion but actively amplifies or shifts the direct effects

of CSA through cognitive prioritization and imitative behavior. By analyzing whether high-volume engagement strengthens the main CSA effect and how sentiment alignment shifts these outcomes, this research provides insight for navigating the "attention economy" of controversial stance-taking.

Method and Data

This study utilizes a multi-source longitudinal dataset (2020–2021) merging Twitter activity with YouGov BrandIndex scores for 54 U.S. brands across 16 industries. The final panel includes 67,324 daily observations. *CSA Classification:* To identify CSA signals, it employs a binomial logistic regression machine learning model trained on 10,294 human-coded tweets. Following accuracy testing against human samples, a 60% likelihood threshold was applied to categorize posts as CSA. *Collective Attention Metrics:* Attention is operationalized via engagement volume and valence. Volume is the standardized sum of likes, replies, quotes, and retweets. Valence is calculated using VADER sentiment analysis of retweets, resulting in a positive-negative ratio: $\frac{(\#positives - \#negatives)}{total\ retweets}$. *Modeling:* This study employs a panel regression with fixed effects for industry and time (year, month, day, and time-of-day). The model tests the direct effect of CSA on brand health, moderated by two-way and three-way interactions with attention volume and valence. This approach allows us to isolate how the "attention economy" of social media amplifies or shifts the impact of controversial stance-taking on objective brand health metrics.

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that the impact of CSA on brand health is contingent upon collective attention metrics. Regression results show that both attention volume ($\beta = 1.814, p < .001$) and valence ($\beta = 66.473, p < .001$) exert positive direct influences on brand health. The isolated main effect of CSA communication translates to a decrease of -2.3% in brand health. High levels of collective attention volume significantly improve outcomes, with a shift from low to high volume resulting in a $+99.4\%$ increase in predicted brand health. Critically, findings identify a "flipped effect" at the intersection of volume and valence. While increasing the volume of a well-received (high valence) CSA stance surprisingly results in a -59.5% decrease in brand health, an ill-received

(negative valence) stance that garners massive collective attention remarkably improves brand health by $+535.0\%$. This suggests that in a competitive information landscape, the sheer visibility of a controversial stance can enhance brand salience and recognition, outweighing initial negative sentiment. Models explain 37% to 72% of the variance in brand health, demonstrating that the interplay of how much the public attends to a message and how they feel about it is an important driver of CSA outcomes.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to the marketing and communication literature in two primary ways. *First*, this study applies collective attention theory as a potential framework for understanding the inconsistent findings surrounding corporate social advocacy outcomes. Results provide evidence for a "flipped effect," suggesting that when a brand's stance garners high-volume collective attention, the resulting brand salience may, in some contexts, offset the risks associated with negative emotional valence. This offers a nuanced perspective on the "attention economy," indicating that visibility itself is a critical moderator of how advocacy impacts brand health.

Second, this research offers practical insights for managers navigating socio-political stance-taking. Findings suggest that monitoring isolated sentiment metrics may be insufficient; instead, managers should consider the interaction between engagement volume and valence. While CSA communication carries inherent risks, the data indicates that high-volume "reverberation" can buffer negative brand health impacts through increased salience. By identifying these non-linear dynamics, this study provides a foundation for firms to better calibrate their communication strategies and risk assessments within volatile social media environments.

References are available upon request.

How Corporations Fulfill Digital Responsibility: Exploring the Pathways from Norms and Governance to Implementation

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Keywords: Corporate digital responsibility (CDR), Government mechanism, Digital ethics

Extended Abstract

Research Questions

In the existing literature, research on CDR at the firm level remains relatively limited and fragmented across various managerial issues. First, the concept of CDR has yet to be comprehensively defined, and many scholars have emphasized the need for further conceptual clarification. This conceptual ambiguity has consequently hindered deeper investigations into the mechanisms through which firms implement CDR.

To address this gap, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What constitutes CDR as a unified framework applicable to diverse digital technologies?
2. How can firms effectively implement the core dimensions of CDR in practice?

Method & Data

This study employs qualitative research methods, specifically content analysis and in-depth interviews, to collect and analyze data. The secondary data are drawn from the most recent AI-related legal frameworks in the United States, Europe, and South Korea, as these regions have established dedicated regulatory systems governing AI compared to other countries. In addition, we examine policy guidelines from several leading companies—namely Microsoft, Google, and OpenAI—given their influential role in shaping the development trajectory of AI technologies and their critical stance toward digital technology ethics. Furthermore, we conduct a systematic review of academic literature using keywords such as *corporate digital responsibility*, *AI guidelines*, *digital ethics*, and *digital governance*, focusing on SSCI and SCI journals within the domains of business and management, information technology and systems, and ethics, as well

as relevant online reports on AI development. Through this review process, we aim to distill the key elements embedded in AI-related governance policies.

Primary data are collected through in-depth interviews. From August 2024 to April 2025, we first interview Chief Information Officers (CIOs), Chief Sustainability Officers (CSOs), and heads of information management departments to gain insight into their strategic thinking regarding CDR. To ensure sample diversity, we also interview personnel from internal IT units and general consumers, allowing us to capture both the current implementation status of digital ethics within focal organizations and consumer perceptions. Since companies possess extensive behavioral data about consumers, understanding consumer expectations surrounding data usage, storage, and collection serves as an essential step in clarifying the core nature of CDR.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal that CDR comprises four primary normative dimensions: ethical commitment, data governance, risk control, and autonomy. In terms of governance mechanisms, organizations must consider the integration of interpersonal coordination, moral responsibility shifting and embedded ethical design. Furthermore, cultivating a digital ethical culture requires internalization, commitment, and the multiple assessment.

Key Contributions

This study reviews and synthesizes existing regulatory frameworks and governance policies on digital technologies across different countries, aiming to clarify the foundations of CDR. Adopting a multi-level perspective, we also examine internal corporate governance mechanisms to develop a practical CDR implementation framework. Theoretically, we contribute to literature by mapping national regulations and leading corporate policies (e.g., Apple, Google) on the ethical use of digital technologies, offering clear behavioral guidelines for aligning digital practices with ethical standards. Practically, we highlight how management structures, cross-departmental collaboration, and organizational roles can facilitate CDR adoption. Our proposed implementation model traces the trajectory from regulatory compliance (“duty-bound”) to proactive responsibility (“responsibility-driven”), providing a roadmap for embedding ethical digital practices into corporate strategy and operations.

“References are Available on Request”.

HOW HEDONIC SOCIAL APPEALS SHAPE ACCEPTANCE OF INSECT-BASED FOODS

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Keywords: insect-based foods, sustainability, novel foods, shared consumption, embarrassment, disgust, hedonic appeals

Description: The current research introduces “shared eating with close others” as a promotional appeal that increases willingness-to-try, actual trial, and purchase of insect-based foods when compared to promotional appeals based on utilitarian or sensory benefits.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Insect-based foods have received wide interest from practitioners for their sustainable and nutritional benefits. However, consumers have been slow in trying or adopting insect-based foods. Retailers are figuring out the most effective ways to promote such foods and encourage trial and adoption. Utilitarian appeals, based on nutrition qualities have been most used, however, research suggests that they do not necessarily motivate consumers' choices. Research on the effects of sensory appeals, based on taste or smell, have produced mixed findings.

The present research identifies for the first time, shared eating with close others as a hedonic social appeal that can be successfully used to promote insect-based foods. We build on prior literature on shared food consumption as a hedonic motive to experience food, and show that in the context of insect-based foods shared eating with close others decreases the negative affect associated with eating insect-based foods, namely embarrassment and disgust. With that, we identify shared eating appeals as particularly effective for novel, out-of-norm foods that consumers might resist adopting. We posit that shared eating with close others can serve as a social motivator to try and consume novel foods such as insect-based foods.

Method And Data

We combine field studies and online experiments to demonstrate the effect of promotional appeals based on shared eating on insect-based food choice, trial, and purchase. In our first field study, Study 1, in a restaurant with 129 participants, we measured consumer choice of insect-based food when utilitarian vs. hedonic social appeals based on shared eating with close others were used. In the second field study, Study 2, in a restaurant with 149 consumers, we measured consumer choice of insect-based food when hedonic social appeals based on shared eating with close others were used compared to hedonic sensory appeals based on taste. We followed with two controlled experiments, study 3 (N = 210) and study 4 (N = 200), where we investigated the

mediating role of perceived embarrassment and disgust as the underlying mechanisms in the effect of hedonic social appeals on consumer choice. Finally in Study 5 (N = 112), done in a simulated retail environment with point-of-purchase tasting display, we examine the impact of hedonic social appeals compared to control appeals on trial and purchase of insect-based foods.

Summary of Findings

The results of our set of studies provide evidence that hedonic social appeals that promote insect-based foods in the context of sharing food with close others (when compared to utilitarian, hedonic sensory, or control appeals) are more successful in increasing choice, trial, and purchase of insect-based foods. Our two field studies in restaurant settings demonstrate that hedonic social appeals based on sharing food with close others versus utilitarian appeals (study 1) or versus hedonic sensory appeals based on taste (Study 2), lead to decreased perceived disgust, and ultimately increase choice and actual trial of insect-based foods. Our results from the two controlled experiments (Studies 4 and 5) further show that hedonic social appeals based on shared eating with close others decrease perceived embarrassment, and in turn perceived disgust. As a result, willingness-to-try and willingness-to-purchase of insect-based foods are increased. Our controlled study in a simulated retail setting (study 5) showed that hedonic social appeals compared to control appeals reduce perceived embarrassment, which in turn decreases feelings of disgust, and ultimately increases both actual trial and purchase of insect-based foods.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research contributes to understanding of how social hedonic factors affect trial and adoption of novel, out-of-norm food products. In the current research, we identify for the first-time shared

eating with close ones as a positive factor that can mitigate the negative affect associated with insect-based foods, and thus influence trial and purchase of such foods. Prior work on food consumption has shown how positive experiences can increase food consumption in certain conditions. However, there is limited knowledge on how positive social experiences mitigate negative affect in the context of novel foods to which people might be resistant. We further contribute to the research on novel foods, by identifying embarrassment as a previously overlooked barrier to trial and adoption.

The current research has practical contributions in offering actionable strategies for retailers on how to promote novel foods. Our research suggests that framing novel food to be shared with close others can be effective in encouraging trial and adoption of out-of-norm foods. Promotional appeals based on the social experience of sharing food with close ones can be easily implemented in various product placement retailing contexts.

IF THEY CAN SEE IT, THEY CAN BE IT: THE IMPACT OF FEMVERTISING ON BRAND-RELATED FACTORS – A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

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Keywords: Femvertising, Female Empowerment Advertising, Self-Determination Theory, Psychological Needs Satisfaction, Consumer Behavior

Description: This study demonstrates that femvertising enhances brand-related outcomes by satisfying women's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, particularly among younger female consumers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Growing concerns over stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising have fostered the development of femvertising – an advertising approach that emphasizes pro-female messaging and imagery. Across empirical studies, femvertising has been linked to more favorable consumer responses at both attitudinal and behavioral levels. However, the literature remains limited in clarifying the generalizability of these effects and the psychological processes underlying them. To address these limitations, the present research advances a threefold inquiry. First, it examines the contextual robustness of femvertising by testing whether its positive brand-related effects

replicate within a cultural environment where traditional gender roles remain more deeply embedded. Second, it investigates the psychological process driving these effects by conceptualizing the satisfaction of women's self-determined needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as the central mediating mechanism. Last, it explores the moderating role of women's age in shaping the psychological and behavioral effects, as responsiveness to identity-related cues tends to decline over the life span. Accordingly, the central research question guiding this study can be stated as: How does femvertising affect brand-related outcomes, and to what extent is this relationship shaped by the satisfaction of self-determined needs and women's age?

Method and Data

To examine the proposed framework, the present study employed a cross-sectional online experiment among female consumers in Germany. Using a single-factor between-subjects design participants were randomly exposed to one of two real-life video advertisements, that were comparable in terms of product category (sportswear) and brand familiarity but differed significantly in their portrayal of women. Thus, participants assigned to the control group viewed a traditional advertisement (Reebok: "Easy Tone"), depicting women in subordinate, sexualized, and domestic roles, whereas those in the experimental group viewed a femvertising campaign (Nike: "Dream Crazier"), portraying women as empowered individuals defying conventional societal norms.

Following the stimuli exposure, participants completed validated self-report measures assessing the study's constructs of interest, including self-determined needs satisfaction, ad attitude, brand

attitude, brand attachment, purchase intention, and word-of-mouth intention. Depending on the nature of constructs, responses were recorded on seven-point Likert scales or semantic differential scales. After data screening, the final dataset consisted of 218 valid responses which served as the basis for all statistical analyses, including robust multivariate and follow-up analyses of variance as well as mediation and moderated mediation analyses.

Summary of Findings

The results show that femvertising significantly outperforms traditional advertising in driving more favorable brand-related outcomes. Based on mediation analyses, this persuasive strength is rooted in femvertising's capacity to satisfy women's fundamental psychological needs. Accordingly, by framing women as empowered, capable, and socially connected, the campaigns are associated with heightened perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These internally rewarding states, in turn, translate into positive consumer responses, ranging from affective reactions, including ad attitude and word-of-mouth intention, to more enduring outcomes such as brand attitude, brand attachment, and purchase intention. Moreover, the findings confirm that while this pathway is present across age groups, it demonstrates greater explanatory strength among younger women. Hence, women's age constitutes a significant boundary condition that not only moderates the extent to which femvertising fulfills psychological needs, but also determines the strategy's broader impact on brand-related factors. Taken together, these outcomes position pro-female advertising as a promising avenue for strengthening consumer responses while concurrently yielding psychological support for women.

Statement of Key Contributions

Building on the empirical evidence, this research offers three theoretical contributions. First, it broadens the substantive scope and generalizability of femvertising by validating its impact across multiple brand-related outcomes and demonstrating its applicability beyond progressive environments. Second, it clarifies the psychological process driving the strategy's favorable effects by establishing the satisfaction of women's self-determined needs as the mediating mechanism. This theoretical advance closes a gap in the literature and positions self-determination theory as a powerful framework within advertising research. Third, by showing that the magnitude of the psychological and behavioral effects varies systematically with age, the study introduces a life-span perspective into the discourse and reveals an important boundary condition for the effectiveness of pro-female advertising.

From a practical perspective, the study provides advertisers with an evidence-based framework for designing campaigns that effectively engage female audiences. Specifically, by identifying the satisfaction of women's psychological needs as the driver of femvertising's effectiveness and noting that younger women respond particularly strongly, it specifies concrete levers that translate into measurable value. Marketers are thus encouraged to employ visual and verbal elements that nurture feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby not only fostering brand-related outcomes but also yielding social advantages for women.

References are available upon request.

Is It the Norm or the Need?

Psychological Drivers of Circular Consumption in Household Appliances

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Keywords: Circular Consumption, Materialism, Product Attachment, Social Norms, Awareness of Need

Description:

This paper examines psychological and social determinants of circular consumer behaviours within the Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates which psychological and social factors drive or inhibit circular consumer behaviours—such as repairing, sharing, gifting, and reducing—and how these determinants interact within the framework of the Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM; Klöckner and Blöbaum, 2010). The central research questions are: (1) Which individual-level factors (e.g., materialism, awareness of need, norms, product attachment) influence engagement in circular behaviours? (2) How do social norms drive circular consumer

behaviour? (3) How can marketing campaigns by firms better promote circular practices beyond sustainable purchasing to support product longevity, reuse, and circulation?

Method and Data

A multi-stage, quantitative research design was employed. First, a literature review informed construct development for circular behaviour measurement. This was followed by scale development and exploratory factor analysis (n = 152), then confirmatory factor analysis (n = 258). A subsequent large-scale survey (n = 741) tested the model. Across the studies (total n = 1,151), structural equation modelling was applied to examine the relationships between materialism, awareness of need, product attachment, and social norms in predicting circular behaviours. All studies used validated measures and standard analytical procedures to ensure reliability and robustness. Data were collected in collaboration with a professional panel provider during the summer of 2024.

Summary of Findings

The structural equation analyses revealed several noteworthy patterns regarding the predictors of circular consumption behaviours. Social norms consistently emerged as a significant positive predictor across almost all behaviours, particularly for Repair, Lending, Sharing, Buying Second-hand, and Giving as a Gift, highlighting the importance of perceived social expectations in driving sustainable actions. Material values and awareness of consequences were generally positive predictors, although their influence varied across behaviours. Product retention tendency positively predicted maintaining value, giving as a gift, and repairing, but was less relevant for other behaviours. Social norms significantly influenced lending, giving as a gift, and repairing, and consistently predicted awareness of consequences across all behaviours. These findings highlight the differential roles of individual motivations, social expectations, and environmental

awareness in promoting circular consumption practices. Overall, results highlight the importance of integrating social-psychological drivers and awareness of need into marketing strategies aimed at promoting circular consumption.

Key Contributions

This research expands marketing scholarship on sustainability by shifting the focus beyond green purchasing to include consumer behaviours that extend product lifetimes and facilitate circulation. It advances the theory by highlighting the role of social norms as driving forces and providing a more nuanced understanding of how mechanisms of social influence operate in sustainability contexts. For practitioners, the findings offer implications for segmentation, message framing, and intervention design. Marketing strategies can leverage social proof, empathy-based narratives, and public commitment to counteract materialistic tendencies. Service innovations—such as repair services, sharing platforms, and gifting or resale marketplaces—should be positioned to align with awareness of need and social-norm activation. Ultimately, this work provides a framework for designing marketing interventions that make circular practices more appealing, socially reinforced, and culturally embedded.

WHEN REASSURANCE BACKFIRES: THE PARADOX OF INFLATION MESSAGING IN RETAIL

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Keywords: Inflation, retailing, price guarantees, economic threat, bulletproof glass effect

Description: This research shows that inflation-related price guarantees such as “Inflation Stop” can paradoxically reduce consumer spending by heightening perceived economic threat, but reframing them with neutral wording mitigates these negative effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers frequently use reassurance messages such as “Inflation Stop” or “Price Freeze” during times of high inflation to signal stability and consumer protection. However, it remains unclear whether such inflation-related guarantees achieve their intended effect or whether they may inadvertently trigger consumer anxiety and defensive behavior. This research addresses three central questions: (1) How do inflation-related price guarantees influence consumers’ purchasing

behavior, particularly basket size? (2) What psychological mechanisms explain these effects? and (3) How can retailers design inflation-related price communications to prevent unintended negative consequences?

Drawing on the bulletproof glass effect (Brough et al., 2022), which posits that protective cues can paradoxically heighten perceptions of threat, we argue that explicit mentions of "inflation" may act as semantic triggers that remind consumers of economic instability. Based on this theoretical framework, we formulate three hypotheses: H1, inflation-related price guarantees decrease basket size (i.e., the number of items purchased); H2, this effect is mediated by perceived economic threat; and H3, the negative effect can be mitigated when the message omits explicit references to inflation.

Method and Data

The hypotheses were tested across two experimental studies using a controlled virtual supermarket environment. Study 1 examined the psychological mechanism underlying the effect of inflation-related price guarantees. Participants completed a grocery shopping task under either a control condition (no signage) or a treatment condition displaying an "Inflation Stop" sign modeled after a real supermarket campaign. Basket size and perceived economic threat were measured. Mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of the inflation-related guarantee on basket size through perceived economic threat. This supports the hypothesis that such signage reminds consumers of economic instability, thereby evoking threat perceptions and leading them to purchase fewer items. Study 2 tested a moderation effect by altering message framing. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: control (no signage),

inflation-related guarantee (“Inflation Stop”), or neutrally framed guarantee (“Price Stop”), which avoided explicit mention of inflation and thus did not activate related threat associations. An ANOVA confirmed that basket size was significantly lower in the inflation-related condition but not in the neutral framing condition. Thus, the negative effect was mitigated when explicit references to inflation were removed, demonstrating that linguistic framing moderates the relationship between reassurance cues and consumer behavior.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, results consistently demonstrate that inflation-related price guarantees can backfire. In Study 1, exposure to an “Inflation Stop” sign significantly reduced basket size and total spending compared to a control condition, indicating a defensive consumer response. Mediation analysis confirmed that this effect was driven by heightened perceived economic threat—participants who saw inflation-related messaging reported feeling more economically threatened, which in turn led to smaller shopping baskets. Study 2 replicated these results and extended them by testing message framing. When the explicit reference to “inflation” was replaced with more neutral language (“Price Stop”), the negative effect on basket size disappeared. This suggests that the problem is not reassurance messaging per se, but rather the salience of inflation-related terminology. The inflation-related wording increased perceived economic threat, indicating that it served as a cue of instability rather than reassurance. Together, these findings reveal a paradox in inflation communication: messages designed to reassure can trigger threat perceptions and reduce spending, while subtle linguistic reframing can preserve consumer confidence and purchasing behavior.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four primary contributions. First, it challenges the dominant assumption and prevailing retail practice that price guarantees universally foster trust and spending by showing that, in inflationary contexts, reassurance cues can paradoxically reduce consumption through increased threat salience. Second, it introduces the "bulletproof glass effect" to marketing and retail communication, demonstrating how defensive signals—intended to convey safety—can instead amplify consumers' sense of economic threat. Third, the paper enriches crisis communication and framing literature by providing empirical evidence that subtle linguistic variations (e.g., omitting the term "inflation") can substantially alter consumer behavior. This underscores the critical role of semantic cues in shaping psychological responses under economic stress. Fourth, the study offers actionable implications for practitioners: retailers should avoid overt inflation references in price guarantees and instead use neutral framings that convey stability without evoking economic insecurity. By bridging theory and practice, this research responds to a recent call by Dekimpe and van Heerde (2023) for empirical work on consumer responses to retailer communications in high-inflation environments, thereby advancing both academic understanding and managerial strategy for marketing in volatile economic conditions.

References are available upon request.

MOVING TOWARD SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: A MULTI-LAYERED CUE PROCESSING APPROACH INTEGRATING NUDGING THEORY

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Keywords: sustainability, consumption, nudging theory, process models

Description: This study examines how macro-level cognitive stages and micro-level processes interact within the Multi-Layered Cue Processing Triangle to shape consumers' responses to nudging interventions that promote sustainable consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sustainable consumption and nudge theory are vital in marketing, policy, and business for aligning economic growth with environmental and social goals. This paper synthesizes two decades of research on sustainable consumption and nudging in marketing, highlighting key concepts, determinants, barriers, and intervention models. It presents the Multi-Layered Cue Processing Triangle, a dual-layered framework integrating macro-level stages (perception, interpretation, motivation) with micro-level processes (attention, evaluation, emotion) to explain how consumers process nudging cues. The paper discusses the framework's boundary conditions and offers theory-driven propositions, providing academic insights and practical guidance for marketing managers.

Summary of Findings

The Multi-Layered Cue Processing Triangle explains how consumers process sustainable consumption nudges through a dual-layered framework. The "outer" triangle captures macro-level stages—perception, interpretation, and motivation—while the "inner" triangle details micro-level processes: attention, evaluation, and emotion. This diagnostic structure helps researchers pinpoint exactly where an intervention may fail, such as during the evaluation phase if greenwashing is suspected. In contrast to existing models, this approach explicitly accounts for boundary conditions like cognitive load, cultural context, and consumer agency, which can reduce a nudge's effectiveness.

Theory-driven propositions suggest that while visual salience drives initial perception, the behavioral response is moderated by the consumer's limited attention. Motivation is further influenced by the perceived credibility of the source and the emotional engagement—such as pride or hope—evoked by the cue. For practitioners, the model yields actionable guidance on personalizing interventions in e-commerce and retail while emphasizing transparency to build consumer trust. By bridging academic rigor with real-world applicability, the framework provides a foundation for designing ethical, context-sensitive nudges that foster durable sustainable behavior.

Key Contributions

The Multi-Layered Cue Processing Triangle represents a significant advancement in behavioral marketing by integrating macro-level decision stages (perception, interpretation, motivation) with micro-level psychological processes (attention, evaluation, emotion). Unlike traditional

models that focus narrowly on cognitive categories, this framework offers a sequential, diagnostic tool to identify exactly where nudges succeed or fail in the consumer journey.

A primary contribution is the development of eleven theory-driven propositions that guide empirical research on how factors like visual salience, source trust, and emotional engagement influence sustainable outcomes. The paper explicitly accounts for boundary conditions—such as cognitive load, cultural context, and consumer agency—providing a more nuanced understanding of nudge effectiveness. For practitioners, the model yields actionable guidance for designing personalized interventions in e-commerce and public policy that optimize credibility while avoiding pitfalls like greenwashing. By bridging academic rigor with real-world applicability, the work establishes an ethically grounded agenda for fostering durable sustainable consumption through context-sensitive behavioral design.

References are available upon request

NOT AS SEEN ON TV: THE HIDDEN COSTS OF MEDIA-INDUCED TOURISM

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Keywords: TV-show tourism, Overtourism, Sustainability externalities, Online reviews

Description: This paper examines how television-driven destination fame reshapes visitor satisfaction and sustainability perceptions, revealing polarized experiences across fans vs. non-fans and across destination types.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Media-induced tourism, particularly driven by television series, has become a powerful catalyst for destination visibility and travel demand. While prior research has largely emphasized its promotional and economic benefits, far less attention has been paid to how such exposure reshapes visitor experiences and sustainability outcomes once destinations become globally visible. This gap is particularly salient in the era of streaming platforms, where fictional narratives can transform unknown locations into mass tourism hotspots.

This study investigates whether and how television-induced tourism affects visitors' perceptions of destinations, with particular attention to the emergence of negative externalities. Specifically, it examines whether destinations used as filming locations experience changes in visitor satisfaction after media exposure. The research further explores whether these perceptions differ between visitors who are fans of the series and those who are not, and whether destination characteristics condition these effects.

Accordingly, the study addresses four research questions: (1) whether media exposure improves overall destination perception, (2) whether visitors recognize negative externalities associated with TV-induced tourism, (3) whether fandom moderates these perceptions, and (4) whether experiences differ across destination types, namely established versus newly famous sites and urban versus natural locations.

Method and Data

The empirical context of the study is television-induced tourism associated with *Game of Thrones*, a globally successful series with extensive use of real-world filming locations. Data were collected through web scraping of tourist reviews from TripAdvisor, a leading platform for travel-related user-generated content. The final dataset consists of 5,549 English-language reviews posted between 2010 and 2025, covering eleven recognized filming sites across six countries. These locations include urban heritage sites, natural landscapes, and fortified landmarks that experienced substantial increases in visitation following their appearance in the series.

Reviews were cleaned to remove duplicates and non-English entries, and no personally identifiable information was retained. Each destination was coded along two dimensions: whether it was an established tourist destination or became famous primarily through the series, and whether it was urban or natural in character.

The study employs a mixed-method approach. Quantitative analysis of numerical ratings captures changes in overall satisfaction before and after media exposure, as well as differences between fans and non-fans. In parallel, Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) analysis is used to examine emotional, cognitive, and social language patterns in reviews. This combination enables a multidimensional assessment of visitor experiences and sustainability concerns.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal that television exposure produces ambivalent outcomes for destinations. While media visibility attracts enthusiastic visitors, it is also associated with declining average ratings following exposure. Many tourists report disappointment related to overcrowding, commercialization, loss of authenticity, and environmental strain, challenging the assumption that media fame uniformly enhances destination perception.

Visitor responses are strongly polarized by fandom. Tourists who explicitly reference the television series tend to evaluate destinations more positively, suggesting that emotional attachment to the narrative buffers dissatisfaction. For these fans, symbolic value often outweighs practical inconveniences. In contrast, non-fans consistently provide lower ratings and employ language associated with fatigue, anger, and conflict. For these visitors, the absence of symbolic meaning makes the costs of congestion and degradation more salient.

The analysis also uncovers systematic differences across destination types. Established urban destinations appear relatively resilient, as existing infrastructure and diversified tourism demand mitigate the impact of media-driven surges. Conversely, newly famous and natural sites are especially vulnerable. Reviews of these locations more frequently reference safety concerns, ecological damage, and crowding. Overall, visitors increasingly and spontaneously acknowledge

sustainability-related externalities, indicating growing awareness of the environmental and social costs associated with media-induced tourism.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to the literature on media-induced tourism, sustainability, and destination marketing. First, it shifts the focus from promotional benefits to the lived experiences of tourists after media exposure, providing empirical evidence of the sustainaility challenges associated with television-induced tourism. The study reveals how ecological strain, social conflict, and disappointment are articulated in tourists' own words.

Second, the study introduces a psycholinguistic perspective to tourism research through the application of LIWC, demonstrating how emotional and cognitive expressions enrich understanding of destination perception beyond numerical evaluations. This approach highlights the moderating role of fandom, showing that media-related symbolic attachment systematically shapes how visitors interpret and tolerate externalities.

Third, the findings advance theory by linking expectation disconfirmation and vulnerability–resilience frameworks to media tourism. The study shows that sustainability outcomes depend on media exposure itself and on destination characteristics, such as the pace at which fame is acquired.

From a practical perspective, the research offers actionable insights for destination managers and policymakers. Media exposure should be treated as a potential sustainability shock rather than a purely promotional opportunity, requiring preparedness, realistic marketing communication, and differentiated visitor management strategies.

References are available upon request.

POLYCRISIS AND CONSUMER CONSCIOUSNESS: ONLINE SHOPPING, PROCESSES OF CHANGE, AND PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Polycrisis, Processes of Change, Online shopping, Consumer consciousness, Sustainable consumption

Description: This paper examines how experiential and behavioral processes of change shape online shopping intentions during polycrisis conditions, with sustainability perceptions as key moderators.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The contemporary marketplace is increasingly shaped by overlapping global crises, including pandemics, geopolitical conflict, climate change, and economic instability. These interlinked disruptions, conceptualized as polycrisis, have transformed crisis from a temporary condition into a persistent contextual reality. Under such conditions, consumer behavior, particularly online shopping, has expanded rapidly, raising critical questions about sustainability, responsibility, and consumer consciousness. While prior research has examined online shopping adoption, crisis-driven consumption, and sustainability independently, limited work has integrated behavioral change theory to explain how consumers cognitively and behaviorally adapt their consumption practices in polycrisis contexts.

This study addresses this gap by applying the Processes of Change framework to online shopping behavior during polycrisis conditions. Specifically, it investigates how experiential and behavioral processes of change influence consumers' intentions to shop online and how these relationships are moderated by perceptions of environmental friendliness and environmental consciousness. The research asks whether crises function as catalysts for heightened consumer awareness and whether sustainability perceptions shape the translation of internal change processes into behavioral intentions. By integrating behavioral change theory with consumer research, this study seeks to advance understanding of how consumers navigate digital consumption amid uncertainty while reconciling convenience with sustainability considerations.

Method and Data

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine online shopping behavior under polycrisis conditions. Data were collected through a structured survey administered to 402 respondents via Amazon Mechanical Turk, ensuring a diverse and geographically distributed

sample with prior online shopping experience. Participants were instructed to reflect on a specific crisis context when responding, including environmental crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest, or economic instability, capturing the multidimensional nature of polycrisis.

The survey instrument was developed using validated scales from prior research on the Processes of Change framework and sustainability-related constructs. Experiential processes of change were measured through items capturing consciousness raising, dramatic relief, environmental reevaluation, social liberation, and self-reevaluation. Behavioral processes of change included helping relationships, stimulus control, counterconditioning, reinforcement management, and self-liberation. Perceived environmental friendliness of online shopping, environmental consciousness, and intention to shop online were measured using multi-item Likert scales.

All constructs demonstrated strong reliability and validity, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding accepted thresholds. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported construct structure and discriminant validity. Regression and moderation analyses were conducted to test hypothesized relationships, enabling examination of both direct effects and interaction effects within the proposed conceptual model.

Summary of Findings

The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed model. Both experiential and behavioral processes of change significantly influenced consumers' intentions to shop online during times of crisis, indicating that crisis-driven consumption is shaped by both cognitive-emotional engagement and action-oriented behavioral strategies. Behavioral processes exhibited a stronger effect, suggesting that coping mechanisms and behavioral regulation play a particularly important role in sustaining online consumption under uncertainty.

Moderation analyses revealed that perceived environmental friendliness of online shopping significantly strengthened the relationships between both experiential and behavioral processes of change and online shopping intention. Consumers who viewed online shopping as environmentally beneficial were more likely to translate awareness and behavioral strategies into actionable intentions. Similarly, environmental consciousness moderated both relationships, indicating that consumers with stronger sustainability values were more responsive to crisis-driven change mechanisms.

Together, these findings demonstrate that crises act as catalysts for consumer consciousness, accelerating behavioral adaptation while simultaneously activating sustainability considerations. Online shopping emerges not only as a functional response to crisis conditions but also as a behavior filtered through environmental values and responsibility perceptions. The results highlight the importance of integrating internal change processes with external sustainability beliefs to understand digital consumption in volatile environments.

Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to marketing and consumer behavior scholarship. First, it extends the Processes of Change framework beyond its traditional applications in health and psychology into the domain of consumer behavior, offering a novel theoretical lens for understanding online shopping in crisis-laden contexts. By empirically testing experiential and behavioral change processes, the research advances theory on how consumers cognitively and behaviorally adapt consumption practices under sustained uncertainty.

Second, the study contributes to sustainable consumption literature by demonstrating the critical moderating role of environmental friendliness perceptions and environmental consciousness. The findings show that sustainability values do not merely coexist with digital consumption but actively shape how crisis-driven behavioral change translates into online shopping intentions.

Third, the research offers practical implications for multiple stakeholders. For e-commerce firms, the results underscore the importance of communicating sustainability benefits alongside convenience. For policymakers and non-profits, the findings highlight opportunities to design interventions that leverage heightened consumer consciousness during crises to promote responsible consumption. Overall, this paper provides an integrated framework for understanding digital consumption in a polycrisis world, bridging behavioral change theory, sustainability, and online consumer behavior.

References are available upon request.

SECOND-HAND LUXURY: NAVIGATING THE TRADE-OFF BETWEEN EXCLUSIVITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Keywords: Second-hand Luxury, Signaling, Sustainability, Exclusivity

Description (1 sentence): This study examines how luxury brands' engagement with second-hand markets shapes first-hand consumers' purchase intentions through competing sustainability and exclusivity signals, contingent on consumer attitudes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Second-hand luxury platforms are expanding rapidly, pushing luxury brands to decide whether to engage directly (e.g., brand-owned resale) or keep distance. Such engagement can signal environmental responsibility and "responsible luxury," potentially strengthening sustainability perceptions among first-hand buyers. At the same time, resale can widen access and lower effective

price points, threatening the scarcity and status signals that underpin luxury exclusivity. Building on Signaling Theory, this research asks how a brand's closeness to the second-hand market shapes first-hand consumers' purchase intentions for new luxury products through two competing perceptual pathways: sustainability and exclusivity. Specifically, we examine (1) whether greater second-hand closeness increases perceived sustainability while decreasing perceived exclusivity, and (2) how these countervailing signals translate into purchase intention. We further ask when these effects are amplified or attenuated by consumers' attitudes, focusing on green consumption attitudes and aversion to sustainable luxury. By isolating the psychological trade-off between sustainability and exclusivity in response to second-hand engagement, the study clarifies whether resale initiatives represent a financial risk to the core business or an opportunity to boost primary demand, and for which consumer segments each outcome is most likely. We also explore whether the sustainability route can outweigh exclusivity losses, yielding a positive effect.

Method And Data

We test the proposed framework in a online experiment. The study employs a 2 (luxury brand closeness to second-hand: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Perceived closeness is manipulated via fictitious online news articles describing a well-known luxury brand either launching a brand-owned second-hand platform or explicitly refraining from any second-hand engagement. To ensure realism while avoiding prior brand associations with resale, a globally recognized luxury brand was used.

Participants were recruited via Prolific using a multi-stage screening procedure to approximate a core luxury consumer segment. Initial pre-screening narrowed the pool based on socioeconomic status, luxury ownership, language, and country. A subsequent screening survey assessed purchase frequency and spending, resulting in a final sample of 100 participants from the United States and

the United Kingdom who regularly purchase luxury goods. After random assignment to one of the experimental conditions, participants read the stimulus article and completed a post-experimental questionnaire.

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales, including perceived exclusivity, perceived sustainability, purchase intention, green consumption attitude, and aversion to sustainable luxury. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling with bootstrapping to test main effects, moderation, and mediation paths.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal a clear trade-off between exclusivity and sustainability perceptions when luxury brands are perceived as closely engaged in second-hand business. Greater second-hand closeness significantly reduces perceived brand exclusivity while simultaneously increasing perceived brand sustainability. Both perceptions independently and positively influence consumers' intentions to purchase new luxury products, confirming the relevance of both signals in contemporary luxury consumption.

Mediation analyses show opposing indirect effects of second-hand closeness on purchase intention. The negative indirect effect via reduced exclusivity is weaker and only marginally significant, whereas the positive indirect effect via enhanced sustainability is stronger and robust. In the fully specified model, the total indirect effect is positive but should be interpreted cautiously, as it is not stable across all model specifications.

Importantly, the strength of these effects varies systematically with consumer attitudes. The positive sustainability pathway is significantly stronger for consumers with favorable attitudes toward green consumption, younger consumers. In contrast, exclusivity losses are more

pronounced among consumers with higher aversion to sustainable luxury, although this effect is only tentative.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to research on luxury consumption, signaling, and second-hand markets in several ways. First, it extends signaling theory in the luxury domain by showing that second-hand engagement activates a dual signaling process in which sustainability gains coexist with exclusivity losses. Rather than treating sustainability as peripheral, the study demonstrates that second-hand strategies reshape core luxury brand signals. Second, the findings advance a receiver-focused perspective on signaling by showing that consumer attitudes systematically shape how sustainability and exclusivity signals are interpreted. Green consumption attitudes and aversion to sustainable luxury determine whether second-hand engagement enhances or undermines purchase intentions, highlighting heterogeneity in signal effectiveness. Third, the study contributes to the emerging second-hand luxury literature by shifting attention from resale consumers to first-hand buyers and primary demand. It provides experimental evidence that second-hand engagement can generate positive spillover effects for core luxury products under certain conditions. Finally, the results offer strategic insights for luxury managers, suggesting that second-hand initiatives should be selectively targeted rather than uniformly applied to balance sustainability benefits and exclusivity risks.

References are available upon request.

STITCHING SUSTAINABILITY: THE ROLE OF HANDMADE ACTIVITIES IN PROMOTING WELL-BEING AND REPAIR INTENTIONS

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Keywords: handmade, well-being, warm-glow, restoring, repairing, sustainability

Description: Through three experimental studies, this research demonstrates the significance of handmade activities in restoring used products on perceptions of well-being and warm glow perceptions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question : Repairing activities are usually linked to sustainable behaviors (Scott & Weaver, 2014) showing a low interest for such activities, by specific consumers only (Arias et al., 2024). There is little research in marketing and consumer behavior literature exploring the links of handmade activities to well-being. The main focus of the previous handmade literature is on perceived quality of the products. Products issued from handmade activities are associated with high quality and superior craftsmanship (Pinkas, 2017). Birau (2024) shows important effects of handmade activities on well-being. Building on these findings, the current project answers to the following research question: what are the effects of restoring products on individual well-being and warm glow perceptions? The emotional reactions to such activities can lead to lower intentions to discard these products and higher probability to repair them in the future.

Method And Data: Three online experimental studies were conducted with participants from the United States (n = 1,705), two of which employed nationally representative samples (stratified according to fundamental socio-demographic variables, including age, gender, occupation, and other relevant characteristics). Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in which either 'new' or previously restored products were available, or 'old' products requiring self-restoration were presented. Across the studies, participants were exposed to varying product categories: desks, nightstands, or bicycles. Participants were instructed to envision themselves purchasing either the 'new' or 'old' product, with those selecting the 'old' product further instructed to imagine undertaking the restoration process themselves. Participants subsequently completed measures assessing perceived well-being and perceived warm glow.

Summary of Findings : Across the experimental studies, participants exposed to the self-restoration condition reported significantly higher levels of well-being, increased warm glow perceptions, and evaluated the purchase as more sustainable compared to participants in the new product or pre-restored product conditions (Studies 1 and 3). Furthermore, when presented with a choice between a new product and an 'old' product requiring restoration, participants who selected the product for self-restoration exhibited higher levels of warm glow (Study 2). Additionally, participants in the self-restoration condition demonstrated greater intentions to repair the product relative to those in the pre-restored product condition (Study 3). Collectively, the findings indicate that psychological benefits, manifested as enhanced well-being or warm glow affect, are particularly salient within the context of furniture repair and restoration. The restoration of furniture not only prolongs product longevity but also engenders a sense of achievement and personal investment. This affective connection may enhance the propensity to select repair over replacement as a consumption strategy.

Statement of Key Contributions: This research adds to the previous findings showing a main effect of handmade activities on perceived well-being. Further these positive well-being effects will spillover to increase intentions to keep the products even if there are no longer used. However, the storage of these products is done with the intention to further repair them.

These results open the path for practitioners to include in their communication strategies well-being appeals that can further promote well-being derived from restoring old products and encourage consumers to involve more in such activities.

The findings also have implications for policymakers. Well-being campaigns that fight depression and health issues could be directed to restoring old products and thus contributing not only to consumers' health but also to societal well-being. Further, policy decisions could be motivated by the positive effects of repairing activities on citizens to encourage businesses to promote stronger re-use campaigns. Future research could further explore the positive effects of handmade activities and their applicability in reuse and restoring of old products to benefit both individuals and the society.

References are available upon request

SYMBOLIC OR SUBSTANTIVE? CAN SUPPLIER CODES OF CONDUCT IMPACT ESG PERFORMANCE?

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Keywords: ESG, Latent Dirichlet Allocation, Supplier codes of conduct, Sourcing.

Description: This study identifies three types of supplier codes of conduct i.e., customary, cooperative, and compliance, and shows how each differentially relates to firms' ESG performance, offering insights into managing hidden ethical risks in global supply chains.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – A BBC investigation into the Turkish textile industry found that iconic retail brands, including ASOS and Marks & Spencer, were implicated in employing refugee child labor in their supply chain (Forbes 2024). Similarly, an undercover investigation found that Mango and Zara sourced from suppliers where employees were compelled to work 12-hour days in hazardous conditions (Forbes 2024). To manage such hidden risks in global supply chains, many firms rely on Supplier Codes of Conduct (SCCs), legally binding documents that articulate expected ethical, social, and environmental standards for suppliers. SCCs are critical for large multinational firms, which possess leverage over suppliers yet also face complex, multilayered supply chains that are difficult to monitor directly. Despite their widespread adoption, the

effectiveness of SCCs remains contested: some view them as meaningful private regulatory tools capable of improving environmental, social, and governance (ESG) outcomes, while others argue they may function as symbolic or "cheap" signals with limited substantive impact. To clarify these ambiguities, this study employs Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), an unsupervised machine-learning method, to identify distinct types of SCCs and analyze their relationship to ESG outcomes. Accordingly, we address two core questions:

RQ1: Does the use of SCCs further firms' ESG rankings?

RQ2: What types of SCCs exist, and do these types impact different aspects of ESG rankings?

Method and Data – We conducted our research using the 2023 Fortune list of companies (Fortune Media 2023). These highly visible organizations face substantial external pressures and provide accessible data, making them an appropriate research setting. We aimed to collect 100 SCCs from Fortune-ranked firms, proceeding from the highest-ranked downward. Following a quota sampling logic to balance effect sizes, statistical power, and data collection costs, we accessed 139 firm websites to obtain 100 usable SCCs. Our dependent variables are the London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG 2024; formerly Refinitiv) ESG ratings, one of the most prominent ESG measures (Berg, Koelbel, and Rigobon 2022). To increase granularity, we used the three ESG pillars i.e., Environmental, Social, and Governance. LSEG applies a rigorous methodology, evaluating firms on publicly reported data across ten themes. These metrics are particularly suitable for our purposes because they are closely tied to the outcomes SCCs are intended to influence, unlike broader measures such as financial performance. Our independent variables are indicators of the three SCC types, using customary SCCs as the base category. We control for industry sector, ESG controversies (lagged one year), organizational assets, and revenues. To

estimate the effects of SCC clusters on ESG performance with a modest sample size, we employ seemingly unrelated regression (SUR), a robust and well-established estimator.

Summary of Findings – Our results show that the use of SCCs (versus not making SCCs publicly available) positively relate to firms' overall ESG rankings. This is an important finding. For example, financial analysts may sometimes not want to, or may be barred, from investing in firms with low ESG rankings. This suggests where firms do not make SCCs publicly available, ESG rankings suffer. We also find that firms typically focus on three archetypes when designing SCCs: customary, cooperative, and compliance SCCs, with each having distinctive features. Last but not the least, we find that compliance SCCs are the best at fostering governance ESG performance, whereas cooperative SCCs foster environmental and social performance.

Statement of Key Contributions – We believe we are the first to show not all SCCs are alike and that their differences predictably relate to different ESG performance. We also are the first to use a sample sufficient for statistical testing. We obtain a striking pattern of results that suggests that firms are able to improve their ESG rankings generally by using SCCs. Further improvement is possible but only by focusing on making these SCCs on cooperation or on compliance. The former lifts environmental and social rankings while the latter increases governance rankings.

References are available upon request.

SYMBOLIC, SUBSTANTIVE, EPISTEMIC: REFRAMING MARKET LEGITIMACY IN SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE

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Keywords: Institutional Legitimacy, Epistemic Authority, Sustainability Governance, Sustainability Marketing, Legitimacy Portfolios

Description: This study develops an integrated framework that positions institutional legitimacy and epistemic authority as distinct but interdependent dimensions of corporate credibility

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: **When Institutional Legitimacy No Longer Guarantees Credibility, How Do Actors Construct Epistemic Authority, The Power To Define What Counts As Legitimate Knowledge About Sustainability Itself?**

Method and Data: This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing content analysis and data triangulation to examine how firms construct market legitimacy. Focusing on three instrumental cases (H&M, Shell, and Nestlé) selected for their sectoral criticality and discursive density, the authors analyze these actors as field-configuring exemplars rather than units for direct comparison. The dataset integrates four complementary sources to capture diverse perspectives: self-articulated corporate disclosures and statutory filings, institutionalized ESG ratings from providers like S&P Global, critical counter-narratives from NGO reports, and public discourse found in news media. Through this triangulated

corpus, a coding framework is applied to map firm narratives against two key dimensions: institutional legitimacy, which gauges symbolic versus substantive alignment with norms, and epistemic authority, which assesses credibility signals such as scientific referencing and third-party verification.

Summary of Findings: The study finds that firms navigate fragmented sustainability governance by assembling "legitimacy portfolios" that combine institutional legitimacy (normative alignment) and epistemic authority (credibility of knowledge claims). Analyzing H&M, Shell, and Nestlé, the research identifies distinct strategic positions: Nestlé aligns most closely with "Substantive Alignment" (Quadrant I) by balancing regulatory conformity with robust, verified metrics. Shell often occupies a "Disruptive but Credible" stance (Quadrant II), leveraging strong scientific referencing (e.g., IPCC data) to maintain credibility despite resisting some normative expectations. In contrast, H&M tends toward "Symbolic Compliance" (Quadrant IV), where high-profile pledges and rankings outpace measurable impact at scale, increasing vulnerability to greenwashing allegations. The findings detail five strategic pathways (P1 to P5) showing that firms move between these states to repair legitimacy or stabilize credibility. Notably, when regulatory anchors are weak, firms use epistemic signals like third-party verification as a substitute for institutional alignment to secure market trust. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that legitimacy is a dynamic, managed asset renegotiated through the interplay of symbolic narratives and epistemic proof.

Key Contributions: This study makes three primary theoretical contributions by integrating epistemic authority, the recognized power to define valid knowledge, into traditional institutional legitimacy theory. First, it moves beyond the binary of "symbolic vs. substantive" action by offering a dual framework that accounts for how firms navigate fragmented governance by balancing normative alignment with the perceived credibility of their knowledge claims. Second, it advances the understanding of sustainability governance

under uncertainty by theorizing five strategic pathways (P1 to P5) that explain how firms transition between legitimacy states, repair contested claims, and use epistemic signals to stabilize credibility when regulatory anchors are weak. Third, it identifies how high epistemic authority can reduce "aggregate confusion" in the market, showing that transparent methodologies and robust data provenance can lead to greater convergence in external ESG evaluations. Ultimately, the paper reframes legitimacy as a dynamic "portfolio" managed through the politics of knowledge, providing a more reflexive model for how corporate credibility is constructed and contested in politicized market systems.

References are available upon request

THE IMPACT OF MARKETING UPON THE PUBLIC GOOD: AN UNDERSTATED RELATIONSHIP

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Keywords: REF 2021, societal contributions, multi-level, collaboration

Description

Through an analysis of the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 impact database (n=504 impact cases), the study explores the multidimensional influence of marketing across societal, economic, environmental, technological, health, cultural and policy domains.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In an era of escalating societal challenges, from climate crisis and health disparities to political instability and digital disruption, the role of academic disciplines in delivering public good has come under increasing scrutiny. Marketing, traditionally associated with commercial enterprises, is evolving to address pressing societal needs through strategic communication, behavior change, and stakeholder engagement. To better understand these contributions, the aim of this paper is to analyze data contained within the UK REF (2021) impact database

(n=504 impact cases). It focuses particularly upon Unit of Assessment 17 (Business and Management Studies) to explore the contribution of marketing research beyond academia. In so doing it reveals that whilst marketing research is being applied to influence policy, support health interventions, advance environmental goals, and empower communities, it is often subsumed under broader headings such as economic impact or digital transformation, masking its distinctive and interdisciplinary value. Means of addressing this in-balance are outlined with areas of future research suggested.

Method and Data

This paper adopts a qualitative interpretive approach to analyze the 504 impact case studies submitted to the most recent Research Excellence Framework assessment, REF 2021, under Unit of Assessment 17: Business and Management Studies. Marketing was identified within case studies either explicitly (as part of research themes or disciplinary context) or implicitly (through application areas like branding, consumer behavior, or stakeholder engagement). Each case was categorized by impact domain (societal, economic, technological, environmental, health, political, cultural and legal) and then examined to determine how marketing contributed to public benefit articulation. The analysis also identified patterns in international collaboration and interdisciplinarity.

Summary of Findings

Societal impacts (n=316 cases) were the most prevalent in the dataset, reflecting academia's significant role in enhancing public welfare, civic participation, and institutional practices. This was the broadest category with marketing research activity supporting a wide range of public and civic initiatives, including behavioral campaigns (e.g. public safety, social inclusion), community engagement efforts, and service design in public sectors such as healthcare and

policing. These interventions often relied on evidence-based communication strategies and participatory frameworks to co-create public value.

In economic contributions (n=102 cases), Marketing played a strategic role in boosting SME competitiveness, enabling digital transformation, and improving access to financial services. Research contributed to practical tools for market analysis, customer insights, and stakeholder mapping that supported local and global economic development. Impact was often amplified through partnerships with financial institutions and regulatory agencies.

In technological contributions (n=27 cases), Marketing insights were central to the diffusion and adoption of new technologies, particularly in sectors like transport, energy, and e-commerce. Contributions included the development of user-centered design principles, trust-building frameworks for digital services, and support for start-ups and innovation clusters in scaling operations.

Environmental impacts (n=20 cases) enabled the promotion of sustainable behaviors among consumers and supported institutional environmental goals through stakeholder education and outreach. Contributions included ethical branding, green consumption campaigns, and partnership models for climate adaptation and waste management strategies.

In health impact (n=19 cases), Marketing approaches were pivotal in shaping public health messaging, supporting the adoption of digital health tools, and improving service accessibility. Examples included campaigns to increase vaccination uptake, reduce hospital readmissions, and enhance user engagement with healthcare platforms. Communication strategies grounded in behavioral research proved essential in driving meaningful outcomes.

In political impact (n=15 cases) and legal impact (n=1 case), several cases illustrated the role of marketing in framing public debates and policy awareness campaigns. These included efforts to influence legislative change through public advocacy and the strategic communication of research findings to government bodies.

In cultural impact (n=4 cases), whilst there are some instances of marketing facilitating the dissemination and accessibility of cultural heritage projects and performing arts initiatives, there remains a clear opportunity for marketing research to further engage with cultural institutions and creative industries.

Key Contributions

This paper contributes to both academic scholarship and professional practice in several ways. First, it demonstrates the breadth of societal relevance beyond commercial objectives attributable to marketing. This includes contributions to health equity, sustainable consumption, digital inclusion, and civic engagement enabled through the role of marketing in shaping behavior, building trust, and facilitating stakeholder participation.

Second, it highlights the integrative and interdisciplinary nature of marketing research. Many impact case studies illustrate how marketing collaborates with disciplines such as public policy, information systems, health sciences, and environmental studies to generate tangible societal value. This underscores the need for scholars to position marketing as a vital partner in multidisciplinary research aimed at public good.

Third, the study identifies a gap in explicit recognition of the contributions marketing makes

in public good research. While many REF 2021 cases relied on marketing principles, branding, consumer behavior insights, or communication strategies for instance, these elements were often embedded within broader narratives of business or policy impact. This lack of visibility limits the perceived academic and societal value of marketing.

For practitioners, the findings reaffirm that marketing research provides actionable insights useful for solving complex real-world problems. Evidence-based communication, behavioral interventions, and strategic stakeholder engagement can improve policy adoption, drive sustainable consumer practices, and enhance public service delivery.

Finally, this study provides practical recommendations for increasing the impact of marketing research. These include promoting disciplinary attribution in research impact submissions, expanding global partnerships, particularly in the Global South, and developing robust evaluation frameworks for long-term impact assessment. The analysis thus positions marketing as a discipline with significant potential to contribute to systemic change, benefiting both academic discourse and professional practice.

References are available upon request

THEY DID WHAT? WHY THE UNEXPECTED SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIORS OF OTHERS LEAD TO POSITIVE OUTCOMES

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Keywords: *expectancy violations, social norms, sustainable behavior change*

Across four experiments, we show that observing unexpected behavior increases sustainable behaviors by heightening behavioral uncertainty and susceptibility to normative influence, an effect that is attenuated when behaviors are already normative and challenges the marketing focus on congruency.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Imagine that you are meeting a friend for coffee at a coffee shop. Upon ordering, you notice that your friend, who is usually not known to be particularly environmentally conscious, brought a reusable coffee cup. Might this observation impact your own behavior the next time you grab a coffee at a coffee shop?

In this paper, we show that observing others behaving unexpectedly (vs. expectedly) positively impacts the observer's behavior. For example, if one observes a not so environmentally conscious friend unexpectedly use a reusable coffee cup, the observer's intentions to also do so in the future will increase. Drawing on theories on expectancy violations (Afifi and Metts 1998; Burgoon 1993), conformity (Asch 1956), social influence (Melamed, Savage, and Munn 2019) and social norms (Cialdini and Trost 1998; Smith et al. 2007), we propose a novel mechanism for this effect. Specifically, we propose that observing others behave unexpectedly in a particular domain creates uncertainty around that behavior (Mendes et al. 2007; Russell and Hubbard 1977). Experiencing uncertainty, in turn, makes the observer more susceptible to normative influence, i.e., more likely to pick up on and act in line with cues that inform them how they *should* behave as a result (Deutsch and Gerard 1955; Melamed et al. 2019; Schachter 1959). In other words, the experience of uncertainty resulting from observing an unexpected behavior increases the reliance on a domain-specific injunctive norm, which, in turn, leads to the desired behavior change (Cialdini 2003). In line with this account, we further show that unexpectedness only boosts the desired behavior if the norm around the focal behavior is not established yet. Contexts in which a specific behavior is already the established norm leave little room for uncertainty around what is expected, and hence render the reliance on normative cues from others obsolete.

Method and Data

Study 1 randomly assigned 196 UK Prolific participants to observe expected versus unexpected pro-environmental behavior. Participants imagined meeting a friend who brought a reusable coffee cup either as expected (environmentally conscious friend) or unexpectedly (not environmentally conscious friend). Observing unexpected behavior increased participants' likelihood of bringing a reusable cup themselves (M = 5.76, SD = 1.85) compared to expected behavior (M = 4.89, SD = 1.85), $t(194) = 3.68$, $p < .001$).

Study 2 tested the effect of expectancy violations in the lab with 272 European undergraduates who watched a *ProVeg 30-day Veggie Challenge* video featuring an ambassador whose shift to a plant-based diet was either unexpected (lifelong meat-eater) or expected (vegetarian). Participants exposed to the unexpected ambassador reported a higher likelihood of considering the challenge (M = 3.20 vs. 2.82), $F(2, 269) = 8.41$, $p = .004$, and were more likely to choose a vegan over a meat burger (31.9% vs. 20.4%), $\chi^2 = 4.59$, $p = .03$.

Study 3 randomly assigned 390 North American undergraduates to observe expected or unexpected reusable-cup behavior. Observing unexpected behavior increased felt uncertainty ($M = 3.91$ vs. 3.14), $t(388) = 4.81$, $p < .001$, and strengthened normative influence ($M = 4.86$ vs. 4.00), $t(388) = 4.99$, $p < .001$, which in turn increased likelihood of bringing a reusable cup ($M = 4.51$ vs. 3.45), $t(388) = 6.01$, $p = .001$. A serial mediation confirmed that uncertainty and normative influence sequentially mediated the effect (indirect effect = .29, 95% CI [.16, .44]).

Study 4 tested whether normativity moderates the effect of expectancy violations in a 2 (expected vs. unexpected behavior) × 3 (normativity: normative, non-normative, no information) experiment with 902 UK participants. A two-way ANOVA revealed main effects of normativity and behavior, and a significant interaction, $F(2, 896) = 3.81$, $p = .02$. Observing unexpected behavior increased likelihood of bringing a reusable cup in the no-

information condition (M = 4.46 vs. 3.76) and the non-normative condition (M = 4.79 vs. 3.70), but the effect was attenuated when the behavior was normative (M = 5.93 vs. 5.67).

Summary of Findings

In sum, we show that observing unexpected versus expected behavior motivates the observer to behave more positively too. This is because unexpectedness creates uncertainty around a focal behavior, which increases the observer's susceptibility to normative influence. We further highlight conditions under which observing others' unexpected behaviors is particularly impactful: contexts where a behavioral norm is not established yet.

Key Contributions

Our research contributes to the expectancy violation literature by showing how unexpected behavior influences observers' actions, an outcome that has received limited attention (Afifi and Metts 1998; Burgoon 1993; Shalev and Morwitz 2012). We demonstrate that positive expectancy violations drive behavior change through normative influence, positioning unexpectedness as a novel source of persuasion (Cialdini and Trost 1998; Kirmani and Ferraro 2017). In doing so, we challenge the dominant emphasis on congruency in marketing (Pracejus and Olsen 2004; Simmons and Becker-Olsen 2006) and offer an alternative strategy for leveraging public figures to promote sustainable behavior change (Steg and Vlek 2009; White et al. 2019).

References

Available upon request

TOO COMPLEX TO CARE? RELATABILITY AS A BOUNDARY CONDITION FOR NUMERICAL PRECISION IN SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS

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Keywords: green advertising, numerical precision, claim relatability, willingness to pay, conjoint

"This study examines how the relatability and numerical precision of sustainability advertising claims jointly influence consumers' willingness to pay, and whether perceived informativeness helps explain when numerical detail enhances or fails to enhance consumer valuation."

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Efforts to promote environmentally friendly products through sustainability advertising are increasingly challenged by greenwashing, which erodes consumer trust and claim credibility (Szabo & Webster, 2021). One proposed remedy is to increase claim believability by incorporating quantitative information, such as numerical metrics, to substantiate environmental claims. Empirical evidence, however, is mixed. While some studies find that numerical precision enhances credibility (e.g., Xie & Kronrod, 2012), others show that numerical information can confuse consumers and undermine claim effectiveness (e.g., Majer et al., 2022). This inconsistency suggests the presence of an unexamined boundary condition.

This research examines which types of sustainability advertising claims are most effective in increasing consumer valuation and why. Specifically, we investigate whether thematically relatable sustainability claims, those that are easy to visualize (e.g., recycled PET bottles), generate higher consumer willingness to pay (WTP) than less relatable claims (e.g., CO_2 compensation), and whether incorporating numerical precision enhances their valuation impact. We further examine whether numerical precision increases perceived informativeness and whether this mechanism helps explain when and why claim design translates into higher WTP.

Method and Data

A choice-based conjoint (CBC) experiment (N = 512) examined how thematic relatability and numerical precision in sustainability claims affect consumers' WTP, and whether these effects are mediated by perceived informativeness. CBC was chosen because it simulates realistic attribute

trade-offs and allows WTP to be inferred from choice behavior. The tested product was a sustainable backpack.

Four sustainability claims were created by crossing relatability (recycled PET bottles vs. CO_2 compensation) and numerical precision (numeric vs. non-numeric details), based on a pretest of candidate claims (N = 61). A vague "sustainable" claim and a "no message" option served as controls. Participants in the CBC completed eight randomized choice tasks. Profiles varied in sustainability claim, brand, price, and customization options. After the conjoint task, participants rated perceived informativeness and completed standard control measures.

Individual-level utilities were estimated using hierarchical Bayes. WTP for each claim condition was derived by scaling attribute utilities relative to the marginal utility of price. Hypotheses were tested in three stages: (1) regressions and general linear models examined main and interactive effects of relatability and numerical precision on WTP; (2) follow-up contrasts decomposed significant interactions; and (3) a structural equation model tested mediation by perceived informativeness using bootstrap resampling.

Summary of Findings

The results show that thematic relatability plays a central role in determining the effectiveness of sustainability claims. Across conditions, relatable sustainability themes (recycled PET bottles) generated substantially higher WTP than abstract themes (CO_2 compensation), supporting relatability as a strong main driver of consumer valuation. This effect held regardless of whether claims were quantified.

Numerical precision significantly increased WTP only when paired with relatable sustainability themes. Adding exact quantities to PET-based claims produced a sizable WTP premium, whereas

numerical precision had little to no effect within abstract CO_2-based claims. This interaction indicates that numerical detail enhances valuation only when consumers can easily interpret and visualize what the number represents.

Perceived informativeness increased both for relatable claims and for numerically precise claims, indicating that numbers generally raise perceptions of information quality. However, informativeness only partially mediated the effects of claim design on WTP. While more informative claims were associated with higher WTP, most of the valuation premium was driven by the combination of relatability and numerical precision rather than informativeness alone.

Overall, the findings identify relatability as a boundary condition for the persuasive impact of numerical precision, explaining when precise sustainability metrics increase consumer value and when they do not.

Key Contributions

This study advances sustainability marketing theory in three ways. First, it conceptualizes relatability as a boundary condition for claim effectiveness, showing that easy-to-visualize, product-linked claims unlock the persuasive benefits of numerical precision, whereas abstract claims do not. Second, it integrates processing fluency, construal level, and signaling perspectives into a unified account: numbers raise perceived informativeness and signal credibility, but only when the claim is relatable. Third, it distinguishes epistemic from functional value by demonstrating that informativeness partially mediates effects on WTP, but clarity alone is insufficient without relevance. Using a choice-based conjoint design, the study shows that numerical precision increases WTP within relatable themes but not abstract ones, reconciling

mixed findings on numerical claims in green advertising and identifying conditions under which such detail helps rather than harms.

For practitioners, the results offer clear guidance for effective sustainability communication. Claims should be anchored in relatable, product-linked benefits, with precise quantities added only when the theme is concrete. Abstract impacts should be translated into tangible equivalents, while overly technical or remote claims without clear consumer relevance should be avoided. Finally, communicators should manage greenwashing risk by aligning precise claims with verifiable product attributes.

“References are available upon request.”

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER GREEN SKEPTICISM: A META-ANALYTIC REVIEW

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Keywords: consumer behavior, consumer scepticism, consumer skepticism, meta-analysis

Description: This meta-analysis investigates the strength and direction of the relationships between green skepticism and consumers' perceptions and behaviors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer skepticism toward environmental advertising represents a cognitive response to questionable corporate sustainability practices. The greater the doubts consumers harbor about a company's actions or communications, the more pronounced their skepticism becomes, resulting in negative responses. Considering that green skepticism is an unfavorable, situation-specific attitude marked by doubt or uncertainty concerning the environmental benefits and claims of

"green" products (Lavuri 2022; Li and Cui 2021), this study aims to examine the strength and direction of the relationships between consumer perceptions, behavioral responses, and skepticism to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Through a meta-analytical review, we explore the key factors associated with skepticism, assess the magnitude and direction of these relationships, and examine potential moderators that may influence these effects.

Method and Data

We searched for "skepticism" and related terms in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of Business journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, covering all records up to December 2024. Following PRISMA guidelines, 469 papers were identified, 148 duplicates removed, and 321 screened. Of these, 50 studies specifically examined skepticism toward green advertising, excluding those addressing broader forms such as climate change or general advertising skepticism. We also excluded studies treating skepticism as a personality trait, keeping those framing it as a situational response. After removing papers that were not retrieved and those with incomplete data, the final sample comprised 46 articles. Three researchers were involved in coding the papers and extracting relevant information and variables (e.g., sample size, mean age, percentage of women, sample type, scale of skepticism, country of data collection, cultural dimensions), with all entries triple-checked for accuracy. Correlations and regression coefficients were standardized or converted to comparable effect sizes. Variables associated with skepticism were grouped into 21 categories. Analyses were performed for seven categories, each containing at least five independent effect sizes. The final meta-analysis included 168 effect sizes from 43 peer-reviewed articles (n = 75,414). Moderator tests assessed demographic, methodological, and cultural influences.

Summary of Findings

Skepticism was positively associated with unfavorable corporate perceptions and negative word-of-mouth (WOM), while showing negative associations with favorable corporate perceptions and actual buying behavior. These findings suggest that skepticism is significantly related to consumer judgments in ways that can undermine brand reputation and market performance. No significant association was observed between skepticism and purchase intention, indicating that skepticism may not be strongly related to stated intentions despite its association with actual behaviors. Similarly, no significant relationships emerged between skepticism and either environmental values or environmental knowledge. However, a significant negative association was identified with environmental concern, suggesting that individuals with higher concern for environmental issues tend to report lower levels of skepticism, which may reflect greater receptivity to sustainability messaging. Moderator analyses revealed demographic and cultural nuances. Women showed stronger negative reactions to skepticism, while older consumers displayed mixed effects, evidencing weaker effect on favorable corporate evaluations but a stronger effect on unfavorable perceptions. Regionally, negative associations were stronger in North America than in Asia, suggesting market-specific trust differences. Cultural dimensions also shaped results: higher uncertainty avoidance reduced skepticism's negative effects, while power distance and indulgence amplified them. Motivation toward achievement and success showed mixed moderating patterns, strengthening negative perceptions but weakening effects on environmental buying behavior.

Key Contributions

This meta-analysis advances the theoretical understanding of consumer skepticism toward environmental advertising by systematically exploring findings from 168 effect sizes from 43

studies. It clarifies the consistent negative association between skepticism and favorable corporate evaluations and pro-environmental behavior, alongside its positive association with unfavorable perceptions and negative WOM. The study enriches skepticism theory by identifying the strength and direction of the relationships between different variables and consumer skepticism (e.g., perception of greenwashing, environmentally buying behavior), while also highlighting the non-significance of relationships with purchase intention, environmental values, and knowledge. Furthermore, the moderator analyses contribute to cross-cultural consumer behavior theory by showing how demographic (gender, age), geographic (continent), and cultural dimensions (uncertainty avoidance, power distance, indulgence, achievement motivation) shape the magnitude and direction of skepticism's effects. For practitioners, the study underscores the reputational and behavioral risks of consumer skepticism, showing its potential to erode credibility, dampen purchase behavior, and amplify negative WOM. Insights into cultural moderators enable managers to tailor sustainability communication strategies to regional and cultural contexts, such as structuring messages for high-uncertainty-avoidance markets or addressing power distance sensitivities. The finding that women and older consumers respond differently to skepticism provides actionable segmentation guidance. Finally, the identification of greenwashing perceptions as a strong driver of skepticism reinforces the need for authenticity and transparency in environmental claims, suggesting that consistent, verifiable sustainability practices are essential to mitigating skepticism and fostering favorable consumer responses.

References are available upon request.

UNEVEN MULTISPECIES VALUATION: COMPARING ANIMAL-CENTRIC, HUMAN-CENTRIC, AND GENERAL SUSTAINABILITY LABELS IN THE EGG MARKET

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Keywords: ethical labeling, corporate social responsibility, signaling theory, animal welfare, multispecies valuation

Description: This paper examines how animal-centric, human-centric, and general sustainability labels function as corporate social responsibility signals in the U.S. egg market, revealing an uneven multispecies valuation in which animal welfare labels dominate both prevalence and price premiums while human labor and general sustainability remains largely invisible.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Ethical labeling is a key strategy in agricultural markets, yet it remains unclear how consumers differentially value the welfare of humans, animals, and ecosystems. While corporate social responsibility (CSR) research has addressed both human (e.g., labor) and non-human (e.g., animal) stakeholders, these areas have developed largely in isolation (Frerichs et al., 2023). Product labels are one of the most common ways firms communicate CSR to consumers (Costanigro et al., 2016; Gosselt et al., 2019), yet little research has systematically compared how animal-centric, human-centric, and general sustainability labels perform within the same product category.

Drawing on signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), this research asks: How do different types of CSR labels compare in their prevalence and ability to influence prices in agricultural markets? More broadly, we examine whether food markets exhibit an uneven multispecies valuation in which some stakeholders are made more visible than others.

We argue that animal-centric labels often function as dual signals, combining both ethical concerns for animals with implications for self-oriented product quality benefits (Verbeke, 2009; Berry et al., 2017), whereas human-centric labels tend to function primarily as ethics-only signals. This asymmetry suggests that the market may privilege animal welfare over human-centric and general sustainability labels.

Method and Data

We conducted a field study of uncooked egg products using secondary data collected in April 2025 from three major U.S. retailers: Instacart, Target, and Kroger. These retailers were

selected for their national presence and combined offline–online operations, making them highly representative of typical consumer purchasing environments.

Two research assistants recorded product-level data including price, brand, count, size, grade, retailer, and the presence of animal-centric labels (e.g., Cage Free, Free Range, Pasture Raised, Certified Humane, Vegetarian Fed, Animal Welfare Approved, Organic), human-centric labels (e.g., Fairtrade, SA8000), and general sustainability labels (e.g., Certified B Corporation, Small Family Farms, Equitable Food Initiative, Rainforest Alliance Certified, Union Affiliation/Labor Partnership, Living Wage Certification, Ethical Trade Initiative). Label presence was determined based on visible packaging claims and retailer product descriptions.

The final sample consisted of 72 egg products. To test label prevalence differences, we conducted paired-samples t-tests comparing the number of animal-centric, human-centric, and general sustainability labels per product. To test price effects, we estimated a regression model with price as the dependent variable and label presence as the independent variables, controlling for egg count, color, grade, and size. Robustness checks examined alternative label specifications and individual label effects.

Summary of Findings

Results reveal an imbalance in how welfare is communicated and valued in the U.S. egg market. Animal-centric labels were highly prevalent, appearing on 76.4% of products, while general sustainability labels appeared on 20.8% of products. No products in the sample contained human-centric labor labels. Notably, every product with a general sustainability label also featured an animal-centric label, suggesting that broader sustainability claims are layered on top of animal welfare claims.

Paired-samples t-tests show that animal-centric labels are significantly more common than both human-centric and general sustainability labels. Regression analysis indicates that animal-centric labels significantly increase egg prices, whereas general sustainability labels do not exhibit a significant price effect. Because no human-centric labels appeared in the dataset, their effect on price could not be estimated.

Robustness checks confirm that the number of animal-centric labels positively predicts price and that specific labels such as Pasture Raised, Free Range, Organic, and Certified B Corporation exert particularly strong effects. Together, these findings indicate that animal welfare is made highly visible and economically valuable, while human labor and general sustainability conditions remain largely invisible in ethical food markets.

Key Contributions

This research advances marketing scholarship by examining consumer evaluation and valuation of product labels that foreground the welfare of humans, animals, and ecosystems. While prior research has examined label types in isolation, few studies have directly compared different types within the same product category. Drawing on signaling theory, we show that animal-centric labels dominate in prevalence and pricing effects because they act as dual signals, conveying both ethical commitments and product-quality benefits. In contrast, human-centric labels are typically perceived as ethics only signals, limiting their consumer appeal. This finding extends work on CSR, ethical consumption, and multispecies marketing by revealing how signals privilege some stakeholders while obscuring others, producing uneven valuation across stakeholders.

Beyond academia, these insights offer practical value. Firms can refine CSR communication strategies by framing human welfare initiatives around quality, health, and

safety. Certification bodies and NGOs can design labels and campaigns that raise the visibility of worker welfare. Policymakers may use these findings when evaluating labeling standards to avoid inadvertently incentivizing animal welfare over labor conditions. Finally, advocates for social justice and sustainability can use this research to highlight the hidden dynamics of ethical consumption and mobilize consumer awareness campaigns that rebalance attention across stakeholders.

References are available upon request

BEYOND HUMAN VOICE: INTER-SPECIES STORYTELLING, BRAND ACTIVISM, AND CONSUMER RESPONSES IN SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING

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Keywords: Inter-species storytelling, Brand activism, Empathy, Brand authenticity, Sustainability marketing

Description: This study examines how inter-species narrative framing and activist brand positioning jointly shape consumer empathy, moral obligation, perceived authenticity, and behavioral intentions in sustainability-oriented social media communication.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Narrative storytelling plays a central role in contemporary marketing communication by shaping how consumers interpret brands, causes, and social issues. Emotional narratives are particularly influential in sustainability contexts, where empathy and moral concern often guide consumer support. Despite this, most marketing research remains anthropocentric, focusing on human narrators and overlooking the persuasive potential of nonhuman voices. At the same time, brands increasingly engage in activist communication, raising concerns about when emotionally charged storytelling fosters genuine engagement and when it triggers skepticism.

This study examines whether inter-species storytelling—specifically first-person animal narration versus third-person human narration—enhances consumer empathy, moral obligation, perceived brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions within a social media environment. Rather than assuming that anthropomorphic or first-person narratives are universally effective, the study investigates whether their impact depends on how brands position and substantiate their sustainability commitments. It further explores whether perceived brand authenticity serves as a key mechanism through which activist positioning translates into consumer support, and whether moral obligation amplifies narrative effects.

This research examines how narrative perspective and brand positioning interact in an Instagram-based context to determine when inter-species storytelling strengthens consumer–brand relationships or is perceived as symbolic within sustainability marketing.

Method and Data

The study employed a 2 (Narrative Framing: first-person animal vs. third-person human) × 2 (Brand Positioning: activist vs. generic) between-subjects experimental design. A total of 200 adult consumers were recruited from an academic-oriented social media influencer and randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Audience analytics indicated that followers predominantly consisted of urban, working-age adults (primarily aged 25–44) residing in major metropolitan areas and actively using social media. The sampling strategy prioritized contextual alignment with Instagram-based communication rather than population-level representativeness.

Participants viewed a mock Instagram post featuring *Tula*, an endangered orangutan. Narrative framing was manipulated through caption perspective, allowing either first-person animal

narration or third-person human description. Brand positioning was manipulated using the same fictitious brand, *Terra*, portrayed as either authentically activist or minimally involved in environmental initiatives. All visual elements and brand identifiers were held constant across conditions to isolate the manipulated factors.

Stimuli were designed using AI-based tools under researcher control. Manipulation checks confirmed statistically significant recognition of both narrative perspective and brand positioning ($p < .001$). Empathy, moral obligation, perceived brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions were measured using established scales. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance followed by univariate ANOVAs.

Summary of Findings

A multivariate analysis of variance revealed a significant overall effect of narrative framing and brand positioning on the combined dependent variables (empathy, moral obligation, brand authenticity, and behavioral intentions), Wilks' $\Lambda = .952$, $F(4, 195) = 2.45$, $p = .047$. Follow-up univariate analyses revealed a differentiated pattern of results. The main effect of narrative framing on empathy did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, $F(1, 196) = 3.78$, $p = .053$, $\eta^2p = .019$. However, a significant interaction between narrative framing and brand positioning emerged for empathy, $F(1, 196) = 6.96$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2p = .034$, indicating that first-person animal narratives enhanced empathic responses only when paired with activist brand positioning.

Brand positioning significantly influenced perceived brand authenticity, $F(1, 196) = 6.72$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2p = .033$. Behavioral intentions were also significantly affected, $F(1, 196) = 4.94$, $p = .027$, $\eta^2p = .025$, suggesting that consumer support was strongest when inter-species storytelling was

embedded in credible activist engagement. Moral obligation did not emerge as a standalone driver but contributed to the overall multivariate pattern, indicating that moral concern functions as a contextual amplifier rather than a direct predictor of behavioral intentions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to sustainability marketing and narrative persuasion research by empirically examining inter-species storytelling as a relational communication strategy. It demonstrates that first-person animal narratives are not inherently persuasive; rather, their effectiveness depends on authentic activist brand positioning. Comparing activist versus generic positioning within the same brand, the study isolates activist commitment from brand identity and highlights brand authenticity as a necessary condition for empathy-driven persuasion.

Conceptually, the research advances a relational consumer perspective that complements established branding frameworks such as consumer–brand identification and emotional branding by extending relational bonds beyond human actors to multispecies stakeholders. Methodologically, the study illustrates how AI-generated stimuli can be integrated into experimental research while maintaining control through consistent design and manipulation checks.

From a managerial perspective, the findings extend beyond non-profit and activist contexts to mainstream marketing domains such as ethical fashion, outdoor apparel, and corporate sustainability communication. The results suggest that consumer trust in AI-assisted or synthetic narratives depends less on narrative novelty and more on transparency, authenticity, and alignment between brand claims and practices. More broadly, the study highlights marketing's role in shaping

responsible multispecies narratives while underscoring the importance of ethical sensitivity when representing nonhuman voices in commercial communication.

References are available upon request.

When Green Goes Public or Private: The Role of Scarcity and Popularity Appeals in Sustainable Marketing

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Keywords
Green advertising; Consumption visibility; Scarcity appeal; Popularity appeal; Brand authenticity

Description
This study investigates how consumption visibility shapes the effectiveness of scarcity versus popularity appeals in green advertising through identity-based mechanisms.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Although consumers increasingly express favorable attitudes toward environmentally friendly products, green advertising does not always lead to stronger purchase intentions. Prior research has examined the persuasive effects of message framing strategies such as scarcity and popularity appeals, yet findings remain mixed and often fail to account for contextual variation. In particular, existing studies rarely consider whether the effectiveness of these appeals depends on whether consumption is publicly visible or privately experienced. This omission limits understanding of when social influence cues enhance or undermine sustainable marketing outcomes.

Drawing on social categorization theory, this research asks when and why scarcity versus popularity appeals are more effective in green advertising across public and private consumption contexts. The central research question examines how consumption visibility interacts with message appeal to influence consumer purchase intentions for green products. Additionally, the study investigates the psychological mechanisms underlying these effects by focusing on two identity-relevant constructs: product symbolism and brand authenticity.

Public consumption contexts heighten identity signaling concerns, potentially amplifying the symbolic value of scarce green products. In contrast, private consumption contexts reduce signaling opportunities, increasing consumers' reliance on authenticity cues to evaluate the credibility of environmental claims. By integrating consumption visibility, message framing, and identity-based processes, this research clarifies key boundary conditions of green advertising effectiveness.

Method and Data

A 2 × 2 between-subjects experimental design was employed to test the interactive effects of consumption type and message appeal in green advertising. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, yielding a final sample of 424 adults. Consumption type was manipulated using two comparable eco-friendly products: a reusable water bottle representing public consumption and a water pitcher representing private consumption. Message appeal was manipulated through advertising copy emphasizing either scarcity (limited availability) or popularity (bestseller and widespread adoption).

All advertisements highlighted environmental benefits, such as reducing plastic waste, to ensure consistent green positioning across conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions and viewed their assigned advertisement for a fixed duration. Manipulation checks confirmed that both consumption visibility and message appeal were perceived as intended.

Purchase intention served as the primary dependent variable. Brand authenticity and product symbolism were measured as mediators using validated multi-item Likert scales. Additional measures, including green consciousness and ad skepticism, were included to disguise the study's purpose and control for alternative explanations. Data were analyzed using MANOVA and moderated mediation analyses with bootstrapping procedures.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that green advertising effectiveness depends on the interaction between consumption visibility and message appeal rather than on their main effects. Neither consumption type nor message appeal independently influenced purchase intentions. However, their interaction was significant. Scarcity appeals increased purchase intentions for publicly

consumed green products, whereas popularity appeals were more effective for privately consumed green products.

Moderated mediation analyses revealed distinct psychological mechanisms underlying these effects. In public consumption contexts, scarcity appeals enhanced product symbolism, increasing the extent to which green products served as identity signals of uniqueness and environmental responsibility. Product symbolism, in turn, positively influenced purchase intention. In contrast, in private consumption contexts, popularity appeals strengthened perceptions of brand authenticity by signaling credibility, sincerity, and trustworthiness, which subsequently increased purchase intention.

Importantly, both product symbolism and brand authenticity fully mediated the interaction between message appeal and consumption type, indicating that appeal effectiveness operates through identity-based evaluations rather than direct persuasion alone. Scarcity did not enhance authenticity in public contexts, and popularity did not increase symbolism in private contexts. These findings underscore the importance of aligning message appeals with consumption visibility to activate appropriate consumer motivations.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to green marketing and advertising research. First, it identifies consumption visibility as a critical boundary condition that determines when scarcity versus popularity appeals are effective in promoting green products. By demonstrating that appeal effectiveness depends on public versus private consumption contexts, the study challenges universal assumptions about sustainable advertising strategies.

Second, the research advances theory by empirically disentangling two identity-based mechanisms underlying green persuasion. It shows that scarcity appeals operate through product

symbolism in public contexts, while popularity appeals operate through brand authenticity in private contexts. This distinction clarifies how signaling value and credibility concerns differentially motivate sustainable consumption.

Third, the findings offer actionable managerial implications. For publicly consumed green products, marketers should emphasize exclusivity, limited editions, and distinctive eco-friendly designs to enhance symbolic signaling. For privately consumed green products, marketers should highlight widespread adoption, certifications, reviews, and third-party endorsements to strengthen authenticity and trust.

Overall, this research provides a nuanced framework for aligning green message appeals with consumption context, enabling firms to design more effective, credible, and strategically targeted sustainability communications.

WHEN LUXURY BRANDS MEET SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION: EXAMINING THE "MODERATE INCONGRUENCE EFFECT"

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KEYWORDS: Luxury brands, Sustainability, Product innovation, Moderate incongruence, Aesthetic design.

DESCRIPTION: This paper explores the effects of different levels of congruence on the (1) product innovation overall evaluation and (2) luxury brand overall evaluation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As luxury brands increasingly turn to sustainable substitution innovations in practice, what about consumer perception? A recent study by Fournaise, Kessous, and Valette-Florence (2022) shows that product innovation incorporating recycled materials can be considered a transgression by the luxury brand, potentially altering the consumer-brand relationship. How are substitution product innovations launched by luxury brands perceived by consumers? Moreover, what are the feedback effects of substitution innovations on the brand? This paper aims at answering the following research question: How do the variation of level of congruence of substitution innovations affect the overall evaluation of the luxury brands and products? The present research seeks to address this underexamined research gap by a series of experimental studies attempting to understand the extent to which surprising or moderate incongruent effect of product innovations (e.g., recycling, upcycling) might lead to a better evaluation of the product itself and the luxury core brand, as compared to congruent innovations (e.g., process or new material alternative).

Method and Data

Four complementary studies are conducted. Study 1 explores the effects of congruence on the product overall evaluation with an experimental study of Moncler luxury jackets using European respondents (N=146). Study 2 complements the previous one by examining the effects of congruence on the luxury brand overall evaluation through an experimental study focusing on Dior luxury sunglasses (N=87). Study 3 aims to examine the effect of various levels of congruence on product evaluation and core brand evaluation using UK Prolific participants (N=450). Respondents

are exposed to three versions of Louis Vuitton travel bag varying in terms of congruence levels. Different leather types are used to manipulate the congruence extent (control, congruence, and moderate incongruence). Study 4's objective is to retest the core effect of moderate incongruence by introducing a nuanced level (mild congruence), in addition to congruence and moderate incongruence (N=600). Data are collected in the US through Prolific and respondents are exposed to four versions of Canada Goose jacket (control, congruence, mild and moderate incongruence).

Summary of Findings

Results show that when brand consistency in aesthetic design is high, i.e. when sustainable attributes of the product are not visible, moderately incongruent product innovations are better options than congruent product innovations (more favourable product evaluation and core brand evaluation).

Key Contributions

The significance of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it enriches previous literature dedicated to luxury brands and sustainability. So far, literature suggested that product innovations that valued past identity, through recycling and upcycling, were more transgressive and entailed lower purchase intent than product innovations that did not value past identity (through introduction of new materials or new processes) (Hemonnet, Kessous and Magnoni, 2022). Yet this research shows these previous results should be refined by introducing the notion of moderate incongruence through variation in product design typicality.

This research extends the works on perceived congruence in marketing. Efforts have been made to compare the impact of congruence and incongruence. While all researchers agree that strong

incongruence is negative in effect, “moderate” incongruence, put forward by Mandler (1982) as more effective than congruence, has gained less unanimous support empirically (Fleck and Maille, 2010). Consequently, our research contributes to a better understanding of moderate incongruence (vs. congruence) and its consequences in terms of product and brand evaluations, in the context of sustainable innovation. Finally, it offers managerial contributions for luxury brand managers who want to conduct sustainable innovation strategies.

References list upon request

WHEN SAFETY FEELS LIKE PLASTIC: HOW INFECTIOUS DISEASE THREATS RESHAPE CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR PLASTIC PACKAGING

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Keywords: infectious disease threat, plastic packaging, cultural evolutionary theory, hygienic safety.

Description: During infectious disease outbreaks, consumers show a distinct preference for plastic packaging driven by a culturally ingrained but scientifically inaccurate heuristic that plastic is more hygienic; however, this preference can be reduced through corrective information and protective labels on sustainable alternatives.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Plastic packaging, particularly in the food sector, has become one of the most visible symbols of environmental harm. Every year, consumers generate tremendous amounts of plastic waste (OECD 2022), causing ecological disaster (UNEP 2021). Accordingly, research consistently shows strong consumer opposition to plastic and growing preferences for sustainable alternatives (Sokolova et al. 2023).

However, this trend sharply reversed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when demand for plastic-packaged food surged across North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region (Leal Filho et al. 2021). Media narratives framed plastic as a pandemic "hero," and consumers gravitated toward plastic despite environmental concerns (Hoekstra 2020).

This reversal is contradictory. Scientific evidence shows that viruses such as H9N2 and SARS-CoV-2 persist longer on plastic than on paper or cardboard (Corpet 2021; Meng et al. 2022; Wißmann et al. 2021), indicating that plastic is not a superior hygienic shield. However, when infectious disease threats are salient, consumers appear to rely on plastic more than ever.

Guided by this contradiction, we ask three research questions: *Do infectious disease threats increase consumers' preferences for plastic packaging? What psychological mechanisms explain this shift in material preferences? Can interventions effectively counteract these preferences?*

Method and Data

We conducted one field study and seven preregistered between-subjects experiments (total N = 4,233). Study 1 is a field study in which individuals were interviewed after grocery shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to establish correlation between infectious disease threat and plastic packaging purchases. Then, Studies 2a–2b aim to test causality between high vs. low (Study 2a) and presence vs. absence (Study 2b) of infectious disease threat and increased preference for plastic-packaged food products. Studies 3a–3b detail the main effect, showing whether the presence (vs. absence) of infectious disease threats leads to a generalized increased preference for packaged products or whether the effect is unique to plastic packaging. After investigating the main effect, Studies 4a–4b, through a combination of content (Study 4a) and mediation (Study 4b) analyses, focus on testing whether consumers' belief in plastic's superior relative protective efficacy (RPE) can be the mechanism underlying the effect of presence (vs. absence) of infectious disease threats and the intention to buy plastic- over paper-packaged products. Finally, Studies 5–6 are 2×2 designs testing potential interventions that challenge or redirect perceptions of RPE, attenuating the effect of infectious disease threats on plastic preference.

Summary of Findings

Across eight studies using different stimuli, products, and packaging materials, and more than 4,200 participants, four main findings emerged. First, disease threats increase plastic preference (Studies 1–2b). Study 1 provides real-world evidence that consumers exposed to infectious disease threats gravitate toward plastic-packaged food products, while Studies 2a–2b confirm the causal relationship between infectious disease threats and the increased relative preference for plastic packaging. Second, the effect is unique to plastic (Studies 3a–3b). Specifically, our findings show that the presence (vs. absence) of infectious disease threats does not cause a preference for every packaging material, such as paper (Study 3a) or compostable (Study 3b), but that the effect is specific to plastic packaging. Third, RPE is the underlying mechanism beyond alternative explanations (Studies 4a–4b), meaning that the presence (vs. absence) of infectious disease threats leads to increased intention to buy plastic- over paper-packaged products because consumers belief in plastic's superior RPE. Finally, both corrective messages about plastic protective inefficacy (Study 5) and labels about paper protective efficacy (Study 6) can mitigate the intention to buy plastic- over paper-packaged products in the presence (vs. absence) of infectious disease threats.

Key Contributions

This research advances academic knowledge by identifying packaging material preference as a novel consequence of infectious disease threats. Our findings reveal that disease salience reorganizes preferences at the material level, leading to a specific increased preference for plastic packaging. This discovery extends research on infectious diseases by highlighting that consumers, in addition to product or social cues, also rely on material heuristics when managing perceived contamination risks.

A second contribution is identifying RPE as the mechanism underlying this effect. Consumers believe that plastic provides superior hygienic protection, a culturally transmitted but scientifically inaccurate heuristic rooted in historical narratives and perceptual cues. By showing that RPE drives plastic preference, we refine Cultural Evolutionary Theory by illustrating that heuristics can persist not only when adaptive but also when maladaptive.

Our research offers actionable contributions for practice and policy. Policymakers can use corrective information and protective labels on sustainable alternatives to redirect consumer choices, allowing public health protection without undermining sustainability goals. Retailers and marketers can mitigate preferences for plastic by framing sustainable packaging not only as green but also as safe, especially during outbreaks. Finally, non-profits can challenge the cultural inertia surrounding plastic, aligning consumer behavior with scientific evidence and sustainability imperatives.

References are available upon request.

WHO REACTS AND HOW? CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS AND PSYCHOGRAPHICS IN CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY CRISES

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Keywords: Corporate Sustainability Crises, Consumer Behavior, Segmentation, Demographics, Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR)

Description: This study examines the demographic and psychographic factors that influence consumers' positive or negative behavioral responses to a company experiencing a corporate sustainability crisis.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer responses to companies experiencing a corporate sustainability crisis are likely to differ according to individual consumer characteristics. Identifying consumer segments that differ in their behavioral responses to such crises, and profiling these segments based on demographic and psychographic characteristics, can enable companies to respond more effectively and efficiently through targeted crisis communication strategies. Although prior research has demonstrated that consumer responses to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) issues in non-crisis contexts vary by demographic and psychographic factors, limited research has examined how combinations of these characteristics shape consumers' behavioral responses during a corporate sustainability

crisis. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent can distinct consumer segments be identified based on their behavioral responses, either supportive or critical, toward a corporation during a corporate sustainability crisis? (2) Which demographic and psychographic factors identified in the existing literature influence the magnitude of consumers' behavioral responses toward a company during a corporate sustainability crisis?

Method And Data

We conducted an experimental 2x2x2x2 full factorial vignette design, incorporating four factors to describe various crisis situations—CSR relevance, damage potential, attribution of blame, and company reputation—with two levels for each factor. A standardized questionnaire was used to survey consumers' demographic and psychographic profiles, their behavioral responses to the company in crisis as well as their immediate perception and evaluation of the crisis stimuli as depicted in the vignettes (a hypothetical cell phone service provider). All behavioral and psychographic reactions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale using various items drawn from literature. An online survey using Prolific based on a representative sample of U.S. participants (N=680) was conducted.

Summary of Findings

Three segments emerged, characterized by negative, neutral, or positive behavioral responses. Stronger negative behavioral responses were observed among female and younger consumers (Gen Z and Millennials), particularly those exhibiting higher levels of collectivist value orientation, greater sustainability involvement, and stronger Consumer Social Responsibility (CnSR). Consumers with higher levels of education perceived crises as less severe yet held higher expectations for effective crisis management compared with those with lower education levels. This pattern reflects their heightened sensitivity to such issues and stronger sense of responsibility

to address crises at an early stage, including through their own behavioral engagement. Furthermore, the stronger association observed between higher collectivist orientation and negative consumer behavioral responses may be explained by individuals' intrinsic motivation to protect collective sustainability goals, leading them to adopt a more critical stance toward companies perceived as potentially threatening these outcomes. This interpretation is further supported by additional characteristics of the high collectivist group, including greater sustainability involvement and CnSR, as well as more critical evaluations of the crisis.

Key Contributions

Our findings suggest that gender, age, and education should be carefully considered when designing corporate crisis communication campaigns, including message content, formulation, and channels, to enhance their effectiveness. Furthermore, we recommend tailoring crisis communication strategies to align with the collectivist or individualist value orientations of each consumer segment. This research contributes to the literature on organizational crisis management and communication, including established frameworks such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory, by extending its application to the understudied context of corporate sustainability crises from the consumer perspective. By using a segmentation approach that has been largely overlooked in previous crisis research, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of heterogeneous consumer responses to sustainability-related crises. These insights enable firms to tailor crisis communication strategies to specific consumer segments, thereby enhancing message relevance, stakeholder alignment, and recovery effectiveness. Additionally, non-profit organizations and consumer advocacy groups may leverage these findings to more effectively engage the public through communications targeted at values-driven consumer segments. Finally, governmental agencies and policymakers can use the results to inform more effective public

outreach and regulatory strategies that account for the psychological diversity of consumer responses.

Consumer Protection, Public Policy and Regulation

A META-ANALYSIS OF INTERVENTIONS FOR PROBLEMATIC SMARTPHONE AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

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Keywords: smartphone, social media, intervention, well-being, meta-analysis

Description: We investigate strategies to manage problematic smartphone and social media use with a meta-analysis examining what types of strategy work best, and for whom.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Many people seek to reduce smartphone or social media use to improve productivity and well-being but struggle due to the habitual and addictive nature of mobile technologies. Understanding how to manage this behavior is therefore important for consumers and policymakers alike. Despite growing interest, research synthesis on interventions remains limited. Existing reviews have focused on narrow intervention classes (e.g., cognitive-behavioral treatments or digital detoxes) or offered conceptual guidance without systematic comparison across approaches. No prior work has developed a broad framework to compare interventions grounded in fundamentally different theoretical perspectives. Thus, the current research addresses three questions: What interventions have been studied? Which one works best? Do intervention effects vary across different groups of consumers? We propose a unifying conceptual framework, and conduct a comprehensive meta-analysis of interventions targeting problematic smartphone and social media use.

Method and Data

Based on an exhaustive literature search across three different databases (PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus) for journal articles published from 2008 to March 2023, we synthesize evidence on intervention effectiveness across two outcome types: *consumption* reduction (e.g., screen time, social media use) and *consequence* improvement (e.g., reducing addiction, anxiety; and increasing well-being, sleep quality, productivity). Interventions are classified into three categories—Limit, Limit Plus, and Non-Limit—to enable meaningful meta-analytical comparisons. We further examine how study characteristics (e.g., intervention design, duration) and population characteristics (e.g., age, gender) vary effect sizes. We identified 59 eligible articles consisting of 72 studies (N = 15,124). We computed effect sizes of both outcome types (*consequence* and *consumption*), and use them as dependent variables to estimate our meta-regressions with three different models: (1) intercept-only models which provide the benchmark in standard meta-analyses; (2) univariate models that include only one predictor; and (3) multivariate models that account for multiple predictors. Due to space constraint, we only present findings of the multivariate models, as they yield better model fits and more conservative effect sizes than both intercept-only and univariate models. We also conducted publication bias checks for the meta-analytical models.

Summary of Findings

Our multivariate, multi-level (accounting for the nested structure of the effect size data within studies and articles) meta-analyses of 307 effect sizes in total, controlling for outcome goal (to reduce/to increase), population, and study characteristics, results in an average standardized mean difference (Cohen's d) of 0.30, a small-to-medium effect size for consequence outcomes, and an average Cohen's d of -0.43, a medium effect size for consumption outcomes. Regarding consequence outcomes, effect sizes are almost 3 times larger for males than for females, and are larger for younger people than older people.

Interestingly, interventions that used non-English languages for instructions and surveys reported higher effect sizes ($d = 0.45$, $SE = 0.08$) than those that used English ($d = 0.16$, $SE = 0.07$). In addition, we found no difference in effect sizes whether the goal is to reduce negative outcomes or to increase positive outcomes. Publication bias checks (trim-and-fill, sensitivity analyses, p-curve analyses) indicate that the computed effect sizes are non-spurious.

Statement of Key Contributions

A central concern in marketing research is consumer well-being. This research compares the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce problematic smartphone and social media use and examines whether such reductions improve well-being. By organizing causal evidence from intervention studies within a grounded framework, it is among the first research syntheses to address the debate on whether problematic usage causally affects outcomes such as mental health and productivity. Overall, interventions show small-to-medium effects in reducing usage and improving well-being, suggesting negative causal effects of smartphone and social media consumption. The research further proposes a framework that categorizes interventions based on whether and how they impose direct restrictions on mobile technology use. This enables systematic comparison across diverse intervention types, extending prior syntheses that focused on narrower sets of approaches. The research also offers actionable insights for policymakers and consumers seeking cost-effective and durable behavioral change. Significant heterogeneity in effect sizes highlights implications for intervention design: interventions are more effective at reducing social media use than overall smartphone use, and effects appear stronger for males than females. Together, the meta-analyses and the catalog of tested interventions provide a practical reference for stakeholders such as policymakers, consumers, and parents seeking evidence-based guidance.

BACKGROUND AWARENESS OF CHOICE ARCHITECTURE IN MARKETING

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Keywords: choice architecture, consumer awareness, consumer protection, experiment

Description: This paper explores experimentally whether information about marketing techniques from external sources (rather than direct disclosure by the marketer) mitigates their influence on purchasing decisions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Manipulations of the choice architecture (CA) intended to alter people's behavior without significantly changing economic incentives or limiting options are widely used in public policy. They have often been criticized for relying on unconscious biases. To allay these concerns, scholars have proposed that their use is disclosed (e.g., Bovens, 2009). Evidence suggests that such transparency does not reduce the effectiveness of CA manipulations, and may even improve people's attitudes towards them (e.g., Loewenstein et al, 2015).

CA manipulations are also often used in the private sector – e.g., in the marketing of products and services – where the issue of transparency has received much less attention, possibly because

marketers would not have incentives to disclose the way they try to influence consumers. However, consumers may be exposed to information about the effects of CAs on behavior from other sources. We investigate whether such "background awareness" influences the effectiveness of CA manipulations in marketing: Do marketers' attempts to boost sales via CA manipulations remain effective if consumers receive information about their potential effects?

Method and Data

We investigate the influence of background awareness on consumer behavior through three pre-registered online survey experiments.

Study 1 (N=1445) is based on a 2 (CA vs No-CA) x 2 (Aware vs Unaware) design. We study two CA manipulations: anchoring defaults, where participants state their willingness to pay (WTP) in a pay-what-you-want scenario, and decoy options, where participants choose a product in a purchasing scenario. Prior to the purchase task, participants in the Aware condition read information on how these CAs work; participants in the Unaware condition face the task directly.

Study 2 (N=1074) replicates and extends Study 1. We present an illustrative picture alongside the awareness text to enhance participants' understanding. We also append four open-ended questions to explore participants' degree of awareness.

Study 3 (N=2168) focuses on anchoring defaults only and adds a one-week delay between the generation of awareness and the purchase task, through a 2 (Anchor vs No-anchor) x 2 (Aware vs Unaware) x 2 (Immediate vs Delayed) design. Differently from the previous two studies, participants in the Unaware condition read a neutral placebo text prior to the purchase task.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, background awareness has differential effects for the two CAs. For anchoring defaults, awareness has a main effect, decreasing WTP irrespective of whether the anchor is deployed. It also decreases the proportion of participants sticking to the default. For decoys, awareness has no effects on participants' choices. We do not find any interaction effect for either CA.

These results are replicated in Study 2. The open-ended questions reveal that the null effect of background awareness on decoys is not due to poor comprehension, as most participants show signs of awareness.

In the Immediate condition of Study 3, we do not replicate the effect of awareness on WTP, but the decrease in the proportion of participants choosing the default remains significant. In the Delayed condition, there is no awareness effect on either WTP or default choices, suggesting any awareness effects are short-lived.

A follow-up test (N=300, not pre-registered) shows that reading a neutral text and answering questions before a WTP elicitation significantly decreases WTP. This suggests that the significant reduction in WTP found in Studies 1 and 2 might be due to a different cognitive mode induced by reading and answering questions, rather than background awareness.

Key Contributions

Methodologically, our design provides a more rigorous test of background awareness effects. Our design identifies the main effect of each CA manipulation, the main effect of awareness and the

interaction between the two. Relative to the standard approach used in the literature, this design has the advantage of potentially uncovering the effect of awareness even in the absence of a CA manipulation. Moreover, by including open-ended questions, we can measure degree of awareness or explore individual differences. These would be useful for future research on awareness and direct disclosure.

Practically, our research has implications for consumer protection that could be valuable for non-academic stakeholders. While marketers may find it reassuring that awareness does not make their practices less effective, policymakers and consumer associations may see a need for better ways to protect consumers from marketing practices that may harm them. Our results imply that educating consumers by providing them with textual and figurative information may work for some CAs but not for others, and only when the information is presented in close temporal proximity to the relevant purchasing decisions.

References are available upon request.

CARBON LABELS AND CONSUMER FLIGHT CHOICES

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Keywords: Carbon Labels; Online Platforms; Consumer Search; Information Disclosure; Sustainable Consumption.

Description: This paper studies the impact of a platform-initiated carbon label on flight search, examining how labels affect conversion rates, substitution toward lower-emission options, and heterogeneous responses across travelers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How does a prominently displayed, platform-initiated carbon label affect consumer behavior in online flight search markets, and under what conditions does it shift demand toward lower-emission options? We study whether carbon labels primarily function as a trust- and assurance signal that encourages completion of purchases on the platform, or whether they induce meaningful substitution toward flights with lower greenhouse gas emissions. We also examine how these effects vary across trip characteristics and traveler types, including booking horizon, domestic versus international routes, and proxies for political orientation. Our goal is to clarify whether disclosure-based sustainability interventions on digital platforms can simultaneously improve platform performance and environmental outcomes, or whether they risk encouraging additional consumption without materially reducing emissions.

Method and Data

We leverage a natural experiment from a major global flight search platform that introduced carbon labels on June 3, 2019, only for one-way searches on its website, with no labels on its mobile

app during the main analysis period. Label eligibility is mechanically determined by whether an itinerary's emissions fall at least 6 percent below a route-specific benchmark. We combine large-scale session and referral data for U.S.-origin one-way searches between April and July 2019 with flight-level emissions from Google's Travel Impact Model. Our empirical strategy integrates a difference-in-differences design comparing website and app sessions over time with a regression discontinuity style comparison of flights just below versus just above the eligibility threshold. Rich fixed effects and controls address route-level heterogeneity, temporal demand shocks, and underlying availability of low-emission options.

Summary of Findings

We document three main findings. First, the introduction of carbon labels increases overall conversion rates on the website relative to the app by roughly 8 to 9 percent, implying that labels enhance trust in the platform and encourage purchase completion. Second, conditional on purchasing, consumers do not systematically substitute toward label-eligible flights at the aggregate level; the composition of chosen itineraries remains largely unchanged once underlying availability is controlled for. Third, when we focus on similar flights near the emissions threshold, labeled itineraries experience significantly higher conversion rates than unlabeled counterparts, indicating that labels matter when tradeoffs in price and convenience are minimal. We further show that label effects are stronger for last-minute travelers, domestic routes, and, suggestively, for trips originating in more Democratic-leaning areas, and that converting consumers search more intensively when labels are present.

Key Contributions

This study advances research on environmental labeling by analyzing a platform-wide, algorithmic carbon label that is based on uniform criteria rather than voluntary firm disclosure, mitigating classic selection and greenwashing concerns. Methodologically, we illustrate how combining interface-based difference-in-differences with quasi-regression discontinuity around an emissions threshold can isolate the effect of informational interventions in large digital marketplaces. Sub-

stantively, we show that carbon labels can increase platform conversions and selectively advantage low-emission options among close substitutes, yet they do not, on their own, generate broad shifts toward cleaner flights. Our findings highlight a tension for policymakers and platforms: transparency initiatives may raise engagement and perceived responsibility while delivering modest environmental benefits, suggesting that effective climate policy in aviation likely requires pairing disclosure with supply-side or incentive-based measures.

References are available upon request.

CONTEXTUAL PRESSURES AND ETHICAL REASONING: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF BUSINESS STUDENTS

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Keywords: ethical decision-making, urgency, regulation, behavioral ethics, business education

Description:
This study examines how urgency, regulation, and disciplinary background interact to shape ethical decision-making among business and non-business students across simulated business scenarios.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how individual dispositions and contextual pressures jointly influence ethical reasoning in business contexts. Specifically, we ask: (1) Are business students more likely than non-business students to make unethical choices? (2) How do situational factors such as urgency, regulatory clarity, and justification cues affect these choices? (3) Can group deliberation mitigate unethical tendencies? Drawing on behavioral ethics and appraisal theory, we argue that ethical decision-making is not static but situationally contingent. Business students, socialized toward instrumental logic, may exhibit greater ethical erosion under time pressure and weak regulation. Understanding how these factors interact provides insight into when and why moral disengagement occurs in professional training contexts and offers implications for ethics education and organizational design.

Method and Data

A controlled laboratory experiment using the validated BRIBE simulation was conducted with 69 undergraduate students (345 total responses) at a U.S. public university. Participants completed five ethically ambiguous international business scenarios individually and then in small groups. Each scenario manipulated urgency (time pressure), regulation (presence/absence of compliance norms), and justification (rationalizing cues). The dependent variable was a binary ethical decision (ethical/unethical). Logistic regression analyses tested main and interaction effects of academic major, contextual pressures, and gender across both scenario-specific and pooled models. This within-subject design enabled simultaneous examination of between-person and within-person variation, increasing internal validity and realism in modeling ethical behavior under situational constraints.

Summary of Findings

Business students were significantly more likely to make unethical choices, particularly in financially framed scenarios. Urgency increased unethical behavior overall ($Exp(B) = 2.51$, $p < .05$), while strong regulatory cues consistently reduced it ($Exp(B) = 0.24$, $p < .01$). Justification cues were generally non-significant but trended toward moral disengagement. Group deliberation produced modest improvements in ethical outcomes, particularly among non-business students, but did not eliminate dispositional gaps. Gender differences appeared in one scenario, with males more prone to unethical choices. Collectively, these results support an interactionist model of ethical reasoning, demonstrating that situational pressures and disciplinary identity jointly determine ethical outcomes. Clear regulatory expectations and structured deliberation can temper unethical behavior, but deep-seated values embedded in business training continue to shape moral cognition.

Key Contributions

Theoretically, this research extends behavioral ethics and interactionist models by showing how urgency, regulation, and disciplinary identity dynamically interact to influence ethical reasoning. It advances understanding of moral erosion as a function of both context and professional socialization. Methodologically, it introduces a multi-scenario, within-subject experimental design that captures ethical variability across diverse business dilemmas. Practically, the study offers guidance for ethics education and managerial practice. For educators, it highlights the need to integrate ethics throughout the business curriculum using experiential simulations that simulate real-world pressures. For organizations, it emphasizes the importance of regulatory clarity and ethical architecture—structures that create moral “defaults” even under time pressure. By diagnosing when ethical failures emerge, this study contributes to both ethical theory and the design of responsible management systems.

References are available upon request.

TITLE: Do Educational Interventions Work Better for Lower SES Parents through their Privacy Knowledge or Directly for their Child's Online Behaviors?

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Keywords: educational interventions, lower socioeconomic status parents' online privacy knowledge, parental styles and controls, children's online risk behaviors

Description: Can simple educational interventions help vulnerable parents (e.g., with lower socioeconomic status (SES)) increase their online privacy knowledge and subsequent intent to use parental controls and teaching their children about online risk behaviors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Approximately 46% of teens are found to be online "almost constantly," up from 24% a decade ago (*Pew Research Center* 2024). Youth and teens are spending 4 to 9 hours online per day, many with troubling online companion chatbots (*American Academy of Child & Adolescent*

Psychiatry 2025; FTC 2025). Sadly, though, children's attention spans have been decreasing, while mental health, addiction, eating disorders, bullying, deep fakes, and suicidal concerns have been on the rise dramatically (Murthy 2024; Veile 2022; *WSJ* 2021). Yet, most children and parents continue to be passive with their online privacy protection efforts and do not fully comprehend how their personal information is used (Walker 2016). AI-recommended content, likes, and follower counts can trigger neural activity, and the use of youth data for tailored tracking and ad content have not helped children and teens online (APA 2024). However, parents can play a very important part in their children's online privacy knowledge, safety decisions, and behaviors (APA 2024). Thus, our main study purpose is to present findings on whether educational interventions work better for vulnerable, lower socioeconomic status (SES) parents through privacy knowledge or more directly through parental controls and teaching their children about online risk behaviors.

Method And Data

Following IRB approval, 251 lower SES parents with children aged 6-15 participated in the Study 3 pretest. Parents were screened for a high school degree or less and a household income less than $50K. One of four educational interventions were randomly assigned: (1) an *American Psychological Association (APA) video* stressing what parents can do to protect children's online privacy information (n=66), (2) an *infographic with voiceover with no recommendations* designed by an academic expert on objective knowledge of sharing private information online (n=65), (3) an *infographic with voiceover with recommendations* in which the expert also includes what parents can do to protect child online privacy information (n=55), or (4) a *control group* without any educational interventions (n=65). Two primary variables measured: (1) supportive parent perceptions (coefficient α = .80) (Darling and Steinberg 1993) and (2) a 15-

item Parents Online Privacy Scale (POPS) (coefficient $\alpha = .85$) measuring the parent's objective knowledge of online privacy safety (Andrews et al. 2023). Two dependent variables assessed: (1) parents' intent to monitor/place controls on their child's online behaviors (five, 5-point items, coefficient $\alpha = .80$; Livingstone et al. 2017) and (2) parents' intent to teach their children about sharing personal information online.

Summary of Findings

A MANOVA showed that POPS differed by experimental condition. Marginal means indicated that the POPS mean for the infographic with recommendations condition (M = 11.994; 79.6% correct answers) was greater than the mean of the control condition (M = 9.942, $p < .001$; 66.3% correct answers). The POPS mean for the infographic no recommendations condition (M = 11.728; 78.1 % correct answers) also was greater than the mean of the control condition (M = 9.942, $p = .003$). No direct effects by experimental conditions were observed for monitoring or teaching intent. For both parent monitoring and teaching intent, regression models showed significant positive effects for supportive parenting, POPS, and a POPS*supportive parent interaction. When both POPS and supportive parenting are at high levels, parent monitoring and teaching are highest. Though our experimental manipulations did not show *direct* effects on monitoring or teaching, mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes 2023) indicated the following. For monitoring and teaching intent, we find relative *indirect effects* of POPS for two experimental conditions: (1) infographic with no recommendations and (2) infographic with recommendations. Thus, the infographic conditions showed the indirect effect of the experimental condition → POPS→ monitoring and teaching intent.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our contribution extends work on *youth* protection of personal information (Andrews et al. 2020; Brucks et al. 1988) to *vulnerable, lower socioeconomic status (SES) parents* (Wang and Wang 2018) in improving objective online privacy knowledge and monitoring and teaching intentions (Andrews et al. 2023). The educational intervention for lower SES parents was best so far for the infographic with voiceover and recommendations. Also, an interaction of POPS * supportive parent affected monitoring and teaching intent. Although there were no *direct* effects of educational interventions on monitoring and teaching intent, important *indirect* effects were found. Specifically, the indirect effects of POPS mediating both infographics with voiceover → monitoring and teaching intent were shown. Study 3's main study is now underway with 400+ lower SES parents to further validate results. Future research is warranted on objective knowledge of AI and misinformation/ disinformation. Unfortunately, the non-academic focus remains mostly on privacy legislation, versus a key understanding of exactly how much parents and their children *actually know and use* in support and control of online activity and behaviors. Our studies help answer these important questions for public health policy, including educational efforts to enhance vulnerable parental online privacy knowledge and subsequent child behaviors.

References are available upon request.

Does Ad Transparency Work? Evidence from Video Ads

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Extended Abstract

Transparency has become a central concern in digital advertising as regulators and platforms respond to growing consumer privacy sensitivities. While transparency disclosures are often mandated, platforms differ substantially in how prominently such disclosures are presented. Many rely on inconspicuous transparency mechanisms that require users to actively seek out disclosure information, whereas others experiment with more conspicuous disclosures that explicitly signal targeting practices. Whether increased visibility of transparency cues improves or harms user engagement remains an open empirical question.

This study examines how the prominence of ad transparency disclosures affects user engagement with video advertisements. We partner with VDO.AI, a large video advertising platform operating across India and the United States, to conduct a randomized controlled field experiment. Users are randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the conspicuous transparency condition, ad targeting disclosures are prominently displayed alongside the video advertisement. In the inconspicuous transparency condition, disclosures are available only through a secondary interaction (e.g., clicking an icon).

Our empirical analysis uses data from 441,908 ad sessions collected over an eight-day period. We focus on key engagement outcomes, including ad completion rates, ad clicks, and downstream

content consumption. The primary identifying variation comes from random assignment of disclosure visibility at the ad-session level.

We find that conspicuous transparency increases ad completion rates by 3.8 percent relative to inconspicuous transparency (p ¡ 0.01). This effect is economically meaningful and robust across alternative specifications. Importantly, we do not observe a statistically significant effect on ad clicks, suggesting that transparency primarily influences viewing behavior rather than immediate click-through decisions.

At the same time, we document a spillover effect on organic video consumption. Users exposed to conspicuous transparency exhibit a 24.8 percent reduction in subsequent organic content consumption, indicating a potential trade-off between transparency and broader platform engagement. This pattern suggests that while transparency can enhance trust or attention toward ads, it may also heighten user awareness of advertising presence, reducing passive content consumption.

We further explore heterogeneous treatment effects and find that the impact of conspicuous transparency is stronger in regions with stricter privacy norms and regulatory environments. This highlights the importance of aligning transparency design with consumer expectations and institutional context.

Overall, our findings contribute to the literature on digital advertising, consumer privacy, and disclosure design by providing causal evidence on how transparency visibility shapes engagement. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that conspicuous transparency can improve ad effectiveness without immediate backlash, though platforms must account for potential spillovers on content consumption. From a policy standpoint, the results offer empirical support for transparency mandates, while also underscoring the need to consider broader behavioral responses.

ENGINEERING SERENDIPITY AND DIAGNOSTIC LUCK FOR EQUITY IN HEALTH: A PROPOSAL FOR EARLY CANCER DETECTION AND PREVENTIVE HEALTH MARKETING

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Keywords: Early Cancer Detection, Diagnostic Luck, Provoked and Accidental Luck, Health Policy and Equity, Preventive Heath Marketing

Description: This research introduces and empirically tests provoked and accidental diagnostic luck in early cancer detection, showing how preventive health marketing and distributive justice principles may shape the equitable translation of serendipitous diagnoses into timely treatment within the proposed Serendipity in Cancer Diagnosis (SERCanDx) framework.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Early cancer detection is conventionally understood as the product of guideline-based screening, individual vigilance, and technological progress. Yet many cancers are identified outside formal screening pathways, through early screening or incidental findings during unrelated clinical encounters. Despite their clinical and societal importance, these "lucky" detections remain theoretically underdeveloped and empirically unquantified in healthcare and marketing research.

This study asks four interrelated research questions. How prevalent are serendipitous or "lucky" cancer detections at the population level, and how do they vary across cancer types? Do cancers detected through lucky pathways differ from guideline-based detections in time to treatment and survival outcomes? How are access to diagnostic luck and its downstream benefits distributed across demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic groups? Can serendipitous detection be reconceptualized not as random chance but as a system-level feature that can be designed, governed, and redistributed equitably?

The study introduces the concepts of provoked and accidental diagnostic luck, distinguishing early or opportunistic screening from incidental detection in unrelated contexts. Grounded in theories of serendipity, distributive justice, and preventive health marketing, the research examines how unplanned diagnostic opportunities shape equity, timeliness, and survival. The proposed Serendipity in Cancer Diagnosis (SERCanDx) framework integrates consumer behavior, clinician readiness, AI-enabled detection, culturally tailored outreach, and equity-focused oversight into a unified model of engineered serendipity.

Method And Data

The study analyzes archival data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) program covering cancer diagnoses in the United States from 2000 to 2022. The final sample includes 14,342,403 cancer cases, representing approximately 46 percent of the U.S.

population. SEER provides detailed information on patient demographics, tumor characteristics, stage at diagnosis, treatment initiation, and survival outcomes, enabling large-scale examination of diagnostic pathways over time.

Diagnostic luck is operationalized in two forms. Provoked luck captures cancers detected earlier than guideline thresholds, such as diagnoses occurring below age cutoffs or unusually soon after screening eligibility. Accidental luck captures incidental detections arising during unrelated medical encounters, including emergency visits, inpatient admissions, or imaging for non-cancer conditions. Analyses focus on early-stage cancers, where earlier detection plausibly confers clinical benefit.

Primary outcomes include time to treatment, measured using median and benchmark-based thresholds, and overall survival. Equity is assessed across race and ethnicity, income quartiles, sex, and rural versus urban residence. Descriptive profiling is combined with stratified comparisons and regression analyses to examine differences in timeliness, survival, and disparities across detection pathways. This approach follows established registry-based methods used in population-level cancer disparities research.

Summary of Findings

Across more than 14.3 million cancer diagnoses between 2000 and 2022, approximately 6 percent were detected through lucky pathways, representing nearly one million patients. Provoked detections were substantially more common than accidental ones, though both pathways contributed meaningfully to early cancer identification across multiple cancer sites. These findings establish serendipity as a structural, not marginal, feature of contemporary cancer detection.

Lucky detections were not uniformly associated with delays in care. Provoked detections were significantly more likely to initiate treatment within 30 days than accidental detections and, in some cases, rivaled or exceeded guideline-based pathways in timeliness. Survival analyses showed that provoked detections were associated with a substantial survival advantage relative to accidental detections, translating into hundreds of thousands of life-years saved at the population level.

Equity analyses revealed a paradox. Accidental detections exhibited smaller racial, income, and geographic disparities in time to treatment than provoked detections, suggesting that unplanned clinical encounters can temporarily flatten structural inequities by bypassing barriers related to insurance, referrals, and scheduling. However, accidental detections were far less likely to convert into timely treatment overall, indicating that serendipity alone does not ensure equitable outcomes without systematic follow-up and governance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four primary contributions. First, it introduces and empirically operationalizes the concepts of provoked and accidental diagnostic luck in early cancer detection, advancing marketing and healthcare scholarship by demonstrating that serendipitous detection is neither rare nor random but a measurable and consequential feature of health systems.

Second, the study advances theory by integrating distributive justice and preventive health marketing to reconceptualize early detection as a system-level design problem rather than solely an individual behavioral outcome. By introducing the Serendipity in Cancer Diagnosis framework (SERCanDx), the research links consumer behavior, clinician readiness, AI-enabled detection,

culturally tailored outreach, and equity-focused oversight into a unified model of engineered serendipity.

Third, it provides the first population-level quantification of provoked and accidental lucky detections across two decades of nationally representative data, establishing their scale, survival impact, and equity implications.

Fourth, the findings generate actionable implications for policymakers, healthcare systems, advocacy organizations, and technology developers. They demonstrate that unplanned diagnostic opportunities can narrow disparities in some contexts but fail to do so without institutional support. Collectively, the study positions preventive marketing not merely as awareness-building, but as a structural mechanism for redistributing life-critical diagnostic opportunities more equitably across populations.

References are available upon request.

EXTERNAL SOCIOPOLITICAL SHOCKS AND FIRM VALUE: EVIDENCE FROM REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE RULING

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Keywords: External sociopolitical policy shocks, financial market event study, stock returns, SCOTUS, Reproductive Healthcare Regulations.

Description: This study examines how a major sociopolitical judicial ruling functions as an exogenous shock to financial markets, showing that firms' political alignment, social reputation, and brand visibility shape heterogeneous investor reactions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: Firms increasingly face external shocks such as regulatory changes, competitor actions, and societal developments that influence investor expectations and firm value. While prior work has focused primarily on business-oriented legal changes with direct compliance or operational effects, far less attention has been devoted to sociopolitical judicial rulings that do not regulate business activity but still shape firms' external environments. Such rulings often concern divisive societal issues, generating uncertainty, stakeholder scrutiny, and reputational risk, without imposing mandated costs. As these decisions grow more visible and politically charged, understanding their financial implications becomes increasingly important. This study examines a salient sociopolitical judicial ruling as an exogenous policy shock to

evaluate its impact on firm value and to identify the firm characteristics that shape deviations from the average market reaction. Our goal is to clarify whether, how, and for whom sociopolitical judicial events matter in financial markets, and to address gaps in research connecting marketing-finance, nonmarket strategy, and public policy.

Method and Data: We examine the Dobbs decision (2022) as a natural experiment to study how investors respond to major sociopolitical judicial shocks. Reproductive healthcare regulation provides an ideal context, as the ruling represented a highly salient, unexpected, and polarizing policy shift with widespread societal and organizational implications. The analysis focuses on large U.S. public firms to ensure consistency in financial and nonmarket data.

Our empirical approach employs an event-study design to capture short-window stock market reactions to new information. This method captures how investors revise expectations of future earnings, measured by abnormal returns, when abrupt legal changes shift the sociopolitical environment in which firms operate. To assess heterogeneity across firms, we examine a cross-sectional regression model that incorporates moderators such as political orientation, social reputation, organisational gender composition, and demographic attributes, along with established financial controls. This design allows us to quantify the immediate market impact of the ruling and explain cross-firm variation through nonmarket factors that shape investor interpretations of sociopolitical exposure.

Summary of Findings: Results show that the sociopolitical judicial ruling elicited significant stock market reactions, serving as an exogenous shock with financial relevance despite the absence of direct compliance requirements. These patterns suggest investors viewed the ruling as informative about future legal and regulatory conditions and their implications for firm performance.

Robustness checks using alternative return models and inference methods confirm that results are not driven by model choice. Cross-sectional analysis shows that nonmarket characteristics significantly shape firm-level variation in reactions. Firms less aligned with the ruling's ideological direction experienced stronger adverse returns, and those with stronger social reputation showed a similar pattern. In contrast, gender-related attributes exhibited no short-term explanatory power.

Key Contributions: The study demonstrates that sociopolitical judicial rulings can generate meaningful market reactions. These findings underscore the importance of monitoring sociopolitical developments as sources of policy-related risk that can influence investor expectations and firms' short-term stability. The study highlights the importance of political and reputational positioning in shaping exposure to such shocks. Overall, it shows that investors interpret sociopolitical judicial events through the lens of firms' political orientation and social standing, making these factors central to understanding financial impacts.

References are available upon request.

MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER INFLUENCE ON FIRM CHOICE TO DISCLOSE PRIVACY RISK

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Keywords

Privacy risk, privacy disclosure, legitimacy theory, stakeholder theory, SEC Item 1A

Description

This study investigates the multiple stakeholder influences on firms' decisions to disclose privacy risk in their SEC Item 1A filings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers are not the only stakeholders affected by and interested in firms' abilities to effectively navigate privacy risks. The U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which provides thought leadership around privacy risk, creates their Privacy Framework from a multiple stakeholder perspective to identify key issues (NIST 2025). Their recently updated Privacy Framework Version 1.1 is geared toward organizations in their efforts to build customer trust, and to enable communication between "business partners, assessors, and regulators," as well as "society as a whole" (p. 1). These stakeholders, among other interested groups, represent important audiences for a firm's privacy strategy. However, the relative influence of each group on firms' privacy decisions remains unclear. We therefore examine *how*

multiple stakeholders influence firms' choices to disclose privacy risk —a market-facing signal with implications for trust, legitimacy, and customer experience.

Specifically, we analyze formal risk disclosures and disentangle the distinct influences of stakeholder entities on this decision. By examining the role of each of these stakeholder groups as they affect a firm's privacy risk disclosure, we expand extant literature on the customer-firm data exchange relationship (Krafft et al. 2021) to consider the varied influence of additional actors on formal privacy risk disclosures.

Method and Data

Effective December 1, 2005, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) began requiring public companies to disclose "information about the most significant risks that apply to the company or to its securities" in Item 1A (Risk Factors) section of their annual 10-K filings (Bao and Datta 2014; Beatty et al. 2019). Item 1A has become a critical communication channel through which multiple stakeholders can identify and evaluate vulnerabilities that may affect a company's business operations and financial conditions.

We adopt a dictionary-based approach to measure privacy risk disclosure at the firm–year level. A firm is classified as disclosing privacy risks if its Item 1A contains any of our keywords. We then adopt a heterogeneous diffusion model (HDM) (Greve, Strang, and Tuma 1995), which categorizes antecedents into four conceptual blocks: the *propensity vector* (a firm's intrinsic features motivating its own disclosure), the *susceptibility vector* (features increasing a firm's likelihood of imitating peer actions), the *contagiousness vector* (features making peers' actions more influential), and the *proximity vector* (shared features between prior adopters and a focal firm that intensify peer influence). This structure enables us to map multiple stakeholder influences to relevant vectors (Gupta, Fung, and Murphy 2021).

Summary of Findings

We find that when prior disclosers are led by more Democratic-leaning CEOs, their adoption of privacy risk disclosure is more likely to be followed by their non-adopting peers. Firms on *Fortune's* "Best Places to Work" list are less susceptible to their peers' adoption of privacy risk disclosure practices. If a firm receives an activist investor proposal on its governance issues, it is more likely to disclose privacy risk. Firms in highly regulated industries face numerous legal and policy pressures to disclose privacy risk, which makes their disclosure behavior more intrinsic and less mimicry-driven.

Besides, we also find that the diffusion of privacy risk disclosure is more evident among firms that share the same location (U.S. State) in which each is incorporated, constituting the legal home of the firm. Given that firm often choose their incorporation location for regulatory or tax advantages, this choice commonly reflects regulatory influences. We find that firms' privacy risk disclosure behaviors are more prominent if they share same industry peer membership with the previous adopters. Finally, firms sharing the same auditor exhibit significantly stronger diffusion, consistent with information and compliance guidance flowing through auditor networks.

Key Contributions

Our findings underscore the importance of adopting a multiple-stakeholder perspective to understand firms' decisions to disclose privacy risk. They extend stakeholder theory in marketing by demonstrating that firms' disclosure decisions are not merely a compliance response or a direct reaction to consumer expectations, but rather emerge from subtle, interdependent relationships with a broader constellation of stakeholders. Moreover, the diffusion patterns we

identify highlight the role of professional and regulatory proximities—such as shared auditors, industries, or incorporation locations—in accelerating disclosure adoption across firms.

This research contributes to the growing literature on privacy risk management by disentangling the complex set of stakeholder forces that shape firms' disclosure behavior. Integrating stakeholder theory with the heterogeneous diffusion model, we show that privacy risk disclosure is both a strategic and relational process, driven by the interplay of organizational characteristics, peer influence, and institutional pressures. Our results point to the need for regulators to recognize that disclosure adoption is conditioned by the social and professional networks in which firms are embedded. For managers, our study highlights that privacy risk disclosure is a signal interpreted by a wide range of stakeholders, from investors to auditors to employees.

*References are available upon request.

ONLINE ANGER, OFFLINE COSTS:

HOW CONSUMER COMPLAINTS CREATE LABOR COST STICKINESS

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Keywords: consumer online complaints, eWOM, labor cost stickiness, reputation governance, strategic rigidity

Description: This study investigates how consumer online complaints, an influential form of negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), affect corporate labor cost stickiness.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study investigates whether and how consumer online complaints, a prevalent form of negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influence corporate labor cost stickiness—the asymmetric adjustment of labor costs to revenue changes. Specifically, it examines whether increased online complaint volumes lead firms to become more reluctant to reduce labor costs during revenue declines. Furthermore, the research explores two underlying behavioral mechanisms: reputation governance, where firms

defensively maintain workforce stability to manage public perception, and strategic rigidity, arising from path-dependent investments in specialized complaint-handling resources. The study aims to bridge a gap between digital marketing phenomena and internal management accounting outcomes.

METHOD AND DATA

The empirical analysis utilizes a large-scale panel dataset of Chinese A-share listed firms from the first quarter of 2018 to the third quarter of 2024. Data on consumer online complaints are sourced from Heimao Tousu (Black Cat Complaints), a major public complaint platform, and are meticulously matched to specific firms. Financial and governance data come from the CSMAR database. The core methodology involves estimating an asymmetric cost behavior model where the stickiness coefficient is a function of complaint volume and control variables. Robustness is ensured through alternative variable specifications, a quasi-natural experiment using a Difference-in-Differences (DID) design based on an exogenous policy shock (the launch of a regional complaint platform), parallel trends tests, placebo tests, and Propensity Score Matching (PSM). Mechanism tests employ two-step regressions and textual analysis.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results show that a higher volume of consumer online complaints significantly increases labor cost stickiness. Firms receiving more complaints exhibit a greater reluctance to reduce labor costs when sales decline. This effect is driven sequentially by two mechanisms: first, active reputation governance, where managers avoid layoffs to shield the firm's public image; second, passive strategic rigidity, where initial

investments in dedicated complaint-handling teams and processes create path dependency, making subsequent labor adjustments difficult. Decomposition analysis reveals that the increased stickiness is primarily due to resistance to adjusting employee headcount rather than wages. Heterogeneity analyses indicate the effect is stronger for firms with higher reputational exposure (e.g., B2C firms, those in competitive markets), greater internal adjustment costs (e.g., high training expenditures), and pre-existing litigation risk.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes several key contributions. Theoretically, it identifies consumer online complaints—a key feature of the digital economy—as a novel and significant driver of labor cost stickiness, extending cost behavior literature beyond traditional internal and macroeconomic factors. It unpacks the dual mediating mechanisms of reputation governance and strategic rigidity, integrating Behavioral Agency and Path Dependence theories to explain how digital pressure translates into concrete cost structures. Methodologically, it overcomes limitations of prior small-sample studies by employing a large, real-world dataset and rigorous causal identification strategies. Finally, it bridges the marketing and management accounting disciplines by demonstrating how a marketing-related eWOM shock directly influences a core internal accounting outcome, advocating for a more integrated understanding of firm behavior in the digital age.

POSITIVE, NEGATIVE, OR BOTH? NAVIGATING VALENCE FRAMING'S EFFECTIVENESS–ACCEPTABILITY DILEMMA IN ROUTE CHOICE

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Keywords: digital nudging elements, valence framing, gain-loss framing, acceptability, route choice

Description: This paper investigates whether the most behaviorally effective valence frames in digital nudging are also the most acceptable to consumers and explains why effectiveness and acceptability can systematically diverge.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Behavioral interventions often rely on valence framing to steer choice, yet emotionally framed messages may differ not only in effectiveness but also in how acceptable they are to decision-makers. This raises a fundamental question: Do the frames that most effectively influence decisions also align with individuals' preferences, or do they create a trade-off between behavioral impact and perceived acceptability?

We examine this question in the context of eco-friendly route choice by comparing four framing designs: a gain frame highlighting fuel savings, a loss frame emphasizing increased fuel consumption, a combined gain–loss frame, and no-information. Our first research question asks: How do these valence framing designs differ in their ability to increase selection of an eco-route? Our second research question addresses preference formation: Which framing designs do individuals prefer when directly comparing all alternatives, and to what extent do these preferences correspond to the designs' behavioral effectiveness? Finally, we investigate the underlying reasons for acceptance and rejection of valence framing designs by exploring individuals' drivers to favor certain framings and dislike others.

Method And Data

We conducted a four-stage online experiment with 419 German-speaking participants recruited via Prolific (July 2025; 56.6% male; M_age = 34.64). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four between-subject framing conditions: gain (fuel savings highlighted), loss (increased fuel consumption highlighted), combined gain–loss, or a no-information control. In two route-choice tasks (short vs. long trip), participants selected between an eco-friendly and a fastest route

in an interactive map interface. We model the probability of choosing the eco-route using binary logistic regression to assess framing effectiveness. Next, participants completed a forced-ranking task, ordering all four framing designs from most to least preferred. Differences in preferences across frames were tested using a Friedman test. To uncover motives underlying acceptance and rejection, participants provided open-text explanations for their most and least preferred designs, which we analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Finally, participants rated the acceptability of the framing design to which they were initially exposed on a multi-item seven-point scale, allowing us to distinguish low preference from outright rejection. Group sizes were balanced, and no demographic differences emerged across conditions.

Summary of Findings

Addressing our first research question, we find clear differences in the behavioral effectiveness of valence frames. The combined gain–loss frame most strongly increased eco-route choices, followed by the loss frame, while the gain and no-information conditions were less effective. Turning to our second research question, preference rankings reveal a contrasting pattern. Participants most strongly preferred the gain frame, whereas both the loss and no-information designs were ranked lowest. Acceptance ratings further show that even low-ranked frames were still evaluated as acceptable, indicating that weak preference does not necessarily imply outright rejection. Our third research question sheds light on the motives underlying these patterns. Qualitative analyses reveal that gain frames were favored for their positive and motivating tone, while combined frames were perceived as transparent but occasionally cognitively demanding. In contrast, loss frames elicited resistance due to their admonishing tone, and the no-information condition was criticized for lacking guidance. Taken together, the findings reveal a divergence between behavioral effectiveness and individual preference in valence-based nudging.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, we respond to recent calls to move beyond studying framing effectiveness alone by explicitly incorporating preference and acceptance as complementary outcome variables. Prior framing research has largely focused on whether gain or loss messages influence choices. We show that behavioral impact and acceptability can diverge systematically, thereby clarifying why preference is not merely an attitudinal by-product but might be a relevant boundary condition for the long-term sustainability of digital nudging strategies. Second, we extend existing valence-framing research by examining gain, loss, combined gain–loss, and no-information frames within one unified design. Rather than treating message valence as a binary choice, we test combined framing as a deliberate "best-of-both-worlds" strategy and demonstrate how it can balance nudging and consumer resistance in digital choice environments. Third, our qualitative evidence shows how loss frames can evoke reactance, while gain frames foster motivation and positive feelings. Taken together, our findings resolve a central ambiguity in valence-based nudging: which framing strategy yields the greatest overall impact once both behavioral effectiveness and consumer acceptance are taken into account.

PRIVACY INTERFACES AS BRAND COMMUNICATION DESIGN TYPOLOGIES FOR TRUST BUILDING AND CONSENT MAXIMIZING

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Keywords: privacy interface, transparency, control, brand communication, trust

Description: This research conceptualizes privacy interface designs that reflect a brand's two privacy strategy orientations: privacy as strategy (trust-building) and privacy as rent (consent-maximizing) and develops a 2×2 typology linking these orientations to interface design strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As brands deepen their engagement with customers through digital channels, they increasingly face tensions among three competing priorities: extracting value from customer data, honoring evolving privacy expectations, and adhering to regulatory requirements. Regulatory frameworks institutionalize principles of transparency and choice by mandating user consent through privacy interfaces, yet they offer little guidance on how to operationalize these principles in interface design. This ambiguity leaves brands with considerable discretion, resulting in wide variation in how privacy interfaces are constructed. In practice, these designs are often shaped by a fragmented understanding of the strategic orientations they reflect. This

research addresses this gap by investigating how brands use privacy interfaces as strategic tools to manage consumer expectations and communicate their data practices. we propose three research questions:

RQ1: How do privacy interfaces function as strategic brand communication tools, and how do they reflect brands' strategic orientations?

RQ2: How can transparency and choice be operationalized into a typology of privacy interface strategies, and what observable design decisions characterize the different quadrants?

RQ3: How do firms across industries implement transparency and choice in practice, and to what extent do these implementations align with their strategic privacy orientations?

Method and Data

To examine how firms implement transparency and choice in privacy interfaces, we conduct an exploratory, supply-side analysis of consumer-facing websites across industries. We draw our sample from the Princeton–Leuven Longitudinal Corpus of Privacy Policies, selecting the 100 most-visited websites in each of five industries (Business, Entertainment, News & Media, Shopping, and Travel). After excluding duplicates, inactive sites, platforms, login-restricted sites, and websites without front-end privacy interfaces, the final sample consists of 95 brand websites.

To capture the interactive and dynamic nature of privacy interfaces, we develop a custom Python-based web scraper that records interface screenshots, extracts textual content, and systematically activates hyperlinks and buttons, including layered choice menus and linked privacy documents. Data analysis follows a mixed-method approach combining theory-driven coding with data-driven insights. Two core dimensions, transparency and choice, are conceptualized as a continuum from limited to full implementation and coded on 7-point scales

(−3 to +3). Coding criteria are grounded in prior privacy communication research. Each interface is independently evaluated by a human coder and an LLM (ChatGPT-5) using an identical codebook. Intercoder reliability is ensured for both transparency and choice dimensions, and averaged scores are used for subsequent analyses.

Summary of Findings

We map 95 websites onto a two-dimensional space defined by transparency and choice ($\chi^2(df=1) = 19.92$, $p < .001$). Results show that 43.16% (N = 41) of websites fall into the quadrant with both clear, user-friendly disclosures and accessible controls, indicating a consistent "privacy as strategy" orientation across both transparency and choice dimensions. We categorize these firms as privacy stewards based on our typology. Conversely, 28.42% (N = 27) of websites fall into the quadrant with generic or obfuscated disclosures and skewed or restrictive control options, reflecting a "privacy as rent" orientation along both dimensions. We label these firms as privacy exploiters. The remaining websites fall into off-diagonal quadrants, representing mixed strategies. In line with our typology, we classify these cases as instrumental privacy designers. In addition, based on our typology, the websites with no front-end privacy interface (N=308) are categorized as privacy compliers, as they neither use the interface to build trust nor to maximize consent. In summary, the analysis reveals a dominant bifurcation: most firms adopt either a full "privacy as strategy" or a full "privacy as rent" strategy. A smaller subset adopts a more instrumental approach, mixing elements of both orientations.

Key Contributions

This research advances strategic marketing by examining how transparency and choice in customer-facing privacy interfaces serve as levers brands use to balance trust and data acquisition. We make three contributions. First, we reframe privacy interfaces not as compliance

artifacts but as strategic brand communication tools. We theorize two privacy orientations: privacy as strategy, which emphasizes trust building to support long-term relationships, and privacy as rent, which prioritizes consent maximization to facilitate data collection. We argue that effective brand communication requires navigating the tension between these orientations. Second, we operationalize these orientations into a 2×2 typology of privacy interface strategies and identify actionable design decisions that define each quadrant. Third, using a theory-guided empirical approach, we analyze 95 websites across five B2C industries. Leveraging a custom-built scraper, we document how brands implement transparency and choice in practice and how these implementations align with strategic orientation. Together, our framework and empirical evidence offer a diagnostic and design toolkit for managers. It enables alignment of privacy interface design with brand positioning and data goals, supports evaluation of existing interfaces, and informs strategic configuration of privacy communications to foster trust while securing consent.

ROLE OF EXPERTS IN DESIGNING POLICY INTERVENTIONS FOR CONSUMERS – EXPLORING DRIVERS FOR FALSE CONSENSUS EFFECT SHOWCASED BY SUSTAINABILITY LABELING POLICY INTERVENTION

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Key Words: Consumer-Centered Public Policy, Food Label, False Consensus Effect, Expert-Consumer Misalignment

Description: This research explores how experts' projection biases contribute to misalignment between expert and consumer preferences in the design of a sustainability food labeling policy intervention.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Experts are valued stakeholders and are often considered crucial in shaping policy interventions. However, they may impose their own preferences on presumed laypeople's needs, resulting in misalignment. Drawing on the false consensus effect, this research examines projection biases in expert judgments and the mechanisms through which experts' assumptions about consumers translate into label design preferences and systematic expert–consumer misalignment. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in the context of food labeling policy, where experts from science, industry, and public institutions commonly advise on sustainability labels as consumer-centered policy interventions designed to influence food choices. The effectiveness of such policy interventions depends on experts' ability to accurately anticipate consumers' perspectives, despite the social distance that often characterizes expert–lay relationships. By analyzing how expert biases influence the design

of sustainability labels, this research provides insights into why expert-driven policy interventions may diverge from consumer needs.

Method and Data

To provide initial empirical insight into expert–consumer misalignment, this research draws on two pilot studies using a mixed-methods approach. The pilot study explores if expert–consumer misalignment occurs in sustainability food labeling and how experts form label preferences based on consumer assumptions. Semi-structured interviews with sustainability experts from science, industry, NGOs, policy, and consumers were conducted. NGO position papers and an expert panel discussion were also included to triangulate expert and consumer views on sustainability labeling. A content analysis using a combined deductive and inductive coding approach identified expert assumptions that informed the development of a conceptual framework explaining expert–consumer misalignment and highlighting novel projection mechanisms.

Building on these insights, the quantitative pilot study examines whether differences in sustainability expertise are associated with differences in label preferences and projection tendencies, consistent with the false consensus effect. An online experiment was conducted in which participants evaluated alternative sustainability label designs. Participants reported their preferences and expectations of others' responses, completed a simulated shopping task, and were classified as quasi-experts or laypersons based on an objective sustainability knowledge test. This design enables an initial assessment of expert–consumer misalignment and suggests it may be driven by expertise-based false consensus effects.

Summary of Findings

Across two pilot studies, the findings provide consistent evidence of systematic misalignment between expert and consumer preferences for sustainability food label designs. Experts tend to favor information-rich labels that emphasize abstract sustainability dimensions, whereas consumers prefer simpler, more concrete cues that are easier to process and apply in purchase decisions. Beyond these preference differences, qualitative insights show that experts' evaluations are shaped by projections about consumers. Specifically, three projection (normative, expertise, motivational) mechanisms emerge that help explain expert–consumer misalignment. These assumptions influence justifications for expert-preferred label designs and contribute to biased projections of consumers.

The quantitative pilot study corroborates these insights by showing that individuals with higher sustainability expertise systematically prefer more complex label designs and project their own abilities onto others more strongly than less sustainability-knowledgeable participants. Together, the findings indicate that expertise-driven projection plays a central role in shaping preferences for sustainability label design and helps explain why expert-designed policy interventions may fail to align with consumer needs. These findings motivate further investigation of expert projection mechanisms in more realistic policy advisory contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to academic, policymaking, and practitioner audiences by examining how misalignment between expert and consumer preferences shapes the effectiveness of consumer-centered policy interventions. Focusing on contexts in which policy success depends on consumer understanding and adoption, the study investigates when and why experts fail to incorporate consumer perspectives when forming judgments. Using sustainability labeling as an illustrative policy domain, the research highlights challenges at the intersection of sustainability marketing and public policy.

From an academic perspective, the study extends the false consensus effect to a socially relevant policy context by shifting attention from managerial decision-makers to experts serving as policy advisors. It demonstrates how egocentric projection tendencies among experts lead to systematic misalignment with consumer preferences and identifies three novel underlying projection mechanisms, thereby deepening the understanding of cognitive biases in expert–consumer interactions.

For policymakers and practitioners, the findings underscore the risks of expert-driven intervention design that relies on biased assumptions about consumers' needs. Misaligned sustainability labels may reduce intervention effectiveness and undermine consumer trust. The identified mechanisms provide a foundation for a subsequent main study that systematically examines expert projection in more realistic policy advisory settings.

References are available upon request.

THE IMPACT OF PRODUCT RECALL EFFECTIVENESS ON FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL FIRM PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: Product Recall, Recall Effectiveness, Customer Satisfaction, Firm value

Description: This study demonstrates that increases in product recall effectiveness improve both customer satisfaction and firm value.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Recalled products that remain on the market serious health risks to consumers (Bae and Benítez-Silva 2011), making product recall effectiveness—the share of recalled products that has been repaired, replaced or removed—a critical indicator of consumer protection that is closely monitored by government agencies (Pagiavlas et al. 2022). For recalling firms, however, recall

effectiveness may represent trade-off: while improving it entails short-term costs, for example related to repairs (NHTSA 2017) and recall communication efforts (Pagiavlas et al. 2022), it also reduces long-term liability and reputational risks by preventing harm to consumers (Bae and Benítez-Silva 2011; Govindaraj et al. 2004; Crosley 2020). This tension raises two key research questions: (1) Does an increase in recall effectiveness ultimately enhance firm performance? (2) Under which conditions is this performance impact strengthened or weakened?

Method And Data

We construct a unique secondary dataset that combines quarterly recall effectiveness data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for 2,713 U.S. vehicle recalls conducted between 2013 and 2021 with corresponding measures of customer satisfaction from YouGov BrandIndex and changes in firm value. To analyze the dynamic relationships among recall effectiveness, customer satisfaction, and firm value, we employ panel vector autoregressive (PVAR) models. To assess key boundary conditions, we additionally collect quarterly data on recall volume (NHTSA), media coverage (LexisNexis), and advertising awareness (YouGov BrandIndex).

Summary of Findings

The results show that increases in recall effectiveness improve both customer satisfaction and abnormal stock returns. Increases in recall-related media coverage and advertising awareness amplify the positive effect of recall effectiveness on customer satisfaction. However, higher advertising awareness simultaneously weakens the impact of recall effectiveness on abnormal

stock returns. In addition, an increase in customer satisfaction positively affects abnormal stock returns, underscoring the link between non-financial and financial firm performance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to the product recall literature by showing that higher recall effectiveness can generate positive responses from both customers and investors, while identifying media coverage and advertising awareness as important boundary conditions of these effects. Second, the study introduces recall effectiveness as a context-specific, publicly observable key performance indicator that complements traditional measures such as customer satisfaction in forecasting firm performance and informing managerial decision-making. Third, the findings extend prior research on the satisfaction–firm value link by showing that recall effectiveness enhances firm value partly through its positive effect on customer satisfaction. Finally, by demonstrating the performance impact of recall effectiveness, the study motivates future research on managerial tools and strategies to improve recall effectiveness.

References are available upon request.

Extended Abstract Template

The Longitudinal Relationships between Social Marginality and Prosocial Behavior: A Cross-Lagged Panel Network Analysis

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Keywords: Social Marginality, Prosocial Behavior, Cross-Lagged Panel Network, Longitudinal Study

Description: This study employs a cross-lagged panel network model on longitudinal data from the German Ageing Survey to explore the dynamic interplay between social marginality (including digital exclusion, social exclusion, and loneliness) and prosocial behaviors (including donating, helping, and receiving help), tracing their interactions across three time periods (T1-T2, T2-T3, T3-T4) to reveal time-dependent evolutions and intricate bidirectional influences with shifting patterns of mutual impact over time.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – 200 Words

Social marginality entails systematic exclusion from economic, political, and social participation (Phelps & Ruhland, 2022; Varghese & Kumar, 2022), whereas prosocial behavior, voluntary acts like aiding, sharing, and collaborating, bolsters social cohesion, psychological well-being, and resilience (Baldassarri & Abascal, 2020; Arbuthnott, 2023; Wan et al., 2023). Social marginality can influence individuals' psychological growth and social conduct through channels like resource scarcity, emotional disregard, and stigmatization (Zahra et al., 2018; Herruzo et al., 2020; Alvarez & Ruiz-Tagle, 2024; Gwacham-Anisiobi et al., 2025), posing significant barriers to their future development. Conversely, prosocial behavior enhances social adjustment and acts as a protective buffer in challenging circumstances (Lim & DeSteno, 2016; Rohner et al., 2022; Malti & Speidel, 2024). Thus, exploring the interactive mechanisms between social marginality and prosocial behavior is vital, as it offers substantial benefits for individual long-term development and societal harmony and stability.

Key research questions are:

1. How do dimensions of social marginality influence engagement in prosocial behavior?
2. To what extent does prosocial behavior reduce the negative impacts of social marginality?
3. In what ways do the dimensions of social marginality interact and amplify each other?
4. How do different forms of prosocial behavior reinforce one another?

Method And Data (Not Applicable For Nonempirical Papers) – 200 Words

In this study, we analyzed data obtained from the German Ageing Survey (DEAS) (Klaus et al., 2017). The DEAS is a nationally representative study conducted among individuals aged ⩾40 in Germany. We selected four waves of data collected in 2014 (T1), 2017 (T2), 2021 (T3), and 2023 (T4) for analysis.

In this study, social marginality is defined as comprising three key components: digital exclusion, social exclusion, and loneliness (MacDonald, 2008; Salemink, 2016; Ragnedda, 2018; Campagne, 2019; Cover, 2020; Varghese & Kumar, 2022). We assessed prosocial behavior using three indicators: donating, helping others, and receiving help (Anker et al., 2010; Dubé et al., 2017; Aknin et al., 2018; Olivo et al., 2021).

We used the Cross-Lagged Panel Network (CLPN) model, an analytical approach developed by Rhemtulla et al. (2019), which integrates network analysis with cross-lagged panel modeling. Using multi-wave panel data, this method estimates how individual items influence other items over time, specifically capturing the effect of a variable at time point 1 on a variable at time point 2. All statistical analyses were conducted using R version 4.4.3.. We tested a cross-lagged panel network model at each time period. All test values are acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Summary of Findings – 200 words

Our findings indicate that helping others reduces social exclusion, supporting the notion that prosocial behaviors foster social connections and mitigate exclusion (Stellar et al., 2017;

MacKenzie & Baumeister, 2019). Lower loneliness among individuals who help or donate aligns with prior research (Aknin & Whillans, 2021; Lanser & Eisenberger, 2023). Social exclusion's suppression of donating contradicts earlier social reconnection theories suggesting that excluded individuals reintegrate through prosocial behaviors (DeWall & Richman, 2011; Narayanan et al., 2013; Simpson et al., 2015), though it positively influences helping behaviors in some periods. Digital exclusion consistently reduces donating and helping behaviors, corroborating Bentley et al. (2024), while digitally excluded individuals receiving more help supports institutional support strategies (Schou & Pors, 2019; Ranchordás, 2022; Alshallaqi & Al-Mamary, 2024). Conversely, donating may increase digital exclusion, potentially due to older adults' higher prosocial tendencies coupled with greater digital exclusion (Hill et al., 2015; Cutler et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022; Mubarak & Suomi, 2022).

Overall, we find that prosocial behaviors can alleviate social marginality, and socially marginalized groups also engage in more prosocial behaviors.

Statement of Key Contributions – 200 words

This study advances business ethics theory on social marginality and prosocial behavior via a dynamic, multifaceted framework. First, it integrates marginality dimensions, digital and social exclusion, alongside loneliness, with prosocial actions like donating and helping others. This interconnected approach overcomes limitations of traditional single-variable studies. Second, using a CLPN model across multiple time points uncovers causal directions and temporal dynamics, shifting from static snapshots to longitudinal insights. Third, extending the model to

multidimensional behaviors introduces innovative methodologies, breaking from conventional psychological and medical applications. It opens interdisciplinary avenues, deepening understanding of societal behaviors in a rapidly changing global context.

These findings equip stakeholders, including marketers and consumer organizations, with strategies to promote prosocial behavior among marginalized groups, enhancing societal inclusion and informing consumer engagement. First, bolstering social support networks through in-person or online mutual aid groups encourages experience-sharing and volunteering, reducing loneliness and building consumer communities that prioritize social impact. Second, offering digital skills training and affordable equipment dismantles technological barriers, enabling access to online marketplaces and prosocial initiatives like crowdfunding. Third, governments and organizations should prioritize policies providing job opportunities and social services, empowering marginalized individuals to engage in consumer markets, thereby boosting brand loyalty and ethical consumption.

THE PRIVATE SELF IN CONSUMPTION: WHY EXPERIENTIAL PURCHASE HISTORY COMMANDS A HIGHER PRICE

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Keywords: privacy, data disclosure, material purchase, experiential purchase

Description: We find that consumers place a higher price on their experiential than material purchase histories because experiential purchases are perceived to reveal more about the self.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Digital traces of consumer behavior, such as purchase histories, have become a valuable form of personal data in the marketplace. Companies frequently seek consumer permissions or design incentives, such as discounts, premium services, or direct monetary rewards, in exchange for access to consumer data. While prior research has examined contextual and firm-related influences on disclosure preferences, how do consumers value different types of purchase history data in everyday purchases? Specifically, how do consumers perceive and value their experiential purchase history data (e.g., a vacation, a concert, a cooking class) versus material purchase history data (e.g., electronics, clothing, furniture)? In this research, we address this gap by examining consumer valuation and willingness to disclose along this critical dimension. We propose that consumers are less willing to disclose their experiential purchase histories and,

when disclosure is prompted, demand higher compensation compared to material purchase histories. We contend that this occurs because experiential purchase histories reveal richer, finer-grained details about consumers' preferences, behaviors, and even lifestyles. Consistent with this mechanism, we reconcile our findings with prior work by showing that selective disclosure moderates the observed disclosure preference.

Method and Data

Study 1a tested the basic effect using a 2-cell (experiential vs. material) between-subjects design. Participants listed the websites they frequently used for either experiential purchases or material purchases. They read an offer to share their purchase history data with third-party companies in exchange for cash compensation and indicated whether they would accept or reject the offer at different price points. Study 1b tested the effect in a different context and narrowed the consumption domain to workout-related products to make the material and experiential purchases more comparable. Then, we tested our proposed process that consumers perceive their experiential purchase history as revealing more personal information than their material purchase history. Using the same procedure as in Study 1b, study 2 measured perceived personal information revealed in the purchase history. Study 3 further examined the process through moderation and reconciled our findings with prior research in a new study paradigm. Participants recalled one significant experiential purchase and one significant material purchase. Then, they either indicated which purchase history they were more willing to allow third parties to access or indicated which purchase they were more likely to post about on social media.

Summary of Findings

Across four studies, we systematically examined how the experiential versus material nature of purchase histories shaped consumers' disclosure preferences. Study 1a established the basic effect, showing that consumers demanded significantly higher compensation to share their experiential (vs. material) purchase history. Study 1b replicated this effect in a more controlled context and ruled out centrality to the self as an alternative explanation. Even when experiential and material purchases were perceived as equally central to one's identity (e.g., workout sessions vs. workout gear), participants still required a higher price to disclose their experiential purchase history. Study 2 provided process evidence by demonstrating that this effect was mediated by the perception that experiential purchase histories revealed richer and more personal information about the self than material purchase histories. Study 3 further uncovered how perceived information revealed shapes disclosure preferences and reconciled our findings with prior research showing that experiential purchases are more likely to be shared in social contexts. Specifically, participants preferred to disclose their material purchase history to third parties, but preferred to share their experiential consumption on social media.

Statement of Key Contributions

Companies frequently seek consumers' permission or offer incentives in exchange for access to personal data. This growing reliance underscores a pressing need to understand consumers' data disclosure preferences and the conditions under which they are willing, or unwilling, to share their information. We examine how consumers value different types of purchase history data in everyday consumption, focusing on the critical distinction between

experiential and material purchases and the underlying mechanisms. Our research contributes to the literature of consumer data disclosure and privacy by identifying the type of purchase history as a key determinant of disclosure preferences and extends the research on experiential versus material consumption by identifying a boundary condition for the well-documented consumer tendency to share experiences rather than material possessions. Practically, our findings show that experiential purchase histories contain richer and more personally relevant information, which heightens privacy concerns and makes consumers less willing to disclose such data without adequate compensation or safeguards. More broadly, this research sheds light on how consumers navigate the tradeoff between the benefits of data sharing and the privacy risks associated with different forms of purchase histories, offering practical implications for firms and policymakers designing data-exchange mechanisms, privacy policies, and regulatory protections.

UNHEALTHY OUTDOOR FOOD ADVERTISING AND ADULT'S DIETARY INTAKE: EVIDENCE FROM THE SOUTH ASIA BIOBANK

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Keywords: outdoor food advertising; marketing strategies; spatial exposure; diet; South Asia

Description (1 sentence): This research examines the exposure of unhealthy outdoor food advertising in residential environments and its association with poorer dietary intake among adults in South Asia.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question (max 200 words)

Marketing is a well-established driver of dietary behaviour, shaping consumer preferences, purchase decisions, and consumption patterns. While prior research has largely focused on digital and broadcast food marketing, outdoor food advertising, including billboards, front-of-shop signage, and posters, remains comparatively understudied, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Outdoor advertising constitutes an unavoidable and

frequently encountered marketing channel embedded in the neighbourhood environment, where repeated exposure may reinforce brand awareness, increase product salience, and activate heuristics in food decision-making. Marketing research suggests that unhealthy foods are often perceived as tastier, more filling, and of better value than healthier alternatives, heuristics that may be further reinforced through repeated outdoor food advertisements.

Evidence from high-income settings indicates that outdoor food advertising features predominantly unhealthy products and is disproportionately distributed among lower-income neighbourhoods, raising concerns about consumer protection and inequality. However, little is known about the composition of outdoor food advertising environments or their associations with dietary behaviour in South Asia, a region undergoing rapid urbanization, expanding advertising markets, and rising consumption of ultra-processed foods.

We examine whether exposure to unhealthy outdoor food advertising near individuals' homes is associated with poorer dietary outcomes and whether these associations differ by sex and income.

Method and Data (max 200 words)

This study combines cross-sectional surveillance data and environmental mapping data from the South Asia Biobank (SAB), a population-based study of adults in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Individual dietary intake was measured using a single 24-hour dietary recall collected with the Intake24 multiple-pass tool, adapted for the South Asian context. Residential locations were geocoded and linked to detailed environmental mapping data capturing food retailers and outdoor food advertisements.

Field researchers systematically photographed and geolocated all outdoor food advertisements visible from public spaces as well as all food retailers within each

surveillance site. Advertised food products were classified using the INFORMAS outdoor advertising protocol, allowing advertisements to be categorized as healthy or unhealthy. Using ArcGIS Pro, a 300-meter Euclidean buffer was constructed around each participant's residence to capture individual-level advertising exposure.

Dietary outcomes included dietary energy density and the percentage of total energy from saturated fat and free sugars. Associations between advertising exposure and dietary outcomes were estimated using ordinary least squares regression models, adjusting for individual socio-demographic and lifestyle characteristics, neighbourhood food retailer availability, and site-year fixed effects. Analyses were conducted for the full sample and stratified by sex and income level.

Summary of Findings (max 200 words)

The outdoor food advertising environment surrounding participants' residences was dominated by unhealthy products. Nearly 90% of all identified outdoor advertisements promoted unhealthy foods, with ice creams and sugar-sweetened beverages being most frequently advertised. On average, individuals were exposed to multiple food advertisements within a 300-meter radius of their homes (mean = 9; SD = 25.65), with higher densities of unhealthy advertisements observed around females and higher-income individuals (27% vs. 23% among males and low-income individuals).

Regression analyses revealed that a higher density of unhealthy advertisements was significantly associated with higher dietary energy density ($\beta = 0.02$; 95% CI: 0.01–0.04; $p < 0.01$). Exposure to advertisements for products high in fat was positively associated with higher intake of saturated fat ($\beta = 0.69$; 95% CI: 0.25–1.13; $p < 0.01$), particularly among females ($\beta = 0.86$; 95% CI: 0.27–1.44; $p < 0.01$) and higher-income participants ($\beta = 0.89$;

95% CI: 0.34–1.44; $p < 0.01$). Similarly, exposure to advertisements for products high in sugar was associated with a higher free sugar intake among females ($\beta = 0.27$; 95% CI: 0.00–0.54; $p < 0.05$) and high-income individuals ($\beta = 0.37$; 95% CI: 0.07–0.66; $p < 0.05$).

Statement of Key Contributions (max 200 words)

This study contributes to the marketing literature by advancing the understanding of outdoor food advertising as an influential yet understudied marketing channel, particularly in LMICs contexts. While prior research has focused largely on television and digital food marketing, this research extends existing knowledge by examining outdoor food advertising in residential environments in South Asia, a region undergoing rapid advertising growth and dietary patterns change.

First, the study provides systematic evidence on the composition of the outdoor food advertising landscape, classifying all food advertisements near individuals' homes and documenting the dominance of unhealthy products, particularly ice creams and sugar-sweetened beverages. Second, by linking geospatial advertising exposure to individual-level dietary intake data, the study shows that greater exposure to unhealthy outdoor food advertising is associated with poorer dietary quality, even after accounting for food retailer availability and individual characteristics. Third, the study highlights heterogeneity in associations by sex and income, contributing to research on consumer segmentation, targeting, and differential responsiveness to marketing cues.

Together, these contributions position outdoor food advertising as a meaningful component of the marketing environment and provide new empirical evidence on how place-based advertising may correlate with consumer dietary behaviour.

References are available upon request

Competitive Paper Template

WHEN FRONT-OF-PACK ECO-SCORE LABELING STEERS CONSUMERS TOWARDS GREENER FOOD CHOICE: THE BRANDING EFFECT

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Keywords: Eco-Label ; willingness-To-Pay ; Consumer ; Labeling.

This article aims to understand the conditions under which FOP Eco-Score labeling of food products could help consumers to choose greener food products, according to the favourability of the score, its consistency with the nutritional score, and the brand of the product.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

According to the Eat-Lancet commission on food, planet and health, the worldwide prioritizing challenge by 2050 is to feed a future population of 10 billion people a healthy diet within planetary boundaries (Summary report, 2024). To face this challenge, Front-Of-Pack (FOP) eco-labeling of food products is considered as a key tool by public policy makers. However, FOP labelling efficiency depends on the consumer' motivation to use it in order to engage a behaviour change in the food choice environment (Nabec, 2017). So on, research is needed in order to understand under which conditions FOP eco-labeling of food products is effective, especially when presented with another label, namely the Nutri-Score, in order to change consumers' choices towards greener food products. Some research has analysed the cross-effects of nutritional and ecological labelling. In fact, the double-scoring strategy leads to some biases in nutritional and environmental quality of food products (Jurkenberck et al. 2024). Moreover, the appearance of scores and associated colors significantly affects the purchase intents for food products, whether it is namely nutritional, ecological or global score (Marette, 2022). Previous research showed that the perceived market position of the brand influences the efficacity of the Nutri-Score in order to change consumers' behavior (Marette et al. 2019).

Method and Data

An online survey was carried out from the 14th to the 20th of June 2024 among 298 respondents recruited via a panel from a research firm in France. Respondents declared on a 5-point scale their confidence in the Eco-Score (M= 3.44; SD= 0.99) and their ecological sensitivity (M= 3.06; SD= 1.04). In breakfast cereals category, we selected 2 national brands, one category leader brand (*Kellogg's Xtra*), one challenger brand (*Quaker Muesli Croustillant*), as well as one private label (*U*). For each brand, we selected 2 product references with equivalent recipes:

a red fruit crunchy muesli and a walnut crunchy muesli. The 6 products had varied nutritional and environmental scores. The data collection follows a mixed within- and between-subjects design. In within-subject design, each respondent evaluated one set of 3 products selected for the study, under 3 levels of information revealing: No-Score (0-Level), One-Score Labeling (Eco-Score or Nutri-Score) (1-Level), Two-Scores Labeling (Eco-Score and Nutri-Score) (2-Level). Respondents' WTP for each of the 3 products they were confronted with is measured on a scale from 0 to 10. The question is: "Considering this average price, indicate the maximum price you would be willing to pay for each of these three packages when shopping at your supermarket or online. There are no right or wrong answers. Answer based solely on your preferences".

Summary of Findings

A 3-level repeated measures analysis of variance is carried out to understand the evolution of consumer WTP for the three products among the three levels of information diffusion. Multivariate tests showed that scores labeling has a direct significant effect on consumer's WTP: $F(2, 881)= 4.19$, $\rho = .015$). The labeling effect strongly varies among the favourability of the score: $F(2, 881)= 16.67$, $\rho = .001$) and the brand of the product: $F(4, 1\ 764)= 2.81$, $\rho= .025$). Branding effect on consumers' WTP change significantly varies among the favourability of the score ($F(4, 1764)= 6.01$, $\rho < .001$). The order of the scores labeling (Eco-Score then Nutri-Score vs. Nutri-Score then Eco-Score) doesn't have any significant effect on consumers' WTP change ($F(2, 881)= .54$, $\rho= .948$). Within-subject contrasts tests between 1-Level and 0-level showed that the one-score labeling doesn't significantly influence consumers' WTP ($F(1, 882)= .73$, $\rho=.394$), but its effect significantly varies among its favourability ($F(1, 882)= 28.77$, $\rho<.001$) and among the brand of the product ($F(1, 882)= 3.86$, $\rho=.021$). There is no significant interaction between the explicative variables. The Eco-Score labeling effect significantly varies among the brands ($F(2, 890)= 3.86$).

Key Contributions

Eco-score labeling could increase willingness-to-pay for eco-friendly food products and reduce the intention to purchase products of poor environmental quality, depending on the brand's position. A favourable Eco-Score improves WTP when consistent with a favourable Nutri-Score, but not when inconsistent. FOP Eco-Score labeling could impact consumers' WTP for food product under some specific conditions. We identify three main effects of Eco-Score labeling on consumers' food choices: score unfavorability effect, concordant multi-scores effect, and branding effect. One favourable Eco-score isn't enough to improve consumers' purchase intention, but one unfavourable Eco-Score provides a warning effect. When the brand has a high perceived position on market, as a leader national brand in its product category, consumers' WTP is more affected by an unfavourable score than when the brand has a lower perceived position, as a private label. Reciprocally, consumers' WTP for a product sold under private label is stronger improved by a favourable Eco-Score than for a national brand. For policymakers, engaging with retailers is necessary to promote the Eco-Score as a tool for encouraging the consumption of eco-friendly food products. Furthermore, to limit the warning effect, Eco-Score labelling could encourage national brands to improve the environmental quality of their products.

Emerging Markets and International Marketing

AN EVALUATION OF RECENT INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMER ADVERSITY RESEARCH: ASSESSING ITS INTELLECTUAL STRUCTURE TO SUGGEST FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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Keywords: hostility, protest, animosity, boycott, knowledge structure

Description: This study evaluates the intellectual structure of the most influential recent research published relating to international customer adversity (ICA) and introduces a multitude of topics for managers to consider in their development and implementation of marketing activities addressing the ICA phenomenon.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

A large volume of research in international marketing (IM) has examined the influences of product and brand origin on choice behavior. In contrast to this relatively focused and established literature, our emphasis is on a wide variety of adverse reactions by customers in the international marketplace irrespective of cause or origin. Potential sources of buyer hostility can be both from within a nation (e.g., bias rooted in regional rivalry or travel experience) or based on bias (positive or negative) toward other countries. Furthermore, customer hostility may be at the product or brand level, an associated individual (e.g., spokesperson or politician and/or their associated origin), a related issue, and/or based on negative sentiments toward a concept or idea about one or more foreign origins. In addition, positive (or negative) sentiments in choice behavior could arise from one's political leanings (e.g., belief in nationalism or populist movements) and can be intra-country, regional, and/or cross-national. For example, some studies

have introduced the notion of regional animosity and demonstrated their respondents exhibited a strong preference for products and services from their home region.

Method and Data

Syntax particular to international customer adversity (ICA) research was used to search the Web of Science database. Based on previous literature, the structure of terms used had three components as they were customer-specific, related to negative sentiment, and included topics emphasizing internationality. Once the search was completed, data from the 2020-2024 period were used to minimize possible historical artifacts bias. The multidimensional scaling results showing the most influential recent articles returned a good fit stress value. The Euclidean distance threshold used to establish research topics into groups was 0.25 or less between two articles. Also, research cliques were identified as they are research groups comprised of three or more influential publications and considered to have very strong multifaceted relationships.

Summary of Findings

To provide an understanding of recent developments, the nature of the most influential recent articles in ICA research were presented. One interlocking chain containing two cliques and three other isolated groups were identified. Emphasizing the importance of demographics as well as personal cultural values on ethnocentric-based consumer purchase behavior, this chain had distinct derivations to focus on consumer segmentation and international crises and their relation to domestic-foreign brand affinity.

Meanwhile, the three secluded research groups highlighted distinct new topics. For instance, one area related to consumer ethnocentrism, brand image and loyalty, anger, and

revenge consumption. Then, another approach dealt with consumer animosity, purchase readiness, product aversion, and diminished consumer boycott participation. Finally, the last group emphasized the interrelatedness of consumer boycotts, global corporations, and gender.

Key Contributions

The primary objective was to unfold the ICA knowledge structure through the identification of the most influential recent articles published. The precise configuration based on the area's co-citation patterns was indicated to display the relative position of each publication. Published works located close together were typically referenced together in the same articles much more frequently than those distant from each other. This shows the interrelationship and balance existing in the knowledge structure.

This study responds to concerns in the marketing discipline that there is insufficient theory-driven research to sustain the domain, thus encouraging calls for a considerable increase in the field's conceptual development. To accomplish this, we addressed the historical artifacts biases inherent in co-citation analyses. The objective was in the Kuhnian tradition to push the frontier of the ICA's knowledge structure by evaluating emergent trends. Therefore, we continue with this approach which clearly states that research topics from different and opposing sides of a research area are ideal to develop promising research areas. Since bibliometric studies essentially depict intellectual networks of ideas, this Kuhnian view follows the perspective that significant gaps in a network create weak ties or institutional voids from which new knowledge frontiers can emerge.

References

References are available upon request.

Culture, Consumption and Markets

ADAPTIVE PERSONAL BRANDING: SEEKING TO FIT IN WHILE ENTERING ORGANISATIONAL FIELDS

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Keywords: personal branding, professional identity, self-management, organizational field

Description: This paper investigates personal branding tactics for early-career professionals entering organizational fields.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In this paper, we propose the notion of 'adaptive personal branding' as a specific form of personal branding for professionals entering organisational fields. This proposal contrasts with the literature, which mostly considers personal branding from a dual strategy perspective, consisting of a combination of the search to *fit in* (Parmentier et al. 2013) and also to *stand out* in the field (Parmentier et al. 2013). As explained by Parmentier et al. (2013), the search for *standing out* is a cornerstone of branding orthodoxies (Keller 1993; Keller et al. 2002) and a notion that has conceptually influenced the personal branding literature. Yet, as we claim, in the context of individuals entering organisational fields, personal branding should be practiced based on the principle of *fitting in*, that is, on the adaptation of the personal brand to the norms, values and expected behaviours of the organisational field. To investigate this topic, we ask: How do professionals craft effective personal brands while entering organisational fields? How important is fitting in for the craft of personal brands while entering organisational fields?

Methods and Data

To explore our research questions, we conducted a qualitative research among ECPs and personal branding consultants. We conducted semi-structured interviews (Kvale 2007) with ECPs and personal branding consultants and, inspired by a netnographic sensibility (Reid and Duffy 2018), collected archival data from personal branding consultants on LinkedIn, YouTube and TikTok to investigate the practices of personal branding for ECPs. The data analysis process involved descriptive and elaborative coding (Saldaña 2009). During the first phase of

the data analysis, we understood that personal branding for ECPs was different from what the literature suggested. In this way, in the second phase of data analysis, we adopted elaborative coding. Specifically, we borrowed process elements from the personal branding literature. In the third round of data collection, from March to June of 2025, archival data from the social media account of 14 personal branding consultants was collected, inspired by netnographic sensibility (Reid and Duffy, 2018). The objective was to further understand how personal branding consultants communicate online about personal branding. This type of data is relevant because it enlarges our understanding of the prescriptive ideas about personal branding that circulates online.

Summary of Findings

We propose the notion of adaptive personal branding and illustrate it through the case of ECPs. We define adaptive personal branding as the strategic positioning of the self to create positive impressions within organisational fields based on the adaptation of a professional identity to align with the values, norms and expected behaviours of the organisational field. In the case of ECPs, adaptive personal branding involves four groups of managerial practices: a) *adapting professional identities*; b) *levelling field-related cultural and social capital*; c) *adjusting online self-presentation*; and d) *taming the desire for authenticity*.

Key Contributions

Adaptive personal branding contrasts with the extant research on personal branding in that it emphasises *fitting in* as the key strategy for personal branding in the specific context of professionals entering organisational fields. Thus, this study extends marketing research which has described personal branding from the perspective of the dual-strategy of balancing *stan-*

ding out and *fitting in* (Parmentier et al. 2013; Parmentier and Fischer 2021). Substantively, this study contrasts with the extant research on personal branding which often investigates professionals already established in organisational fields. As we suggest, the notion of adaptive personal branding is better suited to explain how professionals entering organisational fields should craft a personal brand which allows them to become culturally and socially embedded.

ALGORITHMIC INTERPELLATION, SUBJECT FORMATION, AND SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR DIGITAL CONSUMER IMAGINARIES AND ALGORITHMIC RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

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Keywords: Algorithms, Interpellation, Hailing, Self, Consumer Resistance

Description: This paper advances a theorization of algorithmic interpellation as a mechanism in the shaping of digital consumer subjectivities, imaginaries, and resistance strategies within platform capitalism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As algorithmic systems become central to market mediation, they increasingly participate in shaping how consumers understand themselves, their bodies, and their possibilities for action. While marketing scholarship has explored algorithmic personalization, targeting, and automation, less attention has been paid to how algorithms contribute to subject formation, i.e., how they position individuals within normative identity categories and influence how consumers

come to recognize (or fail to recognize) themselves. Drawing on Althusser's concept of interpellation, we ask: How do algorithmic systems hail consumers into particular subject positions, and how do consumers respond when these algorithmic representations conflict with their sense of self?

We explore this question by examining the implications for digital consumer imaginaries, i.e., the shared horizons of what consumers believe they can be within platform-mediated environments. When algorithmic outputs reflect narrow, often westernized norms, consumers outside those norms may experience misrecognition. These moments raise a second research question: What forms of resistance emerge when algorithmic interpellation fails or becomes visible to consumers? By addressing these questions, we seek to advance a theoretical understanding of how algorithms are involved in the ongoing construction and contestation of consumer identities.

Method And Data

This paper is primarily theory-building, supported by qualitative empirical illustrations drawn from prior peer-reviewed studies of augmented reality (AR) beauty applications, particularly research examining consumer interactions with L'Oréal's virtual makeup tools. These studies involve in-depth qualitative data collected from consumers in India and the United Kingdom, offering cross-cultural insight into how algorithmic beauty technologies are experienced across different racialized and aesthetic contexts.

We conduct a theoretical analysis of this empirical material through the lens of algorithmic interpellation. Rather than treating the data as evidence of technology adoption or

user satisfaction, we reinterpret consumers' narratives as accounts of subject formation, misrecognition, and identity negotiation. We pay particular attention to moments when participants describe discomfort, alienation, or disbelief in response to algorithmic outputs, such as skin lightening or facial reshaping. These affectively charged moments are analyzed as instances where algorithmic hailing becomes visible and contested. This approach allows us to develop conceptual insights grounded in lived consumer experiences while advancing a broader theoretical framework applicable across platform-mediated markets.

Summary of Findings

Our analysis suggests that algorithmic systems operate as subject-forming infrastructures that actively position consumers within normative identity categories. In the context of AR makeup applications, personalization technologies frequently reflect westernized beauty standards, leading some consumers to experience algorithmic misrecognition. Rather than seeing themselves accurately reflected, these consumers encounter algorithmically produced versions of themselves that feel foreign, distorted, or inauthentic. These moments generate frustration and alienation but also foster critical awareness of algorithmic bias and power.

We identify three interrelated algorithmic resistance strategies that emerge from such experiences. First, misrecognition and withdrawal, where consumers refuse to accept algorithmic representations and disengage from recommendations. Second, private reappropriation, where individuals play with algorithmic tools for fantasy or experimentation while resisting internalization of normative outputs. Third, collective counter-visibility, where consumers share experiences of bias and misclassification that lead to questioning algorithmic systems, making these systems publicly visible and contestable.

Together, these strategies demonstrate that resistance is not limited to exit or rejection. Instead, it unfolds through ongoing negotiations of identity, recognition, and visibility within algorithmic environments. Algorithms shape consumer subjectivities, but their authority is unstable and continually challenged in practice.

Key Contributions

First, we introduce algorithmic interpellation as a novel theoretical construct that explains how algorithms function as subject-forming mechanisms rather than merely tools for prediction or personalization. This extends existing work on algorithmic mediation by further exploring the role of algorithms in forming subjects and shaping consumers' sense of self.

Second, the paper advances research on digital consumer imaginaries by showing how algorithmic systems shape not only what consumers see but what they believe is possible for themselves within digital marketplaces. Algorithms help define which identities are intelligible, valued, or marginalized.

Third, we extend the literature on algorithmic resistance by reconceptualizing resistance as identity-based negotiation rather than plain opposition. The framework of misrecognition, private reappropriation, and collective counter-visibility highlights the subtle, everyday ways consumers push back against algorithmic power from within platform infrastructures.

Finally, the paper offers managerial and societal implications by showing how narrow training data and normative design assumptions can alienate consumers and undermine trust. Recognizing algorithmic interpellation encourages more inclusive, reflexive approaches to AI design and supports broader conversations about fairness and representation in platform markets.

BRIDGING INTUITION AND ANALYTICS IN CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS DECISION-MAKING: A DUAL-PROCESS PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: Dual Process Theory; VUCA Decision-Making; Cross-Cultural Marketing; Intuitio Analysis Ambidexterity; Gender in Managerial Cognition

Description: This paper examines how cultural background and gender shape the integration of intuitive and analytical decision-making in marketing under VUCA conditions, using a mixed-methods comparison of Austrian and Indian professionals to extend Dual Process and CEST frameworks to managerial contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study asks how intuitive (System 1) and analytical (System 2) approaches (Evans and Stanovich 2013; Kahneman 2011) are used in marketing and business decisions under VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) conditions (Mack et al. 2016; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013), and how task type, culture, and gender shape that balance. Specifically, four linked questions are

guiding the research: (1) How are rational and intuitive approaches used in business decisions? (2) Which decisions are mainly data-driven versus emotion-based? (3) What role does intuition play under time pressure or uncertainty? (4) How do cultural and gender differences affect the cognition–intuition balance? Framed by Dual Process Theory (Kahneman 2011) and Cognitive-Experiential Self Theory (Epstein 2003) and informed by cultural-dimensions literature (Hall 1973; Hofstede 2024), the research compares Austrian and Indian practitioners to reveal how national cognitive norms and gendered patterns influence when and why managers privilege analytic frameworks or heuristic, narrative strategies in marketing tasks.

Method and Data

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design combined a quantitative online survey (Jan–Mar 2025) with qualitative essay analysis. The survey sampled 194 respondents (Austria n=105; India n=89) using 12 intuitive-experiential items and 19 analytical-rational items drawn from CEST instruments (Epstein et al. 1996). Reliability and sampling adequacy were confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .745–.893$; KMO = .740–.893; Bartlett $p < .001$). Factor scores were generated by regression and median-dichotomized to produce a 2×2 matrix (low/high cognition × low/high intuition), yielding four cognitive profiles. Phase Two analyzed 159 reflective essays (76 Austrian; 83 Indian; 35 excluded for insufficient length) using inductive thematic content analysis, following Boyatzis (1998), Kuckartz (2016), and Mayring (2015); verbatim quotations were preserved for comparative cultural and gender analyses.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal four distinct cognitive decision-making profiles: Low Cognition/Low Intuition, High Cognition/Low Intuition, Low Cognition/High Intuition, and High Cognition/High Intuition (ambidextrous). Austrian respondents were more frequently clustered in the High Cognition/Low Intuition profile, describing decisions guided by KPIs, dashboards, and formal frameworks; intuition was often framed as a "sense check" applied only after analytical validation. For example, Austrian marketers emphasized relying on performance metrics for pricing or campaign evaluation before acting.

Indian respondents more often exhibited Low Cognition/High Intuition or ambidextrous profiles, highlighting narrative reasoning, experiential judgment, and contextual awareness. Participants described using intuition to interpret incomplete data, such as rapidly adjusting campaigns based on market sentiment or client cues. Across both cultures, time pressure and uncertainty triggered greater reliance on intuition, particularly in crisis management, creative positioning, and real-time decision contexts.

Gender differences emerged clearly: women were overrepresented in the ambidextrous profile and reported greater comfort switching between data-driven analysis and intuitive insight. Overall, task type, culture, and situational urgency jointly shaped cognition–intuition balance.

Key Contributions

This paper operationalizes Dual Process and CEST frameworks within managerial marketing contexts, extending their application beyond consumer choice to individual decision profiles in professional practice. It produces an empirical typology (four profiles) that links culture (Austria vs. India) and gender to distinct cognition–intuition blends, thereby enriching organizational ambidexterity literature at the individual level. Practically, it offers guidance for culturally adaptive

training and decision-support design (metric-oriented dashboards vs. narrative/storyboard tools) and highlights gendered strengths in cognitive flexibility. The study also charts avenues for future research, such as longitudinal tracking of profile evolution, broader cultural tests, and neuroscientific measurement of real-time cognitive activation.

References are available upon request.

CEOS AS MORAL LIGHTHOUSES ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Keywords: self-presentation, personal branding, morality, identity work, moral boundaries

Description: This study investigates how CEOs deploy moral identities on Instagram to create personal brands and potentially affect online audiences by becoming a moral lighthouse within business fields.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The phenomenon of public individuals strategically crafting online identities has been extensively explored across the fields of marketing, communication, organization and management. This literature comprises concepts such as personal branding (Parmentier and Fischer 2021; Gorbatov, Khapova and Lysova 2018), which reveals an entanglement between digital self-presentation, economic, social and cultural capital, and social influence. Morality can add a normative layer to the process and the effects of crafting online identities by public individuals. Morality introduces a normative alignment between public individuals and group values. Morality can operate as a strategic resource, enabling public individuals to present themselves as credible and trustworthy and embodying ideals within groups. Exerting moral authority (Hoppner and Vadakkepatt 2019) has become a strategy for constructing public figures. Consequently, examining morality in the craft of online identities extends the literatures on online identities in general and personal branding and professional identities in specific, by integrating the normative and cultural underpinnings that shape perceptions of authority, legitimacy, and trust. This paper explores the craft of moral identities as a resource for building reputation and influence by proposing the less overtly-political notion of **the moral lighthouse**. For that, it asks: *What are the conditions that allow CEOs to become moral lighthouses on social media? How does the personal and professional life of CEOs limit or strengthen the potential to become a moral lighthouse?*

Methods and Data

In this study, we adopted critical visual analysis (Schroeder 2005; Bell 2012; Viotto, Zanette and Brito 2021) for studying 12 CEOs. We analyzed multiple cases to depart from the idiosyncrasies of single case studies. In November 2023 we collected the last 100 posts of 12 CEOs (7 men and 5 women). From that, we chose 24 posts which conveyed moral messages. Each piece could be a feed post, a story or a reel. We followed the steps of critical visual analysis to analyze Instagram data (Viotto, Zanette and Brito 2021). The first step is the description and coding of the main elements of the posts. Two authors engaged with the process separately. Still, the first-order codes turned out to be convergent and complementary. The second step is the condensation of the previous codes into themes - i.e., the tactics to convey moral messages. The third step is the process of generating theoretical insights about the craft of moral identities and its relation to establishing moral boundaries through perceived integrity, trustworthiness, commitment to work ethic and considerate for others.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal three main discursive strategies for crafting moral identities on Instagram: collectiveness, representativeness, and expressiveness. Collectively, these discursive strategies nurture an online identity which we label **the moral lighthouse**. The moral lighthouse is an identity project showcasing a highly successful professional who is also socially connected to relevant groups within institutional fields, who signals and represents the moral values and ideas of worth in these fields, and who signal, through expressiveness, charisma and leadership. We explain how the moral lighthouse establishes moral boundaries through perceived integrity, trustworthiness, commitment to work ethic and consideration for others.

Key Contributions

The notion of CEOs as moral lighthouses expands the marketing and the organization and management literatures by investigating how businessperson craft professional identities and potentially affect society. Through the notion of the moral lighthouse, we add morality as a normative layer to the processes and the effects of crafting online identities for public individuals. The moral lighthouse set moral boundaries while normatively aligning the public person and the group values and ideas. The moral lighthouse constitutes a strategic resource, enabling businessperson to create personal brands that are moral (thus, credible and trustworthy), without engaging in social activism (Hoppner and Vadakkepatt 2019), building visibility and reputation and affecting the public arena through the spread of values and ideas.

CONSUMERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH AI SOCIAL COMPANIONS: A STUDY ON NOVICE REPLIKA USERS

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Keywords: AI social companions, human-AI relationships, consumer mitigation strategies, Replika, relationship formation.

Description: This research examines how novice users navigate tensions in early-stage relationships with AI social companions through four distinct mitigation strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Over 300,000 consumers actively engage with AI social companions, with 25% of young adults believing AI partners can replace human relationships. While scholars agree that consumers can develop social relationships with AI companions, these relationships face significant tensions arising from concerns about intimacy, disclosure, and out-of-context responses. Current research has not examined how consumers actively navigate these tensions during relationship formation. This research addresses the question: How do consumers mitigate tensions that emerge in early-stage relationships with AI social companions? We leverage social cues literature to examine how AI companions' attempts to appear humanlike through social cues, combined with their failures to do so convincingly due to technological limitations, create tensions that consumers must actively navigate. Through a study of novice Replika users, we investigate the specific strategies consumers employ to manage these tensions during the critical first week of relationship development.

Method and Data

We employed a multi-qualitative approach with 20 novice Replika users (14 women, 6 men, aged 18-44) recruited in the UK between February and June 2024 using purposive sampling. Our primary selection criterion was novice user status, participants with no prior Replika experience, verified through screening calls to ensure authentic first-encounter dynamics. None had heard of Replika before, though they possessed varying AI technology familiarity. Day 1 diary analysis revealed motivations ranging from curiosity about AI friendship to testing capabilities to research contribution. Data saturation was achieved at 20 participants. Participants completed 7-day diaries logging 15+ minutes of daily Replika interaction to capture real-time experiences and

minimise memory errors. Follow-up semi-structured interviews (30-60 minutes) provided retrospective insights. We analysed data using abductive thematic analysis, identifying higher-order themes examining how consumers navigate early-stage AI companion relationships.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal that tensions emerged specifically from the gap between Replika's attempts to appear humanlike and its ability to execute them convincingly. Social cues employed—role-play prompts, imagination exercises, memory features, repeatedly fell short due to technological limitations, creating dissonance between intended human likeness and perceived artificiality. Initially, consumers positively perceived Replika as warm and personable, treating it with courtesy. However, as interactions developed, they grew aware of disconnects between attempts and limitations. To navigate these tensions, consumers developed four distinct mitigation strategies: accommodating (going along with unwanted prompts to maintain conversational flow), redirecting (politely steering away from disruptive topics), blocking (actively setting boundaries around privacy invasion), and ignoring (dismissing AI failures as inevitable). Accommodating and redirecting represent opposite responses, passive compliance versus active steering, revealing the range of consumer agency in managing AI interactions.

Key Contributions

First, we advance understanding of consumer-AI relationships by identifying four mitigation strategies that reframe consumers as active agents engaging in complex negotiation processes rather than passive recipients of social cues. Second, we demonstrate that AI companions require new theoretical frameworks beyond traditional consumer-brand relationships. Our findings reveal tensions arise not from deploying humanlike social cues per se, but from failures to achieve intended effects convincingly. This distinction clarifies that social cues designed for

service contexts may backfire in relationship contexts where expectations for authentic interaction are higher. Third, we contribute methodologically by triangulating user-generated data (diaries, interviews) with AI-generated narratives (Replika's diary), offering new approaches for studying human-AI interactions. These strategies provide new theoretical vocabulary for understanding how consumers shape relationships with AI entities at relationship initiation, moving beyond simple acceptance or rejection.

DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN FUTURE MARKETING PROFESSIONALS: INITIAL FINDINGS

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Keywords: Cultural-intelligence, course-embedded educational intervention

Description: A study of the development of cultural intelligence (CQ) through the use of a course embedded educational intervention in a marketing program.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: For this study, an educational intervention was developed that can be easily embedded within an existing course. The interventions were implemented and we tested to determine if the intervention was able to increase the cultural awareness of students in the course. A secondary focus of the study was to determine if student perceptions of the intervention (such as usefulness or meaningfulness) have an impact on the development of cultural awareness.

Method and Data: The study was conducted in a Consumer Behavior course in a comprehensive, mid-sized university in the western United States. A Qualtrics survey with closed-ended questions was used. The survey was initially administered in the first week of the semester to assess cultural intelligence prior to the introduction of the planned intervention (pre-test scores), and the same survey was repeated during the final week of the semester to evaluate

cultural intelligence after the intervention (post-test scores). Student responses were paired to assess the changes (if any) in levels of cultural intelligence in a pre and post test application. There were 42 usable paired samples (for a 71.2% completion rate), and paired sample two-tailed t-tests were used to determine the scope and significance of the changes in cultural awareness. Cultural awareness was measured using an established 20-item Four Factor Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) that has previously been used in the literature. A seven-point Likert scale was used and the measure produced strong Cronbach Alpha scores in both the pre and post test.

Summary of Findings: Across all four dimensions of CQ, as expected the mean post-test scores were higher than the pretest scores. For three of the dimensions (metacognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ and Behavioral CQ) the differences were statistically significant (all p-values < .01). The fourth dimension (Motivational CQ) was only marginally statistically significant with a p-value of .065. All evidence indicates that the educational intervention has a strong positive impact on student levels of cultural intelligence. In addition, we explored if student perceptions of the intervention had an influence on the observed effects. For example, we considered whether the meaningfulness or likability of the intervention led to stronger improvements in cultural intelligence. The findings from this exploratory investigation were mixed, indicating that student perceptions of the intervention are important, but the pattern of results was not overwhelmingly convincing.

Key Contributions: This study demonstrates how a course-embedded intervention can enhance cultural intelligence (CQ). While much of the existing literature emphasizes large-scale initiatives (study abroad or corporate training), this research shows that strategically designed curricular adjustments can yield meaningful improvements in CQ. This work advances understanding of pedagogical approaches to developing CQ. It underscores the importance of

integrating global awareness into introductory business courses. The findings extend prior research by showing interventions of limited cost and scope can positively impact metacognitive, cognitive, and behavioral CQ. This opens new avenues for research on scalable instructional strategies, curricular design, and longitudinal impacts of CQ development within business schools. For practitioners, the study offers actionable insights into workforce preparation. Employers increasingly value cultural intelligence as a critical competency for navigating diverse and global business environments. The results suggest that graduates can enter the workforce with heightened CQ. For organizations, this implies that higher education can serve as a reliable partner in cultivating intercultural competence, reducing reliance on costly post-hire training. Overall, this research highlights the potential of accessible, embedded educational practices to foster globally minded professionals who are better equipped to succeed in multicultural business contexts.

A complete list of references is available upon request.

HUMANIZED TECHNOLOGY VS. (NON)TECHNOLOGIZED HUMANNESS: EXPLORING THE CONSUMER-AI RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Consumer–Brand Relationships; Self-Concept; Symbolic Consumption, Consumer Resistance

Description: This research examines how inner, identity, and social self-processes shape consumers' relationships with humanized AI.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The increasing humanization of conversational AI has intensified polarized consumer responses, with enthusiasm and attachment coexisting alongside resistance and opposition. Such dynamics are typical of disruptive innovations, which often generate simultaneous attraction and rejection (Juma, 2016; Schumpeter, 1961). In markets where satisfaction alone rarely ensures loyalty (Palusuk et al., 2019), these reactions matter because consumer–brand relationships are rooted in symbolic meaning and self-extension (Belk, 1988, 2016; Schmitt, 2012, 2019). Recent research

shows that anthropomorphized AI can become incorporated into users' self-concepts, fostering relational forms that resemble partner-like (Alabed et al., 2022, 2024). However, dominant frameworks—most notably the Attachment–Aversion model (Park et al., 2010, 2013)—conceptualize consumer–brand relationships along a largely dichotomous evaluative continuum and insufficiently account for how different representations of the self-shape relational orientations. Consequently, negative responses to AI are fragmented (Dietvorst et al., 2015; Castelo et al., 2019; Schmitt, 2019; Mou et al., 2025), leaving forms of total aversion, including opposition toward AI users without prior interaction, under-theorized. This study asks how consumers negotiate a spectrum of relationships toward humanized, branded AI and its users, from attachment to aversion.

Method and Data

In line with our theoretical premises, we collected data through twenty-one in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants from diverse levels of AI adoption, including occasional, frequent, and heavy users as well as non-users, recruited via a social media announcement (Monteverde et al., 2025). Conducted between March and May 2025, each interview explored perceptions of this kind of humanized technology, experiences with AI tools, and views on the integration or rejection of AI into social and identity-related selves. The conversational format encouraged participants to elaborate freely on their positive and negative experiences, articulating symbolic, metaphorical, emotional, and social meanings attached to AI and its users. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed to preserve the participants' words and rhetorical language, and thematically coded through an inductive grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), with

constant comparison to refine categories and identify recurring patterns along the full consumer-AI (brand) relationship spectrum.

Summary of Findings

We identify four consumer–AI relationship types spanning the full attachment–aversion spectrum: Attached Users, Structured Pragmatists, Peripheral Experimenters, and Aversed Opponents.

These positions are shaped by distinct configurations of the three-layer self (inner, identity, and social), showing how meaning-making, identity work, and social positioning jointly structure consumer–AI relationships. *Attached Users* integrate AI into daily life and self-concept, humanizing it and forming emotionally laden, sometimes stigmatized bonds. *Structured Pragmatists* adopt AI instrumentally, emphasizing efficiency, control, and skill mastery, with AI use normalized within professional networks. *Peripheral Experimenters* maintain emotional distance, using AI selectively while expressing concern over over-reliance and social pressure. *Aversed Opponents* reject AI, and its users, driven by negative affect, identity protection, and symbolic defenses of humanness, occasionally expressing user-directed hostility.

Beyond these ideal types, we uncover meaningful middle-ground relationships, including ambivalence and ideological resistance without prior AI use. Overall, we show that consumer responses to AI are socially and symbolically situated rather than purely functional, and that the three-layer self provides a parsimonious lens for disentangling the diverse drivers of consumer–AI relationships.

Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions. First, it advances consumer–AI relationship theory by moving beyond attachment-centric or bipolar models and theorizing the middle ground between attachment and aversion, including ambivalence and ideological resistance, while conceptualizing humanized AI as an active agent in consumer identity construction. Second, it integrates the three-layer self (inner, identity, and social), showing how intra- and intergroup dynamics jointly shape the meanings attributed to AI as a branded entity and the social positioning of its users. Third, it contributes methodologically by adopting a grounded, phenomenological approach that captures the social, symbolic, and identity-based mechanisms underlying consumer–AI relationships.

From a managerial perspective, the findings show that consumer responses to AI are symbolic and socially embedded, not merely functional. Brands designing personality-driven AI can benefit from recognizing the full spectrum of consumer orientations and the role of the three-layer self in identity work. Addressing stigma, reducing polarization between users and non-users, and balancing efficiency with symbolic value can foster trust, normalize adoption, and mitigate resistance in increasingly polarized technological markets.

References are available upon request.

IN THE THICK OF THE WAIT: LISTENING AS INQUIRY IN CONSUMER RESEARCH

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Keywords: Listening; consumer waiting; practice-led research; sonic methods; temporality

Descripton: This paper develops a practice-led, sonic approach to consumer waiting, using composed sound works and listening as inquiry to show how delay is structured, sensed, and inhabited as an affective temporal condition rather than treated as a service problem to be optimised.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How can listening, pursued through practice-led sound making, generate knowledge about consumer waiting as it is lived in time? More specifically, how do sonic qualities such as repetition, pacing, silence, interference, and delayed feedback help disclose the felt structure of waiting inside consumer systems and environments? The paper also asks a methodological question: what does

consumer research gain when it treats composition and sonic installation as inquiry devices that can hold the experience of delay in a form others can encounter, rather than treating waiting mainly as a variable to be measured or managed?

Method and Data

The study uses practice-led research in which sound composition and listening operate as the central inquiry process. Three creative works serve as the core empirical material: (1) a vinyl album that stages procedural delay through loops and repetitive service phrases, (2) a cassette EP that explores suspended duration through sparse, slow, degraded textures, and (3) an interactive sound installation built from consumer objects that produces uneven, delayed sonic feedback in response to participant engagement. Data consist of the artefacts themselves plus process documentation generated during iterative cycles of making: compositional sketches, versioned drafts, technical notes, and reflective memos linking sonic decisions (tempo, repetition, silence, withholding resolution, latency) to the experience of waiting the work aims to render. Analysis proceeds by tracing how each work formally organises time and how that organisation makes particular dimensions of waiting perceptible.

Summary of Findings

Across the three works, waiting emerges as a patterned temporal condition with distinct sonic signatures. First, repetition and looping render procedural time as sticky and circular, where messages promise progress while the structure withholds it. Second, slowed pace, sparse

arrangement, and audible degradation produce a sense of stretched duration and affective drift, with attention held in low-level suspension rather than driven toward resolution. Third, interactive latency and uneven responsiveness make delay tangible as friction: action does not reliably yield feedback, which encourages hesitation, renewed attempts, and shared micro-coordination among participants. Format matters. The vinyl album amplifies system-like cycles, the cassette medium sustains linear, unskippable duration, and the installation externalises waiting as a social choreography organised around pauses and unpredictable returns. Overall, the findings support the claim that listening and sonic form can expose how waiting is structured through rhythm, silence, and feedback conditions, beyond what retrospective accounts typically capture.

Key Contributions

Methodological contribution: the paper formalises listening as inquiry within consumer research by showing how practice-led composition can function as a disciplined research procedure, producing analysable artefacts and an auditable chain from sonic decision to conceptual claim. Conceptual contribution: it reframes consumer waiting as an affective-temporal condition that can be investigated through its textures of repetition, suspension, and latency, enriching work that has centred efficiency, perception management, and service outcomes. Substantive contribution for the sonic turn: it demonstrates how sound can operate as research material and research output, not merely as a contextual variable in environments. Practical contribution: it sensitises service and experience designers to pacing, repetition, and silence as structuring forces in waiting, supporting more careful thinking about how atmospheres of delay are composed in everyday consumer settings.

INFOPRODUCTS AS NARRATIVES OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION AMID THE MORAL RISK OF FAILURE

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Keywords: risk ignorance, morality, social media influencers, infoproducts, personas

Description: This paper investigates how social media influencers delude followers into taking risks and acquiring infoproducts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketing and consumer research often portray influencer marketing in positive ways, for instance, highlighting how consumers foster parasocial relationships with social media influencers (Vrontis et al. 2021). Recently, marketing and consumer researchers have started to dedicate attention to the dark sides of social media influencers (Leban 2022; Barari 2023; Ekinci, Dam and Buckle 2025; Hudders and Lou 2023). This work takes a similar venue and investigates scamming cultures within social media influencers which affect consumers ability to access and evaluate risk in the market.

The extant literature on consumer collectives and risk reveals how consumers ignore risks when evolving market dynamics (e.g., market deregulation and corporate efforts to shift consumers' perception from risk to other attributes) encourage consumer inattention to risk (Humphreys and Thompson 2014; Pellandini-Simányi and Barnhart 2024) and how consumers' assessment of risks is affected by culturally constructed frames (Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Thompson 2005; Wong and King 2008; Barnhart, Huff, McAlexander and McAlexander 2018; Thompson and Isisag 2021). In this working paper we investigate a specific type of potential scam: the rising phenomena of infoproducts. For that, we ask: *how do digital influencers convince followers into taking unmeasured risks and acquiring infoproducts?*

Methods and Data

Methodologically, this paper combines a digital methods approach (Rogers 2013; Bainotti, Caliandro and Gandini 2021) with netnographic sensibility (Reid and Duffy 2018) to investigate the field of social media influencers who sell infoproducts in Brazil, which is the third largest country in the world in number of users and average time of use of Instagram (Statista 2025), thus offering fertile ground for creators of infoproducts. Or goal is to investigate how infoproducts are promoted

by social media influencers and how social media influencers attempt to attract potential buyers. Specifically, we are interested in potential scamming qualities within the promotion of infoproducts by social media influencers and how they affect consumers ability to access and evaluate risk. First, we identified 17 digital influencers who participated in Hotmart Galaxy—an event hosted by Hotmart, the self-proclaimed largest global digital products platform. Second, we explored suggestions of related profiles on Instagram, thus creating a larger sample of 65 influencers. The data collection consisted of ten posts and all the stories they posted during one week in early 2025. For the data analysis, we adopted a critical visual analysis of the content (Viotto, Zanette and Brito 2021).

Summary of Findings

Early findings identify five recurring narratives through which social media influencers build attractive personas and frame infoproducts value through the moral risk of personal failure oneself, therefore seducing followers to purchase infoproducts: self-disclosure in aestheticised environments; showcasing productivity and discipline; self-presenting as an accessible role model; moral guides with traditional values; cultivating a strong body and healthy habits. Overall, social media influencers invite followers to embark in a self-transformation process in which the individual is the protagonist. This promise (or mirage) is the hook for the adoption of infoproducts. The transformation is framed as feasible, urgent, and rewarding. Furthermore, through these discourses social media influencers build what we label a moral risk of failure, that is, not becoming the ideal professional that one can be. Through this logic, the purchase of infoproducts in an investment in personal transformation, despite the financial, emotional and social costs.

Key Contributions

Our results suggest that social media influencers attempt to persuade followers in ignoring risks by structuring narratives based on cultural codes that articulate morality, sacrifice, overcoming obstacles, and success. The influence is driven by symbolic value that turns infoproducts into a symbol of the ideology of personal transformation. Such symbolic value affects the interest and the capacity of individuals to consider the risks involved in the acquisition of infoproducts. As argued by Humphreys and Thompson (2014), in contexts marked by complexity and uncertainty putting trust in a specialised system is an imperative. In this context, sellers of infoproducts signal the possibility of personal transformation into a morally conservative role model and the illusion of a return to order, therefore reducing anxieties among systemic risks. Additionally, similarly to the structures of feelings described by Thompson (2005), social media influencers seem to distorts risk perception by making more salient intensively-lived experiences of past failures. By highlighting past failures, emotional traumas and financial frustrations, social media influencers emphasise the perceived risk of individuals remaining in an unsuccessful situation. Investing in infoproducts is not perceived as an exposure to risk, but as an escape from the tangible risk of continuing to fail.

MISATTRIBUTED ACTIVISM: WHEN ACTIVISM IS PERCEIVED, NOT PERFORMED

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Keywords: Brand Activism; Misattributed Activism; Consumer Culture Theory; Consumer Meaning-Making.

Description: This paper introduces misattributed activism, a consumer-driven pathway through which political intent is ascribed to a brand's neutral or commercially motivated actions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper introduces the concept of 'misattributed activism' in which consumers ascribe political or activist intent to seemingly neutral or commercially motivated brand actions. While existing research largely conceptualizes brand activism as a willful strategic choice, this study asks how brands are positioned as political actors without intent. Specifically, it explores how consumers reinterpret commercially, operationally, or legally motivated brand actions as political or activist stances. It further explores the processes through which such reinterpretations gain traction in a hyperconnected, polarized socio-cultural environment and compel brands to respond to meanings that diverge from their original intent.

Method and Data

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study approach to develop a theory on misattributed activism. The cases of Zara, Zomato, and Starbucks were purposefully selected to

ensure variation across industries, geographical scope, and domain of action, namely artistic, operational or legal. Data were collected from publicly available sources, including corporate communications, reputed media coverage, and public discourse on social media. Each case was developed into a detailed narrative, followed by cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns. This approach enabled the development of a process model of misattributed activism.

Summary of Findings

The actions undertaken by the brands in all three cases were framed as strategic or operational. However, consumers, through meaning-making, reinterpreted these actions as laden with activist intent. As a result, brands lost control of the narrative, faced backlash and reputational damage, and were forced to respond to the reinterpreted meanings rather than their original intent. The analysis identifies two forms of misattribution: symbolic misattribution, where visual or material symbols are politicized, and neutrality misattribution, where attempts to remain apolitical are interpreted as partisan stances.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the brand activism literature by identifying an unintentional, consumer-driven pathway to perceived brand activism, challenging the assumption that activism is always a deliberate brand strategy. It further extends consumer culture theory by demonstrating a negative consequence of consumer co-creation, where meaning-making embroils brands in crisis. Managerially, the study identifies misattributed activism as a distinct form of brand risk, wherein brands lose narrative control and must respond to consumer reinterpretation rather than original brand intent.

MORAL ARCHETYPES OF MOTHER NATURE: HOW ANTHROPOMORPHISM SHAPES HUMAN–NATURE RELATIONSHIPS

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Keywords: nature connectedness; nature relatedness; anthropomorphism; Mother Nature; interpretive.

Description: This study reveals how consumers construct four distinct moral archetypes of Mother Nature, each associated with different human-nature relationships, and offers a framework for designing more effective sustainability communications.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – Anthropomorphized portrayals of nature, particularly Mother Nature, represent one of the most widely deployed symbolic devices in sustainability communication, appearing in campaigns from the United Nations' "Mother Earth Day" to Apple's climate initiatives. Despite their ubiquity, these portrayals produce strikingly inconsistent responses. While some studies demonstrate strengthened emotional connection and environmental concern, others report null effects or unintended outcomes including detachment and victim-blaming. This inconsistency reveals a critical gap: existing research has not examined why consumers respond so differently to the same maternal metaphor, nor how these portrayals can backfire despite being explicitly designed to inspire ecological responsibility.

The problem is particularly pressing because maternal metaphors are not mere stylistic devices but morally loaded symbols. To resolve this puzzle, it is necessary to unpack the specific moral interpretations consumers form from anthropomorphized portrayals, especially culturally potent ones like Mother Nature, and how these interpretations structure the relationships people adopt with the environment. Addressing this gap, we investigate three research questions: How do individuals morally interpret anthropomorphized representations of nature, such as Mother Nature? What relational models emerge from these moral representations? How do individuals cope with contradictory moral interpretations of Mother Nature?

Method and Data – We adopted an interpretive qualitative design combining two complementary data sources to capture both elicited and naturally occurring moral interpretations of Mother Nature: twenty-one in-depth interviews and posts and discussion threads from Reddit referencing Mother Nature. We applied reflexive thematic analysis to both datasets, then synthesized themes using the semiotic square, a framework that organizes symbolic meanings along two perpendicular axes of opposition, enabling systematic mapping of each moral archetype relative to its opposite, negation, and the broader tension system structuring human–nature moral relationships.

Summary of Findings – Our analysis revealed that consumers construct four distinct yet coexisting moral archetypes of Mother Nature, each combining specific moral motives, mind perception profiles, and moral–relational models that influence expectations about legitimate human–nature interactions. The Good Mother embodies unconditional care and infinite giving without expectation of reciprocity, evoking high agency and being characterized by a non-reciprocal relational model where individuals feel cared for yet perceive no obligation to protect or reciprocate. The Themis Mother represents impartial justice and principled authority operating beyond human comprehension, corresponding to an anxious, vigilant

relational model marked by uncertainty about nature's boundaries. The Submissive Mother portrays nature as sad and passively enduring harm, co-occurring with an abusive relational model where exploitation continues because the caregiver is perceived as unable to enforce boundaries or resist mistreatment. The Nemesis Mother frames nature as vengeful and actively punitive, giving rise to an avoidant relational model characterized by fear, moral disengagement, and reluctance to form genuine connections. These archetypes organize along two fundamental dimensions: nurturing versus punitive moral motives, and agency-focused versus experience-focused capacities. Beyond identifying these archetypes, we documented four coping strategies individuals employ to manage moral contradictions: Assimilative Subordination, Reconfiguration, Rejection of Anthropomorphism, and Representational Avoidance.

Key contributions – This research advances theory and practice in sustainability communication. Theoretically, we reframe anthropomorphism from a simple cognitive or emotional shortcut into a moral meaning-making process associated with distinct relational models between humans and nature, enriching understanding of anthropomorphism's role in symbolic moralization. We extend Rai and Fiske's moral–relational models from human–human to human–nonhuman interactions, demonstrating that moral attributions to nonhuman entities correspond to specific relational frames rather than merely reflecting pre-existing bonds. We provide an empirically grounded typology adding psychological granularity to Merchant's "Janus-faced" Mother Nature metaphor, offering conceptual explanation for divergent behavioral and emotional outcomes observed across prior anthropomorphism studies. Finally, we problematize assumptions equating emotional closeness with moral reciprocity, revealing how idealized portrayals like the Good Mother are associated with non-reciprocal attachment that potentially legitimizes environmental exploitation. For practitioners, we offer a diagnostic framework revealing that three widely

deployed archetypes (Good, Submissive, and Nemesis Mothers) often trigger detachment or moral disengagement. We recommend hybrid archetypes, particularly combining Themis and Good Mother elements, that integrate warmth with moral authority to encourage mutual accountability and sustained pro-environmental solidarity. Our findings enable communicators to craft sustainability messages that are culturally resonant and ethically robust.

OLD PRACTICES FOR NEW PRESSURES: READING AS A CULTURAL REPERTOIRE OF DIGITAL DISCONNECTION

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Keywords: cultural repertoire; digital disconnection ; hyperconnection ; collective reading ; cultural management

Description: This research reveals how collective reading, supported by rituals and cultural legitimacy, provides a fleeting yet meaningful counter-practice to digital hyperconnection.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how collective reading, as a reactivated cultural practice, resists digital hyperconnection. Qualitative findings highlight internalized digital constraints, reading's enduring legitimacy, the role of collective rituals, and the fragility of disconnection. We frame collective reading as an entertainment-based, temporal counter-practice to hyperconnected routines.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies have become deeply entangled with everyday life. Smartphones, social media platforms, and online services provide infrastructures of hyperconnection, embedding consumers in continuous flows of communication, entertainment, and commercial interaction. While these technologies expand opportunities for sociability and convenience, they also generate fatigue, compulsive use, and anxieties about attention and presence (Alter 2017; Epp, Schau, and Price 2014).

Research in consumer culture has examined how individuals attempt to suspend the logics of hyperconnection. Detox practices such as yoga, mindfulness, or digital-free retreats illustrate responses that present disconnection as a project of self-development, often framed around discipline and personal responsibility (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Giesler and Veresiu 2014; Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman 2017). These studies illuminate how consumers try to regulate hyperconnection, but they also underline the demanding, sometimes ascetic tone that characterizes much of the detox landscape.

Practices such as yoga are themselves long-standing traditions, yet in contemporary consumer culture they have been reconfigured and commodified as explicit tools of detox and well-being (Carrette & King 2005; Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman 2017). Their meaning and use are thus transformed to address digital pressures through logics of self-discipline and responsibilization (Moisio & Beruchashvili 2010; Giesler & Veresiu 2014). Reading, by contrast, operates differently. The practice itself is not reshaped or reinvented by consumers; one reads today much as one has always read, with the same embodied gestures of sitting, turning pages, and immersing in narrative (Chartier 1992; Manguel 1996; Petit 2004). Its significance lies in the fact that it belongs to a cultural repertoire (Swidler 1986): a familiar, legitimate tradition that can be drawn upon without alteration. What changes is not the practice but its framing and function in the age of hyperconnection.

Our study focuses on reading books as a case of a traditional cultural practice that is increasingly re-signified in contemporary contexts. Reading has long been associated with education, leisure, and cultural legitimacy (Petit 2004). In societies saturated by screens, it can also be understood as a potential resource for negotiating disconnection: a practice that combines symbolic legitimacy, hedonic pleasure, and the possibility of alternative temporal engagement.

We contribute to dialogues on consumer resistance (Kozinets & Handelman 2004; Thompson & Arsel 2004), cultural repertoires (Swidler 1986; Kates 2002), and temporal counter-practices (Rosa 2013; Karababa & Ger 2011), highlighting how long-standing traditions may be reactivated in response to contemporary pressures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer Resistance and Marketplace Cultures

Consumer research has explored how individuals negotiate, appropriate, or resist dominant cultural logics (Arnould and Thompson 2005). Marketplace cultures serve as arenas for such negotiations, which may reinforce, creatively rework, or subvert market ideologies rather than merely oppose them (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Kozinets 2001; Arsel and Thompson 2011). Resistance often manifests subtly, through the reinterpretation of cultural resources under constraints (Üstüner and Holt 2007) or the creation of temporary escapist spaces (Canniford 2011).

In digital contexts, practices like mindfulness, slow living, or detox retreats embody collective rituals and symbolic frameworks that challenge hyperconnectivity (Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman 2017). However, these practices are frequently framed as self-development projects, demanding discipline, willpower, and personal growth (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010). They align with broader governance regimes that shift responsibility for well-being and attention management onto consumers themselves (Giesler and Veresiu 2014).

Cultural Repertoires and the Reactivation of Traditions

Sociological work on cultural repertoires highlights how individuals draw on established practices, symbols, and narratives to navigate contemporary challenges (Swidler 1986). Rather than inventing practices ex nihilo, consumers mobilize traditions that carry cultural legitimacy and symbolic value. Consumer research has illustrated this through lifestyle studies (Holt 1997) and examinations of how authenticity and legitimacy are sought in consumption practices (Arnould and Price 2000).

Empirical work shows that repertoires range from emergent subcultures such as fandoms (Kozinets 2001) and festivals (Kozinets 2002) to enduring traditions such as cooking, religious rituals, or community celebrations (Kates 2002; Thompson and Troester 2002). This perspective foregrounds the capacity of longstanding practices to be reactivated as resources in new contexts. Activities associated with education, leisure, or symbolic distinction—such as reading—can thus be understood as repertoires that consumers mobilize to negotiate the pressures of hyperconnection.

Temporal Counter-Practices and Resonance

A complementary dialogue comes from the sociology of time. Rosa (2013) argues that modern societies are characterized by acceleration, producing alienation and a sense of disconnection from meaningful experience. Against this backdrop, practices of resonance create moments of immersion and engagement that counter dominant temporal logics. Consumer research has also examined how temporal regimes shape consumption (Karababa and Ger 2011) and how consumers coordinate competing practices within limited time resources (Southerton 2003).

Reading has long been associated with immersion and attentional depth (Petit 2004). As such, it can be considered within broader discussions of practices that suspend acceleration and create alternative temporal rhythms. The sociology of time suggests that such practices hold particular significance in contemporary contexts of hyperconnection, where consumers seek ways to restore balance and presence (Rosa 2013; Southerton 2003).

Entertainment and Resistance

Much research on consumer well-being has emphasized practices rooted in discipline or asceticism. Yet scholars have also highlighted the role of pleasure in shaping practices of care and

resistance. Holt (1995) shows how cultural practices generate meaning through both utilitarian and hedonic dimensions, while Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, and Canniford (2009) demonstrate how festivals combine entertainment with collective transformation. Resistance can therefore involve playful and hedonic dimensions, as illustrated in contexts such as Burning Man (Kozinets 2002) or brand communities that combine enjoyment with empowerment (Cova and Pace 2006).

This perspective opens the possibility that entertainment-oriented practices may serve as viable avenues for negotiating contemporary challenges such as digital fatigue. Reading, in this sense, contrasts with detox practices marked by discipline, offering instead an accessible form of disconnection that aligns care with enjoyment.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected during a 2025 workshop in France with eight women aged 22–25. An initial session with older women (45–65) was excluded from analysis due to their resistance to framing reading as disconnection, stemming from miscommunication by the organizing library.

The workshop unfolded in four phases: 1/ Introduction: Participants entered a quiet room with soft background music to foster relaxation. A brief conversation established rapport, clarified objectives, and invited reflections on their reading and digital habits. 2/ Disconnection Ritual: Participants symbolically placed their phones in a shared box, marking a collective break from digital connectivity. 3/ Silent Reading: For 45 minutes, participants read individually personal or provided books while the shared setting cultivated a sense of collective engagement. 4/ Group Debrief: Participants discussed their experiences, focusing on concentration challenges, immersion, calm, and contrasts with digital routines, yielding rich narratives on reading's affective and symbolic role in disconnection.

After the workshop, participants completed a short questionnaire on immersion, relaxation, and distraction. Within a week, they took part in semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes), exploring their workshop experience, reading habits, and broader connectivity practices.

In total, the dataset includes eight questionnaires, eight in-depth interviews, and workshop observations. Analysis followed an interpretive, hermeneutic approach (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994), iteratively refining themes through dialogue with literature on consumer resistance, cultural repertoires, and temporal practices. Four key dynamics emerged: the internalized constraint of hyperconnection, reading as a reactivated repertoire, the role of collective infrastructures, and the ambivalence of outcomes.

FINDINGS

Internalized Constraint of Hyperconnection

Participants revealed hyperconnection as an internalized constraint, even during forced disconnection. Handing over their phones evoked conflicting emotions: relief mixed with anxiety, restlessness, and fear of missing out. Mélanie (24) described feeling both liberated and pressured by the thought of missed notifications, immediately checking her phone afterward. Camille (22) likened her phone's absence to a "phantom limb," while Thomas (23) caught himself instinctively reaching for it, highlighting how deeply ingrained digital habits shape emotions and reflexes. These reactions reflect Giesler and Veresiu's (2014) argument that governance regimes produce subjects who internalize norms of constant responsiveness. Even when devices are removed, the discipline of connectivity persists.

Reading as a Reactivated Cultural Repertoire

Reading emerged as a reactivated cultural repertoire (Swidler 1986): an enduringly legitimate practice that consumers reframe as a counter-practice against hyperconnection. Clara (23) initially struggled to focus but eventually became immersed, rediscovering reading's value. Julie (25) contrasted it with passive digital consumption, framing it as an "investment in the mind," though she rarely prioritized it. Thomas (23) associated reading with social approval, unlike the guilt he felt after using TikTok or YouTube. More generally, participants' narratives illustrate how reading retains its traditional form while undergoing changes in its setting and function —unlike practices like yoga or mindfulness that were reconfigured as detox solutions.

Collective Infrastructures and Rituals

Disconnection relied on collective infrastructures and rituals. Participants admitted they would not have sustained 45 minutes of reading alone. The act of placing phones in a shared box functioned as a ritualized gesture, transforming the workshop space into a sanctuary of communal disconnection, much like Bradford and Sherry's (2015) *vestaval*, where symbolic acts create shared meaning and temporarily suspend everyday digital norms. Sophie (24) described the shared silence as "almost sacred," while Camille (22) called the phone surrender a "ceremony." Élodie (26) emphasized that the group setting and atmosphere made disconnection possible, unlike her failed solitary attempts. These accounts align with Schouten and McAlexander (1995) and Schau et al. (2009), showing how rituals and collective support legitimize and sustain disconnection.

Ambivalent Outcomes

Disconnection's effects were fragile and temporary. Julie (25) felt immersed in her book but noted the calm "vanished" upon re-engaging with her phone. Mélanie (24) called it a "parenthesis," and Thomas (23) compared it to "taking a breath before diving back underwater." These experiences echo Kozinets and Handelman (2004), where resistance to dominant logics remains paradoxical as reading created moments of resonance (Rosa 2013), but its benefits dissolved once digital routines resumed.

DISCUSSION

This research explored how consumers mobilize traditional practices to negotiate disconnection from digital hyperconnection. Through collective reading workshops with young adults in France, we identified four dynamics: the internalized constraint of hyperconnection, reading as a reactivated repertoire, the role of collective infrastructures, and the ambivalence of outcomes.

Contributions to research

First, our study shows that resistance does not only emerge from novel counter-cultures (Kozinets 2001; Giesler 2008), but also through the re-appropriation of traditions. Reading, long familiar and legitimate, was described as a way to "reconnect with a forgotten part" (Clara) or as "an investment in the mind" (Julie). Consumers thus mobilize established repertoires (Swidler 1986; Thompson and Troester 2002) to resist hyperconnection.

Second, disconnection was sustained less by individual willpower than by collective infrastructures. Sophie emphasized that "the silence felt almost sacred," while Camille described surrendering phones as "a ceremony." These accounts echo research on marketplace rituals

(Arnould and Price 1993; Bradford and Sherry 2015; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009), showing how rituals and mutual accountability legitimate and enable resistance.

Third, our findings point to entertainment-based resistance. Unlike detox practices framed by discipline (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010; Giesler and Veresiu 2014), reading was experienced as both pleasurable and legitimate. Thomas compared it to "taking a breath before diving back underwater," highlighting how pleasure and relief can coexist with resistance.

Finally, engaging with Rosa's (2013) work on acceleration, we conceptualize reading as a temporal counter-practice. Participants described immersion and attentional depth, but these interludes proved fragile. Julie noted that "the second I picked up my phone, it all vanished." Disconnection created resonance, but only temporarily, pointing to the limits of such practices.

Managerial contributions

Libraries and cultural organizations can support disconnection by offering phone-free collective reading sessions or hybrid events combining reading with group discussions or light rituals. As Sophie and Camille indicated, the group setting was what enabled them to persevere. By framing reading as a collective cultural practice, institutions can legitimize it as a form of care and disconnection while also attracting younger audiences. Crucially, such events present disconnection not as obligation, but as an enjoyable activity.

Overall, these implications highlight that reading can be strategically positioned at the intersection of cultural legitimacy, hedonic pleasure, and digital well-being. Unlike ascetic detox practices, reading offers a form of entertainment-based resistance: consumers disconnect through immersion in stories and enjoyment, rather than discipline. For managers and policymakers, this requires moving beyond narrow views of reading as merely educational, toward recognizing its

potential as a cultural repertoire for negotiating hyperconnection in an accessible and pleasurable way.

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PLAYABLE NATIONAL IDENTITY VIA HISTORICAL VIDEO GAMES IN TAIWAN: A COMPUTATIONAL TEXT MINING STUDY OF PLAYERS' NARRATIVES

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Keywords: Computational method, gameplay experience, historical video game, national identity, Taiwan

Description: Our study examined video game players' experiences with *Raid on Taihoku* and *Righteous Thief Tien-Ding Liao* to demonstrate that "playable national identity" was made possible by shared historical experiences of the WWII era, Japanese colonial rule, and a sense of imagined Taiwanese identity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

We derived our study from their arguments and reasoned that historical gameplay experiential narratives could be investigated whether the imagining/consumption/gameplay processes could help the national building by socially constructing "imagined (Taiwanese) communities," immersing players with previous historical in-game design elements (RQ1). What will be the recurrent keywords and key phrases in the experiential discourses to demonstrate their post-game experiences in the historical game place? (RQ2)

Method and Data

Our study relied on the computational analysis techniques (Dascalu 2014) of players' experiences captured from post-game discussions. Our study extended from existing analytical techniques of players' experiential discourses, which are often conducted through discourse analysis methods (Jones et al. 2015). The text mining technique has received acceptance and legitimacy in social science and humanities fields since 1960 (Bastin and Bouchet-Valat 2014) and has spread to the study of video games (Bragge and Storgårds 2007; Ho and Zhang 2020).

To compile our corpus, we used YouTube to search for the keyword in March 2025 ["台北大空襲" or "*Raid on Taihoku*"] (N=41) to identify sites with streamed gameplay sessions. There were 549 comments from these 41 channels. To compile our corpus, we used YouTube to search for the keyword in March 2025; these search items included ["*Righteous Thief Tien-Ding Liao* or *Legend of Tianding*"]; in the end, we identified 40 channels with live-streamed gaming sessions that contained 1265 comments. This search strategy enabled us to collect post-game narratives to discover emerged themes related to national identity in our corpus.

Summary of Findings

We generated hundreds of key phrases from the post-game discourse corpus using *QDA Miner* and its affiliated program, *WordStat* 8. We have extracted key phrases from the post-game experiential discourses. They represent how these two historical game players felt about and reflected on their post-game experiences. In terms of how players' experiences with historical video games foster their collective memories. In *Raid on Taihoku,* key phrases such as "history of Taiwan" (7.3%, TF-IDF=8.6), "Taiwan independence" (3.6%, TF-IDF=9.8), "play games and learn history" (5.5%, TF-IDF=6.8), "Taiwan's sovereignty" (5.5%, TF-IDF=6.8), suggesting the historical elements of this historical game and their impacts on debates on identity and

nationalism. In *Righteous Thief, Tien-Ding Liao*, key phrases such as "Japanese occupation" (7.1% of the occurrences in the corpus, TF-IDF=21.5), "childhood memories" (7.1%, TF-IDF=19.3), "Japanese occupation era" (3.2%, TF-IDF=10.0), "Japanese colonization" (1.6%, TF-IDF=5.6), suggesting the historical elements of this historical game and their impacts on debates on Taiwanese historical facts.

The connections with Taiwan's painful histories during the Japanese colonial periods were salient as seen in the following extracted key phrases in *Raid on Taihoku*: "Air Raid" (4.92% of the corpus, TF-IDF=37.9), "Taipei Air Raid" (2.00% of the corpus, TF-IDF=18.7), "Japanese Occupation" (1.28% of the corpus, TF-IDF=13.3), "Bombed by the United States" (3.6% of the corpus, TF-IDF=4.9). Similarly, players of the *Righteous Thief, Tien-Ding Liao* historical game have learned about the daily experiences of Taiwanese people during the same historical period as demonstrated in the following key phrases, "Black handed policeman" (1.6% of the corpus, TF-IDF=11.2), "anti-Japanese resistance" (2.4% of the corpus, TF-IDF=10.5), and "attack power" (2.4% of the corpus, TF-IDF=7.9).

Key Contributions

This study employed a computational text mining technique to examine experiential narratives of game players of two popular historical video games. This study is an initial attempt to apply the computational text mining method to study historical video games and their relationship with national identity formation in Taiwan. Wu (2022) also echoed the importance of studying player interactions with a historical video game because they "can re-imagine and reconnect with the historical past of Taiwan while contemplating the political realities of the present time" (p. 50).

From our text-mining study of their post-gameplay experiential narratives, we concluded that players were fully aware of the nature of the *Raid on Taihoku* and *Righteous Thief Tien-Ding Liao* historical video games as historical representations that led to intended or unintended players' national identity. Additionally, when players share their post-game experience, their sense of community can be strengthened. To extend Anderson's (2006) argument, playing historical games can become a ritual (like reading a newspaper in the past) so that people can feel a sense of belonging to a community.

References are available upon request.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: HOW IDENTITY MAINTENANCE SHAPES DIVERGING PREFERENCES FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

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Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Political ideology, Social identity, Identity maintenance

Description: This research examines how the stereotypical association of sustainable consumption with liberal political identity activates identity maintenance motives, driving ideological differences in preferences for sustainable products, and identifies targeted interventions that mitigate this polarization.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Given that household consumption accounts for a substantial share of global emissions (Ivanova et al. 2016), adopting sustainable consumption practices represents one of the most effective individual-level strategies to mitigate climate change (IPCC 2023). Despite its broad societal relevance, prior research in the U.S. context consistently reveals pronounced ideological differences in preferences for sustainable practices, with liberals exhibiting stronger preferences than conservatives (e.g., Coffey & Joseph 2013). Building on research that conceptualizes political

ideology as a social identity shaping consumer attitudes and behavior across domains (Tajfel & Turner 1986; Oyserman & Schwarz 2017), this research examines whether polarized preferences stem from identity maintenance motives. Specifically, individuals may engage in identity-congruent consumption to affirm desired identities or avoid identity incongruence (Steele 1988). Applied to the present context, we argue that sustainable products are stereotypically associated with liberal political identity and propose that liberals adopt sustainable products because such choices affirm their political identity, whereas conservatives avoid sustainable products to distance themselves from the liberal out-group. Further, we investigate how identity maintenance processes can inform the design of targeted marketing interventions, such as identity-congruent framing, that increase preferences for sustainable products across ideological groups.

Method and Data

Our research comprises four sequential studies. Across all studies, Prolific's prescreening feature enabled the recruitment of ideologically balanced samples of U.S. liberal and conservative participants. Study 1 (N = 128) employs a Single Category Implicit Association Test (SC-IAT; Karpinski & Steinman 2006) to assess cognitive associations between sustainable products and liberal political identity. Study 2 (N = 148) examines how liberals and conservatives stereotypically construe consumers of sustainable products by comparing inferences about individuals who purchase sustainable versus conventional products. Study 3 (N = 564) examines the behavioral implications of this stereotype by testing identity maintenance effects in consumer preferences. A purported ideological assessment challenges participants' political identity by presenting threatening feedback based on responses to the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al. 2011), whereas a control condition involves completion of the same questionnaire without ideological test framing or evaluative feedback. A simulated online shopping task then

captures potential compensatory preferences between a sustainable and a conventional T-shirt, using product stimuli pretested for equivalence. Study 4 (N = 897) evaluates the effectiveness of pretested identity-congruent framing interventions for liberal and conservative participants within the same simulated online shopping environment used in Study 3.

Summary of Findings

Across four studies, our findings provide converging evidence that sustainable consumption is culturally stereotyped as liberal and that this stereotype systematically shapes consumer perception and choice through identity maintenance processes. In Study 1, the SC-IAT yielded significantly positive D-scores for both liberal (D = 0.19, SD = 0.29, $t(66) = 5.27$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$) and conservative (D = 0.15, $SD = 0.37$, $t(60) = 3.22$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.41$) participants, indicating a shared cognitive association between sustainable products and liberal political identity. Similarly, for Study 2, a two-way ANOVA revealed that both liberal and conservative participants stereotypically perceive consumers who purchase sustainable products as significantly more liberal than those who purchase conventional products ($F(1, 144) = 156.94$, $p < .001$). Study 3 captured significant compensatory preference patterns in line with the concept of identity maintenance. Following an experimentally induced political identity threat, logistic regression revealed that conservatives showed a significantly lower probability of choosing a sustainable product ($b = –0.86$, $p = .011$), whereas liberals exhibited a marginally significant higher probability of making a sustainable choice ($b = 0.63$, $p = .053$). Finally, Study 4 showed that identity-congruent framing effectively increased sustainable product preferences among conservative participants ($b = 0.53$, $p = .034$). Unexpectedly, identity-congruent frames did not produce a significant effect among liberals ($b = 0.06$, $p = .802$).

Key Contributions

This research provides empirical evidence of an identity maintenance mechanism that shapes the preference for sustainable products of liberals and conservatives in opposing directions. While liberals adopt sustainable products to affirm their political identity, conservatives avoid them to prevent identity incongruence. By documenting this identity-based process across cognitive, perceptual, and behavioral levels, our research complements recent conceptual work that positions political ideology as a social identity central to sustainable consumption (Andrade & Vieites 2025; Cakanlar 2024). The findings further identify two distinct, group-specific intervention strategies for marketers and policymakers seeking to promote sustainability. Challenging political identity increases sustainable preferences among liberal consumers by triggering compensatory sustainable choices. Among conservatives, identity-congruent framing effectively increases sustainable preferences by reducing perceived identity incongruence. More broadly, the results demonstrate that political identity does not inherently intensify polarization. Instead, conditional on accurate targeting, political identity can also facilitate convergence, supporting broader adoption of sustainable products across ideological groups.

References are available upon request.

STABILITY IN MOTION: RETHINKING HOME AMONG GLOBALLY MOBILE PROFESSIONALS

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Keywords: mobility; consumption; security and vulnerability; cross-cultural research; digital possessions.

Description: This conceptual paper explores how globally mobile professionals negotiate home, stability, and belonging through consumption practices in contexts of relocation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Within households of globally mobile professionals, how do consumption practices involving possessions, property ownership, and future planning manifest themselves, and in what ways do these practices reflect changing approaches to security and attachment in mobility contexts?

This question examines how globally mobile professionals construct security in mobility contexts, analyzing concepts such as liquid and solid consumption practices, digital possessions, property ownership decisions, and temporal orientations toward planning and future security.

Method And Data (Not Applicable For Nonempirical Papers)

This is a conceptual paper, not applicable section.

Summary of Findings

This conceptual paper explores how consumption practices among globally mobile professionals shape home-making processes and contribute to the construction of a sense of home in contexts of mobility. Within this research framework, *home* transcends its traditional physical definition, while it might be located in places of employment, personal vehicles, online spaces, and networks of relationships and digital interactions.

The paper highlights how mobility defines lifestyles and identities of globally mobile professionals, with possessions contributing to shaping, anchoring, and stabilizing identity, while simultaneously posing challenges to the fluid nature of movement. Drawing on research on liquid consumption, the paper examines how relationships to possessions are redefined within the context of mobility and relocation, discussing practices such as prioritizing digital over tangible, renting rather than owning property, and investing in multi-functional items that facilitate a mobile lifestyle.

Finally, the paper conceptualizes security and vulnerability as interrelated dimensions of mobility, emphasizing relocation as a liminal condition marked by both opportunity and precarity, where strategies that foster a sense of security might reveal the fragility of permanence and continuity.

Statement of Key Contributions

This conceptual paper aims to contribute to academic scholarship and practice in several ways. First, it has the potential to advance the literature on consumer culture, mobility, and home-making by examining how globally mobiles construct stability and a sense of home during relocation, with particular attention to strategies for managing continuity and belonging within mobility. It also attends

to the potential vulnerability that relocation as a liminal experience may entail, highlighting the understudied relationship between vulnerability and mobility.

Second, the paper seeks to deepen insight into adaptive strategies by examining how attitudes toward property, possessions, and future planning shift in response to relocation, and how mobile professionals manage the interplay between stability and movement.

Third, as part of a broader, multi-sited doctoral project, the paper sets the stage for future comparative insights by focusing on three settings with distinct cultural and social characteristics: Budapest, Hungary; Tel Aviv, Israel; and Odense, Denmark. By examining how local cultures interact with acculturation processes amid mobility, the research highlights both shared strategies and context-specific patterns of home-making.

For non-academic stakeholders, these insights offer practical guidance for supporting globally mobile professionals and their families during relocation, with implications for support systems, policies, and community resources.

References are available upon request.

TELLING DEATH DIFFERENTLY: CROSS-CULTURAL STORYTELLING STRATEGIES IN FUNERAL URN BRANDING

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Keywords: brand storytelling; cross-cultural marketing; emotional branding; death-related products; funeral urns

Description: This study examines how funeral urn brands in China and the United States use culturally adapted storytelling to shape emotional meaning-making in an emotionally sensitive market.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study examines how funeral urn brands adapt storytelling strategies across cultures. Drawing on Hall's high- versus low-context communication framework, we ask: How does cultural context shape emotional framing and consumer meaning-making in funeral urn advertising? By comparing Chinese and U.S. funeral urn advertisements, this research investigates how brands structure narratives, frame emotions, and anchor cultural meaning when marketing the same emotionally charged product across distinct cultural contexts.

Method and Data

This study adopts a comparative qualitative case study approach to explore culturally embedded storytelling strategies in funeral urn branding. Six funeral urn advertisements were analyzed: three from China and three from the United States. Advertisements were selected based on recency (released within the past five years), the presence of clear storytelling elements, and explicit emotional framing. Data were collected from publicly available sources, including official brand websites and video platforms. The analysis followed a three-step process. First, each advertisement was segmented into narrative components using Labov's narrative structure model. Second, a thematic analysis was conducted using a discourse-analytic framework consisting of seven dimensions: narrative structure, emotional framing, cultural anchoring, visual symbolism, brand tone, product positioning, and call-to-action strategy. Coding was both deductive, guided by prior literature, and inductive, grounded in the data. Third, cross-cultural comparisons were conducted to identify systematic similarities and differences between Chinese

and U.S. brand narratives, allowing insight into how cultural communication norms shape storytelling in emotionally sensitive markets.

Summary of Findings

Clear cross-cultural differences emerged in how funeral urn brands construct and communicate meaning. Chinese brands employ cyclical, relational narratives that emphasize ongoing bonds between the living and the deceased. Their storytelling relies on indirect emotional expression, traditional rituals, nature symbolism, and a calm, reflective tone. Emotions such as grief are portrayed as integrated into life rather than as moments requiring resolution. The urn is typically introduced at the end of the narrative as a sacred object completing a spiritual journey, and calls to action are subtle and reflective. In contrast, U.S. brands use linear, individual-centered narratives that follow a clear beginning–climax–resolution structure. Emotional expression is direct and explicit, often conveyed through personal testimonials and expressive language. These brands emphasize personal legacy, individuality, and emotional transformation. The urn is positioned as a central, personalized artifact that facilitates healing and self-expression, and calls to action are direct and emotionally motivating. Together, these findings show that storytelling strategies in death-related branding are deeply shaped by cultural communication norms.

Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to marketing scholarship and practice. Theoretically, it extends brand storytelling and emotional branding research into the underexplored domain of death-related products, demonstrating how cultural context shapes meaning-making in emotionally sensitive markets. By applying a seven-dimension discourse-analytic framework, the study offers a structured approach to comparing cross-cultural storytelling strategies. It also

enriches cross-cultural consumer research by illustrating how high- and low-context communication norms influence narrative structure, emotional framing, and symbolic consumption. Practically, the findings provide guidance for marketers operating in global memorial, funeral, and legacy-related industries. The results suggest that culturally misaligned storytelling may risk appearing inappropriate or inauthentic in emotionally charged contexts. Brands targeting high-context cultures should emphasize relational continuity, symbolic meaning, and indirect emotional appeals, while brands in low-context cultures may benefit from direct emotional expression and personalized narratives. More broadly, this study stresses the importance of culturally sensitive storytelling when marketing products associated with grief, memory, and identity.

References are available upon request.

THE EPISTEMIC JOURNEY: NAVIGATING INFORMATION OVERLOAD ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Keywords: expert authority, consumer autonomy, social media, consumer journey, health and wellness

Description: Drawing on interviews with individuals who consume health-related content, this article examines how individuals negotiate the abundance of information on social media and the everyday labor required by consumers to sort, evaluate, and apply online information.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: The widespread accessibility of information fueled by social media is profoundly reshaping the notion of expertise. Experts and professionals can disseminate their knowledge directly to large audiences, while laypeople can contribute experiential insights and advice. This shift blurs traditional boundaries between experts and laypeople, democratizing access to knowledge while intensifying exposure to digital content, sources, and claims to authority. While marketing research has focused primarily on the spread of false information on social media, this paper draws on the consumer journey framework to examine consumers' exposure to the overabundance of information on social media, asking: How do consumers understand and navigate the abundance of informational content on social media platforms?

Method and Data: We adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology to capture the experiences of consumers on social media. We conducted 19 in-depth interviews with consumers who use social media as sources of information for a wide range of health and wellness information across various social media platforms. From laypeople to pharmacists, doctors, nutritionists, sexologists, and physiotherapists, many types of consumers, experts, and professionals are taking part in wellness conversations on social media, giving us extensive opportunities to better understand the experience of consumers as they navigate a plethora of information.

Summary of Findings: Our analysis shows that consumers navigating health and wellness content on social media are not simply passive recipients or rational assessors of information. We develop the concept of the epistemic consumption journey, a consumer journey model for navigating information that unfolds across four interrelated stages: (1) exposure and saturation, (2) filtering and boundary-making, (3) evaluation and selection, and (4) embodiment and appropriation. From a consumer standpoint, information on social media is not only about mis/disinformation but about too much information: an overabundance that complicates discernment, strains emotional bandwidth, and demands constant epistemic labor.

Key Contributions: Our work contributes to the emerging literature on expertise as an object of consumption. This research highlights the emotional and relational labor consumers perform when navigating information overload. We show that consumers' epistemic labor involves not only evaluating knowledge claims but practices of emotional filtering and relational attunement. In this context, experts are recast less as authoritative figures and more as service providers who supply informational resources that consumers selectively appropriate and test. Practically, we inform professional orders and science communicators—such as scientists, healthcare providers,

and educators—on how to present themselves and communicate more effectively on social media. We suggest that authority alone is insufficient; emotional connection, perceived sincerity, and alignment with lived experiences are critical to establishing credibility.

The Lonely Londoners: A Poetic Model of Consumer Acculturation

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Keywords: consumer acculturation, literary criticism, Poetics of Relation, The Lonely Londoners, Windrush

Description: Drawing on literary criticism and a close reading of *The Lonely Londoners*, this study develops a poetic model of acculturation to reveal how migrants negotiate identity beyond linear frameworks of assimilation, preservation, or bicultural adaptation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Research on consumer acculturation has often focused on how migrants adapt to dominant host cultures (Askegaard et al. 2005; Luedicke 2015; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994; Veresiu and Giesler 2018), overlooking experiences of subordination, exclusion, and resistance (Üstüner and Holt 2007). Studies of hybridity frequently rely on what Gilroy (2013, xxiii) calls the "crude, dualistic architecture of racial discourse," framing identity as a binary between origin and destination cultures.

This paper addresses these gaps by exploring how migrants poetize their relation to the homeland and the unknown. We argue that conventional acculturation models, shaped by assimilationist paradigms, often emphasize integration while neglecting trauma, displacement, and cultural violence. Drawing on Glissant (1997), we propose a poetic model of postcolonial consumer acculturation that highlights errantry, opacity, and imaginative links between home and the unfamiliar.

Using the experiences of the Windrush generation in postwar Britain, we show how migrants articulated identity through poetry, protest, and consumption practices that mythologized exile and mobilized cultural memory. Building on Stuart Hall (2018) and Linton Kwesi Johnson (2024), we conceptualize "poetizing" as a form of mythmaking that imbues migrant identities with emotional resonance and political agency, positioning poetry as a mode of cultural interpretation and identity construction.

Method and Data

This study explores consumer acculturation through literary criticism and a close reading of *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 1956), a foundational novel chronicling the experiences of the Windrush generation - Caribbean migrants who arrived in Britain between 1948 and the early 1970s. Responding to labor shortages, they faced racism, hostility, and systemic exclusion, navigating tensions between belonging and alienation, home and exile - making their experiences particularly suited to Glissant's Poetics of Relation.

Recent consumer research increasingly turns to literature to access emotional dimensions and inner worlds often neglected by empirical methods (Ashman et al. 2025). Drawing on literary criticism, we analyze how Selvon enacts poetic strategies - opacity, detour, and counterpoetics - in depicting arrival, settlement, and resistance.

Ethnic and postcolonial fiction functions as historical record, social commentary, and linguistic reclamation (Young 2020). *The Lonely Londoners* notably captures Caribbean life in Britain from Black migrants' perspectives, resisting assimilation into standard English. Using close reading, we focus on narrative structure, tone, characterization, and language to examine how identity is actively constructed through memory, language, and poetic resistance. Supplementing with oral histories, archival interviews, and memoirs (e.g., Gentleman 2019), we situate the novel socio-historically while keeping it central to understanding migrant meaning-making and resilience.

Summary of Findings

This study interprets *The Lonely Londoners* (Selvon 1956) through Édouard Glissant's Poetics of Relation, highlighting three poetic strategies - opacity, detour, and counterpoetics - that shape the immigrant experience. Opacity emerges in Selvon's creolized English, which

resists translation into Standard English, asserting the right not to be fully known and preserving cultural specificity. Detour manifests in the novel's structure: fragmented vignettes, digressions, and circular temporalities disrupt linear narratives of assimilation, capturing survival, communal memory, and the deferred rhythms of migrant life. Counterpoetics transforms English from within, blending Caribbean orality and idioms to speak simultaneously to multiple audiences while subtly subverting colonial authority.

These strategies extend to everyday acts of consumption - such as sharing calypso tunes or smuggling rum - which become symbolic gestures of cultural continuity and resistance. Humor, memory, and consumption practices encode what Glissant calls "forced poetics," transforming London into a provisional space of belonging despite alienation.

By emphasizing linguistic play, narrative dislocation, and symbolic consumption, Selvon constructs a poetics of suspended meaning that challenges assimilationist frameworks. This approach positions literary form as a tool for analyzing postcolonial consumer culture, revealing how migrant identity, selfhood, and belonging are continuously forged in the interplay of exile, memory, and creative resistance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes three core contributions to scholarship and offers insights for practitioners working with migration and diversity.

First, we move beyond binary and assimilationist paradigms by introducing a poetic model of consumer acculturation grounded in Poetics of Relation. This model frames migrant identity as relational, opaque, and errant - emphasizing complexity over clarity and creativity over conformity.

Second, our analysis demonstrates the value of literary texts as sites of cultural knowledge, providing emotional, symbolic, and affective insights often overlooked in empirical research. A close reading of *The Lonely Londoners* shows how migrants poetize identity through consumption, memory, and linguistic resistance, highlighting the potential of humanistic inquiry to enrich consumer research and postcolonial studies (Hirschman 1986).

Third, for practitioners - particularly in public policy, community engagement, and cultural institutions - our findings highlight the importance of recognizing the emotional and narrative dimensions of migrant identity. Rather than expecting conformity to dominant norms, institutions can support forms of cultural expression that preserve opacity and relational complexity. Consumption becomes a space where meaning is created, belonging is negotiated, and resistance enacted, informing more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices in urban planning, education, social integration, and heritage work.

References are available upon request.

THE POWER OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT, MESSAGE BURNOUT, AND ETHICAL ORIENTATION: HOW FEMVERTISING AFFECTS SHARE-OF-WALLET

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Keywords: Gender, femvertising, customer engagement, message burnout, ethical orientation, PLS-SEM

Description: This study examines how customers' perception of femvertising translates into transactional outcomes, specifically share of wallet (SoW), through the mediating mechanism of customer engagement (CE).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This study examines how customers' perception of femvertising translates into transactional outcomes, specifically share of wallet (SoW), through the mediating mechanism of customer engagement (CE). Grounded in customer-brand identification theory, we propose that value-congruent femvertising increases CE and, in turn, enhances SoW. By situating femvertising within broader debates on gender and structural inequalities, the study also investigates how message burnout and ethical orientation moderate these relationships. The findings will advance literature by empirically testing a model where CE links a values-driven marketing approach to measurable outcomes and demonstrates the potential of femvertising to reduce social divides.

Research Question

How does perceived femvertising translate into transactional outcomes such as share of wallet, and under what conditions does this relationship hold?

Method and Data

The scale for measuring *Perceived Femvertising* has been developed by the authors (under review in a reputed journal), which will be used to test the hypotheses in this study. For PLS based analysis, the total number of participants required to test the proposed model is around 350. Following ethics approval, participants will be customers of sports brands such as Puma and Nike who reside in the USA and are 18 years old and over. The participants will be recruited via the online panel provider Prolific. The online survey will be distributed via the Qualtrics system. Consent will be obtained through a Participant Information and Consent Form on the survey's landing page. The hypotheses will be tested using the SmartPLS (2024) software.

Key Contributions

This research aims to advance CE theory by conceptually testing a model in which CE, comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, operates as a unified construct linking a values-driven marketing approach, i.e., femvertising, to measurable transactional outcomes. The multidimensional *Perceived Femvertising* scale integrates 6 dimensions, contributing to a holistic understanding of how brand-initiated experiences shape perceptions of femvertising. Drawing from customer-brand identification theory, the study positions CE as a mediator such that the higher level of perceived femvertising increases CE and, in turn, enhances SoW. Examining contingency variables such as message burnout and ethical orientation will further enable a nuanced understanding of when and for whom femvertising is most effective, informing resource allocation and campaign design for maximum impact (Blut et al., 2023).

For marketing practitioners, identifying CE as the pathway between femvertising and spending behaviour will offer actionable insight into whether femvertising drives consumer behaviour through heightened engagement or whether its effects remain confined to attitudinal change. Without such empirical evidence, the field risks relying on untested assumptions about the effectiveness of a value-driven marketing approach, leaving both scholars and managers without a validated understanding of the mechanisms and boundary conditions that shape spending behaviour. The study will also exemplify how partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) can be utilized to assess complex models with multidimensional constructs.

References are available upon request.

Special Interest Group (SIG) Programming

AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF DYNAMIC PRICING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

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Keywords: Dynamic Pricing, Consumer Perceptions, Pricing Strategy, Integrative Framework, Systematic Literature Review

Description: This study systematically reviews research on consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing and develops an integrative framework that synthesises the antecedents, outcomes, mediating and moderating mechanisms shaping consumer perceptions towards dynamic pricing and provides mitigation strategies to reduce negative perceptions of dynamic pricing, along with future research directions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Dynamic pricing is a strategy in which prices for the same product or service vary over time, consumers, and/or circumstances. With advancements in AI-driven technologies and personalisation, marketers today routinely adjust prices in real-time. Despite the strategic advantages it offers to firms, it often triggers mixed reactions from consumers, ranging from acceptance to perceptions of unfairness. Recent industry practices have also highlighted that implementing dynamic pricing without considering negative perceptions has resulted in firms

facing consumer backlash and reputational risk. Hence, understanding consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing has become more critical than ever.

Research in the domain is growing, with previous research examining various consumer responses to dynamic pricing; however, these studies are fragmented across theories, contexts, constructs and methods. Due to which, there is limited understanding of how consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing are formed, how they influence consumer outcomes and how firms can effectively manage the negative responses. Therefore, this review tries to address the following research questions: How do consumers perceive dynamic pricing, what antecedent factors shape these perceptions, through which mechanisms do they influence consumer outcomes, and what strategies can firms adopt to mitigate negative consumer responses?

Method and Data

This study is a systematic literature review conducted in the domain of dynamic pricing to specifically understand the existing documented knowledge and identify future research gaps in the domain of consumers' perceptions of dynamic pricing. This systematic literature review adopts the SPAR-4-SLR framework. The Scopus database was used to gather research articles for the review. We did not restrict the search according to time-period or domain to include all relevant studies in this domain

To identify relevant literature for our systematic literature review, we employed a two-phase keyword development process. Initial keywords related to dynamic pricing and consumer perceptions were identified based on prior literature, followed by data-driven identification of keywords to capture the terminological diversity across disciplines. We then conducted unigram and bi-gram frequency and network analysis to identify commonly occurring terms and co-occurring keyword pairs. The final dataset comprised 158 peer-reviewed articles. To systematically analyse the literature, we used the TCCM (Theories, Contexts, Characteristics

and Methods) framework, which organises the literature in a structured way, highlighting the important elements: theories, contexts, characteristics and methods studied in the literature in the study domain.

Summary of Findings

This study shows that consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing are largely unfavourable, with fairness concerns being the most common outcome across contexts. These perceptions are shaped by various antecedents, such as firm-driven factors, which include pricing mechanism, price volatility and firm intentions and relational norms, consumer-driven factors, which include price comparisons, consumer traits and cultural orientation and environment and technology-driven factors, such as data privacy and technology opacity and market factors like limited alternatives.

These antecedents influence the consumer outcomes through both cognitive and affective mechanisms. Cognitive factors include fairness and justice perceptions, trust and ethics evaluations and perceived value and risk. Affective factors include positive and negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, happiness and gratitude, along with coping appraisals, which lead to behavioural outcomes like satisfaction, acceptance, avoidance and retaliation. This study also identifies moderating mechanisms (mitigation strategies) which can mitigate these negative consumer perceptions. These are grouped into themes such as transparency and communication, pricing management, transaction dissimilarity measures, trust, relationship, ethical management and consumer involvement and empowerment.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to consumer behaviour theory by integrating dispersed research on consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing across various theories, contexts, constructs and methods and provides a synthesis of how consumers perceive dynamic pricing and how these

perceptions translate into behavioural outcomes. This study links the antecedents, cognitive and affective mediating mechanisms, moderating mechanisms and outcomes and provides an integrative framework to understand how negative consumer perceptions of dynamic pricing emerge and how they may be influenced. The study also highlights future research directions which can help researchers advance the domain.

The study offers value to managers of organisations which implement dynamic pricing. Managers can use the framework and the actionable mitigation strategies to design, implement and communicate dynamic pricing in ways which can strengthen consumer acceptance and reduce negative interpretations and outcomes. Policymakers and regulators can also use the findings to develop policies on fairness, transparency, and responsible usage of algorithmic dynamic pricing. This can help the firm as well as agencies in keeping a check and balance on profit optimisation practices and consumer concerns of fairness and trust, which can prevent exploitation of consumers and make dynamic pricing a sustainable competitive advantage.

References are available upon request.

CONTAGION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW, ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK, AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: contagion, transfer of essence, consumer behavior, systematic literature review.

Description: This study conducts a systematic literature review of contagion experiences in consumer behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Contagion effects are central to consumer experiences, yet the literature spanning three decades remains fragmented. Concepts such as "product contagion," "consumer contamination," and "emotional contagion" have developed in partial isolation, creating a theoretical divide between the anthropological roots of the "Law of Contagion" and social-psychological streams of affect transfer. Consequently, this research seeks to bridge these gaps. The primary objective is to systematically review the extant literature to answer: How has contagion been defined and operationalized in consumer behavior? Furthermore, can these disparate research streams be integrated into a single, unifying conceptual framework? By addressing these questions, we aim to resolve inconsistencies regarding the drivers of contagion, such as whether physical contact is a prerequisite, and map the future of the field. This study moves beyond the traditional "contamination theory" of consumption to understand essence transfer in an increasingly digitized, circular, and automated marketplace.

Method and Data

To address the research objectives, we conducted a systematic literature review following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. We queried three major academic databases (i.e., Web of Science, Academic Search Complete, and Business Source Complete) using a comprehensive set of keywords related to contagion (e.g., "transfer of essence," "magical thinking," "contamination effect") and consumer behavior. To ensure high-quality synthesis, the search was restricted to articles published in English in Web of Science-indexed business and psychology journals with a Journal Impact Factor greater than three.

After excluding irrelevant domains (e.g., financial contagion), the final sample comprised 131 academic articles published up to the end of 2025. We then categorized each article based on the nature and scope of the contagion experience, specifically coding for the transferred entity, the transfer route, the agents involved, the contextual setting, and the behavioral effects.

Summary of Findings

The review reveals that contagion research has evolved from a focus on negative, physical contact-based "contamination" models to also include positive, symbolic, and contact-free transfers. Despite this evolution, the field remains fragmented across person-to-person, person-to-product, and product-to-product streams. To synthesize these findings, we identify five core elements present in every contagion episode, formalized as the TRACE framework: the (T)ransferred entity (e.g., affect, moral valence), the (R)oute of transfer (e.g., physical touch, proximity, narrative), the (A)gents involved (source and target), the (C)ontext (e.g., retail, digital), and the (E)ffect on behavior (e.g., purchase intention). The analysis exposes that while physical touch and negative essences (disgust) dominate the literature, emerging areas like "intention-based" and "temporal" contagion suggest that essence can also transfer via symbolic associations. Furthermore, we identify systematic gaps and relevant avenues for future research, particularly regarding positive contagion, erasability effects, and the role of non-human agents (AI) in the metaverse and circular economy.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three primary contributions to consumer behavior theory and practice. First, it provides, to the best of our knowledge, the first holistic systematic review of 131 articles,

integrating isolated research streams on psychological, emotional, and product contagion. Second, it introduces the TRACE framework, a novel organizing structure that demonstrates how disparate phenomena, from “celebrity contagion” to “complaint contagion,” share a common underlying structure. TRACE clarifies boundary conditions by specifying how essence transfer varies by context and agent, resolving ambiguities regarding contact-free contagion. Third, we propose a forward-looking research agenda that challenges the “contamination theory” paradigm, calling for investigation into digital essence, AI-driven contagion, and identity reconstruction. Managerially, this work repositions contagion from a threat requiring defensive sterilization to a strategic tool for proactive experience design. We position TRACE as a diagnostic instrument that managers can use to engineer specific elements, such as packaging (Route) or display context, to foster positive contagion and enhance product value.

HUMAN WITH AI IN DECISION MAKING: A MULTI STUDY INVESTIGATION OF AGENCY AND ACTION

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Consumer Decision Making, Human Machine Interaction, Consumer Behaviour, Agency

Description: A multi-study integration of PRISMA guided review and qualitative inquiry, to examine conceptualisation of consumer decision making within AI enabled consumption context.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

The rapid Artificial Intelligence (AI) embeddedness in consumer decision-making process (CDM) is shaping the perception of consumers' need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase action, and their post-purchase behaviour (Engel et al., 1995; Zao-Sanders, 2025).

Extant literature and reviews have examined AI adoption, behavioural outcomes, transparency, and trust, establishing the link between AI influence and consumer decisions. However, these studies have limited insight into the experience and redistribution of decision-making itself when humans and AI act together. Thus, this research aims to examine decision-making agency as an under-theorized dimension in AI-mediated consumer decisions by extending AI-Consumer Behaviour consolidation reviews.

This paper investigates the following questions through two studies.

RQ1. What are growing stream of knowledge on the influence of AI on consumer decision making (Study 1)

RQ2. How does the literature map the AI system's influence mechanism over the consumer's sense of agency (Study 1)? How is it experienced and interpreted by the actors? (Study 2A)

RQ3. What are the key themes driving AI adoption in consumer decision-making? (Study 1 & Study 2B)

In the third RQ, while study one identifies the influential factors, study 2B will provide an interpretation of such factors, in the thematic understanding of the AI context into the concept of consumer decision making.

METHOD AND DATA

Following recent methodological guidance (Lim, 2025) that positions systematic reviews as diagnostic, this research follows a sequential problem-driven multi-study design. Study 1 provides a PRISMA-guided systematic descriptive mapping of AI and CDM literature using the TCM-ADO framework, with an explorative intent.

In Study 1, a structured keyword-based search was conducted with the selection of terms in accordance with the EKB model (Engel et al., 1990, 1995) of consumer decision-making stages, at the Scopus database. The strict inclusion-exclusion criteria, along with snowball, led to a final corpus of 160 articles in the inclusion stage, from a pool of 3578 articles at the identification stage in the search period of 2001 to 2026 (as exported on 2/12/25), in accordance with PRISMA protocol (Mohr et al., 2009). Extensive bibliometric analysis was performed with tools like Biblioshiny by R and VOS Viewer, followed by literature synthesis with the TCM-ADO framework.

The extension of theory formulation, thematic clustering, and findings are being validated by a confirmatory round of qualitative study. Study 2A-Indepth interview with consumers will conclude the explorative scope from Study 1, and Study 2B-Interview with technocrats will validate with confirmatory data, triangulating the findings of the study.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Study 1 identifies agency as a blind spot, implicitly situated alongside constructs such as choice autonomy, decision autonomy, decision delegation, perceived control, reliance, shared agency, perceived power, and AI autonomy/dominance. However, the extant literature has rarely theorized agency as a central antecedent, instead using it as a boundary condition or a moderator.

The TCM organisation of literature points out that research on AI-CDM is primarily rooted in psychological theories and technology adoption (Uncanny Valley, CASA, SOR, TAM/UTAUT), framing AI as a social actor rather than a functional one. Major empirical works are concentrated in China and the USA, with growing diversification across e-commerce, travel, retail, and fashion contexts.

Methodologically, it relies on Quantitative methods and experimental designs, indicating reliance on self-reported intentions rather than behavioural data. The ADO organisation of literature shows that AI cues (transparency, anthropomorphism, and service quality) shape psychological and cognitive appraisals of value, credibility, and trust, with outcomes focused mainly on purchase intention, and to a lesser extent, on resistance and disengagement.

Thematic clustering of theories and antecedents along the five stages of the EKB model indicates significant concentration (~40%) of literature towards the purchase decision stage, followed by the evaluation of alternatives stage, while there is sparse attention to other stages of CDM. The unevenness suggests that existing research privileges decision outcomes over decision processes, reinforcing the need for AI involvement in consumers' experiential engagement across the full decision journey.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes from methodological, theoretical, managerial and societal standpoint. It provides methodological contributions, with a comprehensive synthesis of bibliometric and PRISMA protocol-based reviews on AI-mediated consumer decision-making research, offering a structured overview of expanding and fragmented literature. The integration of EKB stagewise analysis and TCM-ADO mapping of literature extends to process-oriented diagnosis, beyond the review stage, by narrating a replicable executable path for such studies. In continuation of its theoretical contribution, it consolidates varied theoretical foundations in a coherent way of conceptualising AI within consumer decision-making.

From a managerial standpoint, the final outputs of the study will guide managers towards alignment of AI design with distinct decision stages of consumers, beyond one-size-fits-all implementations. The study draws attention to the prospective risks associated with consumers' disengagement, over-automation, and resistance in AI-mediated decisions. Thus, it will enable more responsible and context-sensitive AI deployment in consumer-centric decision environments.

In a larger context, this research will incubate awareness about AI systems' agentic ability to shape consumer decisions beyond the observable outcomes. It will also encourage discussion on ethical and governance considerations related to AI influence in the regular consumption practices of digital citizens. By highlighting decision-stage specificity, this research will also contribute to the UN's SDG 12, responsible consumption and production goal.

References are available upon request.

WHEN FIRMS TAKE SIDES: MECHANISMS AND MODERATORS OF CONSUMER RESPONSES TO CORPORATE SOCIOPOLITICAL ACTIVISM

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Keywords: Corporate Sociopolitical Activism; Consumer Responses; Appraisal Mechanisms; Conceptual Framework; Contextual Moderators.

Description: A mechanism-based conceptual framework that explains how and when consumers respond to corporate sociopolitical activism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA) is now a common form of brand communication, yet prior research provides fragmented and sometimes contradictory evidence about how consumers respond. Some studies report favorable attitudes and supportive behaviors, whereas others document backlash or null effects. These mixed findings suggest that CSA operates through multiple interpretive pathways and depends on contextual contingencies. This paper asks: (1) Through which interconnected cognitive and affective processes does CSA shape consumer attitudinal, relational, and behavioral outcomes? (2) Under what broad classes of conditions do these processes strengthen versus weaken consumer responses to CSA? To address these questions, the paper synthesizes extant CSA scholarship into an integrative, mechanism-based framework that clarifies how consumer responses arise and why effects diverge across contexts.

Method and Data

Not applicable.

Summary of Findings

The framework conceptualizes consumer responses to CSA as arising through five foundational processes that can co-occur and, in some contexts, unfold sequentially. These processes capture how consumers interpret why a firm takes a stance, whether the stance fits the firm's identity and practices, and whether the firm and its communication are credible. They also capture affective reactions to CSA and consumers' readiness to act in response (e.g., support, opposition, advocacy, or withdrawal). In addition, the paper organizes moderators into four broad domains (i.e., audience, message, source, and issue specific factors) that shape which processes dominate and how they translate into outcomes. Taken together, the framework explains why similar CSA initiatives can generate positive, negative, or null effects across studies and clarifies the conditions under which CSA is more likely to strengthen versus erode attitudinal, relational, and behavioral responses.

Key Contributions

First, the paper advances theoretical coherence by integrating dispersed CSA findings into a mechanism-based conceptual framework that connects interpretive judgments and affective appraisals to downstream consumer outcomes. Second, it explains heterogeneity in prior results by showing how different contextual conditions shift the salience and implications of these processes, thereby clarifying why CSA can yield support, backlash, or no observable change. Third, by organizing moderators into audience-, message-, source-, and issue-level domains, the framework provides a parsimonious map for cumulative theory building and for positioning future studies. Finally, the framework offers actionable guidance for firms by identifying the interpretive and emotional levers that shape consumer responses and by clarifying when

sociopolitical engagement is likely to build relational bonds and supportive behaviors versus provoke resistance and withdrawal.

*References are available upon request.

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