

2025 AMA SUMMER ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

Data Revolution: Empowering Humanity

> August 18 • Virtual
August 22-24 • Chicago, IL

PROCEEDINGS

Volume 36

Co-Chairs:

Colleen Harmeling, Florida State University

Tonya Bradford, University of California, Irvine

Adithya Pattabhiramaiah, Georgia Institute of Technology

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-0-87757-027-1

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the 2025 AMA Summer Academic Conference!

As co-chairs of this year's AMA Summer Academic Conference, we bring diverse research backgrounds and perspectives to a shared goal: harnessing the power of data for meaningful impact. Our theme, "Data Revolution: Empowering Humanity," reflects not only our individual research passions but also a timely and resonant call for marketing scholars to engage with the opportunities and responsibilities that today's data-rich environment presents.

This theme underscores the potential of vast and varied data to address urgent global challenges, while also reaffirming our collective commitment to human-centered progress. As academia navigates ongoing transitions, we hope this conference serves as a reminder that our training and scholarship can meaningfully contribute to improving lives, communities, and systems around the world.

Technology and data innovation have long been central to our field. What's new, and exciting, is the scale, diversity, and immediacy of the data now at our fingertips. With that comes an opportunity, and alongside it, an imperative to explore how marketing research and unprecedented data access can improve the human condition, nurture our natural environment, and elevate underrepresented voices. Through the involvement of global scholars and industry leaders, we hope this year's program challenges each of us to reflect on how our work can make a meaningful difference.

This year's conference features 11 tracks, along with special sessions and expert workshops spanning a wide array of topics for scholars and practitioners alike. We are deeply grateful to the 25 global track co-chairs for shaping a rich academic program, to the many reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive feedback, and to the 979 authors from 50 countries who submitted innovative and rigorous work.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Amber Epp, President of the AMA Academic Council, and the members of the Council for the opportunity to serve as co-chairs. A special note of appreciation to Marilyn Stone and Riley Fickett from the AMA staff, whose expertise and steadfast dedication made this conference possible.

Finally, thank you to all who have joined us in Chicago from across the U.S. and around the world. We hope the sessions spark new conversations, collaborations, and research ideas that leverage the power of data to empower and uplift. Here's to a productive, inspiring, and impactful conference!

Sincerely,

Tonya Bradford, Colleen Harmeling, and Adithya Pattabhiramaiah

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Best Overall Paper

“Navigating Brand Relationships with Bereaved Consumers: The Intensified Case of Mothers Experiencing Baby Loss”

Carissa Colligan, Drexel University
Elizabeth Minton, University of Wyoming
Cindy Wang, California Polytechnic State University
Alexa Fox, The University of Akron

Best in Track Papers

Data-Driven Social Impact in Mature and Emerging Markets

“Sober Irony: Reciprocal Spill-Over Effects of Advertising Alcohol-Free Products on Alcohol Sales”

Saeid Vafainia, ESCP
Stijn Maesen, Imperial College Business School
Michael Hanelein, ESCP

Ethics, Privacy and Cross-Industry Data Collaborations

“How Mere Exposure to Ethical Issues Increases Marketers’ Moral Dissonance”

David Hagenbuch, Messiah University
Dorene Ciletti, Point Park University
RJ Thompson, University of Pittsburgh

Human-Centered AI and Digital Marketing

“Harnessing Large Language Models to Predict Product Preferences with Consumer Enriched Prompting”

Alexander Moore, University of Illinois Chicago
Gael Le Mens, Pompeu Fabra University

Innovation and Inclusivity

“The Equalizing Role of Movie Recap Videos in the Film Industry”

Han Yuan, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics
Yuxin Chen, NYU Shanghai
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Leveraging Data for B2B Marketing Innovation

“The Duality of Collaboration and Competition: Marketing Promotions and Supply Chain Relationship Dynamics”

Mayukh Dass, Texas Tech University
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Marketing Interventions in Digital First Environments

“Bundling in Platform Markets: A Two-Sided Matching Approach”

Qiang Zhou, Renmin University of China
Richard Gretz, University of Texas San Antonio
BJ Allen, Brigham Young University
Mark Houston, Texas Christian University
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Perspectives from the Front Line

“Repeated Frontline Employee-Customer Interactions in Service Encounter Cascades”

Li Chen, Cornell University
Thomas Dotzel, University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Nathan Yang, Cornell University

Qualitative Data in Customer-Centric Marketing

“Navigating Brand Relationships with Bereaved Consumers: The Intensified Case of Mothers Experiencing Baby Loss”

Carissa Colligan, Drexel University
Elizabeth Minton, University of Wyoming
Cindy Wang, California Polytechnic State University
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Resilient Global Ecosystems

“Consumer Social Media Responses to Product Recalls: The Roles of Brand Warmth and Competence”

Niklas Schröder, Goethe University Frankfurt
Dominik Hettich, Goethe University Frankfurt
Torsten Bornemann, Goethe University Frankfurt

Social Problems & Well Being

“The Power and Peril of Authenticity: Navigating The Double-Edged Impact of Authenticity on Local Businesses”

Andrew Edelblum, University of Dayton
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Woocheol Kim, Fairfield University
John Clithero, University of Oregon

Technology-Driven Behavioral Insights

“You Must Calculate That: Developing an Automated Tool to Measure Language Assertiveness”

Sameed Khan, University of Massachusetts Lowell
Ann Kronrod, University of Massachusetts Lowell

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Social Problems & Well Being

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON GIFT RECEIVING: WHAT DO WE KNOW AND WHERE SHOULD WE BE HEADING?

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Keywords: Gift receiving, Gift exchange, Gifting, recipient behaviour

Description: This paper offers a systematic review of the gift-receiving and its powerful impacts. This research bears practical and theoretical implications.

A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON GIFT RECEIVING: WHAT DO WE KNOW AND WHERE SHOULD WE BE HEADING?

Research Questions

- What are the antecedents of gift-receiving behaviour, and how does it impact the decision-making of the receiver?
- What are the possible mediators and moderators that affect gift-receiving behaviour and what are the outcomes gift-receiving?

Method and Data

We performed a systematic literature review on gift receiving in psychology and in business and marketing using PRISMA approach. In the screening phase, search among titles, abstracts, and keywords extracts 589 articles in Scopus in the areas of psychology and business

management and accounting. In the next step, we limited the results by only considering the journal articles that appeared in the English language, which revealed 427 articles. Further, we limited the results by screening papers published in top journals of business management and accounting, and psychology in last 10 years which revealed 262 studies, we exclude those studies published in non-peer reviewed journals, featuring lack of relevance, leading us to retain 92 articles in last one decade. Further 12 studies were removed due to lacking relevance yielding a total of 80 studies. Of the 80 remaining articles, studies those were not addressing the concept of receiving gift were further removed, retaining 66 articles in total. After scanning the reference list by forward backward linking 10 studies were added for the full text review. In the present study, an inductive thematic synthesis was undertaken to identify descriptive themes. Overall, our sample consist of 76 articles in total addressing gift receiving.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study are divided into three main areas: antecedents, outcomes, and contingency factors of gift-receiving behaviour. Key antecedents that impact gift receiving include giver's intention, type of relationship, gift characteristics, contextual factors like settings and occasions, social and cultural factors like social norms. In terms of outcomes, receiving a gift can boost self-esteem, strengthen relationships, and trigger both positive emotions (like joy or gratitude) and negative ones (such as guilt or disappointment). It can also lead to greater social and monetary engagement—recipients may become more loyal customers in terms of marketing context or feel more connected to others. In some cases, recipients may hide their true feelings about a gift or dispose of unwanted items through regifting. The study also identifies mediating and moderating factors that shape how gifts are received, such as the perceived emotion of the receiver was most prominent mediating factor impacting outcomes

of gift receiving. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the receiver's perspective to improve personal and commercial gifting practices.

Key Contributions

This paper makes a pioneering contribution by systematically reviewing the overlooked area of gift-receiving behaviour, shifting the traditional research focus from gift-giving to the recipient's perspective. It offers a comprehensive framework identifying the antecedents, outcomes, mediating and moderating factors (e.g., relationship type, personality traits, context) influencing how gifts are received and interpreted. Academically, it highlights the psychological and emotional complexities in receiving gifts and offers fresh insights into why gifts sometimes fail, aiding in developing new theories and models. Practically, it helps marketers and retailers refine promotional strategies by understanding how consumers perceive and react to gifts, ultimately reducing gift rejections and returns. As the first systematic review on gift-receiving, it opens new research avenues, urging scholars to explore cultural, emotional, and relational dynamics from the receiver's side and its implications for consumer well-being.

References are available upon request.

**Title: AMBIENT SCENT FOR SOCIAL BETTERMENT? COFFEE SCENT
UNDERMINES UNETHICAL CONSUMPTION**

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Keywords: coffee scent, unethical consumption, perceived arousal, self-diagnostic, skin conductance

Description: This paper explores how and under what conditions, can coffee scent undermines unethical consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Unethical consumer behavior (UCB) significantly impacts global economies, typically attributed to internal psychological traits and socio-cultural influences. However, little attention has been given to external, implicit environmental cues, particularly sensory stimuli such as ambient scent. This research investigates whether ambient coffee scent, a ubiquitous and culturally significant sensory cue, can implicitly influence and reduce unethical consumer behaviors. Additionally, it explores the underlying psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions of this phenomenon.

Method and Data

To address this question, six studies employing diverse methodologies—field experiments, controlled behavioral laboratory experiments, and physiological assessments (Galvanic Skin Response, GSR)—were conducted: Preliminary fieldwork (N = 421) involved an unobtrusive wallet-drop experiment in a university library, comparing lost wallet incidents between coffee-scented and natural-scented environments. Study 1a (N = 398) observed consumer reactions to intentional pricing errors in a milk tea shop, assessing passive unethical behaviors (silent gain) under coffee versus natural scent conditions. Study 1b (N = 132 tables) examined food waste behaviors at a buffet restaurant under ambient coffee versus natural scents. Study 2 (N = 316) employed a laboratory experiment comparing coffee scent, orange scent, and natural scent conditions to examine active cheating behavior and to test the serial mediation effect of perceived arousal and self-diagnostic processes. Study 3 (N = 109)

distinguished perceived from physiological arousal using GSR technology to further confirm the unique role of perceived arousal in driving ethical behavior. Study 4 (N = 398) investigated boundary conditions by experimentally priming coffee scent as either functional (productivity-related) or entertaining (relaxation-related) and evaluating its moderating effects on unethical behaviors.

Summary of Findings

Consistent evidence across studies demonstrated a significant reduction in unethical consumer behaviors in coffee-scented environments. Specifically: Preliminary fieldwork indicated significantly fewer missing wallets under coffee scent conditions (11.59% vs. 21.28% natural). In Study 1a, consumers in coffee-scented environments were significantly less likely to silently benefit from pricing errors (66.50% vs. 80.73%). Study 1b revealed reduced excessive food waste under coffee scent exposure (51.56% vs. 71.01%). Studies 2 and 3 confirmed through laboratory experiments that coffee scent significantly reduced active cheating and fraudulent returns, mediated serially by enhanced perceived arousal and subsequent self-diagnostic processes rather than physiological arousal. Study 4 showed that priming coffee's functional attribute further amplified its positive ethical influence, whereas priming an entertaining attribute reduced this effect.

Key Contributions

This research significantly extends the literature on unethical consumer behavior and sensory marketing by identifying ambient coffee scent as a subtle yet powerful environmental influencer of consumer ethics. Theoretically, it advances expectancy theory by showing

sensory cues as implicit triggers for ethical expectations and self-regulation, thereby integrating sensory and moral psychology streams. Practically, it offers actionable insights for businesses in retail, hospitality, and organizational settings seeking cost-effective interventions to minimize unethical consumer practices. This work also opens avenues for future research to explore additional sensory stimuli and their broader implications across diverse cultural and consumption contexts.

Beyond the Gift: The Role of Giver's Weight Stigma in Shaping Gift Appreciation

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Keywords: gift-giving, weight stigma, warmth, pity, prejudice

Description: The current research suggests that stigmatized cues (weight) in givers can shape recipient's social perception of the giver and appreciation of a gift.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

While previous research has largely focused on gift-related characteristics that influence recipient's appreciation, the current research suggests that stigmatized cues (weight) in givers can shape recipient appreciation for a gift. We examine the following hypotheses:

H1: Gift recipients express greater appreciation for a gift given by an overweight giver compared to the same gift given by a slim giver.

H2a: Gift recipients perceive an overweight giver as warmer than a slim giver.

H2b: Gift recipients' higher perceptions of warmth increase recipients' desire to interact with the giver, which increases recipients' appreciation of the gift.

H2c: The effect of the giver's body type (overweight vs. slim) on recipients' appreciation of the gift is sequentially mediated by the recipients' perception of the warmth and their desire to interact with the giver.

H3: Recipients' weight-related prejudice (WRP) moderates the positive effect of warmth on recipients' desire to interact with giver such that the effect is weaker when recipients' WRP are stronger.

H4: Recipients' pity for giver moderates the effect of giver's body type on recipients' warmth perception such that the effect of giver's body type on warmth mitigates when recipients feel pity for giver.

Method and Data

The paper uses multiple online experiments with an average sample size of around 300 per experiment. Study 1 aims to examine the main effect of the gift giver's body type on the recipient's appreciation and the underlying process. Study 2 explores whether the effect of the giver's body type on the recipient's appreciation is contingent on the recipient's weight-related prejudices, and Study 3 investigates if the effect mitigates when the recipient feels pity for the giver.

Summary of Findings

Going beyond previous gift giving literature that focuses on how gift's features can shape recipient's responses, we find that giver's visual cues (such as being overweight) influence recipient's appreciation of a gift. we demonstrate that the recipient appreciates the gift more when the gift is given by an overweight giver (versus a slim giver). The effect occurs, in part, because the recipient perceives the overweight giver as warmer than a slim giver, illustrating

endorsement of a common stereotype of overweight individuals. Such perceptions of warmth also enhance the recipient's interpersonal inclination toward the giver, which ultimately increases their appreciation for the gift. We further find that the effect mitigates when recipient has stronger weight related prejudices or when the recipient feels pity for the giver.

Key Contributions

We contribute to the literature by bridging two research streams—weight stigmatization and gift giving. In comparison to the literature on weight stigmatization and discriminative behavior against overweight individuals, we find positive stereotypes surrounding such individuals that influence downstream marketing-relevant consequences—gifts from the overweight givers are more appreciated by the recipient. Second, we contribute to the gift-giving literature by extending the focus beyond the gift itself. Previous research has largely focused on how the gift's characteristics can impact recipient's appreciation level and positive responses. In this research, we examine how the recipient's social perceptions of a giver's body type can transfer to the gift that in turn impact the recipient's appreciation of the gift.

We provide an understanding of the biases surrounding consumer body types and conclude that some can even be positive, such that brands have even greater reasons to develop inclusive marketing strategies that celebrate diverse body type representations of consumers in the marketing campaigns. For consumers, awareness of bias towards the physical appearance of other consumers could encourage mindfulness about avoiding such biases when receiving gifts, fostering more equitable interpersonal relationships, and reducing the impact of negative stereotypes in social interactions.

BITCOIN AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WELL BEING - THE INTERSECTION OF CRYPTOCURRENCY, ESG, AND SUSTAINABILITY.

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Keywords: Bitcoin, ESG, sustainability, well-being, cryptocurrency

Description: This paper explores Bitcoin's potential to impact environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, consumer well-being, and sustainability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper explores Bitcoin's current and potential positive influence on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, as well as societal well-being. Since its 2009 launch, Bitcoin's value has risen more than any other major asset class. Between 2013 and 2024, its annualized return was 132%, compared to just 13% for the S&P 500, and its cumulative return exceeded 450,000%, dwarfing the S&P's 326% (BlackRock 2024). This remarkable appreciation has driven adoption by governments (e.g., El Salvador), corporations (e.g., Strategy), and universities (e.g., Emory).

A central reason for this adoption is that Bitcoin's supply is permanently capped at 21 million coins—a feature often described as the invention of absolute scarcity (Alden 2023). This property, safeguarded by decentralized governance, is unlikely to change (Alden 2023) and represents a radical innovation on par with the printing press and the internet (Bank of American Global 2024). Unlike government-issued currencies, which lose purchasing power over time as money supplies expand to finance deficits, Bitcoin's unchangeable cap offers a non-inflationary monetary base (Lepard 2025). Further, Bitcoin's supply cap is unique among nearly all other cryptocurrencies since their developers can adjust their coins' supply issuance (21shares.com). These attributes support expectations for continued appreciation as adoption grows.

Method and Data

Not applicable. This is a conceptual/theoretical paper that synthesizes insights from academic research and industry reports and books to describe Bitcoin and to build a case of Bitcoin's potential implications for ESG and well-being.

Summary of Findings

Bitcoin's adoption offers significant opportunities to advance ESG objectives (Rudd 2023), in addition to well-being via reduced consumption (Ammous 2018). Environmentally, the energy used in the issuance of Bitcoin (i.e., Proof-of-Work mechanism) ties Bitcoin to physical reality (Alden 2023). This stands in stark contrast to government-issued currency, which can be created at virtually no effort or cost. Beyond this fundamental property, Bitcoin mining can address energy challenges by repurposing stranded or excess energy (e.g., methane) and supporting grid stability through demand flexibility (Firdaus and Mori 2023). Socially, Bitcoin expands financial inclusion by giving unbanked populations direct, low-cost access to secure global payment networks, while also protecting savings from inflation in countries with rapidly depreciating currencies, such as Venezuela (Gladstein 2018, 2021). Governance benefits stem from its open-source, decentralized architecture, which ensures transparency, resists censorship, and fosters public trust—qualities that can strengthen anti-corruption measures and institutional accountability (Bitcoin Magazine 2024).

Concerning societal well-being, Bitcoin's scarce supply encourages a long-term orientation—referred to as a low time preference in Austrian economics (Ammous 2018). For individuals, this can foster reduced overconsumption and more deliberate financial planning. For corporations, it can enable investment in innovation and product quality rather than short-term profit maximization.

Statement of Key Contributions

This work makes several key contributions to both academic scholarship and practical application. First, it reframes Bitcoin as more than a financial instrument, positioning it as a driver of sustainability, marketing strategy, and societal change. Academically, it integrates theories from Austrian economics, sustainability studies, and marketing to provide a novel understanding how hard money influences consumption patterns and time preference. It contributes to the literature on minimalism by connecting Bitcoin adoption to reduced materialism (e.g. Kilbourne et al. 1997), increased savings behavior (Held and Brown 2019), and greater mindfulness in consumption decisions (Souza 2024). The study also advances the discussion on corporate growth strategies by highlighting how Bitcoin reserves can mitigate inflationary pressures, allowing firms to prioritize innovation, quality, and long-term value creation over short-term growth targets (Ammous 2018).

From a practical standpoint, the paper offers insights for policymakers, ESG strategists, and corporate decision-makers seeking to align financial practices with sustainability

goals. It challenges prevailing criticisms of Bitcoin's environmental footprint by showcasing emerging energy solutions within the mining industry. By linking Bitcoin's monetary design to positive societal outcomes, the research provides a foundation for future empirical studies and encourages interdisciplinary dialogue on Bitcoin as a tool for systemic improvement.

References are available upon request.

CHASING THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS: THE IMPACT OF ENVY ON AUTHENTICITY AND GOAL ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: Envy, Goal Pursuit, Inauthenticity, Social Comparison

Description: This research examines how envy-driven consumption goals—compared to self-determined goals—lead to lower enjoyment, reduced commitment to future goals, and diminished feelings of self-authenticity, highlighting the psychological downsides of marketing strategies that leverage social comparison and envy.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

How do envy-driven consumption goals, compared to self-determined goals, affect consumers' hedonic enjoyment, commitment to future goal pursuits, and perceptions of self-authenticity?

Envy, a negative emotion rooted in social comparison, often arises when individuals observe others possessing desirable products or experiences (Parrott and Smith, 1993). In consumer contexts, envy is amplified by luxury branding, advertising, and social media, and has been shown to influence both purchase intentions and brand perceptions. However, while previous research distinguishes between benign and malicious envy and their roles in motivating consumer behavior, limited work has explored how the fulfillment (or lack thereof) of envy-

driven versus self-determined goals affects consumers' post-purchase experiences. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2012) and the extended self-concept, this research argues that envy-driven goals—being extrinsically motivated—are less likely to yield hedonic satisfaction or sustained motivation compared to self-determined goals, which align with intrinsic values and enhance authenticity. This paper investigates whether achieving envy-driven goals reduces future goal engagement and feelings of authenticity. By examining these downstream effects, the study contributes to our understanding of how envy operates beyond initial desire and offers important implications for marketing practices that rely on social comparison to stimulate consumer demand.

Method and Data

In Study 1, 402 undergraduate students participated in a 2 (Goal-Determination: Envy-driven vs. Self-determined) $\times$ 2 (Outcome: Successful vs. Unsuccessful) between-subjects design. Participants read a scenario manipulating goal origin and outcome, then completed a 4-item hedonic enjoyment scale (Waterman, 1993) and a 2-item measure of commitment to future goal pursuit. A two-way ANOVA on hedonic enjoyment revealed no main effect of goal determination ($F(1, 398) = 1.31, p = .25$), a significant main effect of outcome ($F(1, 398) = 15.03, p < .001$), and a marginally significant interaction ($F(1, 398) = 3.40, p = .066$), indicating that success increased enjoyment, particularly for self-determined goals.

In Study 2, 304 undergraduate students completed a similar 2 $\times$ 2 design using stimuli adapted from Van de Ven et al. (2011). Participants responded to a 4-item authenticity scale (Wood et al., 2008). A two-way ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of goal determination ($F(1, 300) = 1.52, p = .22$), but a significant main effect of outcome ($F(1, 300) =$

9.67, $p = .002$) and a significant interaction ($F(1, 300) = 6.00, p = .015$). Success in envy-driven goals led to the lowest perceived authenticity.

Summary of Findings:

Study 1 found that when participants achieved a successful outcome, those with envy-driven goals reported significantly lower hedonic enjoyment ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.16$) compared to those with self-determined goals ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.10$). Enjoyment was highest in the successful self-determined condition and significantly lower in both unsuccessful self-determined ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.35$) and envy-driven conditions ($M = 5.04, SD = 1.28$). A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of goal determination ($F(1, 398) = 14.14, p < .001$), a nonsignificant outcome effect, and a significant interaction ($F(1, 398) = 4.61, p = .032$). Commitment to future pursuits was lower for envy-driven goals after success ($M = 5.48, SD = 1.41$) compared to self-determined goals ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.01$).

Study 2 showed that successful envy-driven goal achievement led to significantly higher inauthenticity ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.56$) than all other conditions, including successful self-determined ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.54$), unsuccessful self-determined ($M = 2.68, SD = 1.61$), and unsuccessful envy-driven ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.44$).

Results suggest that envy-driven success may undermine enjoyment, authenticity, and future motivation.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research offers several contributions as follows:

- First, it adds to the growing literature on envy in marketing and its impact on consumer behavior by examining the consequences of satiated and unsatiated envy-driven (vs. self-determined) consumption goals. Prior research shows envy influences consumers' approach to goal pursuit (Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski 2019). This study finds that when individuals miss the opportunity to acquire envy-driven (vs. self-determined) goals, they are less likely to pursue similar goals in the future and feel less authentic.
- Second, my research provides insights to practitioners who may use envy to drive consumers' interest in the products. Branded consumer goods, especially luxury ones, often become a source of consumer envy (Belk 2008; Usman and Ziegler 2024). This research proposes that such a strategy may not be as beneficial when consumers cannot fulfill their envy-driven goals as they are less likely to pursue such brands.
- Third, the findings suggest consumers may derive less hedonic enjoyment from products acquired through envy-driven (vs. self-determined) goals. While envy may drive initial interest, once acquired, the product may be less satisfying, reducing likelihood of future similar purchases.

References are available upon request

Customer Incivility Management with Brand Purpose

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Keywords: Brand Purpose, Customer Incivility, Moral Awareness, Service Transgressions

Description: This study demonstrates how a clearly articulated brand purpose can curb customer incivility by elevating moral awareness, with its impact shaped by the nature of service failures.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions:

Building on the growing concern over customer incivility in high-contact service settings, this study seeks to investigate whether brand purpose—defined as a brand’s foundational reason for existence beyond profit, can serve as a strategic lever for mitigating such uncivil behaviours. While prior research has largely examined employee-centred or environmental interventions, less is known about how brand-level moral cues can influence customer conduct. Drawing on moral awareness theory, we conceptualize brand purpose as a moral symbol that may heighten ethical salience in customers’ minds during service encounters. Accordingly, we address the following central research questions:

1. Can brand purpose and its communication meaningfully reduce customer incivility?
2. Does brand purpose enhance customers’ moral awareness, thereby mediating its influence on civility?
3. How does the nature of service failure—performance-based vs. value-based—moderate the relationship between brand purpose and customer incivility?
4. Do value-based transgressions amplify or attenuate the moral awareness effects of brand purpose compared to performance-based transgressions?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to uncover whether purpose-driven brand communication can not only bolster customer engagement but also function as a preventive mechanism against incivility—ultimately offering a novel, customer-focused approach to cultivating civility in service contexts.

Data and Methodology:

To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, we employ a multi-study research design incorporating both laboratory and field experiments. **Study 1** examines whether exposure to brand purpose messaging reduces customer incivility in a simulated service failure context. Participants interacted with a hypothetical salon brand (“Hair & Flair”), imagined booking a prepaid haircut, and received an unsatisfactory service outcome. Prior to writing a review on the brand’s application, participants were exposed to either a brand purpose statement or a neutral message, with the service provider depicted neutrally to isolate messaging effects.

Study 2 tests whether brand purpose reduces incivility through heightened moral awareness, focusing on mediation effects. **Study 3** investigates whether value-related transgressions, relative to performance-related transgressions, increase moral awareness and whether this in turn reduces customer incivility. **Study 4** shall address alternative explanations by examining prosociality and forgiveness as potential mechanisms underlying the observed effects. In **Study 5** we will conduct a field experiment to replicate the core findings in an actual service environment, involving real customer–employee interactions to establish external validity. This sequential approach integrates experimental control with ecological realism, enabling robust testing of the theoretical model across diverse contexts and operationalizations.

Summary of Findings:

Study 1 investigated the impact of brand purpose messaging on customer incivility in a hypothetical hair salon service failure context. The brand purpose message, "*Fostering Equal Opportunities in Society through Beauty Education and Mentorship*," was pretested with 38 Indian B-school students, confirming significantly higher perceived social purpose compared to the neutral message, "*Celebrating Real Beauty of our Customers through Exceptional Hair Artistry*." In the main experiment, 168 B-school students participated in a workshop, imagining a service failure and providing feedback via a mobile app.

Two trained raters assessed 136 valid review comments (excluding 31 gibberish responses) for incivility using a 1-7 Incivility Rating Scale, achieving moderate inter-rater reliability (Krippendorff's Alpha = 0.688) after resolving discrepancies. Additional measures included "Refund %" (percentage of payment sought for the failure), analyzed for all 168 participants. Results revealed that the brand purpose message significantly reduced customer incivility and refund demands compared to the neutral message, with effects robust after controlling for brand halo. These findings support the hypothesis that brand purpose messaging mitigates uncivil behavior in service failures. Results from subsequent studies (2–5) will be reported as the research progresses, further elucidating the mechanisms and contingencies of brand purpose effects.

Statement of Key Contributions:

This research makes three core contributions to marketing theory and practice.

First, it extends the moral psychology literature in marketing by positioning brand purpose as a moral symbol capable of influencing customer ethical behaviour, thereby bridging the gap between symbolic brand cues and tangible reductions in deviant customer conduct. Unlike prior work focusing on internal organizational mechanisms, this study shifts the perspective toward customer accountability and the psychological processes—specifically moral awareness—that underlie civility in service exchanges.

Second, it advances services marketing research by introducing a contingency lens: the moderating effect of service failure type. The finding that brand purpose may be more effective in mitigating incivility in performance transgressions—but could backfire or intensify reactions in value transgressions—adds important nuance to how marketers design and deploy purpose-driven communication.

Third, the study offers actionable guidance for practitioners. By demonstrating that low-cost, purpose-driven messaging can promote civil behaviour among customers, it equips brand managers with a scalable tool to address uncivil interactions without heavy reliance on costly organizational interventions. Together, these contributions enrich the theoretical framing of moral symbols in marketing, deepen our understanding of civility in service settings, and offer practical pathways for fostering respectful brand-consumer interactions.

Please Note: References are available upon request.

**DEMYSTIFYING CONSUMER INVISIBILITY IN MARKETING RESEARCH:
TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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Keywords: consumer invisibility, context, form, type

This paper conceptualizes consumer invisibility as a multidimensional construct with three underlying dimensions (context, form and type) and explores its antecedents and outcomes.

Extended Abstract

Research Questions

Extant research defines consumer invisibility as a lack of adequate recognition of the needs, preferences, or existence of certain consumer segments by businesses or marketers (Nguyen et al. 2020). For example, in many cases invisible consumers are overlooked due to their relatively poorer economic potential for generating profits (Basu, Kumar, and Kumar 2023). Interestingly, with the emergence of social media and new technologies, consumers have transformed from being silent, isolated, and invisible individuals into a noisy, public, and even more unmanageable than usual (Donthu et al. 2022). However, this transformation is not uniform, and many consumers are still unable to become more visible or remain invisible due to various reasons including digital access and capability (Fisk et al. 2023). Thus, it is not clear if being invisible or visible is actually in the best interest of consumers, especially those from disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of society. We address this important research gap in this paper by reviewing the relevant literature on consumer invisibility and related concepts, to conceptualize consumer invisibility as a multidimensional construct with three underlying dimensions (context, form and type).

Next, we identify five types of antecedents (technological, organizational, environmental, social, and individual) and three levels of outcomes (micro, meso, and macro) of consumer invisibility, with potential moderators (emerging technologies, communication media, culture, and message alignment) that may influence its impact on important consumer outcomes. Finally, we develop a Consumer Invisibility (COIN) framework with ten testable propositions about the relationships among these variables. This research would help marketing managers design products and services to serve diverse consumer groups more effectively by looking beyond surface-level interactions to uncover deeper needs of their customers.

Conceptual Model and Propositions

Lollar (2015) defines visibility as a controllable state, managed through the strategic concealment of selectable aspects of identity, geographic, or demographic details. We rely on this perspective of visibility to argue that consumer invisibility may be subject to the same levels of control and accounts for the notion of strategic concealment. We also argue that consumer invisibility may be subject to its context and form. Accordingly, we conceptualize the degrees to which invisibility might be sought, or allowable by three dimensions (type, context, and form) in our proposed COIN framework and offer the following propositions:

P1: Technological factors would lead to higher consumer invisibility by providing both consumers and marketers with greater control over the level of visibility they seek or wish to provide, respectively.

P2: Organizational and environmental factors would influence consumer invisibility, depending on how they align with consumer expectations and needs.

P3: Individual and social factors would influence consumer invisibility through active engagement or disengagement, particularly among disadvantaged, vulnerable and privacy-sensitive consumers.

P4: Consumer invisibility would mediate the impact of five types of antecedents on the individual-level outcomes that may vary depending on the consumer and the context.

P5: Consumer invisibility would mediate the impact of five types of antecedents on the organizational level consequences in an industry-specific manner subject to applicable marketplace regulations.

P6: Consumer invisibility would mediate the impact of five types of antecedents on the societal level outcomes subject to cultural and socio-economic barriers.

P7: Emerging technologies would moderate the influence of the antecedents on the three underlying dimensions (type, context, and form) of consumer invisibility.

P8: Communication media would moderate the influence of the antecedents on the three underlying dimensions (type, context, and form) of consumer invisibility.

P9: Personal cultural orientations would moderate the impact of consumer invisibility on customer outcomes, wherein consumers with diverse cultural orientations would exhibit different responses to consumer invisibility.

P10: The degree of alignment between the consumer and the message would moderate the impact of consumer invisibility on its outcomes. For instance, stronger alignment may weaken the negative influence of consumer invisibility.

Key Contributions

This paper makes many important theoretical contributions. First, we introduce a novel Consumer Invisibility (COIN) framework to guide the growing research on what it means for consumers to feel valued, seen, and included in their everyday experiences and what may prevent them from fully engaging as a consumer in a visible manner. Second, the COIN framework may explain why some consumers prefer to remain unseen and how marketers can serve these consumer segments more effectively. Third, the COIN framework represents a new theoretical lens to examine the well-established concepts in marketing research, such as service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value, by allowing researchers to look beyond what is visible and try to discover what the consumers are unwilling to reveal. To summarize, this paper would pave the way for more theory-based research on this topic.

Note: References are available upon request.

DIGITAL EXCLUSION AND HOUSEHOLD DEBT: FINDINGS FROM THE GERMAN AGING SURVEY

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Keywords: Digital Exclusion; Household Debt; Household Income; Logistic Regression; Cross-Lagged Panel Model

Description: This study investigates the negative impact of digital exclusion on household debt, mediated by household income, and its lagged effects, offering insights for targeted marketing and digital inclusion strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

A growing body of research highlights the pivotal role of household debt in shaping consumer behavior, increasing consumption expenditures, and optimizing spending patterns by easing liquidity constraints, particularly for lower-income households (Eggertsson & Krugman, 2012; Mian et al., 2017; Zhang & Guo, 2020; Bialowolski et al., 2024; Deng et al., 2025; Zurita, 2025). In the digital age, internet access significantly influences financial behavior, often correlating with higher household debt and increased risks of credit card debt delinquency (Basnet & Donou-Adonsou, 2018; Li et al., 2024).

Digital exclusion, which is defined as limited access to internet tools and capabilities (Liao et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2024; Lu et al., 2022), hinders households' ability to take advantage of digital

financial services and marketing. The heavy reliance of financial institutions on digital channels restricts the access of digitally excluded households to marketing information and moderate debt for consumption needs (Castañeda et al., 2020; Pariboni, 2016; Xiao & Yao, 2022).

Our research questions are:

1. How does digital exclusion influence household debt?
2. Does digital exclusion exert a long-term lagged effect on household debt?
3. Does household income mediate the effect of digital exclusion on household debt?

Method and Data

In this study, we analyzed data from 3,879 survey responses obtained through the German Ageing Survey (Deutscher Alterssurvey, DEAS), conducted by the Research Data Center of the German Center for Gerontology (Klaus et al., 2017). The DEAS is a population-based study of community-dwelling individuals aged ≥ 40 years in Germany. We used the Internet Competency Score the key indicator to measure digital exclusion. Respondents who self-reported as rather not competent or not competent at all were classified as digitally excluded. This measure captures respondents' digital competence and provides a more comprehensive reflection of digital exclusion than traditional binary measures such as internet use or non-use (Ueno et al., 2023; Heponiemi et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2024; Duan et al., 2024).

The dependent variable in this study is Debt (from property purchase) to pay off (0=No, 1=Yes), with the analysis focusing on the impact of digital exclusion on debt. Independent variables include age, gender, marital status, living children existence, household income, education level, and positive affect. We mainly used binary logistic regression to analyze the relationships between these variables, and we used a cross-lagged panel model (CLPM) to explore its long-term effects. We also selected household income as the mediating variable.

Summary of Findings

The binary logistic regression shows that the relationship between digital exclusion and household debt is statistically significant ($B=-0.366$, $p=0.015$). This indicates that as the level of digital exclusion increases, the likelihood of an individual incurring debt decreases.

Among the control variables, age ($B=-.074$, $p<.001$), gender (women, $B=-.416$, $p<.001$), and marital status (single, $B=-.995$, $p<.001$) negatively affect household debt. Conversely, having living children ($B=.381$, $p=.011$) and higher household income ($B=.003$, $p<.001$) positively influence household debt.

We tested the mediation effects with bootstrapping (est=-0.007, 95%CI [-0.009, -0.005], $p<0.05$, Bootstrap=1000). The CLPM without mediator found that individuals experiencing digital exclusion were more likely to incur household debt in subsequent periods (T1-T2: $B=0.011$, $p<0.001$; T2-T3: $B=0.107$, $p<0.001$). Conversely, individuals with higher household debt may exacerbate digital exclusion in subsequent stages (T1-T2: $B=0.048$, $p<0.001$; T2-T3: $B=0.059$, $p<0.001$). The CLPM with the mediator partially explains the impact of digital exclusion on household debt. Digital exclusion negatively affects household income, which contributes to increased debt. However, between 2021 and 2023, household income had a negative effect on debt ($B=-0.055$, $p<0.05$), possibly due to the macroeconomic environment during this period (Buti & Fabbrini, 2023; Ciravegna et al., 2023).

Statement of Key Contributions

Our study's theoretical contributions are threefold. First, it clarifies the negative effects of digital exclusion on household debt by establishing a distinct association. Second, it examines the delayed effects of digital exclusion on household debt dynamics through the cross-lagged panel model, thereby expanding the temporal scope of related research. Third, it incorporates household income

as a mediator in this relationship, thereby refining our understanding of the underlying mechanism. Our study has three practical contributions. First, it allows marketers to segment consumers based on digital exclusion and demographics, enabling them to develop targeted marketing strategies. Second, it provides a basis for offering tailored financial products to elderly, digitally excluded users, addressing their unique needs. Third, our study advocates for digital skills training to improve access to financial services, promote prudent debt management, and encourage healthier financial practices.

DO GENERATION AND GENDER MATTER IN POSITIONAL CONSUMPTION? AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords:

Status consumption, Conspicuous consumption, Fashion consciousness, Luxury attitudes, Evolutionary consumer psychology

Description:

This paper examines how gender and generation shape status-driven consumption patterns from an evolutionary perspective.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Status is a fundamental human motive influencing consumption across luxury, fashion, and positional goods. While evolutionary psychology recognizes its universal role, limited research examines how gender and generation jointly shape status-related behaviors. This

study investigates differences in four key constructs—status consumption (SC), conspicuous consumption (CC), fashion consciousness (FC), and attitudes toward luxury products (ALP)—while controlling for status as a fundamental motive (SFM). Drawing on evolutionary theory, we hypothesize that females will score higher than males, younger consumers higher than older ones, and that generational effects will be more pronounced among females. Gendered consumption strategies may reflect evolved adaptations: females signaling refinement and relational capital; males emphasizing dominance and competitive advantage. Age-related variation is expected as younger consumers prioritize mate attraction and social visibility, while older consumers shift toward legacy and stability. By integrating these dimensions within a single evolutionary framework, this research addresses a notable gap in the literature. Beyond theoretical advancement, the study offers practical insights for marketers and policymakers seeking to understand—and responsibly target—distinct consumer segments in the fashion, luxury, and positional goods sectors. The research also informs consumer education initiatives aimed at mitigating potential risks associated with conspicuous and status-oriented spending.

Method and Data

We collected survey data from 533 respondents: 169 males (32%) and 364 females (68%), with 217 (41%) from Generation Z (18–25 years) and 316 (59%) from older generations. Measures employed established multi-item scales: SC (Eastman et al., 1999), CC (Chaudhuri et al., 2011), FC (Mehta, 2020; Sproles & Kendall, 1986), ALP (Li et al., 2012), and SFM (Neel et al., 2016). All exhibited strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.756\text{--}0.840$).

We applied a 2×2 MANCOVA to examine main and interaction effects of gender and generation on SC, CC, FC, and ALP, controlling for SFM. Diagnostic tests confirmed the suitability of the analysis: Box's M indicated homogeneity of variance–covariance matrices;

Bartlett's test confirmed significant intercorrelations among dependent variables; and collinearity checks showed negligible associations between SFM and the independent variables. This approach allows for simultaneous examination of multiple dependent variables, accounting for shared variance and potential interaction effects. The binary nature of both independent variables ensures clear group comparisons, while controlling for SFM isolates incremental gender and generational influences. This design provides a robust test of evolutionary predictions regarding adaptive consumption patterns and supports the derivation of actionable marketing and policy insights.

Summary of Findings

Results reveal significant main effects for both gender and generation. Females and Generation Z exhibit higher SC, CC, FC, and ALP overall, with gender explaining more variance than generation. Interaction effects are nuanced: the generational increase in SC is stronger for males, while generational increases in FC and ALP are stronger for females. CC shows no meaningful interaction. Across all measures, Generation Z scores higher than older cohorts, highlighting a stronger orientation toward image-focused and status-related consumption in younger consumers. These effects persist even after controlling for SFM, confirming that gender- and generation-specific behaviors extend beyond the universal human motive for status. Notably, the patterns challenge assumptions about uniform generational effects across genders and contradict claims that Gen Z males' fashion involvement matches females'. Instead, younger males appear more status-signaling oriented, while younger females show greater engagement with luxury and fashion. The findings suggest differentiated adaptive purposes in resource display and social competition, consistent with evolutionary theory. These insights carry strategic relevance for segmenting and targeting consumers in luxury and fashion markets, while also identifying segments—

particularly young females—potentially at higher risk of overindulgence in conspicuous consumption.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study is the first to jointly examine gender and generation effects on SC, CC, FC, and ALP within an evolutionary framework while controlling for SFM. Theoretical contributions include demonstrating that gender- and generation-based differences persist beyond universal status motives, indicating evolutionarily meaningful adaptations in consumption strategies. Younger males' elevated SC suggests a dominance-signaling focus, while younger females' higher FC and ALP reflect refinement and relational capital signaling. The results challenge the assumption of uniform generational trends and provide a multidimensional view of positional consumption.

From a managerial perspective, these insights enable more precise segmentation. Campaigns for younger males should highlight dominance, achievement, and competitive positioning; those for younger females should emphasize exclusivity, aesthetics, and fashion-forward elements. Digital platforms, with accessible demographic targeting, are well suited for implementing such differentiated strategies. Public policy implications arise from the heightened susceptibility of younger and female consumers to conspicuous spending, suggesting a need for targeted financial literacy and responsible consumption initiatives. By identifying observable traits—gender and age—as reliable predictors of status-driven consumption, this research equips marketers, policymakers, and educators with actionable knowledge to navigate both the opportunities and the ethical considerations inherent in targeting positional goods markets.

References are available upon request.

DON'T LOOK UP: THE EFFECT OF GROUPS, COGNITIVE DISSONANCE, AND TIME ALLOCATION ON HEALTHY CONSUMPTION DECISIONS

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Keywords: sedentary behavior, cognitive dissonance, reference groups, selective distortion,

discretionary time

Description

This study examines how reference groups, selective distortion, and discretionary time allocation jointly shape the decision to remain engaged with regular guided physical activity (RGPA), a key behavioral factor in preventing chronic diseases.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As chronic diseases driven by sedentary lifestyles and obesity continue to rise, accounting for over 75% of deaths in countries like Brazil, understanding the psychosocial drivers of health-related consumption is critical. This study addresses how cognitive and social mechanisms influence decisions regarding sustained engagement in RGPA. Specifically, it explores three key factors: (1) reference group influence, or the social pressure exerted by peers, family, and aspirational figures; (2) selective distortion, the cognitive tendency to reinterpret threatening health information to avoid psychological discomfort; and (3) discretionary time, defined as personally controlled time that may be hedonic or goal-oriented. Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory and social influence models, this study investigates how these constructs contribute to the continuity or abandonment of RGPA. A central research question also assesses whether aspirational group influence increases retention in health-enhancing services.

Method and Data

A cross-sectional online survey was conducted with 597 Brazilian adults who currently or previously engaged in RGPA. Respondents completed validated Likert-scale measures adapted for three constructs: (1) Reference Group Influence (four items, $\alpha = .74$), measuring perceived social alignment with family, peers, or workplace; (2) Selective Distortion (three items, $\alpha = .83$), capturing resistance to acknowledging the health risks of physical inactivity; and (3) Discretionary Time Hedonic Perception (three items, $\alpha = .63$), evaluating whether leisure time is perceived as enjoyable when allocated to physical activity. Factor analyses confirmed scale

structure, and binary logistic regression modeled the relationship between these variables and the respondent's RGPA status (active or former user). The analysis was performed using SPSS 29.

Summary of Findings

Findings show that selective distortion significantly reduces the likelihood of maintaining RGPA engagement ($B = -0.39$, $p < .001$), reinforcing its role as a psychological barrier to adopting healthier routines. Individuals who deny the necessity of physical activity are 32% less likely to continue RGPA. Reference group influence had a marginally significant effect ($B = -0.16$, $p = .06$), suggesting that individuals surrounded by sedentary peers may conform to inactive norms. In contrast, aspirational groups, such as fitness influencers, had no statistically significant effect ($B = -0.04$, $p = .59$), indicating limited persuasive power among non-adherent individuals. Finally, discretionary time perception emerged as the strongest predictor ($B = 0.78$, $p < .001$), with each unit increase in hedonic valuation of RGPA time more than doubling the odds of continued participation (+118.4%). The model correctly classified 78.6% of participants and explained up to 43.6% of variance (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .436$).

Key Contributions

This study advances the literature by integrating cognitive dissonance theory and time-use psychology to explain behavioral disengagement from health-related services. It reveals that promoting RGPA adherence requires more than awareness campaigns. It demands confronting selective distortion, reshaping social environments, and transforming how leisure is perceived. The limited influence of aspirational figures challenges conventional marketing approaches reliant on celebrity endorsements and calls for community-based interventions that emphasize

peer reinforcement. Public health practitioners and service providers should focus on fostering environments where physical activity is socially rewarding and personally meaningful.

Emphasizing the pleasurable, emotionally gratifying aspects of RGPA may be more effective in driving long-term behavioral change than norm-based appeals alone. In summary, this paper offers a multidimensional framework for understanding, and ultimately shifting, patterns of healthy consumption under the pressures of modern life.

References: References are available upon request.

EFFECTS OF DIGITAL CONTENT TYPE ON CONSUMERS' DIGITAL HOARDING BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: digital hoarding, content types, anticipated regret, risk aversion

Description: This study investigates how different types of digital content (hedonic vs. utilitarian) influence individuals' digital hoarding behavior, revealing that utilitarian content is more likely to be hoarded due to heightened anticipated regret and risk aversion, with evidence from one secondary-data analysis and three scenario-based experiments, thereby extending product-type research to the digital domain and offering practical strategies for reducing unnecessary accumulation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The rapid expansion of information and communication technologies, together with the widespread adoption of the Internet, has made digital office work and content creation pervasive. Digital hoarding—excessive accumulation of digital content—has become

common, yet such indiscriminate storage can harm cognitive resources, cause ego depletion, and trigger anxiety and compulsive behaviors. At the organizational level, it can impair efficiency and raise costs. While prior research has mainly examined individual traits and psychological drivers, little attention has been paid to the role of the content itself. Drawing on the hedonic–utilitarian framework from marketing, this study investigates: (1) whether hedonic versus utilitarian digital content leads to different hoarding tendencies, and (2) the psychological mechanisms—specifically anticipated regret and risk aversion—underlying these effects.

Method and Data

We conducted one exploratory analysis using authentic secondary data from the Bilibili platform and three scenario-based experiments, both offline and via Credamo. Across studies, utilitarian content was hoarded more than hedonic content (Exploratory analysis: $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 96.45\%$ vs. $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 20.89\%$, $SD_{\text{utilitarian}} = 2.10$ vs. $SD_{\text{hedonic}} = .10$; $t(99) = 3.60$, $p < .05$, $d = .51$, 95% CI = [.34, 1.17]; Experiment 1: $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.38$ vs. $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.93$, $SD_{\text{utilitarian}} = 1.25$ vs. $SD_{\text{hedonic}} = 1.42$; $t(168) = 2.18$, $p < .05$, $d = .33$, 95% CI = [.04, .85]; Experiment 2: $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 13.07$ vs. $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 8.18$, $SD_{\text{utilitarian}} = 11.82$ vs. $SD_{\text{hedonic}} = 4.45$; $t(35) = 2.10$, $p < .05$). In Experiment 3, anticipated regret mediated the effect ($\beta=0.398$, 95% CI [0.207, 0.628]), risk aversion also mediated ($\beta=0.104$, 95% CI [0.022, 0.204]), and both jointly formed a significant serial mediation ($\beta=0.059$, 95% CI [0.012, 0.136]).

Summary of Findings

Our model positions content type as the independent variable, anticipated regret and risk aversion as mediators, and hoarding behavior as the outcome. Results show: (1) Utilitarian content elicits stronger hoarding than hedonic content; (2) Anticipated regret mediates this effect, as utilitarian content heightens perceived loss from non-hoarding, prompting storage; (3) Risk aversion also mediates, with individuals more willing to keep functionally valuable content; (4) Anticipated regret and risk aversion jointly produce a serial mediation, where regret increases risk-avoidance, intensifying hoarding of goal-oriented utilitarian content.

Key Contributions

Theoretically, this study (1) enriches digital hoarding research by applying the hedonic–utilitarian framework to content and revealing the roles of anticipated regret and risk aversion; (2) strengthens methodological rigor through combining secondary data analysis with experiments; and (3) extends product-type research from physical goods to digital content, broadening digital-age consumer decision-making theory. Practically, the findings can help consumers make rational storage decisions, guide platforms to design prompts discouraging unnecessary accumulation, and aid organizations in reducing inefficiencies and costs from excessive data retention.

EMOTIONAL EATING AND FOOD CONSUMPTION: A REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: emotional eating, emotional food, food consumption, systematic literature review

Description: This systematic literature review provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing research on emotional eating within the context of food consumption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Emotional eating is defined as consuming food – generally with sugar and fat – in response to emotions (Chang 2021; Debeuf et al. 2022). Previous research has primarily focused on negative emotions such as stress, anxiety, and anger as triggers for emotional eating (e.g., Aguiar-Bloemer and Diez-Garcia 2018; Munichor and Friedlander 2019). However, recent studies have also explored the connection between eating behavior and positive emotions such as hope, happiness, and food as a reward (Bongers et al. 2013; Chang 2021). This topic raises a significant discussion

about the influence of emotions on food consumption and its implications for health, self-control, and the role of food in daily life. Considering this context, we conducted a comprehensive systematic literature review to examine the antecedents, decisions, and outcomes investigated in emotions and food consumption studies. Our research illustrates how different emotional triggers activate mechanisms, which results in varied consumption patterns. By linking these triggers and decision-making processes to their short- and long-term consequences, we provide practical insights for developing targeted interventions and outlining a future research agenda to analyze unexplored nuances.

Method and Data

This study employs a systematic literature review to analyze the influence of emotional eating on food consumption behavior. This review is domain-based and follows the ADO framework, categorizing the studies according to the Antecedents, Decisions, and Outcomes hypothesized in the theoretical models (Paul, Khatri, and Kaur Duggal 2023). We searched for synonyms and related terms for emotional eating (e.g., Bongers et al. 2013; Cardi et al. 2019). Our search string included terms like “emotional eat*,” “comfort eating,” “hedonic eating,” and others relevant to food consumption. We specified the context with terms such as “consumer” or “customer” using “AND.” We utilized the Scopus database, focusing on peer-reviewed English articles in Business, Management, or Psychology, yielding 461 documents. After analyzing abstracts, we selected 154 papers that directly addressed the impact of emotions on food consumption, excluding those centered on medical studies. From these, we selected 68 studies that employed experimental methodologies for understanding the causal relationships between the constructs.

Summary of Findings

Emotional eating is influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. Internally, emotions – both negative (e.g., sadness, stress) and positive (e.g., happiness) – affect food choices, often increasing the consumption of high-calorie foods. Cognitive factors like perceived control and busyness also shape decisions, with stress weakening dietary restraint and promoting indulgence. Externally, product-related elements (e.g., visual cues), environmental factors (e.g., music, payment methods), and social contexts (e.g., peer influence, shared meals) further impact eating behaviors. Emotional regulation and cognitive processing mechanisms, such as hedonic cues, influence how individuals respond to food stimuli. Behavioral responses, like cravings or uncontrolled eating, are often shaped by mood and individual traits such as emotional eating tendencies, dieting habits, and physiological states like hunger or body weight. Situational contexts, including family practices or food marketing, interact with internal states to influence behavior. Outcomes of emotional eating include increased food intake and preference for unhealthy foods, particularly under stress or low self-control. Positive emotions can also drive eating but may lead to better choices when paired with information. Emotional eating can serve both adaptive (e.g., stress relief) and maladaptive functions (e.g., weight gain), affecting broader domains like mental health, social interaction, and purchase intentions.

Statement of Key Contributions

By applying the Antecedents-Decisions-Outcomes (ADO) framework, we organize emotional eating considering its internal factors (emotional, cognitive, and physiological processes) and external influences (social settings, marketing cues, environmental triggers) that shape food choices. The paper also integrates cognitive mechanisms, such as perceptions of control and

attentional biases, with physiological responses like stress-induced cravings, providing a holistic view of why and how emotional eating occurs. By bridging literature from psychology, consumer behavior, and nutrition, this study offers a theoretically and practically overview to advance research on emotional eating and guide interventions toward healthier food consumption. As a future research agenda, we call for future studies on the role of positive emotions on food choices, situational factors (availability, time constraints, payment methods), and the adaptive (versus maladaptive) consequences of emotional eating. Importantly, the effects of emotional eating extend beyond diet, potentially influencing mental health, social connections, and financial stability, underscoring its wide-ranging impact on overall well-being. Finally, marketers and policymakers can use these insights to understand how emotions influence consumer decisions and design strategies that balance indulgence and well-being.

References are available upon request.

EXAMINING PROBLEMATIC SMARTPHONE USAGE: THE EVOLUTION FROM COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS TO EXCESSIVE USE IN INDIA AND CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This investigation scrutinizes the escalating trend of problematic smartphone usage among young populations in India and China, elucidating its underlying factors and ramifications. Employing descriptive research methodologies and structural equation modeling (SEM), this study illuminates how cognitive distortions that perpetuate compulsive usage patterns. The outcomes offer critical insights into the behavioral dimensions of smartphone dependency, helpful to marketing professionals, policy architects, and educational practitioners.

Keywords: Problematic Smartphone Usage, Cognitive Distortions, Youth Digital Conduct, Inflated Usage Patterns, Digital Well-being

Description: This study investigates the rising issue of problematic smartphone use among youth in India and China, revealing how cognitive distortions drive compulsive behaviors equips stakeholders to effectively address marketing strategies, policy development, and educational interventions.

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous presence of smartphones has transformed the digital ecosystem, with China and India emerging as the foremost markets for user adoption. However, this widespread integration has been accompanied by an increase in smartphone dependence, notably among younger demographics. While previous studies have investigated the catalysts of smartphone addiction, a significant knowledge gap remains regarding the progression from addiction to

distorted perceptions, and ultimately to excessive use. Addressing this trajectory is crucial for tackling escalating societal challenges and enhancing the current body of research.

The development of smartphone addiction can be conceptualized through a three-stage model. The initial phase involved frequent and habitual smartphone use. This behavior often progresses to a second stage, characterized by cognitive distortions, where individuals form perceptions centered on security, enjoyment, utility, and ease of use (Bacil et al., 2024). These beliefs subsequently reinforce compulsive behaviors, leading to the third stage of excessive smartphone usage. At this point, users recognize their dependence but struggle to reduce their usage despite negative consequences.

This study aimed to examine these stages, specifically analyzing how perceived security, utility, usability, and enjoyment influence compulsive behavioral intentions and excessive smartphone use. By investigating this progression, this study seeks to elucidate the complex mechanisms underlying smartphone dependency and provide actionable insights. These findings not only address a pressing global issue but also establish a foundation for practical interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of compulsive smartphone behaviors.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND INVESTIGATIVE FRAMEWORK

This study utilizes the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as its core theoretical underpinning to examine the correlations between smartphone addiction (SPA), perceived security (PS), perceived usefulness (PU), perceived enjoyment (PE), perceived ease of use (PEU), and compulsive behavioral usage intention (BUI) in the context of excessive smartphone use. TPB provides a well-established model for comprehending how individual attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Through the application of TPB, this study aimed to decipher the cognitive and social factors that drive compulsive smartphone behavior and illuminate the processes by which these behaviors escalate into problematic usage patterns.

Examining Excessive Smartphone Use

The investigation identified excessive smartphone use as a critical phase in the development of smartphone dependence. During this stage, individuals exhibit compulsive behaviors rooted in distorted perceptions of their smartphone use. Despite acknowledging their excessive habits, users often struggle to reduce their dependence, highlighting the need for effective overuse management strategies (Olson et al., 2022).

This study incorporates the extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to evaluate how perceptions of security, enjoyment, usefulness, and ease of use contribute to compulsive behavioral intentions. TAM enhances our understanding of how technological and psychological factors interact to reinforce compulsive behaviors and lead to excessive use (Bernroider et al., 2014). TAM creates a comprehensive framework for analyzing the progression from smartphone addiction to excessive use driven by distorted beliefs.

Empirical Support and Research Gaps

The proposed framework is supported by various studies that have demonstrated key relationships.

Addiction and Perceived Security:

Research indicates a strong association between addiction and users' sense of security with smartphones, even when risks are recognized (Arpaci et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024).

Addiction and Perceived Usefulness:

Addiction is often connected to users' perceptions of the productivity and task efficiency facilitated by smartphones (Lee et al., 2018; Kuem et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021).

Addiction and Perceived Ease of Use:

The accessibility and user-friendliness of smartphone technology significantly contributes to addiction (Bernroider et al., 2014).

Enjoyment as a Behavioral Driver:

Entertainment and escapism function as key motivators for compulsive smartphone use, reinforcing distorted beliefs (Alhassan et al., 2018; Thomée, 2018; Chen et al., 2015).

Behavioral Intentions and Excessive Use:

Behavioral intentions influenced by usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment often lead to excessive smartphone use (Bernroider et al. 2014).

Although existing research provides valuable insights into smartphone addiction, gaps remain in the understanding of how addiction evolves into distorted beliefs and compulsive behaviors, culminating in excessive use. These gaps are particularly evident in youth populations, where overuse has significant implications for mental health and social wellbeing.

This study's framework establishes a structured approach for investigating the behavioral and cognitive dynamics underlying compulsive smartphone use. The findings aim to inform practical interventions to address the growing issue of smartphone overuse, thereby contributing to healthier digital habits and improved well-being.

METHODS

Data Collection

This study utilized a descriptive research design to explore smartphone addiction among young adults in India and China, who were chosen for their substantial smartphone penetration and usage patterns. This study focused on individuals aged 18-25, a cohort deemed susceptible to excessive smartphone use. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered using a cross-sectional approach. The sample comprised 1,102 participants, 490 from India and 612 from China. Convenience sampling was used based on age (18-25 years), country, and daily smartphone usage exceeding eight hours, enabling a thorough examination of smartphone addiction across both nations.

This study sought to examine the interrelationships between Smartphone Addiction (SPA) and the following key variables within the context of excessive smartphone use: Perceived Security (PS), Perceived Usefulness (PU), Perceived Enjoyment (PE), Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), and Behavioral Usage Intention (BUI).

Measurement and scale

Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert type scale, and the data were subjected to comprehensive reliability and validity checks. The survey was conducted online, without participant incentives. Construct measurement utilizes established psychometric tools adapted to the smartphone context where necessary (Davis, 1989; Gefen et al., 2003; Johnston & Warkentin, 2010; Nysveen, 2005). The framework for evaluating smartphone addiction was based on Charlton's (2002) scale for online game addiction. Measures for Perceived Security were adapted from Ha and Stoel (2009) and Kim et al. (2010), whereas Perceived Enjoyment was assessed using scales from Davis et al. (1992) and Heijden (2004).

Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis, the dataset underwent preprocessing, including assessments for nonresponse bias and common method bias, both of which were determined to be statistically insignificant. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed for data analysis because of its efficacy in predictive and exploratory research and its capacity to handle complex models without stringent data assumptions (Hair et al., 2012).

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DATA INTERPRETATION

The research methodology encompassed meticulous data processing and analysis protocol, leveraging a convenience sampling technique to acquire primary data from 1,102 respondents. The application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) facilitated the examination of six predictor variables and one criterion variable (see Figure 1). The observations from the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) models illustrated that the posited framework provided an excellent fit to the data. The model's Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) resulted in a value of 1.89, which is below acceptable criteria, suggesting that the model is balanced if we think about it in terms of complexity versus explainability. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.97 indicated an excellent fit relative to the null model. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.96, indicating an excellent fit while penalizing the simplicity of the model. The Parsimony

Normed Fit Index (PNFI) provided a model parsimony measurement of 0.72, which is above recommended minimum levels, and indicates efficiency of the model structure. These fit indices together suggest that the SEM framework appropriately models the relationships among constructs whilst providing acceptable levels of statistical and theoretical fit. Model fit indices corroborated the congruence between the empirical data and hypothesized theoretical framework, with all constructs demonstrating statistically significant outcomes ($P < 0.001$). The salient coefficient of determination values was recorded for the following key constructs: Inflated Smartphone Usage (0.679), Compulsive Behavioral Usage Intention (0.634), Perceived Enjoyment (0.667), Perceived Ease of Use (0.864), Perceived Security (0.594), and Perceived Usefulness (0.913). The investigation revealed partial mediation effects for several constructs, including Perceived Enjoyment, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Compulsive Behavioral Usage Intention, exhibiting both direct and indirect influences. Furthermore, the analysis identified moderating relationships such as the impact of Perceived Security on Perceived Enjoyment and Perceived Ease of Use, the influence of perceived enjoyment and perceived ease of use, and the effect of Perceived Usefulness on Perceived Ease of Use and Compulsive Behavioral Usage Intention, thereby enhancing the overall model robustness.

Path loadings elucidated the associations between constructs and their respective indicators. In the context of Smartphone Addiction, the most prominent factors were anxiety during smartphone separation (0.845), compulsive notification checking (0.826), and disorientation in the absence of the device (0.816). These behavioral manifestations were associated with irrational cognition, as reflected in dimensions such as Perceived Enjoyment, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Security, and Perceived Usefulness. . In case of coefficient of determination (R^2) for Perceived Security of 0.594, which suggests that about 59.4% of the variance in the dependent construct that is most closely associated (most likely behavioral intention or some

such related mediator) is explained by Perceived Security in the model. Therefore, this is a moderately strong effect. Although Perceived Security is not the strongest predictor compared to, for example, Perceived Usefulness, which had an R^2 of 0.913, it does remain an important component of user behavior to a certain extent, especially in more trust/risk/digital engagement contexts.

A cross-cultural comparison between India and China conducted through multi-group analysis (See Table 1) revealed significant disparities in smartphone addiction dynamics. The results indicated a higher prevalence of Inflated Smartphone Usage in China ($R^2 = 0.619$) than in India ($R^2 = 0.554$). Within the Chinese cohort, Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness emerged as more potent mediators, whereas Perceived Enjoyment assumed a more prominent role in the Indian context. These findings underscore the cultural variations in the manifestation of distorted beliefs and cognitive patterns that influence smartphone addiction across diverse national contexts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This investigation revealed a substantial reliance on smartphones among participants, with many experiencing discomfort and anxiety when separated from their devices. The persistent urge to check notifications appears to provide a sense of security, thus reinforcing this attachment. Despite awareness of the potential risks in online transactions, respondents continued to view smartphones as secure and enjoyed their use for activities such as online gaming, social media engagement, and messaging. Even when cognizant of excessive Internet use and prolonged engagement with gaming and social media platforms, respondents prioritized these digital interactions, indicating that satisfaction derived from virtual experiences often compensates for unmet offline needs.

Multi-group analysis (MGA) highlighted regional distinctions between Chinese and Indian respondents. Chinese users demonstrated greater ease of use, potentially stemming

from the country's advanced digital infrastructure, wider availability of smartphone options, and widespread technological literacy among youth. Furthermore, Chinese users exhibited higher trust in government regulations to protect digital security, which likely contributed to their confidence in integrating smartphones into various aspects of their lives. However, Indian users displayed stronger cognitive biases toward perceived enjoyment, driven by the growing influence of entertainment applications that offer immediate gratification and stress relief. These cultural and technological differences underscore the unique ways in which smartphones shape user behavior in each region.

These findings have significant implications for marketers, including smartphone manufacturers, application developers, and telecommunication providers. These stakeholders were responsible for addressing excessive smartphone use and promoting healthier consumption patterns. Encouraging balanced smartphone use not only benefits users, but also enhances brand reputation and customer loyalty. Public awareness initiatives could play a crucial role in this effort by educating users about the risks of overuse and promoting practices that support digital well-being. Social media campaigns, for example, can provide accessible strategies for moderating screen time.

From a practical perspective, marketers can develop and implement tools to help users monitor and regulate their smartphone use. Built-in applications featuring time trackers, reminders to take breaks, and usage dashboards could empower users to self-manage their habits. Periodic alerts, such as pop-ups and prompting users to limit their screen time, could further encourage moderation. Additionally, health tips or "green alerts" promoting environmentally conscious behavior could be integrated into smartphone ecosystems to support both personal well-being and sustainable practices.

The adverse consequences of excessive smartphone usage, including compromised mental well-being, diminished social interactions, and suboptimal academic performance,

necessitate proactive intervention from pertinent stakeholders. Implementing automated limitations on recreational applications following prolonged use and streamlining access to frequently used programs could mitigate unnecessary engagement. Encouraging the installation of updates and the adoption of responsible usage tools would contribute to the cultivation of salutary digital habits. Furthermore, integrated notification systems can assist users in regulating their screen-time consumption.

Marketing professionals must recognize their role in corporate social responsibility by guiding consumers towards more balanced and productive digital behavior. The implementation of diverse alert mechanisms, such as push notifications, text messages, or in-app reminders, can inform users of excessive usage patterns and promote moderation. Periodic prompts encouraging users to evaluate and adjust their digital consumption habits could facilitate the development of healthier, long-term practices. These initiatives would not only address smartphone dependency but also enhance brand loyalty and consumer trust.

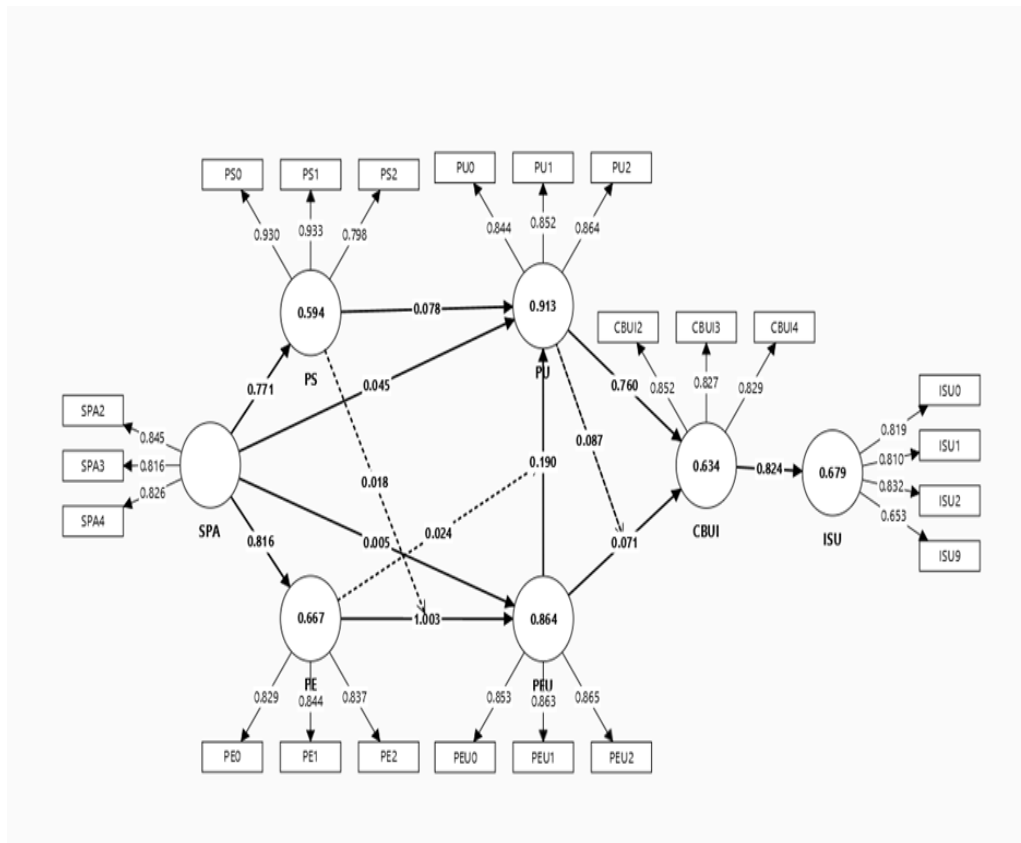


Figure 1: Path Model (SEM)**Table 1: Results of Multigroup Analysis**

Pathway	Path Coefficients (β)		Standard Error (SE)		t-value		P
	China	India	China	India	China	India	
SPA -> PS	0.752	0.748	0.030	0.034	25.07	22.00	< 0.001
SPA -> PE	0.79	0.848	0.032	0.038	24.69	22.32	< 0.001
PS -> PU	0.713	0.803	0.029	0.036	24.59	22.31	< 0.001
PE -> PEU	0.023	0.214	0.001	0.010	23.00	21.40	< 0.001
PEU -> PU	0.136	0.0714	0.005	0.003	27.20	23.80	< 0.001
PU -> CBUI	0.185	0.213	0.007	0.010	26.43	21.30	< 0.001
PEU -> CBUI	0.757	0.788	0.031	0.036	24.42	21.89	< 0.001
CBUI -> ISU	0.787	0.744	0.032	0.034	24.59	21.88	< 0.001
SPA -> PU	0.087	0.020	0.004	0.001	21.75	20.00	< 0.001
SPA -> PEU	0.9	0.953	0.036	0.043	25.00	22.16	< 0.001

Path way	Path Coefficients (β)		Standard Error (SE)		t-value		R ² Value		
	China	India	China	India	China	India	Construct	China	India
SPA -> PS	0.752	0.748	0.030	0.034	25.07	22.00	Perceived Security (PS)	0.566	0.560
SPA -> PE	0.79	0.848	0.032	0.038	24.69	22.32	Perceived Enjoyment (PE)	0.632	0.718
SPA -> PU	0.087	0.020	0.004	0.001	21.75	20.00	Perceived Usefulness (PU)	0.793	0.745
SPA -> PEU	0.9	0.953	0.036	0.043	25.00	22.16	Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	0.852	0.607
PS -> PU	0.713	0.803	0.029	0.036	24.59	22.31	Compulsive Behavioural Usage Intention (CBUI)	0.807	0.850
PEU -> PU	0.136	0.071	0.005	0.003	27.20	23.80			
PE -> PEU	0.023	0.214	0.001	0.010	23.00	21.40			
PU -> CBUI	0.185	0.213	0.007	0.010	26.43	21.30	Inflated Smartphone Usage (ISU)	0.619	0.554
PEU -> CBUI	0.757	0.788	0.031	0.036	24.42	21.89			
CBUI -> ISU	0.787	0.744	0.032	0.034	24.59	21.88			

In conclusion, mitigating the repercussions of excessive smartphone usage requires collaborative effort. Stakeholders across various sectors must cooperate to devise and implement innovative solutions to promote equilibrium and well-being. By fostering more judicious relationships with technology, marketers and service providers can contribute to a sustainable digital ecosystem, thereby yielding benefits for both individual users and society at large.

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FACTORS DRIVING ADOPTION OF AI BASED NPO MARKETING TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES IN INDIA: STAKEHOLDER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Non-Profit Marketing, TOE framework, Sponsoring organisations

Description: The paper identifies the factors driving adoption of AI based NPO Marketing tools and technologies in India.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In India, non-profit organisations (NPOs) are defined as activities (donors vs. implementers) or countries of origin (Northern International Relief and Development Organizations or Western NPOs vs. Indian NPOs). The Western NPOs focus on environment, human rights, and consumer rights, as opposed to the Indian NPOs, which focus on welfare, modernization, and empowerment (Nanda, 2000; Panda, 2019). The technology adoption is relatively higher in the case of Western NPOs as they focus on capacity building of staff and leadership and technology use as opposed to Indian NPOs that focus on branding or reputation, cost of service delivery, speed of service delivery, and quantum of service delivery, having a relative lower level of technology adoption and use (Salm, 1999; Panda, 2019). A need exists to identify the key challenges facing Indian NPOs in adopting technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI can support NPO marketing related to donor journey mapping, business simulations, marketing automation, prospect identification, content creation, action recommendations, and basic task automation (BWF, 2023).

Thus, the research question this study addresses through the identified research gap is:

What factors drive the adoption of AI-based NPO Marketing tools and technologies in India?

Method and Data

A study was conducted amongst the stakeholders of NPO marketing, i.e., sponsoring organizations (social marketing/Corporate Social Responsibility/nonprofit trust aligned with a Company) and NPOs, to identify the factors that would drive the adoption of AI in NPO marketing tools and technologies in India.

In this study, we contacted NPOs (n=10) and sponsoring organizations (n=5) through qualitative research through in-depth interviews. This study applies the Gioia methodology to analyze discussions with the sponsoring organizations and NPOs. A good data structure in the Gioia approach involves participant-based first-order codes, which the researcher then summarises as second-order themes and aggregated dimensions, i.e., factors for the adoption of AI-based NPO marketing tools and technologies (Gioia et al., 2013; Van Maanen, 1979).

Summary of Findings

In this study, we contextualize the TOE (technological, organizational, and environmental) based framework to identify the factors for adopting AI-based NPO Marketing tools and technologies in India. While technological, the relative advantage over existing technology-based solutions adopted for NPO marketing, compatibility with existing IT systems, and relatively less deployment complexity drive the adoption of AI-based NPO Marketing tools and technologies in India. The organizational factors for adoption relate to the availability of financial resources, the IT sophistication, benefits of AI-based NPO marketing tools and technologies for better post-deployment business goal achievement, and the support of top management for effective deployment. The environmental factors relate to the competitive pressure from the NPO ecosystem to deploy AI-based NPO Marketing tools and technologies, better business, and digital aim for adoption.

Statement of Key Contributions

Due to a lack of technology knowledge and financial resources, NPO marketing in India has faced challenges in reaching out to the correct set of audiences using technology as a medium. The performance of NPOs is severely hindered due to a lack of knowledge of business

processes and technology. The deployment of AI can provide solutions to many challenges plaguing the NPOs in India. Adopting technology may create better funding mechanisms, targeting, delivery, and impact assessment for program beneficiaries. This study identifies the factors driving the adoption of AI-based NPO marketing tools and technologies; this would aid NPOs and sponsoring organizations in effective deployment by addressing the challenges ahead of deployment. Using the study, the practitioners can identify and develop a techno-business case for internal approval to deploy AI-based NPO marketing tools and technologies. The NPO funding team can also use the findings of this study to enable better deployment of AI-based tools; the collaborative deployment in both NPO and sponsoring organizations can aid in greater efficiency in achieving program objectives through beneficiary targeting and delivery.

GREEN MARKETING ORIENTATION SCALE: MODIFICATION AND RE-VALIDATION IN THE ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT

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Keywords: Green marketing orientation, scale, modification, revalidation, Ethiopia

Description: This study developed and validated a 17-item green marketing orientation (GMO) scale for Ethiopia, revealing contextual differences and offering a structured framework to guide sustainable business practices and enhance competitive advantage.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) reflects a firm's comprehensive commitment to integrating environmental sustainability into its operations. Although extensively studied in developed nations, GMO remains underexplored in developing countries like Ethiopia, where green

marketing is shaped by distinct socioeconomic, cultural, and legal factors. Much of the existing research relies on marketers' perceptions and lacks rigorous validation, raising concerns about the reliability of current measurement tools. Furthermore, the absence of a universally accepted, context-specific GMO scale in Africa limits both academic progress and practical application. In such settings, green marketing is often reduced to short-term promotional strategies, sometimes resulting in "green washing." In contrast, GMO promotes a long-term, organization-wide approach to sustainability. Ethiopia's rising environmental commitments such as its updated climate pledges, the Green Legacy Initiative, and anti-pollution policies underscore the urgency for credible green marketing strategies. This study seeks to modify and revalidate an existing GMO scale for Ethiopia's manufacturing sector, addressing its validity, contextual adaptability, and key dimensions.

- a) How valid and reliable is the existing GMO scale when applied to the Ethiopian manufacturing sector?
- b) What modifications are necessary to adapt the GMO scale to the Ethiopian context?
- c) What are the core dimensions of GMO in Ethiopia's manufacturing industry?

Method and Data

The study employed a comprehensive methodology to develop and validate a context-specific Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) scale for Ethiopia. The process began with an extensive literature review and the generation of new items through interviews with marketing managers of environmentally recognized manufacturing firms. This approach ensured the inclusion of local cultural and contextual factors. A pool of 51 items was created, reflecting three GMO dimensions: strategic, tactical, and internal. A content adequacy assessment was conducted with

experts from academia and industry to refine the items. Using ANOVA, 40 items were retained for their alignment with the GMO dimensions. A pilot study with 130 managers followed, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) led to the removal of items not meeting psychometric criteria. This resulted in 26 items across the three dimensions.

Further EFA with new data and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the scale's structure. Reliability was confirmed with Cronbach alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.91. Convergent and discriminant validity were also established. The finalized model showed strong internal consistency and a good fit with the observed data. This validated scale provides a reliable tool for measuring GMO in Ethiopia's manufacturing sector, aligning green marketing practices with national sustainability goals.

Summary of Findings

The study introduces a newly developed 17-item Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) scale tailored to Ethiopia, offering a validated measure of firms' environmental marketing practices. The scale comprises three key dimensions: strategic, tactical, and internal GMO. Strategic green marketing focuses on setting green policies, forming collaborative partnerships with stakeholders, and allocating resources to support environmentally sustainable initiatives. Tactical green marketing integrates green considerations into the traditional marketing mix product development, promotion, distribution, and pricing ensuring that environmental responsibility is embedded in operational activities. Internal green marketing highlights the importance of nurturing a green organizational culture by empowering employees with the knowledge and skills required to implement eco-friendly practices.

The findings underscore critical contextual differences between green marketing in Ethiopia and that in developed countries. By applying rigorous qualitative and quantitative methods, the study identified new, context-specific items that reflect Ethiopia's unique environmental and institutional landscape. These distinctions emphasize the necessity for localized measurement tools rather than adopting generalized scales from advanced economies. Overall, the study makes a significant contribution to green marketing literature by offering a holistic and context-sensitive GMO framework, and it provides practical guidance for Ethiopian firms to align their marketing strategies with broader sustainability goals and regulatory demands

Key Contributions

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by being the first to conceptualize and empirically validate a comprehensive Green Marketing Orientation (GMO) framework in the African context, focusing on Ethiopia. It modifies and revalidates existing GMO scales to suit region-specific economic, cultural, and organizational conditions. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study develops a reliable 17-item GMO scale encompassing three dimensions: strategic, tactical, and internal. The findings highlight notable differences from European models. Strategically, the Ethiopian scale emphasizes partnerships with stakeholders and reverse logistics, rather than market segmentation or digital engagement. Tactically, it prioritizes physical distribution networks over digital communication. These variations reflect local corporate culture, infrastructure, and institutional development, underlining the need for context-sensitive scale adaptation.

From a managerial perspective, the scale provides a structured roadmap for embedding sustainability at all organizational levels. Top-level managers can set strategic direction, middle managers can implement green marketing tactics, and lower-level managers can instill green values among employees. The validated scale not only aids compliance with environmental regulations but also enhances competitiveness and supports long-term sustainability goals. It serves as both a diagnostic and strategic tool for aligning green marketing practices with national and global environmental objectives in emerging markets.

GREEN MATERIALS VERSUS GREEN PROCESSES: THE ROLES OF COMPONENT OWNERSHIP AND CREDIT APPROPRIATION

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Keywords: green consumption, green manufacturing, perceived ownership, credit appropriation

Description: This research demonstrates that consumers are more likely to appropriate environmental credit to themselves when purchasing products made with green materials compared to those made through green processes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In today's society, sustainability has become an increasingly significant focus for policymakers, firms, and consumers. Many companies are incorporating green practices by using eco-friendly materials (e.g., LEGO bricks made of recycled plastics) and/or adopting sustainable manufacturing processes (e.g., LEGO bricks made through energy-efficient processes). From a

firm's perspective, these green practices are aimed at benefiting the environment. However, how do consumers perceive products made from green materials and those produced through green processes? Despite the common belief that green manufacturing processes are more beneficial to the environment than green materials, our research across four studies reveals that consumers are more likely to appropriate environmental credit to themselves when purchasing products made with green materials compared to those made through green processes.

Method And Data

Across four lab studies, this research investigates how different types of green product components influence consumers' appropriation of environmental credit. Study 1 establishes the initial evidence for the effect of green component (materials vs. processes) on credit appropriation. This effect is driven by the difference in perceived component ownership. Importantly, we rule out the perceived ownership of the green product itself, demonstrating that the type of green component shapes consumers' credit appropriation independently of product ownership perceptions. In Study 2, we identify green materials as the driver of this effect, showing that they lead consumers to appropriate greater environmental credit to themselves. In addition, this study rules out accessibility as a potential confound. To dig deeper into the effect, Study 3 examines consumer heterogeneity. Results reveal the effect of green component on credit appropriation is more pronounced among consumers with a stronger need for ownership and those who perceive green products as having greater environmental efficacy. Study 4 explores downstream consumer behaviors, demonstrating that the green component further influences the willingness to engage in word-of-mouth, to participate in brand communities, and to recommend products.

Summary of Findings

To promote sustainability and to minimize environmental impact, firms increasingly make use of green materials (e.g., recycled plastics) and incorporate green manufacturing processes (e.g., energy-efficient processes). This research examines how consumers respond to these pro-environmental practices. Through four laboratory experiments, this research demonstrates that (1) consumers are more likely to appropriate environmental credit to themselves when purchasing products made from green materials compared to those produced using green processes; (2) such difference in credit appropriation is driven by the perceived component ownership in green materials rather than in green processes; and, (3) because consumers tend to appropriate environmental credit associated with green materials to themselves, they are more likely to share positive word-of-mouth and to join brand communities when purchasing products made from green materials as opposed to those made from green processes. These findings offer valuable insights into the difference in consumer responses to green materials and green processes, the underlying mechanisms, and the downstream marketing outcomes.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our research makes three key contributions. First, we identify a novel effect of green product components on credit appropriation. Although green processes are often viewed as more impactful for environmental sustainability, our findings reveal that consumers are more likely to appropriate environmental credit for themselves when purchasing products made with green

materials. Empirical evidence shows that green materials, not green processes, are the primary driver of this effect.

Second, we uncover a unique mechanism via perceived component ownership, such that consumers develop a greater sense of psychological ownership toward the components of products made of green materials compared to those created through green processes. Moreover, we rule out several potential confounding factors, including the perceived ownership of the overall product and the accessibility of the green component.

Finally, we offer important managerial implications through downstream consequences. Because green materials prompt greater credit appropriation, they also encourage more supportive consumer behaviors, such as positive word-of-mouth and participation in brand communities. Our findings suggest that firms aiming to boost consumer advocacy and engagement should emphasize the use of sustainable materials in their products, while also communicating the broader scope of their sustainability efforts.

References are available upon request.

HELPING THOSE WHO SUFFER: COMPASSION IN CAUSE-RELATED MARKETING

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Keywords: Compassion, Cause-related marketing, Advertising appeals, Message-framing, Donation behavior

Description: Our findings suggest that using a consumer (vs. company)-focused message-framing strategy in cause-related campaigns can increase feelings of compassion, which in turn positively affects brand attitude and donation intentions; particularly, for younger consumers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Charities have long used emotional appeals in fundraising activities (Cockrill and Parsonage 2016), using heart-tugging images and music to motivate donations to organizations like UNICEF. However, research related to cause-related marketing indicates that consumers also expect for-profit companies to contribute toward societal needs (e.g., Joireman et al. 2015). Consequently, companies frequently collaborate with charities using cause-related marketing that benefits both organizations. The current research proposes that compassionate individuals may be more likely to positively respond to cause-related marketing campaigns, and investigates whether compassion can be manipulated through message-framing techniques in

advertisements. Although compassion has been investigated in related fields (e.g., psychology), there has been little research in marketing. Particularly, compassion's influence in cause-related marketing and its impact on consumer behavior broadly is not well understood. Thus, this research explores the role of compassion in cause-related marketing and examines how companies can use it to drive certain behaviors for specific outcomes that benefit both the company and the cause. Specifically, we investigate two research questions:

RQ1: Can compassion be elicited among consumers through cause-related marketing campaigns?

RQ2: Does compassion influence reactions to the framing of cause-related marketing campaigns?

Method And Data

In study 1, student participants ($N = 253$, $M_{age} = 22$, Male =51%) were randomly assigned between two message-framing conditions regarding *who* is showing compassion (company vs. consumer). All participants were shown an ad about Kia's cause-related marketing initiative. The first sentence of the ad displayed a message about sea turtles and how they are critically endangered. In the second part of the ad, participants in the company (consumer) condition read the message about Kia's collaboration with Sea Turtles Inc. as a consequence of the company's care and support (consumer's care and support) toward sea turtles. After viewing the ad, compassion, brand attitude, and donation intentions were measured. Study 2 used a general sample from Prolific ($N = 300$, $M_{age} = 45$, 49.7%=Male) and a dish soap was used instead of a car to investigate whether the effects hold for lower involvement purchase situations. In addition, a fictional brand was used to control brand category effects. All participants were

shown an ad for a fictional dish soap's cause-related marketing initiative, which was similar to study 1.

Summary of Findings

Regression analysis (PROCESS model 7; Hayes 2018) for study 1 revealed that individuals in the consumer (vs. company) condition elicited greater feelings of compassion ($p < .03$), and compassion mediated the effect of message-framing with a consumer focus on brand attitude (95% CI = [.020,.394]) and donation intentions (95% CI = [.019,.397]). In study 2, we did not find the main effect of ad conditions on compassion ($p > .10$). Our first study used a younger sample, and this study used a general sample. Therefore, consistent with previous findings that younger generations are more critical of social responsibility initiatives (Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet 2021), we expect that age might be influencing the effect of our ad conditions on compassion. We ran PROCESS model 7 (Hayes 2018) with age as a moderator, and found that there was an effect for younger participants ($\text{age} \leq 33$; $p = .02$), such that the consumer (vs. company)-focused ad elicited more compassion (no effect for older participants, $p > .10$). Furthermore, compassion mediated the effect of consumer-focused ad on brand attitude (95% CI = [.019,.661]) and donation intentions (95% CI = [.010,.586]), for younger consumers.

Statement of Key Contributions

Increasingly, individuals are being asked to show compassion in the marketplace, whether through charitable donations or engaging in prosocial behaviors. However, there is little research regarding the effect of compassion on consumer behavior. Current research investigates how compassion can be elicited through message framing in cause-related campaigns, such that consumers' support to the company and the cause is strengthened. Our research makes several important contributions to cause-related marketing and compassion

research. Importantly, we show that cause-related ads are more likely to elicit compassionate feelings in consumers by using consumer (vs. company)-focused messaging, which in turn increases brand attitude and donation intentions. Particularly if a cause-related marketing campaign is targeting younger consumers, ad campaigns can elicit more positive responses from younger consumers by focusing more on what the consumer does for a cause than what the company does for a cause. This is an important finding, as many cause-related marketing campaigns focus on what the company is doing for the cause. Based on our research, making the consumer feel that they are a part of the process to positively contribute to the cause may be a worthwhile strategy to help enhance attitude toward the brand and donation intentions.

HOW DOES AVERSIVE IMAGES INFLUENCE HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY FOOD CHOICES: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY TO EXPLORE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FOOD CHOICES

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Keywords: Visual cues, Attitudes, Habits, Intervention, Food choices

Description: This study investigates the impact of aversive images on eating intentions and behaviour.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

How does healthy and unhealthy food stimuli affect consumers' eating intentions and food preferences?

METHOD AND DATA

An experimental study was conducted using a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design, where healthy food choice ads (with implications vs without implications) and snacks ads (without implications vs with implications) were manipulated. 735 respondents agreed to participate after being contacted by email, with 600 randomly selected and assigned to four groups. Each cohort comprised 150 participants. Participants were briefed initially about the reason for their participation. The four treatment conditions were: (i) snacks ads without implications, (ii) snacks ads with implications, (iii) healthy food ads with implications, and (iv) healthy food ads without implications. To conduct the experiment, respondents were exposed to their treatment condition before they completed the survey. Respondents who participated in the 'Without Implications' group were shown only food ads. Those in the 'with implications' group saw food ads and implications of eating snacks/fruits in front of each food option. To maintain uniformity, each advertisement was kept identical in all respects, except for the inclusion (or exclusion) of different food options. ANOVA and multiple regression were performed to assess differences between key variables among those exposed to snacks/healthy food ads with or without implication and whether these variables predicted intentions and behaviour of eating fruits/snacks.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results suggest that explicit attitudes and affective attitudes exhibited a high level of statistical significance. Participants exposed to images of nutrient-rich foods accompanied by health benefits text messages developed significantly stronger favourable explicit attitudes towards consuming nutrient-rich foods than those who viewed only nutrient-rich food ads. Self-regulation was found to moderate the effect of eating intention on behaviours in the presence of nutrient-rich food visuals and health benefits messages. For those exposed to healthy food messages without implications, affective attitudes, habits and interaction effect of habits and normative beliefs predicted intentions. Exposure to snack messages without implications revealed that norms, self-regulation and habits statistically significantly predicted intentions.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

The study makes important contribution to knowledge by shedding light on the effect of self-regulation in explaining the intention-behaviour gap. The results revealed the moderating effect of self-regulation on the association between intentions and behaviour, in the presence of nutrient-rich food visuals with health benefits messages. Thus, an individual's ability to self-regulate can strengthen his/her eating intention and positively predict healthy eating behaviour. Another important contribution is the findings that exposure to healthy and unhealthy visuals with implications can significantly enhance habits to the extent that these influences the association between normative beliefs and eating intentions of healthy and junk foods. The findings highlight the importance of considering multiple facets of individuals' habitual tendencies and normative beliefs when designing interventions aimed at promoting healthier food choices as well as those intended to discourage energy-dense food intake. It also demonstrates the importance of contextual cues in enhancing consumers' ability to self-regulate in a manner that explains the intention-behaviour gap. Our results emphasize the need to consider the interplay between different components of messaging and visual cues when designing interventions aimed at influencing consumers' food choices in marketing contexts.

References are available upon request.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

HOW MINDSETS DRIVE THE DESIRE FOR EXPERIENCES OVER POSSESSIONS

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Abstract

This study explores how consumer mindsets influence preferences for experiential versus material purchases. Specifically, it examines whether priming individuals with a growth mindset (the belief that personal traits are malleable) increases preference for experiential products and how this effect varies with financial security. Two experimental studies were conducted with participants from different income levels. Study 1 demonstrated that growth mindset priming significantly increased preference for experiential products among high-income participants. Study 2 replicated these findings and further identified that the effect of growth mindset on experiential preferences is moderated by expected future financial security and current money management stress. The research contributes to the understanding of implicit theories in consumer behavior, linking growth mindset to the experiential advantage and highlighting the role of financial security in shaping these preferences. These findings provide valuable insights for marketers of experiential products and policymakers aiming to enhance consumer well-being by encouraging experiential consumption.

Keywords: Material Consumption, Experiential consumption, growth mindset, fixed mindset

Research Question

This study investigates whether consumer mindsets—specifically growth versus fixed mindsets—influence preferences for experiential versus material purchases. While prior research has established that experiential purchases generally lead to greater happiness than material ones, little is known about the psychological mechanisms that motivate consumers to choose experiences in the first place. We ask: Does priming individuals with a growth mindset increase their preference for experiential products, and if so, under what financial conditions does this effect hold? By integrating mindset theory with consumer research on the experiential advantage, we examine whether implicit beliefs about personal malleability translate into greater interest in experiences over possessions.

Method and Data

We conducted two online experiments with Prolific panel participants. In Study 1 (N=231), participants were randomly primed with either a growth or fixed mindset and asked to choose between self-generated experiential and material products. Household income was measured to test income-based differences. In Study 2 (N=350), we replicated the design but incorporated additional measures of expected future financial security and current money management stress. Analyses included ANOVAs, regressions, and the Johnson–Neyman technique to examine interactions between mindset and financial security indicators. Together, the two studies provide robust causal evidence of mindset effects and boundary conditions.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, growth mindset priming increased consumer preference for experiential over material purchases. In Study 1, the effect was strongest among high-income participants, suggesting that financial resources facilitate the influence of mindset. Study 2 replicated the effect and demonstrated that it is moderated by financial security: growth mindset increased preference for experiences when participants perceived high future financial security

and low current financial stress. Thus, the experiential advantage is not universal but contingent upon both psychological mindset and financial context. These findings extend research on implicit theories and consumer choice by linking mindset to experiential consumption.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions. First, it introduces implicit theory (growth vs. fixed mindset) as a novel driver of the experiential advantage, advancing understanding of psychological mechanisms in consumer well-being. Second, it identifies financial security as a boundary condition, showing that mindset effects are amplified under conditions of resource stability. Third, it extends consumer research by offering causal, experimental evidence that mindsets can be situationally primed to influence purchase preferences. Practically, the findings highlight opportunities for policymakers and marketers to strategically foster growth mindsets, thereby promoting experiential consumption that enhances consumer happiness and life satisfaction.

TITLE: How Regulatory Focus may Influence Compensatory Consumption Behaviors

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Keywords: Regulatory Focus, Compensatory Consumption, Symbolic Self-Completion, Escapism, Regulatory Fit

Description:

This research investigates how regulatory focus influences individuals' preferences for different compensatory consumption strategies under self-threat.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study examines whether individuals' self-regulatory focus influences their preference for symbolic self-completion versus escapism strategies when facing self-threats. We propose a

regulatory fit framework where symbolic self-completion strategies align more effectively with promotion-focused messages, whereas escapism strategies align more closely with prevention-focused messages when individuals experience self-threats. This work addresses the research gap on how different compensatory strategies are selected and matched with regulatory fit.

Method and Data

251 undergraduate students were recruited from an online panel and randomly assigned to one of two conditions (regulatory focus: promotion focus vs prevention focus). Firstly, participants were informed that they were participating in two unrelated experiments. Then, participants were asked to imagine a scenario where self-threat related to interpersonal rejection was manipulated.

Next, they were asked to answer questions about their feelings as manipulation checks.

Subsequently, participants were informed that they would proceed to another survey and were asked to choose their preferred box of chocolates from two identical options that differed only in the slogan displayed on the packaging. In the promotion-focus condition, participants were exposed to the slogan "Share delicious moments—every moment with loved ones", representing symbolic self-completion strategy and "Savor the flavor—every moment is relieving and healing", representing symbolic escapism strategy. In the prevention-focus condition, participants were exposed to the slogan "No more loneliness—every moment frees you from isolation",

representing symbolic self-completion strategy and " Forget your worries—every moment waves goodbye to sorrow", representing escapism strategy. Then, they indicated their attitude and purchase intention for the two chocolates. Manipulation checks for compensatory strategies and control variables (e.g., age, gender) were also collected.

Summary of Findings

The manipulation of self-threat and slogan manipulation were successful. Results support our hypotheses. The results of regression suggested that self-regulatory focus significantly influenced the strategy purchase intention index ($F(1,249) = 8.19$; $p\text{-value} = 0.005$) and attitude index ($F(1,249) = 11.46$; $p\text{-value} = 0.0008$). Specifically speaking, participants in promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) conditions tended to report higher purchase intentions and attitudes for symbolic self-completion (vs. escapism) strategy.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature and practical management of compensatory consumption. First, it is the first study examining regulatory focus as a crucial factor influencing preferences for different compensatory strategies. Previous research has predominantly focused on a singular strategy. Secondly, this research adds to the regulatory fit literature by demonstrating that self-regulatory focus can align individuals' goal orientation with various

compensatory strategies. Finally, our findings offer managerial implications to marketers.

Marketing managers can utilize marketing stimuli to temporarily manipulate consumers'

regulatory focus and provide congruent strategy-related products to increase their preferences.

For instance, for products not dealing with threat (e.g., snacks), marketers can use ad slogans to

induce a prevention-focused state. In contrast, for products addressing self-threats (such as status

goods), marketers can evoke a promotion-focused state. When regulatory fit is achieved,

consumers are more likely to develop more favorable attitudes and stronger purchase intentions

toward products that align with their regulatory focus.

INVESTIGATING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE SETTINGS

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Keywords: sustainable consumption behavior, circular economy, second-hand clothing, fast-fashion, online shopping

Description: This study applies the theory of planned behavior to examine how sustainable consumption behavior influences purchase intention for second-hand vs. fast-fashion clothing in online and offline settings, finding that all TPB components significantly predict vintage clothing purchase intention online and that sustainable consumption behavior more often moderates the effect for subjective norms than for attitudes or perceived ability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Past research has examined second-hand shopping motivations (Guiot & Roux, 2010), attitudes toward fast fashion and second-hand clothing (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Shan et al., 2022; Shuai, 2016), and purchase intentions for second-hand goods (Yan et al., 2024). Research has also examined the link between environmental concerns and sustainable consumption behavior (SCB) in the circular consumption model and attitudes toward fast fashion, as well as second-hand, or vintage, goods to understand purchase intentions in SCB (Padmavathy et al., 2019). However, no research has explored how SCB influences second-hand purchase intention across online and offline platforms, a key factor for NPOs relying on thrift store revenue.

This research seeks to answer: What can NPO marketers do to increase second-hand clothing purchase intention and sales in online and offline environments? Additional questions include: (1) Does SCB influence purchase intention for second-hand vs. fast-fashion clothing in online and offline settings? (2) Do consumers with various levels of SCB have varying purchase intentions for second-hand vs. fast-fashion clothes? (4) Do attitudes toward second-hand shopping influence purchase intention? (5) Do norms toward second-hand and fast-fashion shopping influence purchase intention? (6) Does perceived ability to purchase influence behavior toward buying second-hand and fast-fashion clothes?

Method and Data

A 54-item questionnaire was distributed online nationwide through a data collection firm. Four scenarios were created to measure purchase intention based on shopping environment and type of clothing in a 2 (Clothing: Fast Fashion vs. Vintage) $\times$ 2 (Environment: Online vs. Offline) experimental design. SCB was measured using 13 items covering quality of life and care for future generations from the 24-item scale developed by Quoquab et al. (2018). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios that manipulated two control variables – type of store and the type of clothing. For example, scenario 1 said *Imagine you are browsing a store online and see an attractive brand-new shirt that is what you've been looking for and it's in your price range*, and scenario 2 said: *Imagine you are browsing a store online and see an attractive second-hand shirt that is what you've been looking for and it's in your price range*. After reading their assigned scenario, participants completed a five-item purchase intention scale (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Chen & Barnes, 2007), followed by three TPB constructs (Fishbein &

Ajzen, 2010). Two manipulation checks on 7-point Likert scales verified scenario comprehension. Finally, participants provided demographic data.

Summary of Findings

A final sample of 352 participants were analyzed, with all scales and manipulations successful (all *alphas* > 0.7; all *p-values* < .001). Scenario one (*n* = 94), found that perceived behavioral control significantly predicted purchase intention (*p* = .011) and interacted with SCB (*p* = .030), indicating that low SCB consumers were more likely to purchase fast fashion online, while SCB dampened this effect. Scenario two (*n* = 108), found all TPB components significantly predicted purchase intention of second-hand clothing online, with SCB moderating attitude (*p* = .027) and subjective norms (*p* = .003), suggesting that attitudes and social influences shaped second-hand purchase intention with sustainability orientation. Scenario three (*n* = 64) found that perceived behavioral control predicted purchase intention (*p* = .015) of fast-fashion offline, with SCB moderating attitude (*p* = .030) and subjective norms (*p* = .037), suggesting high-SCB consumers consider both personal attitudes and social pressures when purchasing fast fashion in stores. Scenario four (*n* = 86) found that attitude (*p* = .004) and subjective norms (*p* < .001) predicted offline second-hand purchase intention, with SCB moderating subjective norms (*p* = .007). Low-SCB consumers were more influenced by social norms when buying second-hand clothing in stores.

Key Contributions

This research offers four primary conclusions. First, that subjective norms had a significant interaction with sustainable consumption behavior in three of the four scenarios – all but fast

fashion online. This may confirm that consumers are thinking about sustainability even when considering a purchase at a fast fashion store. However, when online, the fast fashion purchase is able to be made because no one is present to observe the behavior. Second, perceived behavioral control appears to have a dampening effect on making a fast fashion purchase by consumers low in SCB. It could be that while SCB is not a strong individual difference for these consumers, making a fast fashion purchase triggers thoughts of sustainability and makes them hesitate.

Third, subjective norms interacted with SCB when consumers were shopping in a second-hand store. This was not expected, but could be a case of the desire to communicate what they perceive to be positive social behavior. Fourth, SCB moderated the relationship between TPB variables and purchase intention five out of six times between second-hand online and fast fashion offline purchases. These results may indicate that consumers are indeed considering the sustainability, no matter the style or location of the purchase.

MAPPING THE RURAL ANTENATAL MOTHERS' JOURNEY: TRUST POINTS AND TOUCHPOINTS

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Keywords: Rural Antenatal Care, Trust, Touchpoints, Service Design, Customer Journey Mapping, Experience-Based Co-Design

Description:

This study examines rural antenatal care as a multi-channel service journey, highlighting consumer trust as the primary driver of engagement and adherence. Using a qualitative longitudinal design grounded in service marketing and healthcare decision-making theory, it applies experience-based co-design (EBCD) and customer journey mapping (CJM) to identify touchpoints and trust points across the maternal care pathway. Data from 145 participants, including antenatal and postnatal mothers, ASHA workers, healthcare providers, and household influencers, reveal how frontline agents, family dynamics, and channel integration shape trust formation, service adoption, and defection in high-stakes, low-resource contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

This study examines how rural antenatal care can be conceptualized as a multi-channel service journey in which both touchpoints (formal service interactions) and trust points (moments influencing decision-making confidence) shape healthcare utilization. Drawing from Customer Journey Mapping (CJM), Experience-Based Co-Design (EBCD), and service marketing literature on trust-building, we explore how these elements interact within a complex, multi-stakeholder ecosystem of healthcare providers, community influencers, and household decision-makers.

This study addresses three questions:

1. What are the key touchpoints and trust points in rural antenatal care journeys?
2. How do these trust points shape maternal decision-making at critical service junctures?
3. How can healthcare service design leverage trust to improve maternal care adoption?

By answering these questions, this study reframes rural maternal healthcare as a service experience design challenge, contributing to service marketing theory while offering actionable insights for healthcare managers and policymakers

Methods and Data

This qualitative longitudinal study employed experience-based co-design (EBCD) and customer journey mapping (CJM) to examine service touchpoints and trust points in rural antenatal care. The research was conducted in rural districts of West Bengal, India, between June 2023 and October 2024. Using purposive and snowball sampling, a total of 145 participants were recruited: 50 antenatal mothers, 10 postnatal mothers, 30 ASHA workers, 10 nurses, 5 doctors, and 40 family members.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, longitudinal ethnographic tracking of 30 antenatal mothers from pregnancy confirmation to postnatal care, and stakeholder interviews with healthcare providers and household influencers. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed through manual thematic analysis, following a framework-based coding approach informed by service marketing literature on trust-building.

Themes explored included the role of ASHAs, barriers to institutional care, trust points in decision-making, and family influence on care choices. A maternal journey map was developed to visualize touchpoints, trust points, and decision junctures across the antenatal period, enabling comparative analysis between mothers who accessed institutional care and those who faced barriers.

Summary of Findings

Rural antenatal care emerges as a multi-channel service journey in which consumer trust is the primary driver of engagement and adherence. ASHA workers function as frontline relationship managers, bridging institutional care and community norms by delivering both functional services (e.g., registration, check-ups) and relational value (empathy, reassurance). Trust points operate as decisive “moments of truth” — respectful treatment at PHCs, personalized counselling, and proactive follow-ups act as service quality inflection points that strengthen loyalty to formal care pathways. Household influencers, particularly husbands and mothers-in-law, act as either co-creators or detractors of trust; their endorsement accelerates adoption, while resistance contributes to defection.

Findings reveal that service access does not guarantee service utilization. Cultural norms, financial constraints, and logistical barriers parallel high-funnel traffic with low conversion in commercial service contexts. Digital reminders and mHealth tools enhance engagement only

when reinforced by trusted human agents, highlighting the interdependence of physical and digital channels in high-stakes health service journeys. Overall, the results position trust as a strategic service design lever, where aligning human and digital touchpoints around trust-rich interactions can systematically improve adoption, retention, and outcomes in maternal healthcare.

Key Contributions

This study integrates customer journey mapping with trust-centered service design in rural antenatal care, a high-stakes and life-critical service context. Drawing on service marketing, healthcare decision-making, and service equity theory, it advances theory by distinguishing between touchpoints—service interactions—and trust points—moments that shape decision-making confidence—thus reframing maternal healthcare journeys as relational and iterative rather than linear. It positions trust as both an antecedent and moderator of service adoption in vulnerable contexts and demonstrates how relational trust, household influence, and frontline agent credibility jointly drive engagement.

Empirically, the study shows that progression through the antenatal care journey depends on trust points, not service availability alone, paralleling conversion dynamics in commercial services. A multi-stakeholder maternal care map reveals how healthcare providers, community influencers, and household decision-makers co-create or erode trust.

Managerially, the findings suggest aligning touchpoints to reinforce trust points and training ASHAs as relationship managers skilled in empathy, cultural negotiation, and digital endorsement. The trust-centered framework is scalable to other low-resource sectors such as financial inclusion and education. Socially, the research reframes maternal healthcare as a service experience challenge, offering actionable strategies to reduce service defection, improve maternal health equity, and strengthen community-based trust systems.

“References are available upon request.”

**TITLE: NAVIGATING ONLINE TROLLING: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS
MANEUVERING NEGATIVITY AND MANAGING WELL-BEING**

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Keywords: Social media influencers, online trolling, tactical maneuvers, multi-dimensional well-being

Description

This study examines the specific tactics utilized by social media influencers to navigate online trolling and how that further helps them in managing their well-being.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The aim of this study is to examine the challenges faced by social media influencers (SMIs) when they face online trolling, and the specific tactical manoeuvres utilised by them against online trolling, which can further help in maintaining their overall well-being in the contentious environment of social media platforms.

Therefore, the research addresses two research questions that are interrelated to each other:

- 1. What specific tactical manoeuvres do SMIs employ to negotiate and/or resist online trolling?**
- 2. How do these tactical maneuvers contribute to helping SMIs manage their well-being in a holistic fashion?**

The research addresses a significant gap in the present literature of online trolling, which often does not take into account the relational, cultural and social factors that influence the online presence of SMIs. This approach often reduces the problem of trolling to individual resilience (Beyer, 2022). Thus, the research addresses this specific gap by situating online trolling within the interconnected web of influencer, audience and platform interactions and offers a nuanced understanding of the coping strategies of SMIs. The study is grounded within the theoretical frameworks of Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975) and Self-Regulation Theory

(Baumeister et al., 2007), which offer a comprehensive understanding towards threat perception, emotional regulation and community mobilisation by SMIs to cope with online trolling.

Method and Data

The study adopts a qualitative research design informed by the interpretive paradigm, which was done to understand how SMIs negotiate and/or resist trolling to manage their overall well-being. The study deploys in-depth interviews to collect the data from 26 SMIs (16 women and 10 men) recruited through purposive and later snowball sampling. The interviews lasted for 90-150 minutes, were conducted in English and covered SMIs across a wide range of domains, including lifestyle, beauty, travel and fashion. The data collected resulted in 233 pages of transcripts. Throughout the data collection process, the researchers also maintained reflexive field notes and memos to maintain thick descriptions. The researchers then proceeded to analyse the data through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); which followed an iterative style of coding through open, axial and selective coding. The inter-coder reliability score of the coding process turned out to be 0.93, which ensured analytic consistency.

The research maintained trustworthiness and reflexivity throughout its execution. Trustworthiness was maintained through the credibility (triangulation), dependability (audit trail), confirmability (memos) and transferability (thick description) of data. At the same time, reflexivity was maintained through maintaining a track of the positionality of the researcher and the researcher's bias. Thus, this approach made sure that the study carried both rigour and depth.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study reveal that SMIs utilize four interconnected tactical strategies to navigate online trolling on social media platforms, which are:

- a. **Platform Moderation:** Platform moderation involves two tactics, namely, selective engagement (not responding directly to trolls) and Algorithmic resistance (hiding harmful remarks through comment restriction, keyword filters, etc.).
- b. **Content Moderation:** Content Moderation involves two tactics, namely, mindful community discourse (involving SMIs engaging in community interactions and exchanging meaningful values) and creative appropriation of trolls (which includes turning hate comments into humorous content to reframe negativity into entertainment).
- c. **Participatory Activism:** Participatory Activism involves co-creation of counter-narratives (SMIs reframing negative information into something of value with their followers) and intersectional advocacy (SMIs pushing back against any kind of identity-based harassment through their representation and shared narratives).
- d. **Fan Moderation:** Fan Moderation involves loyal followers of SMIs acting as digital shields (like mass-reporting hateful comments) and supporting through active solidarity with SMIs (through supportive and encouraging comments).

These interconnected tactics lead to diverse and holistic well-being dimensions, which are: **social well-being** (digital solidarity), **psychological well-being** (emotional validation), **cultural well-being** (collective identity), and **hedonic well-being** (humor as an act of resistance).

Key Contributions

Theory: The study develops a holistic, interconnected model of coping strategies of SMIs, which integrates granular tactics that SMIs deploy to navigate against online trolling. The study also goes on to further understand how these tactics further help SMIs manage their well-being, which is multi-dimensional in nature. The study also extends the Self-Regulation Theory by coming up with the novel theoretical contribution of “community-led co-regulation” as a way for followers to facilitate the cultural well-being of SMIs through emotional regulation and the reclaiming of narratives. Further, the study extends the Protection Motivation Theory by looking at the ways in which SMIs perceive and control visible threats in the form of online trolling and then move further to preserve their overall well-being.

Practice: The study can be useful for the industry in offering practical insights into developing efficient management policies to also involve trolling and harassment management for SMIs, which can help them create better audience engagement strategies. Furthermore, brands can also include a safety-first policy for SMIs to ensure that the threats can be countered on an institutional level. Additionally, added sensitivity and evidence-based recommendations can be embedded in platform moderation tools so that SMIs can manage trolling a lot more efficiently.

**References are available upon request*

Navigating Uncertainty: Mitigating Negative Effects through a Social Norm Perspective

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Keywords: Uncertainty, Self-focus attention; Moral behaviors; Social norm

Description: This study examines how uncertainty reduces consumers’ moral behaviors by increasing self-focus—mediating this effect—and shows across three studies that individualist social norms mitigate this tendency in contexts including moral judgment, return fraud, and wardrobing

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The past years have seen political uncertainty, lingering COVID-19 effects, double-digit inflation, labor shortages, climate change, and widespread layoffs, creating unprecedented disruption (Lefevre et al., 2023; Palmer, 2023; Bushard, 2023). Misinformation and conflicting narratives exacerbate difficulties in coping with threats to health, economy, and society (Campbell et al., 2020). Uncertainty, whether from distant events (e.g., AI's impact on jobs) or immediate issues (e.g., traffic), significantly influences consumer decisions (Cutright, 2012; Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017).

We propose that uncertainty increases consumer immoral behavior by consuming cognitive resources (Hayes et al., 1999), prompting affect-driven decisions and reducing self-control (Schmeichel et al., 2003), and by making such behavior easier to justify (Gneezy et al., 2018).

H1: Uncertainty is positively associated with consumer immoral behavior.

We further posit that this effect operates through self-focus attention (Han et al., 2017), as uncertainty-induced cognitive load prompts individuals to prioritize their own needs over others' (Lee & Winterich, 2022).

H2: Self-focus mediates the uncertainty–immorality link.

Finally, individualist social norms, which emphasize responsibility and justice concerns (Hofstede, 1980; Sinha & Lu, 2016), may weaken this effect.

H3: Individualist norms weaken the uncertainty–self-focus association.

Method And Data

Three experiments tested our hypotheses.

Study 1: Eighty-three MTurk participants (M age = 33.43; 79.5% male) were randomly assigned

to high vs. low uncertainty via a tsunami-prediction news article (Lembregts & Pandelaere, 2019). They then rated the acceptability of an undesirable consumer behavior.

Study 2: Three hundred thirty-four U.S. university students (M age = 23.73; 40.2% male) completed the same uncertainty manipulation, followed by a fraud refund scenario (Jiao & Wang, 2018) and a five-item self-focus scale (Han et al., 2017).

Study 3: Two hundred nineteen MTurk participants (M age = 39.06; 50.9% male) took part in a 2 (social norm: individualism vs. collectivism) $\times$ 2 (uncertainty: high vs. low) design. Social norms were manipulated via a game scenario (“Civilization” strategy article), uncertainty via a writing task (Ng et al., 2021). Participants indicated wardrobing intentions and completed the self-focus scale. All studies included manipulation checks, demographic questions, and debriefing.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed marginally successful manipulation ($p = .07$) and higher immoral acceptability under uncertainty ($p < .05$). In Study 2, manipulation was successful ($p < .05$); uncertainty increased fraud intent ($p < .05$). PROCESS Model 4 showed self-focus mediated the effect (indirect = 0.05, CI [0.01, 0.16]). In Study 3, manipulations were successful. Wardrobing intent was higher under uncertainty only in the collectivist condition ($p < .05$). Self-focus showed the same pattern, with moderated mediation (PROCESS Model 7) significant (index = 0.18, CI [0.01, 0.53]). Across studies, H1–H3 were supported.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it identifies uncertainty as a key antecedent of consumer morality, extending literature on moral decision-making. Second, it adds to the limited research on the decision-making consequences of external uncertainty in consumer

contexts (e.g., Ng, Faraji-Rad, & Batra, 2021; Lembregts & Pandelaere, 2019). Third, it advances self-focus research by examining its role in immoral consumer behavior—a topic less explored compared to its effects on product evaluation (Hung & Wyer, 2011), choice (Goukens, DeWitte, & Warlop, 2009), and satisfaction (Pham et al., 2010).

The findings have practical implications for policymakers and charities, especially amid today's uncertainty. Policies that enhance transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct may help mitigate immoral behaviors. Importantly, results show that individualist social norms can buffer uncertainty's negative effects on morality.

For retailers, the implications are tangible. The National Retail Federation estimates that return fraud scams such as wardrobing cost \$12.6 billion annually. Our results suggest that highlighting individualist social norms—through website content or marketing—may reduce such unethical practices. By framing responsible consumption as part of personal identity, retailers can discourage immoral purchase behavior while fostering a culture of accountability.

PACKAGE UNIT SIZE AND QUANTITY PERCEPTION: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF UNIT SIZE ON CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: Packaging, Unit Size, Product Virtue, Food Marketing, Social Wellbeing

Description: This research investigates how unit size and product virtue (healthfulness) influence consumer perceptions of quantity and consumption time, offering insights into packaging strategies for healthier marketing and contributing to social wellbeing discussions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question – The primary research question addresses how perceptions of quantity and consumption time are influenced by the unit size of packaged products and how this effect varies depending on the perceived healthfulness (virtue) of the product. Specifically, we explore whether consumers perceive larger portion sizes as leading to more consumption time and how this perception differs between virtuous products (e.g., water) and less virtuous products (e.g., soda). We hypothesize that consumers will associate larger unit sizes with greater consumption time for less virtuous products but not for more virtuous products. This study seeks to understand the psychological processes behind such perceptions and their implications for consumer behavior,

public health, and social wellbeing.

Method and Data – We conducted an experiment with 236 participants (mean age = 38.1, 42% female) to test the impact of unit size and product virtue on perceptions of quantity and consumption time. A 2 (unit size: mini-sized vs. large-sized) $\times$ 2 (degree of virtue: less virtue vs. more virtue) ANOVA was used to analyze the data. The participants were asked to estimate the quantity and consumption time for each product type. Results showed that for the less virtuous product (soda), participants perceived a larger quantity and longer consumption time when presented with a larger unit size, while no significant difference was found for the more virtuous product (water). This suggests that product virtue moderates the impact of unit size on consumption perceptions.

Summary of Findings – The findings reveal that for less virtuous products (like soda), larger unit sizes were perceived as leading to more consumption and longer consumption times. This aligns with the portion size effect, where consumers struggle to control consumption of less healthy products. However, for more virtuous products (like water), the unit size did not significantly influence perceptions of consumption time or quantity. This indicates that the healthfulness of a product may reduce the impact of packaging size on consumer behavior. These results provide evidence that perceptions of product virtue play a moderating role in how consumers respond to portion sizes, suggesting that healthier products may not be subject to the same portion size biases as less virtuous ones. This also contributes to the discussion of social problems related to overconsumption and social wellbeing.

Key Contributions – This research contributes to the academic literature on food marketing by introducing the concept of “product virtue” as a moderating factor in shaping consumer perceptions of portion sizes and consumption time. It expands existing theories on unit size

heuristics by showing how the healthfulness of a product can mitigate the effects of larger packaging on consumption behavior. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that marketers can influence consumer behavior by considering both the size of packaging and the perceived health benefits of the product. By offering smaller packages for less virtuous products or highlighting the health benefits of virtuous products, marketers can encourage healthier consumption patterns. These insights are valuable not only for businesses and marketers but also for public health organizations, policymakers, and researchers working to combat diet-related diseases. This research provides a basis for designing marketing strategies and policies that promote healthier eating habits, reduce the public health burden of overconsumption, and address broader social problems tied to food consumption and social wellbeing.

PROTESTANT RELIGIOSITY AND ETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: DEVELOPING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALE

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Keywords: Protestant religiosity, Christianity, scale development, consumer ethics, ethical behavior

Description: This research develops a new 4-dimensional, 14-item scale tailored to Protestantism, and the scale is applied to assess the impact of Protestant religiosity on eight consumer ethical behaviors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The study investigates the influence of religiosity on consumer decision-making, focusing on Protestant Christianity, and addresses the limitations of existing religiosity measures. Prior scales often fail to capture nuanced, religion-specific dimensions or predict consumer ethical behaviors effectively (Vitell 2009; Allport and Ross 1967; Wilkes et al. 1986). Traditional approaches either categorize individuals by affiliation, attendance, or subjective importance (Cohen et al. 2017; Huber and Huber 2012) or use self-assessments of beliefs and practices that lack specificity and validation (DeJong, Faulkner, and Warland 1976; Worthington et al. 2003; Büssing 2019; Hill and Hood 1999). These shortcomings lead to inconsistent findings in marketing contexts, as religiosity often does not significantly predict behaviors due to unidimensionality or generality (Flere et al. 2011; Mathras et al. 2016; Minton, Leary, and Upadhyaya 2018). The research question is: How can a multidimensional Protestant religiosity

scale be developed to accurately measure beliefs and practices, and how does it influence consumer ethical behaviors compared to existing scales? Grounded in Protestant theology, including the “Five Solas” (Beeke and Smalley 2021; Calvin 1989; Schreiner, VanDrunen, and Barrett 2017), the study proposes dimensions like salvation through Jesus Christ, Bible knowledge, rejection of worldly desires, and moral conduct. It aims to fill gaps in religion-marketing literature (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2019; Hunt and Vitell 1993; Maseeh et al. 2022; Mokhlis 2006; Almutawaa 2023; Waller and Casidy 2021) by testing the scale’s impact on ethical behaviors like shopping-related ethical behaviors, purchase of luxury counterfeit products, and recycling.

Method and Data

The study developed a new Protestant religiosity scale using 97 items from Gardiner Spring’s (2009) work on Protestant beliefs and practices. An online survey collected responses from 1,631 U.S. adults (mean age 30.4, SD=13.2; 55.8% female, 44.2% male), with 15.6% Protestant, 28.6% Catholic, 5.7% Jewish, 29.0% other religions, and 21.1% non-religious. The survey assessed ethical behaviors on a 5-point scale, adjusted for consistent ethical values. It included Mokhlis’s (2006) general religiosity and De Jong and Faulkner’s (1967) Protestant religiosity scales for comparison, plus socio-demographics. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with orthogonal rotation refined the items, eliminating redundancies and weak loadings, resulting in four dimensions with 14 items. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 12 confirmed the structure ($\chi^2(df=71)=144.69$; GFI=0.92; AGFI=0.89; CFI=0.97; IFI=0.97; SRMR=0.049; RMSEA=0.064), meeting fit thresholds (Hu and Bentler 1999). Factor loadings ranged 0.67-0.91 (t-values ≥ 14.19); composite reliabilities 0.77-0.95; AVEs >0.50 and squared inter-correlations, confirming validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Cronbach’s alphas were: Salvation through Jesus Christ (0.95), Bible knowledge (0.90), Rejection of worldly desires

(0.86), Moral conduct (0.77). Regression analyses tested predictive power on ethical behaviors, controlling for age, gender, and income.

Summary of Findings

The 14-item scale showed strong convergent validity, correlating 0.79 with Mokhlis (2006) and 0.77 with De Jong and Faulkner (1967), but outperformed them in multidimensionality and theology-specific focus. Regression analyses indicated it predicted ethical behaviors more effectively, with rejection of worldly desires and moral conduct significant in 7/8 regression models, salvation in 4/8, and Bible knowledge in 5/8. Existing scales were less consistent.

Dimensions had distinct effects: Salvation through Jesus Christ and moral conduct positively influenced ethics (e.g., promoting generosity, societal good); Bible knowledge and rejection of worldly desires negatively (e.g., prioritizing biblical over secular values). This revealed dual influences within religiosity, explaining prior inconsistencies (Vitell 2009; Hunt and Vitell 1993). For rational actions (price consciousness, life satisfaction, store loyalty), moral conduct had the strongest positive impact. Ethically upright actions (impulsive shopping [negative], doing good, recycling) were positively affected by salvation/moral conduct, negatively by rejection of worldly desires. Ethically questionable actions (counterfeit purchases, legal but questionable) showed inconsistent impacts.

Key Contribution

This study introduces a validated, multidimensional Protestant religiosity scale, addressing shortcomings of general/unidimensional measures (Büssing 2019; Egbert, Mickley, and Coeling 2004; Hill and Hood 1999; Mathras et al. 2016). Grounded in Protestant theology (Beeke and Smalley 2021; Howard 2016; Murray 2015), it captures both intrinsic and extrinsic traits, resolving inconsistencies in consumer ethics research (Vitell 2009; Minton, Kaplan, and

Cabano 2022; Stolz 2009). It highlights dual influences – alignment (e.g., salvation) vs. conflict (e.g., Bible knowledge) – advocating context-specific, teaching-focused scales (Agarwala, Mishra, and Singh 2019; Maseeh et al. 2022; Roy et al. 2023).

Practically, it enables marketers and policymakers to target Protestant consumers (13.2% global, 33% U.S.; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary 2024; Gallup 2024) by aligning campaigns with dimensions like moral conduct, enhancing segmentation, CSR, and ethics frameworks (Sood and Nasu 1995; Cleveland, Laroche, and Hallab 2013; Waller and Casidy 2021). It supports refined strategies for faith-driven ethics, improving consumer relations. The scale facilitates future research across faiths/cultures, encouraging comparative/longitudinal studies and business ethics applications (Arlı and Pekerti 2017; Lindridge 2005; Minton, Leary, and Upadhyaya 2018), bridging academia-practice gaps.

References are available upon request.

**RECYCLING BEHAVIOUR OF TOWNSHIP CONSUMERS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
DOES RECYCLING HABIT INFLUENCE ACTUAL BEHAVIOUR?**

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Keywords: Recycling behaviour; recycling habit, actual recycling, South Africa, township

The paper analyses which factors influence recycling behaviour in South African townships.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates whether recycling habits influence the actual recycling behavior of township consumers in South Africa. Despite the urgent need to promote circular economy practices, recycling rates in South Africa remain low, particularly in townships where infrastructural challenges and socio-economic inequalities hinder waste management. Previous research has mainly focused on urban or developed contexts, leaving township consumer behavior underexplored. The study therefore addresses the gap by examining whether recycling habit mediates the relationship between factors such as past behavior, environmental concern, facilitating conditions, personal norms, and policy regulation with actual recycling behavior. The Theory of Interpersonal Behavior (TIB) provides the theoretical framework, extending existing literature beyond the commonly applied Theory of Planned Behavior. By testing the influence of habit on actual recycling practices, the research seeks to generate insights for both theory and practice in sustainability and consumer behavior.

Method and Data

A quantitative survey was conducted with a sample of 411 township consumers across South Africa. Respondents were recruited via an online panel, and data were collected in July 2023. The measurement items were adapted from established recycling behavior studies and applied to constructs including past behavior, environmental concerns, facilitating conditions, personal norms, policy regulation,

recycling habits, and actual recycling behavior. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale. Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM). The model achieved satisfactory fit indices (e.g., CFI=0.93, RMSEA=0.059), supporting the robustness of the measurement and structural models. SEM analysis explained 35% of variance in recycling engagement and 65% in actual recycling behavior, providing strong empirical support for the research framework.

Summary of Findings

The findings confirm that recycling habit significantly drives actual recycling behavior in township contexts. Past behavior, environmental concern, facilitating conditions, and personal norms were found to influence recycling habit. However, only facilitating conditions and personal norms directly affect actual recycling behavior. Policy regulation showed no significant direct effect but indirectly influenced behavior through recycling habit. Mediation analysis confirmed that habit plays a central role in linking past behavior, environmental concern, facilitating conditions, personal norms, and policy regulation with actual recycling outcomes. These results demonstrate that habit formation is critical for promoting sustainable waste management practices in disadvantaged communities. They further suggest that external enabling factors, such as accessible facilities, and internal moral obligations, such as personal norms, are essential drivers of recycling engagement. The study highlights the complexity of recycling behavior in township areas, where structural barriers intersect with behavioral and normative influences.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to theory by applying the Theory of Interpersonal Behavior to township recycling, offering new insights into the role of habit in sustainability contexts often overlooked in existing studies. Unlike prior research in developed or urban settings, this study emphasizes the unique socio-economic and infrastructural barriers faced by township consumers. Empirically, it demonstrates that while personal norms and facilitating conditions directly foster recycling behavior, other determinants such as environmental concern and policy regulation rely on habit formation to exert influence. Practically, the study provides actionable guidance for policymakers and municipalities: improving facilitating conditions (e.g., access to bins, collection systems) and fostering personal responsibility can help cultivate recycling habits that ultimately drive sustained behavior. By focusing on township communities, the study sheds light on a neglected but critical area of environmental research and provides recommendations that align with South Africa's transition towards a circular economy.

References are available upon request.

STRATEGIC DONATION TIMING:

UNVEILING THE ROLE OF YEAR-START AND YEAR-END

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Keywords: Donation-Based Crowdfunding, Campaign Launch Timing, Temporal Effects, Beneficiary Type, Message Framing

Descriptions: This study investigates how temporal cues in campaign launch timing interact with beneficiary type and message framing to shape fundraising performance in donation-based crowdfunding.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

Temporal factors play a crucial role in shaping individuals' prosocial behaviors, including charitable giving. Among various temporal cues, the beginning and end of the year stand out as critical periods that evoke distinct psychological mechanisms. The beginning-of-year period is associated with the "fresh start effect," motivating individuals to pursue aspirational goals, whereas the end-of-year period aligns with "seasonal altruism," amplifying generosity during culturally significant times. While previous research has acknowledged these effects, empirical evidence on

their impact in donation-based crowdfunding contexts remains limited. This study addresses four core questions: whether campaigns launched at the beginning of the year achieve higher donation performance than those launched mid-year; whether campaigns launched at the end of the year achieve higher donation performance than those launched mid-year; whether the impact of launch timing differs according to beneficiary type; and whether the impact of launch timing differs according to content characteristics such as warmth or urgency. Donation performance is assessed using multiple indicators, including total funds raised, number of donors, and goal achievement rate.

METHOD AND DATA

This study uses data from a participation-based crowdfunding platform in South Korea that allows both individuals and organizations to initiate donation campaigns. The dataset contains 4,393 campaigns launched between 2020 and 2024. For each campaign, information is available on fundraising outcomes (total amount raised, number of donors, goal achievement rate), fundraising goals, duration, and descriptive features such as word count and number of images. Beneficiary types are classified into elderly, children/youth, disabled, and others (including environmental causes, natural disasters, and animal welfare). Content characteristics capture whether a campaign emphasizes urgency or warmth in its messaging. Additional variables describe organizational and contextual factors, such as organization type, geographic location, online activity, and the number of projects launched in the same period. The analysis examines performance differences across campaigns launched at different times of the year, with particular attention to the interaction between timing, beneficiary types, and content characteristics.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The analysis shows that donation-based crowdfunding performance on the studied platform varies with campaign launch timing. Campaigns launched at the beginning and end of the year achieved significantly higher outcomes than those launched during other periods, across total funds raised, number of donors, and goal achievement rate. End-of-year campaigns recorded the strongest results, consistent with seasonal altruism, while beginning-of-year campaigns benefited from renewed motivation linked to the fresh start effect. Interaction effects between timing and beneficiary type were statistically significant, with campaigns for socially vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and children/youth, showing more pronounced performance gains at specific times of the year compared to other beneficiary categories. Content framing also played a role, as warmth-oriented messaging performed better at the beginning of the year, suggesting that emotional appeals may align well with fresh start motivations. These results indicate that both the timing of a campaign and its beneficiary and content characteristics jointly influence fundraising outcomes, offering practical insights for designing more effective campaigns in participation-based crowdfunding environments.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Although prior theoretical and experimental studies suggest that the beginning and end of the year are favorable periods for charitable giving, empirical evidence from real-world crowdfunding contexts remains scarce. Temporal effects, despite their strategic importance, have not been sufficiently examined in relation to campaign launch timing, a key strategic decision for organizers. This study extends the literature by moving beyond the main effects of timing to examine how it interacts with beneficiary type and content framing in shaping fundraising outcomes. By

identifying that the effectiveness of launch timing varies across beneficiary categories and message framing strategies, the research highlights the conditional nature of temporal influences in donation-based crowdfunding. These insights contribute to theory by integrating temporal cues with campaign design variables, offering a more contextualized understanding of prosocial behavior in digital environments. For practitioners, the findings underscore that launch timing should be considered in conjunction with beneficiary profiles and message framing, rather than as a stand-alone factor, when planning and executing campaigns.

SWEETHEARTING AND ITS COSTS

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Keywords: Service marketing, Illicit frontline behavior, Sweethearting, Bystander, Perceived fairness

Description: This paper examines how witnessing sweethearting unauthorized preferential treatment by frontline employees affects uninvolved bystanders' satisfaction, fairness perceptions, emotions, and behaviors, and identifies when and how these negative effects may be mitigated.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines how witnessing sweethearting, defined as frontline employees giving unauthorized preferential treatment to certain favored customers, affects third-party bystanders in service encounters. While prior work has primarily considered the dyadic relationship between frontline employees and the favored customer, this study focuses on the overlooked consequences for uninvolved observers. It investigates whether such behavior lowers bystanders' satisfaction, trust, and intentions to complain or spread negative word-of-mouth. The research further explores the mediating roles of perceived fairness and jealousy in explaining these effects. Two moderators are considered. One moderator is an apology issued by the frontline employee, which may influence review behavior. Another moderator is the number of bystanders present, which may affect responsibility to react, drawing on the bystander effect theory. Four

experimental studies are conducted to address these questions, systematically testing the main effects, mediating mechanisms, and boundary conditions. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how sweethearting harms service evaluations, and to identify situational factors that may attenuate or exacerbate its impact.

Method and Data

Four experimental studies were conducted with participants recruited from Prolific and undergraduate student pools. In each study, participants read scenarios depicting service encounters in which they either witnessed a customer–employee interaction involving sweethearting behavior or an interaction without involving the sweethearting behavior. Study 1 (285 participants recruited from a student subject pool; 60.4% female; $M_{\text{Age}} = 21.79$) tested the main effect of observing sweethearting on bystander satisfaction and perceived fairness. Study 2 (287 participants recruited from a student subject pool; 56.8% female; $M_{\text{Age}} = 21.32$) examined a serial mediation model in which witnessing sweethearting reduced perceived fairness, which in turn elicited jealousy and led to negative evaluations. Study 3 (232 participants recruited from Prolific; 53.1% female; $M_{\text{Age}} = 42.83$) expanded the outcome variables to include negative word-of-mouth intentions, intent to complain to the manager, and evaluations of the employee, and tested the moderating effect of an apology on review responses. Study 4 (129 participants recruited from Prolific; 47.9% female; $M_{\text{Age}} = 39.19$) introduced the number of bystanders as a moderator, assessing whether multiple bystanders reduced the intention to react, consistent with the bystander effect theory. Across studies, participants completed validated measures of satisfaction, fairness, jealousy, and intent to complain, while review behavior was coded by independent raters.

Summary of Findings

The findings consistently demonstrate the detrimental effects of sweethearting on bystanders. Across four studies, witnessing sweethearting significantly reduced satisfaction with the employee and the service provider, lowered perceived fairness, and increased feelings of jealousy. Mediation analyses confirmed that perceived fairness and jealousy explain the relationship between sweethearting and reduced satisfaction. Study 3 revealed that the sincerity of an apology moderates review behavior. When apologies were perceived as sincere, participants left relatively less negative reviews, yet sincerity did not fully restore satisfaction, fairness, or trust, nor did it eliminate negative emotions or the intention to complain to the manager. Study 4 found that the presence of multiple bystanders reduced the intention to complain, consistent with diffusion of responsibility in the bystander effect. These results highlight the hidden costs of sweethearting, showing that its impact extends beyond immediate service recipients to uninvolved observers, creating lasting negative impressions and emotional responses. The effects persist across varying contexts. The presence of other bystanders can attenuate these reactions through diffusion of responsibility, but negative feelings persist beneath the surface, quietly eroding customer satisfaction.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research advances the literature on third-party effects in service encounters by extending the conceptualization of sweethearting beyond the dyadic employee–favored customer relationship to include uninvolved bystanders. It integrates justice theory, social comparison theory, and emotional appraisal frameworks to explain why bystanders respond negatively even when they are not directly harmed. By identifying perceived fairness and jealousy as mediators, it clarifies

the cognitive and emotional processes underlying these reactions. The study also introduces and tests important boundary conditions. It demonstrates that an apology sincerity influences review behavior, although even sincere apologies cannot fully reverse the harm caused by sweethearting. It further shows that the number of bystanders moderates intention to complain, providing empirical support for the bystander effect in a service context. These findings reveal that social dynamics can conceal underlying dissatisfaction, making the damage from sweethearting more difficult to detect. The research offers practical implications by highlighting that sweethearting erodes brand perception and customer satisfaction indirectly through bystander reactions, in addition to its direct ethical and financial risks. Managers should train frontline employees to maintain consistent service standards, act as fairness agents, and avoid illicit preferential treatment, as even subtle instances can have broad and lasting reputational consequences.

**THE DISABILITY PERSUASION EFFECT: WHEN AND WHY INDIVIDUALS
WITH DISABILITIES SHAPE CONSUMER PREFERENCES**

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Keywords: disability, lay perception, diversity, equity, inclusion

Description: This study introduces the “disability persuasion effect,” where consumers are more receptive to marketing messages from individuals with disabilities.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Recently, growing attention to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has spurred interest in the impact of employing individuals with disabilities on marketing effectiveness. However, existing studies typically view disability as a symbol of inclusivity and uniqueness, suggesting that incorporating disability into marketing enhances the brand’s positive image or signals the

uniqueness of firms using such strategies (Lee, Alwi, and Gambetti 2024; Wang and Wei 2024). For example, brands that feature individuals with disabilities as models in advertising are often viewed as “good” companies, resulting in favorable consumer responses. These findings reflect the impact of using disability in marketing itself on the brand’s overall image. However, little is known about how consumers’ specific personality perceptions of individuals with disabilities influence their responses to marketing messages delivered by them, thereby shaping marketing effectiveness. The present research introduces the “disability persuasion effect,” proposing that consumers are more inclined to accept marketing messages and claims when delivered by individuals with disabilities (vs. those without), driven by naïve perceptions about disability.

Method And Data

Across six studies, we tested and replicated this effect in diverse contexts, including crisis management, advertising, influencer marketing, and social media-driven popularity.

Summary of Findings

The present research examined how disability representation in marketing influences consumer responses to marketing activities. Unlike prior studies that focus on the symbolic advantage for brands employing disability representation in advertising, our findings highlight the crucial

role of lay perceptions associated with individuals with disabilities in driving marketing effectiveness across a variety of marketing contexts (crisis management, advertising, influencer marketing, and social media-driven popularity).

Statement of Key Contributions

A growing body of research has documented the positive effect of disability representation in advertising. We extend the literature by demonstrating that the effect can occur across a broader range of contexts. Specifically, whereas prior research has emphasized disability representation as a signal of a company's moral virtue or "doing good," the present research highlights its persuasive impact through trait-based inferences about the marketing actor.

Practically, our research offers actionable insights for marketers aiming to build consumer trust. Incorporating individuals with disabilities into marketing communications not only enhances the brand's image of inclusivity but also increases acceptance of its messages. In an era where consumers increasingly social responsibility, these findings offer meaningful guidance for designing marketing strategies that resonate with diverse audiences

"References are available upon request."

**The Impact of Time on Dyadic IS/OS Sales Teams:
Curvilinear Performance Patterns and the Essential Role of Breaks**

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Keywords: Sales team effectiveness; Inside Sales–Outside Sales (IS/OS) dyads; Team tenure; Discontinuous growth modeling

Description: This paper investigates how the performance of dyadic Inside Sales–Outside Sales teams evolves over time, revealing an inverted-U relationship between collective tenure and effectiveness, and showing that strategically timed breaks and reunions can boost performance by refreshing knowledge and mitigating the effects of informational silos.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

1. Research Question

This study examines how dyadic Inside Sales–Outside Sales (IS/OS) team effectiveness changes over time, addressing the gap in sales research that often adopts static perspectives (Li & van Knippenberg, 2021). Drawing on team cognition theory (Cooke et al., 2007; Salas & Fiore, 2004) and social network theory (Burt, 2005; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003), we investigate three questions: (1) Does collective team tenure exhibit an inverted-U relationship with performance (Katz, 1982)? (2) Should teams pause collaboration after reaching optimal performance to prevent knowledge redundancy and isolation (Weick, 1969; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971)? (3) Do reuniting team members after a break perform better than during initial collaboration due to enriched knowledge and retained shared cognition (Zhang et al., 2017; Gorman & Cooke, 2011)?

2. Method and Data

We analyzed five years of archival sales data from a B2B industrial materials provider, comprising 159 IS/OS teams (91 outside salespeople, 83 inside salespeople) and 2,325 monthly team-level observations. Performance was measured as monthly sales revenue, with tenure tracked pre- and post-break. Control variables included team composition, territory size, and average customer size (Claro et al., 2020). Discontinuous growth modeling (Bliese & Lang, 2016) was used to capture both linear and quadratic tenure effects, as well as performance shifts after breaks. A three-level cross-nested mixed-effects model structure was adopted: time occasions (Level 1) nested within outside salespeople (Level 2), nested within inside salespeople (Level 3).

3. Summary of Findings

Results reveal that team performance improves with tenure initially (supporting H1) but

declines after ~21 months, indicating an inverted-U pattern (Katz, 1982; Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2020). Breaks in collaboration significantly boost subsequent performance (supporting H2), as returning members bring new skills and experiences acquired elsewhere (Van de Vegt & Sparrowe, 2014; Schmitz, 2013) while retaining prior shared mental models (Gorman & Cooke, 2011). Post-break teams, however, reach peak performance faster but also experience a steeper decline (supporting H3), suggesting shorter optimal collaboration cycles post-reunion. These dynamics reflect the benefits of additive team tenure (Liang et al., 1995) and the drawbacks of prolonged knowledge redundancy (Burt, 2005; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000).

4. Key Contributions

Theoretically, we advance sales team literature (Ahearne et al., 2010; Rapp & Rapp, 2023) by integrating temporal dynamics into models of IS/OS team effectiveness, addressing natural discontinuities caused by turnover (Li & van Knippenberg, 2021). We show that tenure has dual effects: enhancing performance up to an optimal point, then reducing it via informational silos (Weick, 1969; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971) and constrained innovation (Schmitz, 2013). Practically, our findings guide managers to strategically rotate members, implement structured breaks, and leverage reunions to boost performance (Zhang et al., 2017). We recommend designing training and knowledge-sharing mechanisms to prolong benefits and mitigate decline. This framework enables firms to sustain sales performance and reduce inefficiencies in high-turnover environments (Claro et al., 2020).

Note: References are available upon request.

THE IMPACTS OF RELIGIOSITY TOWARD IDEOLOGICAL BETRAYAL BRANDS

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Keywords: Religiosity, Ideological Betrayals, Brand Engagement, Brand Disengagement

Descriptions: This study aims to empirically investigate the influence of religiosity on the consumer-ideological brand relationship both before and after instances of perceived betrayal.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although religiosity has traditionally been recognized for its impact on shaping consumer political identity and political consumerism, there is a growing trend of businesses publicly expressing their positions on contentious social and political matters. These corporate stances may not always align with consumers' ideologies, resulting in sentiments of brand betrayal. This study aims to empirically investigate the influence of religiosity on the consumer-ideological brand relationship both before and after instances of perceived betrayal. Three studies demonstrate that the four cohorts of religiosity (i.e., nonbelievers, classifiers, transformers, and devotees) differ in ideological brand engagement pre-betrayal. The ideological betrayal brand is an important moderator in religiosity and brand relationships post-betrayal. The requirements for re-engagement are due to previous brand disengagement or reconciliation. The research highlights the importance of religiosity as a multidimensional construct and its effects on brands adopting ideological stances.

Research Question: This study examined the impact of religiosity on consumer behavior toward ideological brands, both before and after brand betrayals. Specifically, it asks:

1. How do different types of religiosity affect brand engagement with ideological brands?
2. How does religiosity moderate brand disengagement following ideological betrayal?

3. How does religiosity affect consumers' willingness to reconcile with and reengage with a brand after betrayal?
4. What are the mechanisms (i.e., disengagement and reconciliation) through which religiosity impacts brand re-engagement after ideological betrayal?

The research seeks to fill gaps in the literature by examining religiosity as a multidimensional construct across four cohorts, including nonbelievers, classifiers, transformers, and devotees, and by distinguishing between practical and ideological brand betrayals.

Method and Data: The research employed a multi-method approach across three studies to examine how religiosity influences consumer responses to ideological brand betrayals. Study 1 collected data from 730 college students who identified a favorite brand from social media, rated their engagement with it, and assessed the brand's ideological alignment. Participants also completed a 12-item religiosity scale, classifying them into four cohorts: nonbelievers, classifiers, transformers, and devotees. Study 2 consisted of two parts. In Study 2A, 285 participants identified brands they perceived as having committed ideological betrayals and rated the nature of these betrayals as practical or ideological. Study 2B surveyed 497 MTurk respondents to examine the moderating effects of ideological betrayal on brand disengagement and reconciliation. Participants rated their likelihood to disengage from the brand and their openness to reconciliation, followed by completing the religiosity scale. Study 3 expanded on these findings with 804 MTurk participants, examining the full pathway from ideological betrayal to brand disengagement, reconciliation, and eventual re-engagement. The study utilized validated scales for all key constructs and employed regression analyses, moderation testing, and

PROCESS macro modeling to assess the influence of religiosity and betrayal type on consumer-brand relationships.

Summary of Findings: The study revealed that religiosity significantly moderates brand behavior. Devotees remained engaged with brands regardless of ideology, while transformers showed higher engagement with ideological brands. Nonbelievers were more likely to disengage after ideological betrayal but were not open to reconciliation. Classifiers avoided ideological brands and were less inclined to reconcile. Reconciliation efforts led to re-engagement among devotees, transformers, and classifiers, but not nonbelievers. Across all three studies, ideological betrayal emerged as a strong moderator of brand disengagement and re-engagement, and religiosity was a key factor in how consumers perceive and react to these events. The findings offer practical strategies for managing brand relationships across different consumer religiosity profiles.

Key Contributions: This study explored how the four distinct cohorts of religiosity, including devotees, classifiers, transformers, and nonbelievers, respond differently to ideological brand betrayals. It contributed to the field of brand engagement by showing that religiosity and politics are important ideological factors that influence consumer behavior. These factors affect how people engage with brands, disengage after perceived betrayals, reconcile their views, and eventually reengage. The research addressed a gap in the existing literature by demonstrating that religiosity is not a uniform concept but varies meaningfully across different consumer groups. It also introduced the idea that brand betrayals can be practical, such as service failures, or ideological, such as political advocacy by companies. Religiosity played a strategic role in shaping these responses. Devotees often remained loyal to a brand regardless of its ideology,

while the other groups responded more strongly when the brand's ideology aligned with their own. Brand reconciliation strategies were effective in restoring engagement among devotees, classifiers, and transformers, but not among nonbelievers. Overall, the study provided useful strategies for managing consumer relationships based on religious orientation and offered new insights into how ideological tensions influence brand loyalty and consumer decision-making.

THE RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF HELP-SELF AND HELP-OTHERS APPEALS IN VOLUNTEERING ADVERTISING: THE MODERATING ROLE OF BEHAVIOR CONSEQUENCES

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Key words: Advertising appeal, help-self, help-others, benefits and costs, volunteering

Description: An empirical study of the moderating role behavior consequence type on the effectiveness of help-self and help-others advertising appeals

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Help-self and help-others appeals are two common advertising appeals in both consumer marketing and social marketing. In volunteerism advertising, a help-others appeal encourages viewers to reflect on the potential impact of their charitable actions on the recipients; in contrast, a help-self appeal focuses on the welfare of the donors themselves (e.g., to learn new knowledge and skills, gain favorable judgment from peers, network with others, reduce guilt, etc.).

Prior research examining the persuasiveness of these two appeals produces mixed results. Earlier work applying a motivation approach seeks to align individuals' motivation orientation (egoism vs. altruism) with ad appeals. Later research also examined the role of specific motivations (e.g., financial gains, impression management, value expression, etc.). To date, the question of whether individuals are mostly egoistically motivated or altruistically motivated is far from being resolved. Recent research starts to examine the boundary conditions for the relative persuasiveness of help-self versus help-others appeals. These boundary conditions examined typically relate to viewers' characteristics such as age, gender, culture, personality, self-construal, moral emotion, empathy, etc.

In this research, we adopt a cognitive approach and examine the moderating role of helping consequences—a factor that pertains to the ad message per se rather than viewers' characteristics.

Method and Data

We propose that exposure to help-self versus help-others ad appeals can activate contrasting social reference point in processing information. A help-self appeal activates a self reference point, whereas a help-others appeal activates an others reference point. Once a reference point is activated, it will influence subsequent information processing such that individuals will demonstrate differential sensitivity to different kinds of behavior consequences and be persuaded differentially by such consequences highlighted in advertisements. Specifically, we hypothesize that help-self appeals are more persuasive than help-others appeals when an ad highlights how volunteering may help oneself attain various benefits; whereas help-others appeals are more effective than help-self appeals when the ad highlights how volunteering may help other people by reducing their miseries (i.e., costs).

We designed a series of 2 ad appeals (help-self vs. help-others) x 2 helping consequences (benefits vs. costs) between subject factorial experimental studies to test our hypotheses. Four versions of volunteering advertisements were created corresponding to the four experiment conditions. College student subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four experiment conditions. Subjects were shown one of the four ads and filled out a questionnaire containing main DVs, control measures, and manipulation check measures.

Summary of Findings

Main dependent variables include (1) likelihood to volunteer for a list of presented volunteering opportunities, (2) general intention to volunteer, and (3) intention to learn more

volunteering opportunities. A set of two-way ANOVA analyses on the data provide evidence supporting the hypothesis. Participants who read the self-benefit ad indicated a higher likelihood to sign up for volunteering ($M = 66.86$) than those who read the self-cost ad ($M = 44.15$, $t = 3.67$, $p < .01$), whereas participants who read the others-cost ad indicated a higher likelihood to sign up for volunteering ($M = 66.98$) than those who read the others-benefit ad ($M = 53.05$, $t = 2.18$, $p < .05$). Similar patterns of ANOVA analysis results were observed on other dependent measures as well. Manipulations were successful. In a set of ANCOVA analyses, demographics and volunteering experience were not found to influence the results significantly.

Key Contributions

Our research bears both theoretical and practical implications. We broadened and extended previous work on the effectiveness of volunteerism advertisement. We showed that the persuasiveness of a charity ad can be boosted by aligning the help-self vs. help-others appeal with a particular type of helping consequences (benefits vs. costs) highlighted in the ad. We took a cognitive approach (vs. motional approach, as in much previous research) and showed a factor that pertains to the message per se rather than viewers' characteristics (e.g., gender, culture, motivation orientations, perspectives etc.) plays a critical role in understanding the effectiveness of help-self and help-others appeals in volunteerism advertising.

In addition, our research also adds and extends previous research on the cognitive asymmetry between self versus others social reference points. Basic psychological research indicates that the self and others are the two main social reference points around which consumers organize their social cognitions. Social reference points can be chronically accessible or temporarily primed and influence information processing. In this research, we showed that such contrasting social reference points (self vs. others) can be activated in exposure to different

ad appeals (help-self vs. help-others) and make individuals being sensitive to different behavior consequences.

**THE ROLE OF COMPANIES IN ENCOURAGING VOTER PARTICIPATION:
EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF CORPORATE “GET OUT THE VOTE” APPEALS**

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Keywords: corporate political advocacy, corporate sociopolitical activism, get out the vote, voter mobilization

Description: This study examines how corporate vs. public voter mobilization appeals impact perceived fit, consumers’ attitude, and voting intention.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The global decline in voter turnout has led political and educational institutions to launch information and voter mobilization campaigns. Recently, companies have also addressed the voter turnout issue through corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA). For example, Sony Music encouraged consumers to vote ahead of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, and the Lufthansa Group engaged during the 2024 European election. With that they respond to consumers’ expectations that brands should contribute to society and also try to avoid negative CSA consequences. While existing CSA literature focuses on partisan sociopolitical issues like sustainability or immigration, research on companies’ non-partisan efforts and especially on CSA to increase voter turnout is lacking. We therefore want to investigate how company non-

partisan voter mobilization appeals are perceived compared to public institution appeals in terms of fit between message and sender and how the appeals affect consumer attitude and consumer intention to vote. We are also interested in how the appeals' effects differ between consumers and companies and analyze how consumers' general trust in companies and how companies' past CSA influences fit perception and resulting attitude and behavioral intention.

Method and Data

To answer the research questions, we conduct four online experiments in Germany. Studies 1a, 1b, and 2 are experiments that were conducted in the run-up to actual political elections in real-world contexts and demonstrate the robustness of our studies (Study 1a/b: European elections; Study 2: state elections in Brandenburg). In Studies 1 and 2, we focus on the effect of mobilization appeals by companies compared to public institutions on perceived fit and the resulting effects on consumers' attitude toward the appeal and their voting intention. We test the serial mediation of mobilization appeals by companies on consumers' voting intentions via perceived fit and attitudes toward the appeal for international (Study 1a) and regional (Study 1b) senders. Study 2 tests this mediation in a different electoral context with different stimuli, thereby increasing the external validity of our results. Study 3 is an online scenario experiment in the context of a fictitious upcoming federal election in Germany. We investigate how the mediation path differs depending on consumers' general trust in companies and how a company's past CSA (i.e., activist companies vs. non-activist companies) affects fit perceptions and subsequent attitude toward the appeal and voting intention.

Summary of Findings

Nonpartisan mobilization appeals from companies are perceived as less fitting than those from public institutions, which has a negative impact on consumers' attitudes toward the appeal and their voting intention. However, there is no general difference between companies and public senders in terms of the total impact on voting intentions, suggesting that both appeals have positive effects compared to no appeal at all.

Consumer trust mitigates this effect: people with higher general trust in companies perceive a higher fit of message and sender for companies, leading to smaller differences in attitudes and resulting voting intentions. Furthermore, consumers perceive more fit between a company and its mobilization message if the company has previously engaged in CSA. This in turn leads to a more positive attitude toward the appeal and ultimately to higher voting intentions. Nevertheless, there is no general difference in voting intentions between companies that have previously been involved in sociopolitical issues (CSA) and those that have not. Overall, attitudes toward the appeal and perceived fit vary depending on trust and prior company CSA but these factors do not lead to large differences in consumers' voting intention.

Key Contributions

With our research, we contribute to theory and practice by being one of the first studies to empirically examine the phenomenon of companies encouraging consumers to vote. This research contributes to the growing literature on CSA as it is one of the first to study companies' engagement to increase voter turnout and therefore non-partisan CSA. We also study effects that go beyond consequences for the company but include consequences that are directly related to the issue addressed (i.e., voter turnout). We enhance understanding of companies' potential

impact on voter turnout by identifying the role of perceived fit in consumers processing of companies' voter mobilization appeals. We also identify factors under which the negative effect of a corporate sender on perceived fit is smaller. Our research provides helpful insights for practitioners that want to encourage their consumers to vote. For public institutions our results already show that companies can help them increase voter turnout and they can use support of corporate engagement in reaching their goal to strengthen voter participation. In general, our findings help research and practice to understand the effects of corporate voter mobilization appeals and manage the resulting perceptions, attitudes, and behavior.

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMPTION DEFERRAL FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTS

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Keywords: Socially responsible products; effort; specialness; consumption deferral

Description: This research examines the impact of socially responsible product characteristics on consumption deferral.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Imagine purchasing a notepad made of recycled materials and finding yourself unexpectedly postponing its usage. The purpose of this research is to expand the knowledge on the effects that socially responsible product characteristics, such as recycled content, have on the intentions to defer the consumption of such products. Using the results of four experimental studies, this research proposes that purchasing socially responsible products can increase the likelihood of forgoing the consumption of such products. People can defer consumption for reasons such as meaningful value (Belk et al., 1989), identity relevance (Sheehan and Dommer, 2020), occasion matching (Shu and Sharif, 2018), and beauty preservation (Wu et al., 2017).

Extending extant theorizing, the current research proposes that consumers are more likely to defer consumption of products with socially responsible characteristics than products without such attributes. The proposed effect occurs due to heightened effort inferences related to socially responsible products, resulting in higher perceptions of product specialness. The effect is expected to be attenuated by the consumption goal and the environmental benefit level associated with the socially responsible product characteristics.

Method and Data

Study 1 measured the effect through a naturalistic online field study using Facebook ads. It was a 2 (product type: SR, control) x 2 (consumption deferral: tonight, later) between-design experiment. The ads displayed a fictional bottle of wine with a CO₂-neutral emissions logo (vs. no logo), ideal for tonight's dinner plans (vs. future dinner plans).

Study 2 tested the proposed effect using simulated purchase behavior and ruled out the effect of expensiveness on perceptions of product specialness using (n=219). It was a one-factor

(product type: SR, control) between-design experiment. Product type was manipulated with a SR logo. Participants purchased a notebook on a website and subsequently did a product evaluation to measure consumption deferral.

Study 3 tested the moderating effect of consumption goal (n=262). It was a two-factor (product type: SR, control and goal: need, want) between-design experiment. Consumption goal was manipulated (adapted from Su et al., 2024) by informing consumers that they bought a product (bottle of wine) because it was either a “must have” (need condition) or a “nice to have” (want condition) product. Product type was manipulated by including a CO₂ neutral label while consumption deferral was measured in days.

Study 4 tested the moderating effect of environmental benefits (EB) and ruled out the effect of perceived scarcity (n=241). It was a two-factor (product type: SR, control, and EB: low, high) between-design experiment. EB was manipulated using an article (Tezer and Bodur, 2020) about the benefits of recycled materials, while product type (blanket) was manipulated with a recycled materials logo.

Summary of Findings

Research has examined how consumers decide about and purchase socially responsible products but less is known about what happens during the consumption process (Tezer and Bodur, 2020). The current research fills this gap by exploring the consumption stage of socially responsible products in terms of consumption timing. It specifically explores how the presence of socially responsible product characteristics encourages consumption deferral of products with such attributes. Across the four studies, this research demonstrates that socially responsible product characteristics lead to consumption deferral. This relationship is mediated by perceived effort associated with socially responsible products and product specialness derived from such

effort. The effect is attenuated by consumption goals of wanting (vs. needing) socially responsible products and in the presence of low (vs. high) environmental benefits of socially responsible attributes. Furthermore, the results rule out scarcity and perceived expensiveness as alternative mechanisms.

Key Contributions

From a managerial perspective, this research provides insights into an alternative attribute that makes a product special, enabling marketers to highlight socially responsible products for special occasions and explore changes in terms of pricing. It also reveals effects influencing repurchase and disposal: if consumers defer consumption of socially responsible products, they may increase use of conventional products. Similarly, regarding policy implications, this research provides evidence that while deferral can reduce consumption and benefit the environment, such benefits may be offset when conventional alternatives are chosen, underscoring the need for deeper understanding of socially responsible consumption.

From a theoretical perspective, although vast research addresses purchase decisions, limited research examines the stage between purchase and disposal decisions. This research makes several theoretical contributions. First, it advances literature on inferences leading to consumption deferral (e.g., Rifkin and Berger, 2021; Sheehan and Dommer, 2020) by identifying socially responsible product characteristics as a novel driver. Second, it contributes to the literature on meaningful possessions (e.g., Belk et al., 1989; Shu and Sharif, 2018), showing that meaningful possessions are created through the association between socially responsible characteristics and effort. Third, it contributes to the socially responsible product consumption stages literature (Lin and Chang, 2012; Tezer and Bodur, 2020) by examining timing effects.

References are available upon request

VALUE CO-CREATION IN EXCLUSIVE ONLINE COMMUNITIES: AN EXAMINATION OF ONLINE SALONS

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Keywords: Value Co-Creation, Knowledge Sharing, Community-Based Innovation, Well-being

Description: This study investigates the process of value co-creation through collaborative knowledge exchange within exclusive digital communities.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The utilization of individual knowledge and experience has gained prominence in recent years; however, the full potential of personal expertise remains untapped. User innovation research has explored methods for extracting innovative ideas embedded within individuals (e.g., von Hippel, 2005). This study aims to elucidate the value co-creation process that arises from the exchange of individual knowledge and experiences.

This investigation centers on "online salons" in Japan as platforms where individuals with shared interests voluntarily gather. Each salon has a distinct purpose: facilitating dynamic participant interactions that are presumed to generate value co-creation. In this context, online salons are considered closed communities, with "online salon" referring to the framework and "community" denoting the relationships formed within. We define "incremental value" as collective knowledge generated through the synthesis of individual knowledge rather than market novelty. "Realization of value co-creation" is conceptualized as the production of outputs derived from this collective knowledge.

Based on these definitions, we examine whether online salons can function effectively as co-creation communities.

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

To elucidate the value co-creation process, we conducted in-depth interviews with community participants by carefully observing the community dynamics. The

interviewees were selected based on their active involvement in online salons. Data collection was continued until theoretical saturation was achieved using snowball sampling. The final sample included 11 respondents (five males and six females; age distribution: four in their 20s, two in their 30s, three in their 40s, and two in their 50s). While business-oriented salons were predominant, other genres such as childcare were also represented.

This investigation utilized Semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' involvement in online communities. The interviews delved into the context of their participation, the specifics of their activities, perceived benefits, the significance of these digital spaces in their lives, and their future intentions.

The study employed a grounded theory approach (GTA) to inductively construct a theory from individual interview data. Following the procedure outlined by Strauss and Corbin (2014), the analysis was as follows:

- 1) Conceptual labeling of transcribed interview data was applied iteratively to each dataset.
- 2) Clustering related concepts to extract first-order categories.
- 3) Second-order categories (including core categories) are derived by grouping the related first-order categories.
- 4) Theoretical construction through analytical synthesis.

Summary of Findings

Research demonstrates that value co-creation is realized when three crucial actors—problem holders, salon proprietors, and contributors—fulfill their respective roles within the community.

"Problem holders" are individuals seeking to address specific issues who engage in community participation. The integration of individual knowledge was not spontaneous; rather, problem-holders incorporated others' expertise to achieve personal goals and deepen their own understanding. Value co-creation stems from an individual's strong motivation to resolve specific challenges. In a community without enforcement mechanisms and predicated on individual autonomy, the salon proprietor's philosophical approach serves as a unifying element, rendering their influence critical. However, as the community expands, the capacity of a single individual to manage all the aspects becomes limited. Consequently, the significance of "contributors" who are highly motivated to assist others increases. Contributors are driven by empathy toward the proprietor and attachment to the community, indicating that the community's core is embodied in the proprietor.

A significant finding demonstrated that participants derived life satisfaction from their community engagement. Analysis of community activities using the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) revealed their contribution to enhanced well-being.

These observations indicate that participation in co-creation enhances individuals' well-being and creates societal value.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances the academic discourse on value co-creation by shifting the focus from firm-centered interactions to community-based individual engagements. It specifically explores how digital salons serve as platforms for collective knowledge-sharing and innovation. Unlike previous research on peer communities with uniform interests, this study examined communities with diverse motivations, revealing their potential to address societal challenges while enhancing participant well-being.

Academic Contributions:

1. Develop a novel framework for understanding value co-creation among individuals with varied interests.
2. Illuminating the essential roles of trust and autonomy in fostering collaborative environments.
3. It expands the scope of value co-creation literature by integrating concepts from well-being theory.

Practical Contributions:

1. It provides actionable strategies for project managers in the corporate, non-profit, and governmental sectors to leverage community-based innovation.
2. This highlights the potential of digital salons in Web3 and decentralized organizational contexts to address complex societal issues.
3. Practical approaches to improving participant well-being through structured community engagement.

Non-Academic Implications:

Organizations seeking to promote collaboration can apply these findings to enhance group dynamics, align individual goals with collective objectives, and ensure sustainability in co-creation activities. Policymakers can utilize these insights to design frameworks that support knowledge-sharing economies, while promoting societal well-being.

VALUES, ASPIRATIONS, AND WELL-BEING FOR CHINESE AND AMERICAN MILLENNIALS

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Keywords: Schwartz’s Values, Aspirational Index, Well-being, Millennials, Cross-cultural research

Description: This research investigates the differences in values, aspirations, and well-being between Chinese and American Millennials.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

China is one of the most important markets for consumer goods in the world (Zhou et al., 2010). China is one of the largest export markets for U.S. goods and services, while the United States is the top export market for China with China holding a critical position in the global supply chain (Siripurapu & Berman, 2024). Despite the significance of China and the importance of the Chinese consumer, more research is needed to understand the cultural influences that can impact consumer behavior, especially as they relate to the American culture. Thus, the main contribution of the current research is to understand the similarities and differences between the two cultures in terms of values, aspirations and well-being that could drive market and consumer behavior in each country. In the current research, we investigated three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How does Schwartz’s values differ between Chinese and Americans?

RQ2: How does the Aspiration Index differ between Chinese and Americans?

RQ3: What aspects of the Aspiration Index predict well-being for Chinese and Americans?

Method and Data

An online survey was created through Qualtrics and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Data were collected through a Qualtrics panel which specified for an age range of those born between 1992 – 1996 for 300 respondents for each culture. Respondents with significant missing data or those that did not include their specific age within the survey were removed, resulting in a final sample of 266 for the Chinese and 244 for the American sample. For the Chinese data, 46.6% were female and 59.4% made below \$30,000. For the American data, 79.9% were female and 53.3% made below \$30,000. The short version of Schwartz's List of Values (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005) was used to measure the 10 different values. The Aspirational Index, which consists of 23 items grouped into four subscales: self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and financial success, was used to assess aspirational intentions (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). To measure well-being, we utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) since self-esteem is crucial for understanding a person's well-being and success (Monteiro et al., 2022).

Summary of Findings

Of the 10 values, there were significant differences between the two samples on all dimensions except for achievement, hedonism, universalism and tradition. More specifically, American Millennials were higher in self-direction ($t = 4.22, p < .001$), benevolence ($t = 2.43, p = .015$), and stimulation ($t = 2.41, p = .016$) as compared to Chinese Millennials. The Chinese were higher on power ($t = -6.81, p < .001$), conformity ($t = -2.26, p = .024$), as well as security ($t = -5.75, p < .001$) as compared to Americans.

For the Aspirational Index, American Millennials exhibited higher level of self-acceptance ($t = 4.34, p < .001$) than Chinese Millennials, but Chinese scored higher than Americans on financial success ($t = -8.97, p < .001$). For well-being, the results show that American Millennials have a significantly higher level of self-esteem than Chinese Millennials ($t = 3.05, p = .002$). For American Millennials, only the self-acceptance dimension was significant ($t = 3.52, p < .001$) in predicting self-esteem. While for Chinese Millennials, only the community feeling dimension was significant ($t = 4.82, p < .001$) in predicting self-esteem.

Statement of Key Contributions

The current research makes several key contributions to the literature on generational cohorts and cultural differences between two divergent cultures – Americans and Chinese. Because generational cohorts embody the values during a specific period, they represent the cultural change that takes place over time (Egri & Ralston, 2004). Thus, the current research makes important contributions to the literature by investigating a new generational cohort – Millennials. This cohort experienced significant economic changes since China began its economic reform and open-door policies in 1978, moving to a market economy where consumers were given choice in the products they purchased (Li & Xiao, 1999). While some research has begun to explore the differences between American and Chinese Millennials on concepts such as luxury purchases (Mudel et al., 2021) and sustainable clothing (Su et al., 2019), more research is needed. Our research provides valuable insights into how the two different cultures differ in terms of values, aspirations, and well-being. Understanding these differences in concepts such as values and well-being is important as these two societies continue to have important cultural and economic impacts on the global economy. These results can be used by companies wishing to

appeal to the two different cultures and provide guidance to policy makers wishing to increase societal well-being.

“References are available upon request.”

WHEN FRIENDS AND FAVORITES EVOLVE TOGETHER: UNDERSTANDING THE DUAL CAUSALITY BETWEEN PURCHASE INTENTIONS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Keywords: Social Selection, Social Influence, Similarity-attraction, Stochastic actor-oriented modelling, Purchase intentions

The paper studies the simultaneous evolution of consumers' purchase intentions and social network using panel network data.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In this study, we attempt to understand the underlying reasons behind the observed correlation between the consumption preferences of network members. To do so, we try to address the following research questions: a) Does a consumer's purchase intention become similar to the purchase intention of their network member over time? (social influence) b) Does the consumer select network members based on how similar they are in terms of purchase intentions? (social selection) and c) Do these relationships change in the context of a high versus a low congruent product?

Method and Data

We collect panel network and attitudinal data to address the mentioned research questions. To collect data from a network with a clearly defined boundary and limited variation in the

members' entry and exit, we collected data from all the first-year students enrolled in a residential MBA program. To define the social network of the individuals, we collected data on their close friends in the program. We also collected data on their purchase intention for a high self-congruent product—the student exchange program offered by the institute, and a low self-congruent product—a meal at a high-end restaurant. The categorization of products as high or low self-congruent was based on self-congruency scores provided by the participants. We collected two waves of data, four months apart, to capture the evolution of consumers' social network and purchase intentions. We used stochastic actor-oriented modeling for the analysis. This method allows us to test for social selection and social influence while controlling for each other. For building the final model, we used forward selection. We controlled for individual-related factors and network-related factors that might impact close friend selection and purchase intention for the products.

Summary of Findings

This study analyses the dynamic relationship between consumers' purchase intentions and social network for two distinct product categories: a high self-congruent product (student exchange program) and a low self-congruent product (a meal at a high-end restaurant). We conducted a panel network analysis using stochastic actor-oriented modeling. The findings reveal that in the case of the high self-congruent product, both effects – social selection and social influence are significant, however, in the case of the low self-congruent product, only the social influence effect is significant. This suggests the critical role product self-congruence plays in determining the presence of social selection.

Key Contributions

This study adds to the similarity-attraction effect literature by testing for the effect using longitudinal data based on real interactions and allowing attitudes to change dynamically

along with social connections, thus addressing a methodological shortcoming of the previous studies. We also test for the effect in the context of two products differentiated by their level of self-congruence, which helps establish the boundary condition for the similarity-attraction effect. The study also adds to the co-evolution literature, which is majorly method-dominated, by providing theoretical grounding.

This study offers practical insights for marketers by highlighting the importance of creating a relevant brand image and elucidating the underlying process behind consumers' identification with brands. Crafting a strong brand image that is reflective of the target group's attitudes would facilitate consumer identification with the brand and the creation of a brand community. This would increase the social value derived by consumers, leading to greater satisfaction. The study also showcases that for low self-congruent products, such strategies would not be successful. Thus, for such products, marketers should try to leverage social influence to promote product adoption.

When Humans Face Limits: How Perceptions of God Affect Purchase Decision Avoidance

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Keywords: Limit Situation, Religion, God Salience, Decision making, Decision Avoidance

Description: The research investigates how limit situations and different views of God affects decision-avoidance tendencies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Today, we face numerous challenges that remind us of our human limitations, from the outbreak of viruses and devastating fires like the Palisades fire to wars, death, diseases, and even advancements in technology that test the boundaries of human intellect. Karl Jaspers identified these challenges as limit situations – moments like death, suffering, the fragility of one’s own body, and uncertainty (Jaspers, 1971). How do these limit situations shape our decision-making, particularly decision avoidance tendency? The current research explores the question from a novel perspective – View of God – as people in limit situations tend to think of God. Importantly, people have diverse representations of God (Jang et al., 2018). Some people associate God with unconditional love while others associate it with authoritarian image. We thus question how decision avoidance tendencies would be affected by different views of God.

Method and Data

We expect that in limit situations, God salience will increase. However, decision avoidance will depend on individuals’ views of God. Individuals with an authoritarian view of God are more likely to avoid decisions, whereas those with a loving view of God are less likely.

Study 1 manipulated limit situations through questionnaires prompting thoughts about human existential limits or thriving reality. We measured multiple variables, including financial decision avoidance. Limit situations increased God salience. Importantly, for individuals with an authoritarian view of God, greater salience increased financial decision avoidance, whereas for those with a loving view, salience did not increase avoidance.

Study 2 aims to replicate the findings with a different limit situation manipulation (video manipulation). Also, we included different decision avoidance contexts - laptop purchase, dinner menu choice. We found consistent patterns of decision avoidance in both laptop purchases and dinner menu choices.

Study 3 directly manipulated God salience and examined its impact on financial decision avoidance. In high-salience conditions, authoritarian views predicted greater avoidance, but in low-salience conditions, views of God had no effect.

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, we find that limit situations heighten God salience. But the impact of salient God on decision avoidance depended on whether individuals viewed God as authoritarian or loving. When individuals perceived God as authoritarian, they exhibit a stronger tendency to avoid decisions. On the other hand, individuals who see God as loving do not show this increase in avoidance tendency. These results highlight the nuanced role of religious cognition in decision-making under existential constraints.

Statement of Key Contributions

Current research explores an important question – how do we make decisions when confronted with their limits as human beings? By using a novel lens – the view of God, we provide theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, we contribute to the decision literature by introducing the "limit situation" as a new antecedent of decision avoidance. While prior research has identified factors like choice overload, anticipated regret, and choice difficulty as triggers for decision avoidance, we demonstrate that existential thresholds and view of God also influence decision avoidance. Also, this research advances the literature on religion by addressing calls to better understand how religion influences consumer behavior (Mathras et al., 2016). Beyond religiosity and religious affiliation, we offer insights into how view of God shapes human decision-making. Practically, this research provides valuable insights for marketers aiming to understand consumer decision-making during major events. Based on the findings, we recommend that companies use messages conveying empathetic and supportive help from God to reduce decision avoidance. Also, companies may adjust their marketing strategies by offering tailored decision support, such as recommendation systems or decision assistance by salesperson to encourage active decision-making for those who view God as authoritarian.

* References are available upon request.

Data-Driven Social Impact in Mature and Emerging Markets

**A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD: GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY EFFECTS OF
ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE DISCLOSURE**

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Keywords: ESG disclosure; Geographic proximity; Legitimacy; Inverted U; Marketing capability

Description: This paper examines the relationship between the local firms’ Environmental, Social, and Governance disclosure extent and focal firms’ ESG disclosure extent.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The sustainability strategies of geographically proximate firms significantly shape those of focal firms. While adopting these local practices can enhance focal firms’ institutional legitimacy, the associated costs may jeopardize their efficiency. This situation presents a critical trade-off. However, our understanding of how focal firms strategically navigate this tension between legitimacy and efficiency remains limited. Drawing on institutional theory, this study explores whether and how the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)

disclosure extent of local firms (LESGD) influences the ESG disclosure extent of focal firms (FESGD).

Method and Data

We estimate the main and moderating effects using a two-way fixed effects model. To address endogeneity concerns, we employ propensity score matching and instrumental variable methods.

Firms' ESG disclosure extent data comes from the Bloomberg ESG Database (Bellamy, Dhanorkar & Subramanian, 2020; Gualandris et al. 2021). Corporate geographical locations and financial characteristics are from the CSMAR (China Stock Market and Accounting Research Database) (Li and Lu, 2020; Li, Li, & Liu, 2022).

We matched the data by firms' stock code and year, excluded companies with significant financial irregularities and poor financial health, and also excluded companies missing ESG disclosure extent scores (Deng, Li & Ren, 2023; He et al. 2024). Our final sample includes 1085 unique Mainland Chinese listed companies, totaling 8908 observations from 2011 to 2020.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that LESGD positively affects the FESGD, while beyond a certain threshold, it turns in a negative direction, demonstrating an inverted U-shaped relationship. Moreover, relative LESGD and relative local financial performance shift the turning point of this inverted U-shaped curve to the right, mitigating the negative effects of LESGD. Additionally, the focal firm's marketing capability flattens the curve and shifts the turning

point to the right, amplifying the positive effects of LESGD while reducing LESGD's negative effects.

Key Contributions

This research advances marketing scholarship by investigating how organizations navigate legitimacy pressures and efficiency (Baldini et al. 2018; Husted, Jamali & Saffar, 2016a). We theorize and empirically evidence that focal firms' ESG disclosure extent follows an inverted U-shaped pattern in response to neighboring firms' disclosure extent. We also uncover that both positive (mimetic isomorphism and knowledge spillover) and negative (disclosure costs and free-riding) mechanisms jointly shape ESG disclosure outcomes. We further introduce marketing capability as a critical moderator, showing how firms can buffer or amplify local legitimacy pressures, thus highlighting a strategic pathway for marketers aiming to align disclosure with firm-level resources and objectives.

Policymakers interested in fostering transparent business practices should be aware of geographic spillover effects to avoid either overstimulating disclosures or inadvertently encouraging free-riding. Companies and non-profit organizations aiming to promote sustainability standards can benefit from recognizing how local clusters of high- or low-disclosure firms can shape focal firms' disclosure strategies. Moreover, executives responsible for crafting sustainability and marketing strategies can leverage our insights to calibrate ESG initiatives, especially by harnessing marketing capabilities that confer greater agility in managing legitimacy pressures and stakeholder expectations.

A WISDOM-INSPIRED APPROACH TO PRODUCT DESIGN FOR THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY: DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE 5D-PDS

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Keywords: Circular Economy, Product Design, Consumer Wisdom, Scale Development, Sustainable Innovation

Description: This research introduces and validates the Five-Dimensional Product Design Scale (5D-PDS), a novel instrument reflecting consumer perceptions of circular economy–aligned product design features and examining the moderating role of consumer wisdom.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As firms shift toward circular economy strategies, they face an urgent need to understand how consumers perceive product design features that align with sustainability and long-term value. Traditional product design scales focus on aesthetics, functionality, and symbolic value, but fail to capture emerging dimensions like repairability, emotional

attachment, or environmental responsibility. This research addresses two primary questions: (1) What key dimensions define consumer perceptions of product design in the context of the circular economy? and (2) How does Consumer Wisdom—a psychological trait reflecting mindful, ethical, and future-oriented consumption—shape consumer evaluation of such design features and their behavioral outcomes? We introduce the 5D-PDS scale, which captures five core product dimensions: reliable performance, affordable repair, feature innovativeness, environmental & social responsibility, and enduring aesthetic appeal. We further develop a conceptual model linking these dimensions to perceived utility, emotional attachment, purchase intention, and willingness to pay a premium—while testing the moderating role of Consumer Wisdom. In doing so, this work expands the scope of design measurement and identifies psychological mechanisms that influence consumer responses to innovation for the circular economy. This research addresses critical gaps at the intersection of marketing, design, and sustainability by developing a tool for firms to align design strategies with evolving consumer values.

Method and Data

We conducted two empirical studies using U.S.-based online samples to develop and validate the 5D-PDS. In Study 1 ($N = 290$), we generated 63 candidate items across six conceptual domains derived from literature on design, sustainability, and consumer value. Exploratory factor analysis revealed a five-factor structure, eliminating the cost/affordability dimension. The resulting 5D-PDS includes 20 items—four per dimension—with strong psychometric properties ($\alpha > .80$ for all subscales). Study 2 ($N = 450$) confirmed the factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis, demonstrating convergent and discriminant validity. The scale showed incremental predictive validity

over existing scales (CEPQ, New Product Design Scale) in predicting perceived utility, emotional attachment, purchase intention, and willingness to pay a premium. We also measured Consumer Wisdom and tested a structural equation model linking consumer wisdom to the 5D-PDS dimensions, and then to psychological and behavioral outcomes. Multi-group SEM further examined whether these relationships differed across high- and low-wisdom consumers. Results confirmed that Consumer Wisdom predicts stronger endorsement of circular design features and amplifies their effects on psychological and behavioral outcomes. Together, these studies offer a validated measurement tool and theoretical framework that firms can use to design, assess, and market circular products more effectively and meaningfully.

Summary of Findings

We find that consumer perceptions of circular product design are best represented by five distinct dimensions: reliable performance, affordable repair, feature innovativeness, environmental & social responsibility, and enduring aesthetic appeal. The 5D-PDS demonstrates strong psychometric robustness across two studies, including high internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity, and incremental predictive power over established design scales. The scale significantly predicts consumer outcomes such as perceived utility, emotional attachment, willingness to pay, and purchase intention. Importantly, emotional attachment emerged as an underappreciated pathway through which design features drive downstream behaviors, especially for dimensions like repairability and sustainability. We also show that Consumer Wisdom plays a dual role: it predicts stronger endorsement of circular design features and moderates their effects on value perceptions and behavioral outcomes. Structural equation modeling confirms that

the influence of Consumer Wisdom on purchase behavior is fully mediated through design perceptions and affective responses. High-wisdom consumers are more responsive to design features aligned with long-term value and economic & social responsibility, whereas low-wisdom consumers place more weight on performance. These results validate the 5D-PDS as a comprehensive tool for understanding consumer responses to circular design and highlight the importance of segmenting by psychological traits such as Consumer Wisdom.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four key contributions to marketing and sustainable innovation. First, we develop and validate the Five-Dimensional Product Design Scale (5D-PDS)—a psychometrically robust, multidimensional tool that captures consumer perceptions of product design in the context of circular economy principles. Second, we introduce enduring aesthetic appeal, affordable repair, and environmental & social responsibility as essential, yet previously overlooked dimensions in product design measurement. Third, by integrating Consumer Wisdom into our conceptual framework, we advance theoretical understanding of how psychological traits influence consumer responses to sustainability-oriented design features. This bridges design research with emerging literature on mindful and sustainable consumption. Fourth, we demonstrate that the 5D-PDS outperforms existing product design measures in predicting critical consumer outcomes such as emotional attachment, purchase intention, and willingness to pay a premium. From a managerial perspective, the scale offers actionable guidance for firms seeking to align product design and innovation strategies with evolving consumer expectations. It also supports segmentation strategies that account for consumers' values, enabling brands

to connect with the emerging segment of “wise” consumers. Ultimately, this research equips marketers and designers with a behavioral and psychological roadmap for advancing circular product strategies that are meaningful, measurable, and market-ready.

ABSOLUTE VS. PERCENTAGE DISCOUNT: WHAT WORKS FOR LOW-PRICED PRODUCTS OFFERING SMALL DISCOUNTS?

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Keywords:

Discount framing, low-priced products, small discounts, perceived discount depth, consumer behavior

Description:

This paper examines how consumers respond to absolute versus percentage discount framings for low-priced products offering small discounts, highlighting the role of perceived discount depth as a mediator.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines how consumers respond to absolute versus percentage discount frames in the context of low-priced products offering small discounts. While discount framing has been widely studied, most existing work focuses on either large price reductions or high-priced products. Prior recommendations, such as the “Rule of 100” (Berger, 2013), suggest percentage discounts are more effective for lower-priced products. However, these guidelines tend to overlook products in the sub-\$10 range like in the grocery market where discounts typically amount to mere cents. Existing studies (e.g., González et al., 2016; DelVecchio et al., 2007) address discount framing but do not explicitly test the sub-dollar context or the psychological mechanisms influencing effectiveness. This paper addresses that gap by exploring whether absolute discounts (e.g., “50 cents off”) outperform percentage discounts (e.g., “10% off”) in increasing purchase intentions for low-priced items. We examine perceived discount depth as a mediator to understand which framing is most effective in retail price promotions and why. This insight helps retailers and marketers design better promotions in competitive, price-sensitive markets by revealing not just what works, but the underlying reasons for its effectiveness.

Method and Data

We conducted three experimental studies using U.S.-based participants recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk. All studies used between-subjects designs. Study 1a compared purchase intentions across three discount frames (10% off, 50 cents off, and \$0.50 off) for a product priced at \$5.00 (18-pack of eggs). Study 1b replicated this using smaller discount amounts (5%, 25 cents,

and \$0.25) for a gallon of milk, also priced at \$5.00. These two studies tested the main effect of discount framing on purchase intention. Study 2 tested the mediating role of perceived discount depth (adapted from Grewal et al., 1996) using two conditions: 5% off and 45 cents off, applied to a \$5.00 water bottle. In total, over 800 responses were collected across the studies, and manipulation checks ensured stimulus clarity. Cronbach's alpha for the purchase intention scales was .75–.79 across studies. All studies controlled for potential demographic confounds. Data was analyzed using ANOVA and mediation analysis via Hayes PROCESS (Model 4). We also explored differences between cents and decimal framings (e.g., 50 cents vs. \$0.50), controlling for numeric magnitude salience. This multi-study approach ensured internal validity and conceptual replication, adding robustness to our conclusions.

Summary of Findings

Across all three studies, absolute discounts in cents (e.g., “50 cents off”) led to significantly higher purchase intentions than equivalent percentage discounts (e.g., “10% off”), even when the monetary value was identical. In Study 1a, participants exposed to a “50 cents off” frame reported higher purchase intentions than those seeing either “10% off” or “\$0.50 off.” Study 1b replicated this pattern using “25 cents” vs. “5%” vs. “\$0.25.” Interestingly, cents-based framings outperformed even their decimal-form equivalents (e.g., 25 cents > \$0.25), suggesting that numeric magnitude ($25 > 0.25$) may drive salience. Study 2 confirmed the underlying mechanism: perceived discount depth was significantly higher in the absolute discount condition, and it mediated the effect of framing on purchase intention. When perceived depth was included as a covariate, the framing effect became non-significant, confirming full mediation. These findings support the absolute number heuristic (Morwitz et al., 1998), whereby consumers perceive larger

numbers like 50 cents as more meaningful than smaller ones like 10%, even if both represent the same economic value. The effect is strongest with small, sub-dollar discounts on low-priced items, where consumers use intuitive heuristics instead of detailed calculations.

Key Contributions

This research makes several theoretical and practical contributions. First, it extends discount framing literature by isolating an underexplored pricing context: low-priced products (<\$10) with small discounts (<\$1). Prior studies offer guidance for moderate and large discounts but leave open the question of how consumers interpret very small promotions. More important, a recent report by McKinsey & Company (2023) suggests that 73% of consumers now place greater importance on grocery discounts than they did a year ago. It also notes that ongoing industry consolidation and persistent inflation will likely push grocers to offer more competitive prices. Second, by empirically demonstrating that absolute discounts enhance perceived discount depth and purchase intention through the absolute number heuristic, we contribute to a deeper understanding of consumer judgment under cognitive simplicity. Practically, our findings offer actionable guidance to retailers in grocery and price-sensitive markets: small discounts should be framed in absolute terms to boost consumer engagement. This insight holds especially for mature and emerging markets where price sensitivity is high and promotional clutter is common. This research urges marketers to tailor discount framing to consumer perception, enhancing campaign effectiveness and pricing transparency. Future studies could identify price thresholds where absolute framing's advantage lessens or reverses across varied price ranges.

References are available upon request.

Consumer Perceptions of BNPL: Sentiment, Topics, and Engagement on Social Media

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Keywords: Buy Now Pay Later (BNPL); Social Media; Sentiment Analysis; Topic Modeling; Negative Binomial Regression; Holiday Events

Description: This paper examines how sentiment, topical framing, and user level features jointly determine the retweets of BNPL-related messages on X during the 2024 U.S. holiday shopping season. Using transformer-based sentiment classification (RoBERTa), Latent Dirichlet Allocation(LDA) topic modelling, and negative binomial regressions with event and topic fixed effects, the study emphasizes event contingent drivers of retweets and foregrounds regression evidence as the core contribution.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Prior research within the broader fintech domain demonstrates that linguistic strategies and emotional elements in brand tweets influence user engagement via dual-path information processing mechanisms (McShane et al., 2020; ShabbirHusain et al., 2024). However, these studies have largely treated fintech as a homogeneous

field, leaving unanswered questions about specific product innovations and consumption cycles. BNPL as an emergent payment modality, has attracted growing attention within both scholarship and public discourse, especially during major U.S. retail events. The U.S. holiday shopping season, characterized by concentrated consumer spending and elevated social media activity, therefore provides a distinctive context in which to investigate drivers of retweet behavior. Despite this, the diffusion dynamics of BNPL-related tweets during this period remain insufficiently explored, particularly with respect to temporal heterogeneity across events and variation in thematic content.

In light of these considerations, this study investigates the following research questions:

1. How do sentiment and topics impact the retweetability of BNPL-related tweets during major U.S. retail events?
2. Which characteristics of individual tweets and user profiles moderate the effects of sentiment and thematic context on retweet behavior?
3. How do variations in event framing and topical focus shape the dynamics of retweet engagement?

Method and Data

Our dataset comprises 14,887 BNPL-related tweets collected from X between November and December of 2024. Each tweet was annotated with an emotion label and a continuous sentiment score using a RoBERTa-based multi-class classifier (Liu

et al., 2019). We extracted topic structure via LDA, yielding five interpretable topics: promotional discounts and impulse purchases; FinTech industry discussion; consumer credit and debt concerns; convenience and payment flexibility; and holiday spending and management. Due to pronounced overdispersion in retweet counts, negative binomial regressions with fixed effects for events (Christmas, Cyber Monday, Black Friday, Thanksgiving, Election Day, and normal days) and topic-fixed-effects specifications were used to assess topical heterogeneity. The explanatory variables included the sentiment score and its polarity and intensity variants, the number of hashtags and cashtags, whether or not a URL was included, user mentions, and user attributes such as log followers and log friends. This modeling strategy allowed us to determine how sentiment and posting tactics interacted with event contexts and topical framings while accounting for temporal and thematic heterogeneity.

Summary of Findings

The impact of sentiment on retweet differs across event: higher emotion scores significantly increase retweets during Christmas ($p < 0.001$), but significantly reduce them on Cyber Monday and ordinary days (both $p < 0.001$). At the content level, the effects of sentiment are topic-dependent. In discussions about consumer credit (Topic 3), negative sentiment is positively associated with retweet counts. This indicates that critical or cautionary content attracts greater engagement. Conversely, in discount- and fintech-related conversations (Topics 1 and 2), positive sentiment significantly decreases the likelihood of being retweeted (both $p < 0.001$). Together, these results underscore the importance of tailoring emotional framing strategies to topical context

and event timing.

Regarding user attributes and tagging strategies, follower count (`followers_log`) is the strongest and most consistent positive predictor of retweet volume. For instance, the coefficients are 0.9740 on Cyber Monday, 0.3743 on Black Friday, and 0.3870 on Christmas (all $p < 0.001$), which highlights the role of social reach in amplifying content during major shopping events. Friend count (`friends_log`) exhibits heterogeneous effects. It is positively associated with retweets in fintech topics (topic 2, $p < 0.001$) but negatively associated with retweets in discount-related discussions (topic 1, $p < 0.001$). This reflects the context-dependent influence of social connectivity.

Tagging strategies also yield nuanced effects. The number of hashtags and cashtags significantly promote retweets in FinTech and promotional contexts ($p < 0.001$) but have negative effects during Christmas and in discussions about consumer credit. Similarly, URL inclusion and user mentions consistently have significant negative coefficients across most event and topic models. On Cyber Monday, for instance, the coefficients are -2.7619 (but have negative effects during Christmas and in discussions about consumer credit. Similarly, URL inclusion and user mentions consistently have significant negative coefficients across most event and topic models. On Cyber Monday, for instance, the coefficients are -2.7619 ($p < 0.001$) and -3.2125 ($p < 0.001$), respectively, suggesting that the inclusion of URLs and user mentions tends to negatively affect retweetability.

Model fit statistics also support these findings. Pseudo R^2 values range from 0.266 on

Election Day to 0.810 on Cyber Monday, which indicates substantial explanatory power. Both AICc and residual deviance both decrease markedly compared to null models. Additionally, Likelihood ratio tests also confirm the superiority of negative binomial regression with fixed effects for modeling over dispersed retweet counts.

Building on these findings, the study further reveals that hashtag and cashtag counts influence the retweets of BNPL in a context-dependent manner. These counts boost retweets during promotional events like Cyber Monday and Black Friday, but reduce them at Christmas. URL inclusion and user mentions consistently decrease retweet likelihood across most events, indicating the need for timing-sensitive social media strategies. Furthermore, BNPL sentiment fluctuates based on the event. Specifically, 54.4% of tweets are neutral, positive sentiment peaks at Christmas, and negative sentiment is highest on Cyber Monday. These findings reflect event-specific consumer moods that influence retweet behavior.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper has three major contributions. First, it shows that the drivers of engagement in BNPL-related social media discourse depend on the event: tactics that increase diffusion during promotional periods decrease it during celebratory periods. This underscores the need to align social media strategies with specific temporal contexts, such as Black Friday, Cyber Monday, or other event-driven periods. Second, the paper identifies a context-emotion contingency in which emotional valence has opposite effects depending on the framing of the topic or event. Positive sentiment amplifies sharing during Christmas, while negative sentiment gains greater traction in

credit-risk conversations. Third, the paper offers a concise, replicable methodological framework integrating transformer-based sentiment analysis, LDA topic modeling, and fixed-effects negative binomial regression. This provides researchers and practitioners with a transferable approach to analyzing discourse and diffusion in emerging fintech domains.

CONSUMERS' REACTIONS TO CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY CRISES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Keywords: Corporate Sustainability Crises, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Consumer Behavior, Corporate Reputation

Description: This study investigates consumers' behavioral responses to eight types of corporate sustainability crises that vary regarding the level of damage potential, blame attributed to the company, and CSR relevance and considering the role of corporate reputation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers are increasingly expecting companies to take responsibility for sustainable development. However, empirical research comparing consumers' behavioral responses to various types of corporate sustainability crises remains limited. This study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do consumers behaviorally respond to various corporate sustainability crises that differ in terms of damage potential, attribution of blame, and the relevance to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? (2) How does a company's pre-crisis reputation impact consumer behavioral responses across these different crisis types?

Method And Data

We utilized a 2x2x2x2 full factorial vignette between-subject design, incorporating four factors—CSR relevance, damage potential, attribution of blame, and company reputation—with two levels for each factor. The questionnaire included seventeen experimental vignettes (including one control vignette), multi-item measures for each experimental factor, and items assessing participants' behavioral responses to the company depicted in the vignettes—a hypothetical cell phone service provider. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. An online survey was conducted using a representative sample of U.S. participants (N=680). ANOVA was employed to examine the effects of manipulated factors on consumers' behavioral responses towards the company experiencing the crisis.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that when the company has a low reputation, consumers' behavioral responses are not significantly influenced by the level of damage potential, CSR relevance, or attribution of blame. However, when the company has a high reputation, significant effects emerge, with both damage potential and attribution of blame influencing consumers' behavioral responses, while the CSR relevance of the crisis does not have a significant effect. In addition, when a crisis is perceived as having high damage potential and is considered highly relevant to CSR, consumers evaluated the company more harshly, exhibiting stronger negative reactions compared to crises with lower CSR relevance. Conversely, when the perceived damage potential is low, consumer reactions remain muted regardless of the crisis' CSR relevance. A significant three-way interaction was observed when attribution of blame was included in the model. Specifically, high levels of blame attribution intensified negative behavioral responses, overshadowing the effects of damage potential and CSR relevance. In contrast, when attribution of blame was minimal, consumers

responded more negatively only when the crisis was perceived as both highly damaging and highly relevant to CSR, and less negatively when the crisis was seen as minor or unrelated to CSR.

Key Contributions

This study addresses a gap in the literature by integrating crisis types that have been largely overlooked in prior research on corporate sustainability and CSR crises. It advances the understanding of corporate sustainability crises from the consumers' perspective, thereby fostering more effective crisis management strategies. By explicitly examining behavioral responses such as boycotting, 'buycotting', and intention to mobilize other stakeholders, this study highlights the role of consumer social responsibility in the context of corporate sustainability crises. Furthermore, it provides insights into the dynamic development of different crisis types based on consumer behavioral responses.

CUSTOMIZATION AND FIRM SHAREHOLDER VALUE

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Keywords: Customization, Shareholder value, Voluntary disclosure, Public listed firms

Description: Customization significantly enhances firms’ abnormal stock returns, demonstrating that shareholders believe that the benefits of customization outweigh the costs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Customization emerged in the late 1980s as a response to the intense competition among manufacturing firms brought about by large-scale production during the industrial economy era.

Davis (1989) was the first to explicitly propose the concept of mass customization, defining it as a production strategy that delivers personalized products or services through modular product design, flexible processes, and integrated supply chains. With the intensification of market competition, an increasing number of firms have adopted customization as a strategic approach to enhancing customer value. Customization enables firms to provide personalized products or services tailored to customers’ heterogeneous preferences (Franke, Keinz, & Steger, 2009).

Customization significantly enhances the differentiation of products or services offered by firms, enabling them to charge a premium for their uniqueness (Auh et al., 2019; Syam & Kumar, 2006). Additionally, increased differentiation strengthens the firm's competitive advantage within the industry (Bernhardt, Liu, & Serfes, 2007). Consequently, customization allows firms to charge higher prices for customized products or services, thereby achieving greater competitive advantages within the industry and ultimately improving their financial performance (Auh et al., 2019). These combined effects significantly increase firms' short-term profitability while making substantial contributions to improved customer satisfaction and revenue growth (Wang et al., 2017; Hildebrand et al., 2014). However, while customization can enhance customer satisfaction, it also presents significant challenges for firms. For instance, customization often undermines economies of scale, increases design and manufacturing costs, and complicates communication and coordination with partners, thereby raising operational costs and potentially reducing firm performance (Bhaskarabhatla, 2016; Wang et al., 2017). This will raise the question: how do shareholders react to firm's customization?

Previous research has explored the impact of customization on customer-based metrics (e.g. satisfaction, customer purchase) and accounting-based metrics (e.g. revenue, cost and firm financial performance). The effect of customization on shareholder response has not been studied. If a firm wants to get support in the capital market, the reaction of shareholders is an outcome that they are very concerned about.

Based on an empirical analysis of data from Chinese A-share listed firms from 2007 to 2022, we investigate the impact of customization on abnormal stock returns. Furthermore, we examine whether this impact varies depending on internal factors, such as ownership structure, and external factors, such as market attention. This will be the first study on customization using natural language processing and a sample of listed firms.

Method and Data

We use a sample of A-share firms listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen Stock Exchanges in China to test our hypotheses. We collect data from annual report, Wind database and the China Stock Market & Accounting Research (CSMAR) database. The initial sample was processed as follows: we excluded financial firms such as banks, securities companies, and insurance companies; excluded firms under special treatment (ST, *ST) or particular transferred (PT) and observations with significant missing data. The final sample covers the period from 2007 to 2022, resulting in 12,779 firm-year observations.

For the explanatory variable (i.e. customization), we use natural language processing. The steps are as follows: First, we develop a dictionary for customization. Keywords in the dictionary served as seed words, and we use a deep learning-based similar word generation system to expand the lexicon. This system, trained on large-scale Chinese financial text data, minimizes subjective biases and weak correlations in determining similar words. Afterward, the generated keywords were manually verified, and a final lexicon of customization terms was built. Second, we downloaded annual financial reports of A-share listed firms from the CNINFO website

(<http://www.cninfo.com.cn/>) and analysed the frequency of the keywords from the customization lexicon in these reports. Indicators such as total keyword frequency and keyword frequency as a proportion of total words in the annual report were calculated. For the dependent variable, following extant literature on marketing's effect on firm value, we adopted a firm's abnormal (i.e., unexpected) stock return as a proxy of shareholder value (e.g., Astvansh & Jindal, 2022; Mishra et al., 2013; Modi & Mishra, 2011). Abnormal stock return is the portion of a firm's stock return that cannot be explained by market-wide risk factors. To calculate a firm's abnormal stock return, we estimate the Fama-French and Carhart four-factor model (Carhart, 1997; Fama and French, 1993).

Before hypothesis testing, the data were processed as follows: To reduce the impact of extreme outliers, key continuous variables were winsorized at the 1% and 99% levels. To avoid multicollinearity issues, continuous variables used in interaction terms were mean-centered, and variance inflation factor (VIF) test was performed on all explanatory variables. The results showed a maximum VIF of 1.19 and an average VIF of 1.05, well below the empirical threshold of 10, effectively ruling out multicollinearity concerns in the regression model. To address heteroskedasticity, robust standard errors were applied. To handle endogeneity issues, methods such as propensity score matching (PSM), instrumental variable (IV) techniques, and placebo tests were employed to reduce potential biases caused by reverse causality, omitted variables, and sample selection bias. Moreover, to ensure the reliability of our findings, a series of robustness checks were conducted, including controlling for additional fixed effects, using

alternative regression models, changing variable measurement methods, and excluding specific subsamples.

Summary of Findings

Customization significantly enhances firms' abnormal stock returns, demonstrating that shareholders believe that the benefits of customization outweigh the costs. This result highlights the strategic importance of customization in driving superior financial outcomes for firms.

The impact of customization on abnormal stock returns varies depending on the firm's ownership structure. For state-owned enterprises (SOEs), customization has a significant positive effect, suggesting that these firms are better equipped to leverage customization strategies due to their scale and resource advantages. In contrast, for non-state-owned enterprises (Non-SOEs), the relationship between customization and abnormal stock returns is not significant, indicating that the effectiveness of customization may depend on ownership-related factors.

Market attention also moderates the relationship between customization and abnormal stock returns. In firms with high analyst coverage, the positive impact of customization is not significant, likely due to increased visibility and the potential for competitors to replicate customization. However, in firms with low analyst coverage, customization has a significant positive impact on abnormal stock returns, suggesting that lower visibility may protect the competitive advantages derived from customization.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes significant contributions to the literature on customization, corporate governance, and firm performance. First, it advances the understanding of customization by demonstrating its role as a strategic tool that enhances firm value through improved abnormal stock returns. The study extends existing research by highlighting that the value-enhancing effects of customization depend on both firm-specific and external contextual factors. Second, it contextualizes the role of ownership structure by showing that customization positively influences abnormal stock returns in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) but not in non-state-owned enterprises (non-SOEs). This suggests that SOEs, with their larger scale and resources, are better positioned to leverage customization strategies effectively. Additionally, the findings explore the role of market attention, emphasizing its dual-edged nature. While high analyst coverage increases visibility and transparency, it may also expose firms to competitive risks, thereby undermining the benefits of customization.

This study also offers practical insights for managers and policymakers. For managers, it highlights the importance of matching customization strategies with their firm's ownership structure and market conditions. Firms with lower market visibility or those in less transparent environments may achieve better outcomes from customization. For policymakers, the findings point to the need to consider ownership differences when encouraging strategic practices like customization in various types of firms. Finally, the study adds to the research on emerging markets by analyzing data from the Chinese A-share market. It explores the specific features of

emerging markets and shows how institutional factors, such as state ownership, interact with strategic choices, providing a clearer understanding of how these factors affect firm performance.

DISCLOSING DATA FOR THE PLANET: UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS' PRIVACY-RELATED DECISION-MAKING FOR SUSTAINABLE PURPOSES

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Keywords

Data Disclosure, Privacy, Sustainability, Collective Efficacy, Altruism

Description

This research investigates the psychological mechanisms behind consumers' willingness to share data for pro-environmental versus commercial purposes, revealing that sustainable framing lowers collective efficacy perceptions and evokes motivational conflicts between altruistic intentions and short-term personal benefits.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Pro-environmental initiatives like climate projects rely on citizen data to analyze and address climate change. While consumers' decision-making in commercial disclosure settings is widely explored, it remains unclear how consumers form their disclosure decisions in pro-environmental settings. Thus, this research investigates how consumers decide to disclose data for pro-environmental versus commercial purposes.

Method and Data

This research followed a mixed-methods design across two studies. First, 11 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with German-speaking participants, selected through convenience sampling, thereby ensuring variation in age, employment status, as well as sustainability engagement and attitudes. In line with inductive research conventions (Glaser and Strauss 2006), sampling concluded at $N = 11$ (six self-identified as women, $M_{\text{Age}} = 39.45$). The interview guide, validated by two external assessors, included open-ended questions on participants' perceptions of sustainability, their experiences with sharing data for pro-environmental purposes, perceived benefits and concerns, and preferences between sharing data for pro-environmental versus commercial self-benefits. Responses included both qualitative reflections and ratings. Second, a scenario-based online experiment was carried out with a sample of German university students. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios describing a new app for a city concept for their hometown. In the commercial condition, data sharing was linked to personal benefits (e.g., personalized offers, parking suggestions). In contrast, the sustainable condition emphasized pro-environmental benefits (e.g.,

air quality and green space management). The sample consisted of $N = 134$ participants (69.4 % self-identified as women, $M_{\text{Age}} = 23.37$). We used the PROCESS macro for SPSS to model the decision-making process in commercial vs. pro-environmental contexts in one customized, integrated mediation model (Hayes 2018).

Summary of Findings

First, the interviews shed light on consumers' intrinsic motivations behind privacy decisions. Participants expressed altruistic intentions and a willingness to contribute to common goals. However, they often traded collective, long-term benefits for short-term or personal benefits, leaving them with an inner conflict as well as skepticism about the actual effect of collective efforts.

In a scenario online experiment, we find that a sustainable (vs. commercial) setting triggers a negative perception of collective efficacy ($b = -1.18$, $t(129) = -6.42$, $p < .000$). Perceived collective efficacy, in turn, has a statistically significant positive effect on consumers' perceptions of altruistic benefits ($b = .291$, $t(128) = 2.99$, $p = .003$). A direct effect of the sustainable (vs. commercial) data disclosure situations remained on altruistic benefit perception ($b = .655$, $t(129) = 2.80$, $p = .006$), indicating that there is no full mediation through collective efficacy perception. Altruistic benefit perception does not influence consumers' final decision-making to disclose the requested data ($b = .021$, $t(125) = .215$, $p = .829$). Surprisingly, we find that a sustainable (vs. commercial) setting has a marginally positive effect on utilitarian benefits ($b = .148$, $t(128) = 1.74$, $p = .083$), which directly increases intention to disclose ($b = .351$, $t(125) = 3.31$, $p = .001$).

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the understanding of academic and non-academic stakeholders, as well as policymakers, by providing novel insights into the intersection of marketing, privacy, and sustainability. First, from an academic perspective, it extends the privacy calculus theory (Smith et al. 2011) by incorporating collective efficacy and altruistic benefit perceptions into the decision-making framework, thereby advancing the theoretical understanding of privacy in non-commercial, pro-environmental contexts. Second, it contributes to pro-environmental behavior literature by revealing how perceived efficacy and risk-benefit trade-offs influence individual participation in collective environmental efforts (e.g., White et al. 2019). Third, by integrating qualitative insights with quantitative results, our mixed-methods design captures both psychological drivers behind data disclosure decisions and models a decision-making framework.

From a practical perspective, this study highlights the challenge of leveraging data for pro-environmental purposes. Our findings underscore the difficulty of promoting data sharing for pro-environmental purposes through altruistic messaging alone. Reframing sustainability messages to highlight concrete, personally relevant benefits is essential. These insights can guide organizations, policymakers, and firms in designing marketing communication strategies that address privacy concerns while aligning sustainability goals with tangible consumer incentives.

References are available upon request.

DRIVING TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: MARKET PERFORMANCE OF SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT INNOVATION IN THE U.S. AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

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Keywords: Sustainable product innovation, pricing, advertising, U.S. auto industry

Description: This study investigates how product greenness influences product market performance considering contingency effects of pricing, and advertising.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The discussion on sustainable product innovation has gained increasing prominence in marketing scholarship, public policy agendas, and the popular press. In response to stakeholders’ concerns, many firms in the global auto industry have been innovating to develop sustainable, where firms focus on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions not only by producing electric and plug-in hybrid cars, but also by implementing strategies to make traditional cars lighter and more fuel-efficient. A growing number of studies have examined the performance outcomes of sustainable product innovations, yet there is a lack of understanding of how product greenness affects market performance of products.

To address this gap, we investigate the relationship between product greenness and market performance in the U.S. auto industry. In addition, we examine the moderating effects of two critical quality signals: product pricing and advertising expenditure.

Method And Data

Our sample is constructed with data compiled from multiple sources. The data covers automobile sales from major auto brands in the U.S. market for a total of 120 months, from January 2011 to December 2020. Our sample includes 432 unique automobile models from 33 different auto brands. It is noted that not every model has sales data over the study period, since there are some newly launched models and terminated models from 2011 to 2020. Overall, our final sample includes 26,747 model-month observations.

We use a random effect panel data regression model to test our hypotheses. We also correct endogeneity by adding Gaussian copulas terms for potentially endogenous variables as additional controls in the model.

Summary of Findings

Our results suggest that product greenness positively influence product market performance, and this relationship is moderated by product pricing and product advertising expenditure. In particular, the positive relationship between product greenness and product market performance becomes stronger when a product is priced higher, or when the product is associated with lower product-level advertising expenditure.

Statement of Key Contributions

We provide three significant theoretical contributions with this study. First, to the best of our knowledge, it is the first empirical investigation to compare the market performance of sustainable product innovations with that of less green or non-green counterparts. Second, we extend the application of signaling theory and reactance theory in the sustainability context by demonstrating the significance of two quality signals - product pricing and advertising expenditure in influencing the success of sustainable product innovation. Third, we introduce an objective measure of car greenness that eliminates reliance on subjective perceptions. Unlike prior studies, which often use perceptual measures to assess sustainable product innovation and performance, our approach leverages observational data to capture both product performance and greenness

**FROM EMPATHY AND RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION TO SOCIAL
ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF CSR IN SHAPING IDENTIFICATION AND
CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY**

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Keywords: corporate social responsibility, brand equity, empathy, responsible consumption, consumer-brand identification

Description

This study explores how empathy and responsible consumption act as dual psychological mechanisms that shape consumer-brand identification and, through it, influence brand equity, trust, and social engagement within CSR-driven consumption contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Research Question**

How do consumers emotionally and cognitively respond to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and how do these responses shape consumer-brand identification and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE)? While CSR is widely recognized for enhancing brand legitimacy and trust, the psychological mechanisms by which it translates into equity and behavior remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by modeling empathy (emotional route) and responsible consumption (cognitive route) as antecedents of identification, and by assessing the extent to which identification enhances CBBE and downstream behaviors such as trust, purchase intention, recommendation, and social engagement. The core objective is to test a dual-pathway framework through which CSR stimulates affective and ethical resonance, ultimately reinforcing relational and reputational brand value.

Method and Data

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design with a convenience sample of 99 Mexican consumers, all of whom were exposed to a real CSR campaign from Pan Q' Ayuda, a cooperative bakery led by people with disabilities, older adults, and single mothers. Participants evaluated the initiative using validated multi-item scales covering empathy, responsible consumption, consumer-brand identification, CBBE, trust, purchase and recommendation intentions, and social media engagement. Constructs were measured using 7-point Likert scales. Psychometric validation involved composite reliability, AVE, and Fornell-Larcker criteria, all of which met or exceeded established thresholds (e.g., $\alpha > 0.85$; $AVE > 0.66$). The structural model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0.

Summary of Findings

The results empirically support the proposed dual-pathway model. Empathy ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 3.44$) and responsible consumption ($\beta = 0.28$, $t = 2.84$) both exerted significant positive effects on consumer-brand identification, confirming the relevance of emotional and cognitive engagement in socially responsible contexts. Identification, in turn, strongly predicted CBBE ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 4.86$), which significantly influenced trust ($\beta = 0.69$), purchase intention ($\beta = 0.41$), recommendation intention ($\beta = 0.53$), and social engagement ($\beta = 0.27$), all at $p < .001$. These findings validate the mediating role of identification and highlight CBBE as a key enabler of pro-brand behavior. Importantly, empathy was not merely a reactive emotion but a structured force

that enhanced alignment with brand values, while responsible consumption operated as an evaluative lens, reinforcing ethical congruence.

Key Contributions

This study offers four key contributions to branding and CSR literature. First, it conceptualizes and empirically tests a dual-pathway model of identification, grounded in both empathy and responsible consumption. Second, it reaffirms consumer-brand identification as a critical mediator linking CSR perceptions to CBBE and behavioral outcomes. Third, it demonstrates that CSR effectiveness depends not only on reputational gains but also on the emotional and ethical activation of consumers. Finally, the study provides actionable insights: brands seeking legitimacy in post-pandemic, socially aware markets should design CSR strategies that elicit empathy and validate consumer ethical concerns. Rather than relying on aspirational messaging alone, successful CSR campaigns must cultivate emotional resonance and moral alignment to convert value congruence into brand equity and engagement.

References: References are available upon request.

**IS THE CATALOG REALLY DEAD? RETAIL SHOPPING OF ELDERLY
CONSUMERS AND THE ROLE OF CHANNEL CHOICE**

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Keywords: Elderly Consumers, Multichannel Retailing, Catalog Design Experience, Consumer
Spending

Description: This paper examines how specific exploratory and sense-making attributes of the
retail shopping experience influence elderly consumers' spending, and how these effects differ
between single- and multi-channel shoppers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Due to their significant purchasing power and distinct shopping preferences, older generations represent a critical target group for retailers (Taylor 2023). Understanding their shopping habits is essential for tailoring channel strategies to their needs. While previous research shows that elderly consumers prefer catalogs due to perceived risks in digital shopping, catalogs are increasingly disappearing from retailers' marketing strategies (Wiesel et al. 2011). This raises the question about whether and how the retail (catalog) shopping experience influences elderly's spending behavior. Using Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) landscape preference model, this research examines how exploratory (e.g., catalog design, raffles, and discounts) and sense-making attributes (e.g., customer service, fulfillment, and return policies) of the retail shopping experience affect actual spending, and whether channel use modulates these relationships, particularly considering elderly consumers' preference for familiarity (Guido et al. 2021) and potential reluctance to fully adopt digital channels (Garry and Harwood 2019). Understanding these dynamics is essential for retailers aiming to develop marketing strategies that align with elderly consumers' needs, reduce perceived risks, and foster higher spending in an evolving retail landscape.

Method and Data

A large-scale survey was conducted in partnership with a European retailer that offers both traditional catalog shopping and online shopping. The sample consists of 5,238 elderly customers with an average age of 70.1 (SD=9.41) years, randomly selected from the retailer's customer

base. The survey was administered via paper questionnaires sent through postal mail one week after customers' most recent purchase, achieving a response rate of 34.8%. Respondents assessed their perceptions of key retail attributes—including catalog design, promotional elements like raffles and discounts, customer service, fulfillment, and return policies—using established seven-point Likert scales. Shopping channel usage (single-channel vs. multi-channel) and actual customer spending data within the last year were obtained from the retailer's CRM system. The data were analyzed to examine how retail attributes influence spending and how these effects differ by channel usage, providing empirical evidence on elderly consumers' purchasing behavior.

Summary of Findings

The study finds that both exploratory and sense-making attributes significantly increase elderly consumers' spending. Among these, catalog design (i.e., the experience consumers have with the visual appearance of the catalog) emerges as the single strongest driver, with robust effects in both single- and multi-channel shopping, although particularly pronounced for single-channel users. This effect remains significant even when catalogs operate alongside other channels, indicating that they not only generate sales in their traditional contexts but also boost purchases across other retail channels. Similarly, promotional elements such as raffles and discounts significantly boost spending for single-channel users but show no significant effect for multi-channel consumers, who may face information overload or divided attention across channels. In contrast, sense-making attributes—customer service, fulfillment, and return policy—demonstrate consistent positive effects on spending across both single- and multi-channel shoppers, with no significant moderation by channel type. Taken together, these findings highlight the enduring

relevance of catalogs and promotional incentives for single-channel elderly consumers, while underscoring the universal importance of operational reliability and customer support in enhancing trust and purchase behavior, regardless of channel configuration.

Key Contributions

Elderly consumers represent a rapidly growing and influential target group; yet, neither research nor management knows enough about this consumer segment. Incorporating elderly consumers more extensively into marketing research is both a strategic imperative and a matter of social responsibility. This study offers novel insights into how attributes of the retail shopping experience influence the spending behavior of elderly consumers, with a particular focus on the moderating role of channel choice. The research challenges phasing out catalogs by showing that they drive purchases within traditional channels and boost sales across multi-channel environments. Furthermore, customer service, fulfillment, and return policies are vital for increasing spending across all environments, regardless of the channel. Promotional incentives, such as raffles and discounts, however, show a stronger influence in single-channel settings, suggesting a more targeted responsiveness among these consumers. In line with consumer lay theories (Wood 2010), our findings show that elderly consumers stick to known choices and are not likely to adapt to new channels. Practical recommendations include integrating high-quality catalogs with multi-channel strategies and tailoring promotions to channel preferences.

References available upon request

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF TRIPADVISOR GUEST REVIEWS: DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS FOR SUSTAINABLE LUXURY HOTEL MARKETING

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Keywords: Sentiment analysis, sustainable marketing, luxury hotels, guest reviews, sustainability

Description: This paper investigates how sentiment analysis of TripAdvisor guest reviews provides actionable insights for enhancing sustainability and marketing strategies in luxury hotels.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How can sentiment analysis of online guest reviews be used to align luxury hotel marketing strategies with sustainability goals and consumer expectations? This research explores the emotional and perceptual aspects of guest experiences at Al Baleed Resort Salalah by Anantara. It aims to uncover how guests perceive luxury and sustainability through natural language, and how these sentiments can inform ethical branding and marketing practices.

Method and Data

The study analyzed 1,347 English-language guest reviews collected from TripAdvisor between 2016 and 2024 using a lexicon-based sentiment analysis approach. Reviews were processed using Python and the TextBlob library to evaluate polarity (ranging from -1 to 1) and subjectivity (ranging from 0 to 1). The data revealed a distribution of slightly positive sentiment and high subjectivity, indicating emotional engagement and satisfaction with sustainable practices. Pre-processing included tokenization and stopwords removal to ensure accuracy. Reviews were classified as positive, neutral, or negative based on word frequencies, highlighting how specific sustainability efforts impacted guest perception.

Summary of Findings

The sentiment analysis showed a mean polarity of 0.398 and subjectivity of 0.614, indicating that reviews were generally positive and highly emotional. Positive reviews emphasized service quality and eco-conscious efforts, while neutral reviews highlighted areas for improvement. The near-normal distribution of sentiment scores reflects guest satisfaction and reveals opportunities for enhancing experiences through sustainability. The findings suggest that marketing efforts emphasizing authentic, eco-luxury practices—such as using locally sourced materials or supporting local communities—can strengthen customer loyalty and brand equity.

Key Contributions

This study bridges sentiment analysis with sustainable luxury marketing by offering a data-driven framework for aligning brand strategy with guest expectations. It provides theoretical insights by integrating sustainability with consumer emotion in hospitality and practical

implications for improving customer engagement, policy development, and luxury hotel branding. By examining user-generated reviews, the study provides hotels and policymakers with insights to refine sustainability messaging and improve service delivery. This research contributes to marketing scholarship by demonstrating the potential of sentiment analytics as a tool for sustainable brand management and long-term customer relationship building.

THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY: A VALUE-ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOUR MEDIATION MODEL

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Keywords: voluntary simplicity; sustainable anti-consumption behaviour; religiosity; altruistic environmental concern; Muslim consumers

Description: This paper examines the effects of intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic social religiosity, and extrinsic personal religiosity on altruistic environmental concerns and voluntary simplicity following the Value-Attitude-Behaviour framework.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions:

Do intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social dimensions of religiosity have any distinct impact on altruistic environmental concerns of Muslim consumers?

Do intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social dimensions of religiosity have any distinct impact on the voluntary simplicity behaviour of Muslim consumers?

Do altruistic environmental concerns mediate the associations between intrinsic, extrinsic personal and extrinsic social dimensions of religiosity and voluntary simplicity behaviour of Muslim consumers?

Methods and Data:

The study utilises previously developed measures on five-point Likert scales. 498 usable responses were collected from Pakistani Muslim consumers aged 18 years or above through structured survey instrument using purposive sampling. PLS-SEM was applied to analyse the collected dataset using SmartPLS (Hair et al. 2014).

The direct effects showed that intrinsic religiosity (IR) and extrinsic personal religiosity (PER) are positively associated with voluntary simplicity (VS) ($\beta = .304$, $t = 4.869$ and $\beta = .185$, $t = 3.337$).

Extrinsic social religiosity (SER) did not significantly impact VS ($\beta = .329$, $t = 7.747$). All three dimensions of religiosity were found to have positive direct effects on altruistic environmental concerns (AEC) ($IR \rightarrow \beta = .461$, $t = 9.479$; $PER \rightarrow \beta = .190$, $t = 3.698$; $SER \rightarrow \beta = .122$, $t = 3.575$). The direct effect of AEC on VS was also found to be significant and positive ($\beta = .329$, $t = 7.747$). IR positively impacts VS through AEC (H6a- $\beta = .152$, $t = 6.161$). Similar results were found about both dimensions of extrinsic religiosity, which indirectly motivate VS through AEC for PER ($\beta = .063$, $t = 3.183$) and SER ($\beta = .040$, $t = 3.139$).

Summary of Findings:

Intrinsic religiosity is a significant predictor of voluntary simplicity, which is consistent with the previous study by Chowdhury (2018). Not SER but PER has a direct positive association with VS behaviour. It is because the personal dimension of extrinsic religiosity is concerned with the intrinsic benefits of practising religion for one's self, like those stemming from VS behaviour. The lack of a direct association of SER with VS might be caused by VS being rooted in intrinsic motivations of seeking peace and fulfilment.

All three dimensions of religiosity directly motivate AEC, which aligns with findings by Davari et al. (2017) and Felix et al. (2018). Intrinsic religiosity is a stronger determinant of AEC than extrinsic religiosity in Muslim consumers. Finally, AEC attitude is found to be a significant mediator that describes the VS behaviour by Muslims with high IR and PER. Furthermore, AEC motivates VS behaviour, influencing Muslims to be ethical simplifiers by minimizing the use of resources, and adopting sustainable anti-consumption practices to save resources for the greater good (Schwartz 1992; Thøgersen and Ölander 2003). Hence, in Muslim consumers, religiosity is a significant predictor of AEC and VS where AEC meaningfully and positively mediates this association.

Statement of Key Contributions:

Firstly, this quantitative research is the first to collectively examine the impact of a three-dimensional, intrinsic, extrinsic social, and extrinsic personal, religiosity orientation on AEC and VS behaviour of a rarely studied sample of Muslim consumers by using the VAB model in anti-consumption literature. Secondly, the paper studied the role of religiosity as a predictor of VS behaviour and extended the limited quantitative literature on these associations (Chowdhury 2018). It also tested the mediating role of AEC, which was not formerly analysed in the literature as an explaining variable between religiosity, i.e IR, PER, SER, and VS. Lastly, the study uses primary data from Muslim consumers of a developing country, Pakistan, a rarely investigated market in this perspective, because the previous studies have majorly sampled religious consumers of developed countries. More than two billion Muslim consumers make them a significant market worldwide, with specific product and service needs and preferences influenced by their religious values, e.g., Halal food and Islamic banking. A better understanding of the factors impacting their consumption practices can contribute to achieving sustainability goals through behaviours like VS, and marketing practices which align with Muslims' Islamic doctrines of moderate consumption.

Ethics, Privacy and Cross-Industry Data Collaborations

**CANCELED OUT? NEGATIVE SPILLOVER OF LABOR EXPLOITATION CRISIS
AND POSITIVE SPILLOVER OF POST-CRISIS APOLOGY ON RIVAL BRANDS**

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Keywords: Luxury Industry, Crisis Spillover, Post-Crisis Communication

Description: The paper examines how a crisis at a leading luxury brand affects consumer attitudes toward the focal brand, its rivals, and the industry, and how the brand’s post-crisis responses shape spillover effects.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

A crisis at a single brand can influence perceptions of other brands, a phenomenon known as crisis spillover. For this particular phenomenon, this study investigates two main questions. First, how does a crisis involving a leading luxury brand affect consumers’ attitudes toward the brand, its rivals, and the overall luxury industry as a whole? Second, how do different post-crisis responses (i.e., denial, apology, and no response) from the brand mitigate the negative effect caused by the crisis on consumers’ attitudes toward the brand itself and the spillover to its competitors and the industry? The research is motivated by the real case of a luxury brand being placed under court administration in Italy for failing to monitor suppliers accused of unethical practices. Building on crisis communication and spillover literature, the study develops hypotheses predicting declines in consumers’ attitudes to the focal brand, its

competitors, and the industry after the brand's crisis, and proposes that an apology will alleviate these declines in attitudes compared to alternative responses.

Method and Data

Two controlled experiments were conducted to examine crisis spillover and the influence of post-crisis responses. Study 1 tested the impact of a brand crisis on consumer attitudes toward the focal brand, three close rivals, and the luxury industry. Participants first rated their attitudes toward each brand and the industry. They then read a news article modeled on actual news and provided post exposure ratings. Attitudes were measured using established seven-point scales. Study 2 replicated the procedures of Study 1 and introduced a manipulation of post-crisis responses in three conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to read either a denial reflecting the brand's actual response, an apology as an alternative, or no response as a control. These responses were presented as simulated posts from the brand's official Facebook page to resemble realistic brand communication. After exposure, participants again rated their attitudes toward the brands and the industry. Crisis responsibility attribution to the brand or the industry was also measured to examine its potential moderating role.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 examined the immediate effect of a brand crisis on consumer attitudes toward the focal brand, three rival brands, and the luxury industry as a whole. After exposure to a brand's crisis news, consumers' attitudes toward the focal brand declined significantly. Consumers' attitudes toward the three competing brands and the overall industry also dropped, confirming crisis spillover. Study 2 replicated the design of Study 1 and added a post-crisis response manipulation with denial, apology, and no response conditions. Across all conditions, both the brand's and the industry's post-crisis attitudes remained below pre-crisis levels, indicating the crisis had a significant impact and could not be fully repaired by any of the post-crisis approaches tested. Interestingly, in the apology condition, consumers' attitudes

to all three rivals were alleviated to pre-crisis levels, suggesting that an apology of the brand in crisis safeguarded its rivals from negative spillover. Additional analysis implied that brand's crisis responsibility attribution may further deteriorate consumers' attitudes toward the brand, its rivals, and the industry.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study offers two key contributions in the relevant literature. First, it advances our understanding of crisis spillover literature. The findings demonstrate that a crisis involving one prominent luxury brand can harm not only the brand in question but also its competitors and the broader industry. This evidence emphasized the importance of crisis management by highlighting that reputational damage can be made to not only rivals but also the entire sector. Second, the study contributes to the literature on post-crisis communication by presenting how the focal brand's different responses influence perceptions of its competitors. An apology, while insufficient to restore the focal brand's own image or improve views of the industry, helped prevent declines in rival brand attitudes compared to a denial or no response. These results introduce the concept of post-crisis communication spillover, showing that a brand's actions in the aftermath of its crisis can influence perceptions of other brands in the industry. The findings highlight the need for luxury brands to protect their collective reputation through proactive and post-crisis collaboration, preserving consumer confidence in the high-end market.

References are available upon request.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TITLE

Measuring Digital Privacy: Development and Validation of a Multi-Dimensional Scale

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Description:

This paper develops and validates a comprehensive, multi-dimensional scale to measure the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral facets of contemporary digital privacy.

Keywords: Digital privacy; Scale development; Digital Literacy, Measurement; Artificial Intelligence related concerns.

Research Question:

As digital life pervades everyday activity, robust measurement of what people know, believe, and do about digital privacy is essential. Existing instruments are often narrow, dated, or insufficiently validated. We ask, which distinct, measurable latent constructs best represent the domain of digital privacy today, and how reliably can they be assessed across concerns, attitudes, awareness, skills, and platform-specific behaviors? Our objective is to develop and validate a multi-facet scale that separates higher-level cognitions from concrete practices, while remaining modular enough for research, policy, and education.

Method and Data

We followed a multi-stage, categorical-appropriate workflow. An initial pool of 131 items was administered to 329 respondents. After pre-specified quality checks (e.g., incompletes/low-quality patterns), the analytic sample was $N = 280$. For each dimension, we estimated mixed correlation matrices (polychoric for Likert, tetrachoric for binary, polyserial for mixed pairs), selected factor counts via Horn's Parallel Analysis, and ran EFA using

principal-axis factoring with oblique rotation. Resulting structures were then tested with CFA using WLSMV estimator for ordered indicators. Item retention followed pre-registered rules along with content coverage checks.

Summary of Findings

The multi-stage validation process successfully refined an initial item pool into a final 128-item instrument that measures 22 distinct and reliable constructs. Across retained factors, reliability was strong ($\omega > .74$), with supportive CFA fit and convergent/discriminant evidence. Broad, monolithic concepts of privacy were found to empirically decompose into specific sub-dimensions. For example, "Privacy Concerns" was confirmed to have three distinct factors, while "Security Behaviors" was shown to comprise four separate types of user actions. The final 22-factor model demonstrated excellent fit to the data. To enhance practical utility, a 45-item short-form scale was also developed. This "mini-scale" was validated and functions as an exceptionally strong proxy for the full instrument, correlating with the full-scale scores at an average of $r = .93$.

Key Contributions

This research provides a significant contribution to the field by offering a comprehensive multi-dimensional Digital Privacy Scale. Its primary contribution lies in moving beyond monolithic measures of "privacy concern" to a granular, modular framework that separately assesses cognitions (e.g., Factual vs. Perceived Awareness), attitudes, and enacted behaviors. By providing a robust tool to measure these distinct facets, the scale offers a new and more precise way to conceptualize and empirically measure digital privacy, an important component of digital literacy. The availability of a validated short form ensures its applicability across a wide range of research, policy, and educational contexts.

WHAT ROLE DOES POLITICAL IDEOLOGY PLAY IN THE LIKABILITY OF BILINGUAL ADVERTISING? THEORY, METHOD, AND FINDINGS.

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Keywords: Political Ideology, Bilingual, Advertisement

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

With the influx of immigrants and increasing diversity of the U.S. population, the use of bilingual advertisements is gaining popularity. Using the moral foundations theory and consumer decision making, we conducted an experimental study to test the proposed research question. The result showed that people's political ideology affects their perceptions of bilingual advertisements. Compared to their conservative or Republican-leaning peers, liberal or Democratic-leaning people tend to have a more favorable view of bilingual advertisements, and have a higher level of intention to purchase the product featured in the bilingual advertisement. Managerial and research implications are discussed.

With increasing immigration by refugees, tourists, and migrants to the U.S., an increasing number of firms attempt to acquiesce to their needs by advertising in their native languages. It is common for consumers to find bilingual advertisements, billboards, and menus. Bilingual advertisements are generally more prevalent in border areas. For example, advertisements are often written in English and in Spanish along the U.S.-Mexico border. Bilingual advertisements are also found in areas where there are large concentrations of immigrants such as Los Angeles and New York. Although bilingual advertisements may seem commonplace, they are not without

controversy. Consumers with conservative values may disdain firms' effort to reach out to consumers who advertise in another language. For example, a recent poll found that about half of social conservatives are "bothered" when they hear a foreign language spoken in public (Ingraham, 2019). Social media and news regularly report of consumers from the dominant culture lashing out at firms that use bilingualism in their advertisements (Greenwood, 2018). Political ideology refers to people's views of how the government should function. In the U.S., the political spectrum consists of Democrats or liberal-leaning voters on the one end, and Republicans or conservative-leaning voters on the other end. Prior research has found that liberal-leaning people exhibit different decision-making processes compared to their conservative-leaning peers. For example, conservative-leaning consumers, when compared to liberal-leaning ones, rely more on their intuition when making purchasing decisions (Dijksterhuis et al., 2006). Furthermore, consumers' political ideologies may influence their perceptions of advertising (Northey & Chan, 2020). However, how political ideology affects perceptions of bilingual advertisements has not been examined. This research fills this void.

We investigated the mechanisms by which political ideology affects bilingual advertisements. Conservative-leaning consumers differ from their liberal-leaning peers in terms of the likeability of a bilingual advertisement. If political ideology does influence people's likeability of bilingual advertisements, the role it plays in the process needs to be explored. Insights from this research could help us understand consumers' perceptions of bilingual advertisements and subsequent purchase decision making.

Political ideology refers to opinions, ideas, and values that shape people's worldview (Dawson, 2001; Chan & Faria, 2022). Specifically, political ideology not only influences the way people believe society should be structured (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009), but also affects

their needs, goals, and motivations (Jung & Mittal, 2020). Political ideology can be measured along a spectrum where liberal leaning (e.g., people who vote Democratic) people are on the one end and conservative-leaning (e.g., people who vote Republican) on the other (Northey & Chan, 2020). Relative to conservative counterparts, people with liberal ideology tend to be more risk taking, embrace change, and tolerate uncertainty (Chan, 2019; Northey & Chan, 2020). People who are conservative prefer the “status-quo” (Eidelman et al., 2012) and tend to adhere to social norms (Fernandes & Mandel, 2014). Conservatives also prefer uncertainty avoidance (Chan & Illicic, 2019; Jung & Mittal, 2020).

Consumers hold different political ideologies, and these ideologies often impact people’s buying intentions of different products (Chan, 2020; Chan & Illicic, 2019). Moral Foundations Theory suggests that people’s social and political worldviews are grounded in their evaluations of what is right and wrong. The political attitudes of liberals and conservatives can vary across different issues. For example, relevant moral foundations may reinforce existing attitudes when evaluating pro-attitudinal situations. Second, the presence of relevant moral foundations may also modify or adjust attitudes in a counter-attitudinal way (Day et al. 2014).

Based on moral foundation theory, we argue that consumers with conservative leaning political ideologies are more likely to have weaker buying intentions when exposed to a bilingual advertisement as compared to their liberal-leaning counterparts. This suggests that conservative-leaning consumers are more prone to like advertisements that communicate and market products in English-only. In turn, higher levels of consumer likeability of English-only advertisements result in higher levels of buying intentions for conservative-leaning consumers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between people’s political ideology, likeability of a bilingual advertisement, and purchase intention of the advertised

product. We hypothesize that liberal leaning people, compared to their conservative leaning counterparts, will be more likely to have a greater purchase intention of the product featured in a bilingual advertisement. Liberal-leaning people are more open to different perspectives and embrace new things. On the other hand, conservative people hold their traditions in higher regard and are likely to stay in their comfort zone (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). A bilingual advertisement having both English and another foreign language on it deviates from an ordinary advertisement conservative people are normally exposed to and expected of. Thus, we anticipate liberal leaning consumers will have greater likeability of a bilingual advertisement, compared to their counterparts with a conservative orientation. Additionally, the likeability of a bilingual advertisement might moderate the relationship between political ideology-purchase intention of the product in a bilingual advertisement. In other words, the relationship between political ideology and purchase intention of the product in the bilingual advertisement is contingent on the level of likeability of the said advertisement. Thus, we propose the following research question:

RESEARCH QUESTION

- (1) Do consumers' political ideology affect the likeability of a bilingual (English Spanish) advertisement?

METHOD AND DATA

We recruited 108 undergraduate students in a marketing class and offered them extra credit in exchange for participation in the experiment. We first asked the participants to self-report their political orientation before we showed them a bilingual advertisement in English and Spanish. The advertisement illustrated an American brand-type of automobile in the middle-price range. We assessed the likeability of the bilingual advertisement as well as the buying intention. These constructs were measured using a 9- point Likert type scale. For Political Ideology,

respondents answered a single-item political ideology scale (1=Liberal to 9=Conservative; $M=5.07$; $SD=2.17$). This item has shown to be very consistent with other political ideology measures and predictive of consumer voting patterns (Jost et al. 2003; Jost 2006; Nail et al. 2009). For Likeability of the Advertisement, this construct measures how consumers evaluate a print advertisement, in this case, a bilingual advertisement. Advertising stimuli influence consumers by its characteristics and can communicate likability or unlikability (Leather, McKechnie, & Amirkhanian, 1994). This construct was measured using three items ($\alpha=.910$; $M=5.00$; $SD=1.51$).

For Buying Intention, we attempted to capture the potential influence of an advertisement on consumers' likeability toward the product or brand it promotes (Chen et al. 2005). In this case, we measured the effectiveness of the bilingual advertisement with two questions assessing buying intention to purchase the product advertised ($\alpha=.910$; $M=6.48$; $SD=1.20$).

Interaction Analysis. To test the effect of likeability of the English-Spanish advertisement on the political ideology-purchase intention relationship, we ran a Hayes model 1 in SPSS (Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrapping samples as well as 95% confidence intervals. The results show that the coefficient of political ideology ($\beta=-0.4212$, $SE = 0.2216$, $p=0.0601$) is negatively related to purchase intention and is significant at the 10% level. The more conservative the people's ideology, the less likely they have intention to purchase the featured product in the bilingual advertisement. Furthermore, the coefficient of the interaction term between political ideology and likeability of the bilingual ad ($\beta=0.0863$, $SE = 0.0427$, $p=0.0457$) is positive and significant at the 5% level, indicating that as students' likability of the bilingual ad increases, the negative effect of their political ideology (from being liberal to being conservative) on purchase intention decreases.

Discussion. As seen in Figure 1 below, consumers with a conservative political ideology when compared to consumers with a liberal one, are less likely to buy the vehicle in the Spanish-English bilingual advertisement. Thus, our primary thesis of the study is supported. Furthermore, the likeability of the bilingual advertisement is not directly related to purchase intention. It has, however, a positive moderating effect on the negative political ideology-purchase intention relationship, suggesting that the likeability of the bilingual ad strengthens the negative relationship (i.e., making it more negative) between political ideology and buying intention. Additional analysis indicates that students' political ideology does not directly affect the likeability of the bilingual advertisement. It seems that students' ideology has a more salient effect on their purchase intention than on their likeability toward the bilingual advertisement.

KEY CONTRIBUTION

In our study, we find that conservatives have less buying intention of the advertised product in the bilingual advertisements as compared to liberals. In addition, advertisement liking strengthens the negative relationship between political ideology (1 being liberal and 9 being conservative) and buying intention (making this negative relationship more negative). This finding is intriguing. Relative to their liberal counterparts, conservative college students may like bilingual advertisements but less likely buy the product. Among conservative college students, the more bilingual ad liking, the less likely the buying intention.

References are available upon request

Innovation and Inclusivity

COMPARING MALE AND FEMALE SENDERS OF HELPFUL VOTES FOR ONLINE USER REVIEWS

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KEYWORDS: gender role, electronic word-of-mouth, marketing communications,
social media, helpful votes

DESCRIPTION: This paper studies the behavioral differences between male and female
senders of helpful votes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How does the sender's gender influence the perceived helpfulness of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) messages? Prior research shows people instinctively detect and remember gender (Gardner, Macintyre, & Lalonde, 1995; Ito & Url, 2003), and gender roles have long shaped marketing communications, often via stereotypes (Eisend, 2019). While eWOM offers women equal opportunity to participate compared to male-dominated advertising (Mallia & Windels, 2018), disparities remain—women tend to give higher ratings than men (Bayerl et al., 2024; Bobrow, 2024). Emotional expression, a key eWOM driver (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), is also filtered through gender norms, with men's strong feelings often seen as passion and women's as "emotional" (Shields, 2005). Women more frequently display positive emotions while internalizing negative ones (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). This study uses Amazon user review data to test whether review helpfulness, measured by helpful votes, varies with the sender's gender.

Method and Data

We use the Amazon user review dataset from McAuley, Targett, Shi, & Van Den Hengel (2015), collecting 11,092 individual reviews via Python. Each review includes a profile name, classified as male or female based on human names (e.g., “Julie”) versus others. Of the reviews, 8,048 (76%) are male and 2,654 (24%) are female. We code *gender* as 1 for female and 0 for male. The review rating (*valence*) ranges from 1 to 5 (mean = 4). Helpful votes average 6.4, ranging from 2 to 1,000. For prior reviews on the same product, we calculate *PVol* (number of prior reviews) ranging from 1 to 1,130 (mean = 50), *PVal* (average prior rating) ranging from 1 to 5 (mean = 4.1), and *PVar* (variance in prior ratings) ranging from 0 to 8 (mean = 1.3). We also compute $ValDiff = valence - pval$ (mean = -0.16, range = -4 to 4). To test our hypothesis, we estimate a Poisson regression since helpful votes are count data:

$$\text{Helpful votes} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Gender} + \alpha_2 \text{ValDiff} + \alpha_3 (\text{Gender} \times \text{ValDiff}) + \alpha_4 \text{PVal} + \alpha_5 \log(\text{PVol}) + \alpha_6 \text{PVar} + \varepsilon.$$

Summary of Findings

All coefficients are significant. The coefficient on *gender* (0.042) indicates female senders are more likely to receive helpful votes. *Valence difference* is negative (-0.032), meaning male senders gain more helpful votes when their review ratings are lower. The interaction term (*gender* × *valence difference*) is positive (0.041), making the net effect for females positive (0.009), suggesting they receive more helpful votes when ratings are higher. Regarding prior reviews, the coefficient on $\log(\text{prior volume})$ is negative (-0.075), implying reviews are more helpful when fewer prior reviews exist, as information is scarcer. *Prior valence* is positive (0.074), suggesting that when earlier reviews are highly rated, a new review helps confirm purchase decisions. *Prior variance* is also

positive (0.043), meaning greater disagreement among earlier reviews increases the informational value—and thus helpfulness—of a new review.

Key Contributions

This study provides the first empirical evidence on whether a gender gap exists in perceptions of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) based on the sender's gender.

Traditional marketing communications often employ gender stereotypes, shaping both brand perceptions and broader social views on gender equality (Eisend, 2019). Recent research finds women give higher online ratings than men (Bayerl et al., 2024), consistent with stereotypes portraying women as more cooperative and friendly (Kajonius & Johnson, 2018). Such gaps may reflect both personality traits and social influences. Our results show women's reviews are more likely to receive helpful votes when positive, and less likely when negative, compared to men. This pattern suggests social pressures encouraging women to provide positive reviews and mirrors workplace findings where women expressing negative emotions are conferred lower status (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). These insights have important implications for marketers and policymakers seeking to address gender inequality and promote empowerment.

DECENTRALIZED INCENTIVES: A LITERATURE REVIEW, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER MARKETING

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Keywords: Blockchain tokens, decentralization, decentralized incentives, stakeholders, empowerment

Description: This study conceptualizes decentralized incentives by introducing their attributes, value propositions for stakeholders, and value capture for businesses, providing implications for stakeholder value co-creation in decentralized marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Blockchain tokens have emerged as a new type of decentralized incentives with the potential to transform centralized incentive schemes and have gained attention in various industries. By 2025, over 9,000 blockchain tokens are listed on Coinmarketcap, with a market capitalization of \$3.9 trillion and 575 million users. The significance of blockchain-based tokens is seen as a transformation from the “Internet of Information” to the “Internet of Value” (Treiblmaier 2022). This is also called Web 3, a more decentralized and empowering web than the Internet. However,

token-enabled decentralized incentives are often introduced from a technological perspective. Decentralized incentives are perceived as obscure for marketing purpose. Traditionally, incentives are crucial to align stakeholders' interests with a business' objective to maximum business performance by offering value propositions *for* stakeholders while not *to* stakeholders in marketing. To close this research gap, this study aims to develop an integrated theoretical understanding of decentralized incentives by systematically reviewing cross-disciplinary business academic literature of blockchain token incentives, answering following questions: (1) What are decentralized incentives? (2) How decentralized incentives motivate stakeholders? (3) How decentralized incentives contribute to businesses? (4) What implications decentralized incentives provide for stakeholder marketing, and (5) What are future research directions for developing decentralized incentives in marketing?

Method And Data

This study adopted a literature review as its research method, following the instructions suggested by Palmatier et al., (2018) and Snyder (2019). The researchers conducted two-rounds of literature search and a pilot review in the middle. First, the researchers systematically searched relevant literature on Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar databases in July 2023, by a search formula focusing on blockchain tokens as incentives. This step results in 337 papers. The authors screened and read the initial papers in a pilot review to fully immerse themselves in the current landscape. In December 2024, this study incorporated more recent papers and ultimately narrowed its scope to ABS-listed journals for formal conceptualization, resulting in 30 articles (across the disciplines of management, finance, information systems, operations, and marketing) related to blockchain token incentives published prior to 2024. Next, the researchers conducted a content analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022) by coding each article, identifying

consistencies and inconsistencies among articles, classifying and interpreting the article clusters for answering research question one to three. Finally, the study follows the grounded theory (Urquhart et al. 2010; Wiesche et al. 2017) to generate models and theories and interpret the data with more relevant literature.

Summary of Findings

This study identifies that three key attributes of decentralized incentives that drive their variation: *technical decentralization* (control agent), *stakeholder empowerment* (process and psychological orientation), and *ecosystem involvement* (collective scope). These attributes differentiate them from centralized incentives that characterized by authority monitoring, firm-centric delegation, and siloed hierarchical operations. Based on the three core attributes, this study suggests a definition of decentralized incentives as *value units, built on and monitored by decentralized technologies to motivate stakeholders by enhancing their process and psychological empowerment to achieve business goals in an ecosystem through decentralized ways.*

Furthermore, this study identifies four types of value provided to stakeholders in decentralized incentives: *decentralized profitability, recognition, functionality, and autonomy.* These four value types illustrate how decentralized incentives embody action advantages in decentralized capabilities by passing bureaucracy superior and intermediaries across four aspects: assets (financial), social networks (relational), interfaces (functional), and self-sovereignty (personal). Additionally, this study introduces three types of stakeholder value co-creation enabled by decentralized incentives: *stakeholder governance, stakeholder production, and stakeholder resource sharing.* Combining the findings together, this study proposes *a decentralized incentive scheme.* This scheme shows the role of decentralized incentives as driven force in empowering

stakeholders with decentralized capabilities and achieving their value co-creation in a decentralized way for businesses.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to illustrating how decentralized technologies reshape the institutional logic of value co-creation—from firm-centric orchestration to incentive-driven empowerment. It extends stakeholder theory by conceptualizing stakeholders not as passive recipients of value, but as autonomous agents embedded within programmable governance systems, actively co-producing value through token-enabled incentives. It underscores the importance of configuring technical decentralization, stakeholder empowerment, and ecosystem involvement as the foundation for interest-aligned and self-sustaining value creation.

This study also implicates the fluidity of stakeholder roles based on the holdership of blockchain tokens, moving beyond the conventional view of stakeholders as fixed actors within firm boundaries (e.g., employees and suppliers) (Freudenreich et al., 2020; Shaikh & Randhawa, 2022). This underscores the importance of individual stakeholders as context-driven actors whose roles are shaped by their token ownership. It also emphasizes the need to activate stakeholder capabilities and foster their engagement in co-creation processes through decentralized incentive mechanisms. The mechanism of decentralized incentives further illuminates new stakeholder-agency relationship, in which the traditional dominance of human monitors is diminished, and technological consensus mechanisms gain prominence. This study emphasizes empowerment, replacing the delegation model in traditional agency theory (Bosse & Phillips, 2016), as a key driver to motivate stakeholder co-creation.

TITLE: ETHICS IN GREEN INNOVATION: HOW TMT MARKETING EXPERIENCE INTERACTS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND POLITICAL TIES

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Keywords: TMT marketing experience, green innovation, environmental awareness, political ties.

Description: TMT marketing experience positively drives green innovation in Chinese listed firms, but this effect is strengthened by proactive environmental awareness and weakened by reactive environmental awareness and both achieved/ascribed political ties.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Compared to developed economies, transition economies such as China urgently need firms—especially their top management teams (TMTs)—to engage in green innovation to contribute to sustainable development (Jun et al., 2021). Prior research has shown that green innovation can be influenced by observable and unobservable TMT characteristics. However, these studies have mainly examined each type of independent influence (e.g., occupational

experience or ethical cognition), neglecting their interactive influence. Therefore, we focus on the relationship between TMT marketing experience and green innovation, and explore the moderating role of TMT environmental awareness (proactive or reactive) and TMT political ties (achieved or ascribed) from an ethical versus unethical perspective. We propose the following hypotheses:

H1. TMT marketing experience is positively related to green innovation.

H2. The positive impact of TMT marketing experience on green innovation is stronger when proactive environmental awareness increases.

H3. The positive impact of TMT marketing experience on green innovation is weaker when reactive environmental awareness increases.

H4. The positive impact of TMT marketing experience on green innovation is stronger when achieved political ties increase.

H5. The positive impact of TMT marketing experience on green innovation is weaker when ascribed political ties increase.

Method And Data

Our sample consists of 21,346 firm-year observations from 4,467 Chinese A-share listed firms. The data are sourced as follows: (1) TMT marketing experience and environmental awareness extracted from listed firms' annual reports; (2) green patent data obtained from the China Research Data Service Platform; and (3) firm-level financial and governance data collected from the China Stock Market and Accounting Research database.

We employ an ordinary least squares (OLS) model with year and industry fixed effects. Considering the time lag between innovation input and patent output, we use one-period lagged independent and control variables to investigate the determinants of green innovation. The specification of our baseline model is as follows:

$$GI_{i,t+1} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 ME_{i,t} + \alpha_2 Controls_{i,t} + Year\ FE + Industry\ FE + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

where $GI_{i,t+1}$ denotes green innovation for firm i in year $t+1$. ME is the independent variable representing TMT marketing experience, and $Controls$ is a set of firm-, board- and TMT-level control variables.

To examine interaction effects and test H2-H5, we estimate the following extended model:

$$\begin{aligned} GI_{i,t+1} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 ME_{i,t} + \beta_2 PEA_{i,t} + \beta_3 REA_{i,t} + \beta_4 ACHPT_{i,t} + \beta_5 ASCPT_{i,t} \\ & + \beta_6 ME_{i,t} \times PEA_{i,t} + \beta_7 ME_{i,t} \times REA_{i,t} + \beta_8 ME_{i,t} \times ACHPT_{i,t} \\ & + \beta_9 ME_{i,t} \times ASCPT_{i,t} + \beta_{10} Controls_{i,t} + Year\ FE + Industry\ FE + \varepsilon_{i,t} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where PEA denotes proactive environmental awareness, REA denotes reactive environmental awareness, ACHPT denotes achieved political ties, ASCPT denotes ascribed political ties, and the remaining variables are defined as in Equation (1).

Summary of Findings

The results show that TMT marketing experience has a significant positive impact on green innovation. Furthermore, while proactive environmental awareness, as an ethical practice, strengthens this positive relationship, reactive environmental awareness, regarded as a less ethical or even unethical practice, and both achieved and ascribed political ties, considered controversial practices, weaken this effect. These findings imply that although executives' marketing experience

enhances a firm's green innovation performance, the (un)ethical and controversial practices of corporate executives constitute critical boundary conditions for that performance. Our findings offer strategic insights for firms—particularly in transition economies—on how to manage corporate leadership to maximize green innovation and contribute to improved environmental governance.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, this study identifies TMT marketing experience as a key antecedent of green innovation and provides empirical evidence of its direct positive impact, enriching the UET literature on how functional backgrounds influence strategic decision-making and innovation outcomes. Second, it advances research on environmental strategy by distinguishing between proactive and reactive environmental awareness, revealing their heterogeneous and even opposing moderating effects on the marketing experience–green innovation relationship. This deepens understanding of how ethical orientations within TMTs shape the effectiveness of sustainability-driven initiatives. Finally, it examines the complex role of achieved and ascribed political ties as boundary conditions, showing that such connections can weaken the positive influence of marketing experience on green innovation. This challenges the assumption that political ties are always beneficial, instead highlighting their potential agency risks and ethical trade-offs.

Exploring the impact of aligning entrepreneurial and corporate social responsibility orientations on firm performance metrics

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Keywords: corporate social responsibility orientation, entrepreneurial orientations, firm performance, coalignment

Extended Abstract

Research Questions

This study explores an integrative model that aligns the corporate social responsibility (CSRO) and entrepreneurial (EO) orientations within the context of the performance metrics of firms. We examine the effects of such alignment on the financial outcomes of firms and investigate how these effects may be mediated by operational performance (such as brand awareness and brand image).

Method & Data

We conduct a longitudinal survey spanning from 2018 to 2022, collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data (including archival and textual data) from 56 firms in Taiwan. Then we categorize and name them into four distinct “coalignment” groups: low EO/CSRO, high EO/CSRO, low EO/high CSRO, and high EO/low CSRO. We

refer to these as conservative (CO), social entrepreneurial (SE), CSRO, and EO firms, respectively.

Summary of Findings

We find that SE firms predominate EO, CSRO, and CO firms in terms of financial performance. In addition, CSRO firms possess a better brand image than SE firms, while both SE and EO firms exhibit stronger brand awareness. These findings stress the complementary roles of EO and CSRO in enhancing various dimensions of firm performance.

Key Contribution

We examine EO and CSRO in conjunction, rather than separately, focusing on the alignment between the two. This focus offers a more detailed and comprehensive blueprint on how strategic orientation as a whole (considering both types) impacts a firm's core business metrics. Second, we develop a conceptual model that provides valuable insights into the "mechanisms" underlying operational performance, which can be beneficial for researchers with a sole focus on understanding organizational metrics. Finally, we conducted a longitudinal survey incorporating multiple data sources to address the temporal lag between strategic orientation and performance, thereby providing a clearer empirical contribution to the casual relationship between the two.

"References are Available on Request".

LEVERAGING IDENTITY IN MARKETING: A STUDY OF CONSUMER PREFERENCES IN POLARIZED AND INCLUSIVE BRAND

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Keywords: Self-Identity, Social Identity, Consumer-Brand Identification, Consumer Self-Expression, Polarized Positioning, Inclusive Positioning

This study investigates how consumer self-identity and social identity influence brand preference between polarized and inclusive positioning and subsequently examines the differential effects of these strategies on consumer brand identification and self-expression.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines how self-identity and social identity affect brand preference based on positioning (polarized versus inclusive). The rationale for this inquiry is rooted in the increasing complexity of consumer behavior, where individual identity significantly shapes brand preferences (Harmon-Kizer, 2013). As consumers seek greater alignment between their personal values and brand choices (Zhang, 2020), understanding how the interplay between self-identity and social identity influences their gravitation towards either a polarized brand with a bold, strong stance or one with universal and inclusive appeal becomes critical. Accordingly, our primary hypotheses test for a significant association between individuals' self-identity (H1) and social identity (H2) and their choice of a polarized versus an inclusive brand.

Furthermore, the study investigates the outcomes of such choices. Aligning brand narratives with consumer identities can deepen brand identification and empower self-expression (Chen, 2021; Phau, 2001). We therefore question if these distinct strategies yield different results in building these crucial brand relationships. The nature of these differences is meaningful because it reveals the relative impact of each strategy on building a strong, identity-based consumer-brand relationship. Accordingly, we hypothesize that there are significant differences in consumer-brand identification (H3) and consumer self-expression (H4) between individuals who associate with polarized brands and those who associate with inclusive brands, providing critical insights for strategic brand management.

Method and Data

We conducted a quasi-experiment with a sample of 242 physically active individuals from university and commercial gyms. The fitness industry was chosen for its varied identification patterns (Anderson, 1994). The procedure was structured in phases: first, we assessed participants' self and social identities in fitness using adapted scales. Next, we introduced stimuli for two fictitious fitness brands— Brand X, with a polarized positioning designed to foster a sense of superiority among 'elite lifters' while alienating others, and Brand Y, which used inclusive messaging to make all consumers feel welcome and accepted. Participants were then asked to select the brand they resonated with most. Following this choice, we measured consumer-brand identification and consumer self-expression for the selected brand using established scales.

Of the 184 participants who selected either of the brand, logistic regression confirmed H1 and H2, revealing that higher self-identity ($B = -1.106$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B)=0.331$) and social identity ($B = -1.027$, $p < .001$, $\text{Exp}(B)=0.358$) both had a significant inverse relationship with the choice of the inclusive brand. Furthermore, independent samples t-tests supported H3 and H4. The results revealed that the polarized brand (Brand X) generated significantly higher mean scores for both consumer-brand identification ($t(184) = 4.539$, $p < .001$, $MD = 0.55$) and consumer self-expression ($t(184) = 4.937$, $p < .001$, $MD = 0.66$) compared to the inclusive brand (Brand Y).

Summary of Findings

Our findings indicate that self-identity and social identity are significant predictors of brand preference. Individuals with stronger, more defined self and social identities demonstrated a clear gravitation towards the polarized brand (Brand X). This preference is attributed to the brand's bold positioning, which offers exclusivity and reinforces their identity by enhancing in-group solidarity and out-group dissociation. In contrast, individuals with less defined identities were more likely to select the inclusive brand (Brand Y), suggesting a preference for its supportive and welcoming environment that minimizes the risk of alienation.

A central discovery is the trade-off between broad appeal and deep connection. While the inclusive brand attracted a larger number of participants, the polarized brand fostered significantly stronger consumer brand identification (CBI) and consumer self-expression (CSE). This outcome suggests that by aligning closely with specific values, polarized brands create a powerful resonance that intensifies consumer attachment and allows for greater self-expression. Inclusive brands, while providing a supportive environment, may dilute the intensity of personal identity alignment, resulting in lower CBI and CSE scores. This presents a critical strategic consideration for brands navigating the choice between widespread reach and deep, identity-driven engagement.

Key Contributions

This study significantly enhances academic knowledge by providing empirical evidence for how identity alignment affects brand preference, we establish that modern brand positioning must extend beyond simple product differentiation to encompass a strategic alignment with consumer identities. Our findings offer a clearer, more nuanced understanding of the relationship between self-identity, social identity, and consumer choice, particularly in the context of polarized versus inclusive messaging.

A key implication for marketers is the clarification of a critical strategic trade-off. For brands targeting niche markets with highly identified consumers, a polarized strategy can be highly effective. Although it may reach a smaller audience (as seen in our study 70 vs. 116), it fosters significantly stronger consumer-brand identification and self-expression. This approach is ideal for brands seeking to build a powerful "tribe" around shared, exclusive value.

Conversely, for brands aiming for mass-market appeal or targeting consumers with less defined identities, an inclusive strategy offers a lower-risk path to broader reach. This approach builds a welcoming environment that maximizes audience size and minimizes alienation, even if the emotional connection is less intense per consumer. Ultimately, our findings encourage a shift from demographic-based targeting to a more effective identity-centric approach for building resonant brands.

(References are available upon request.)

THE ILLUSION OF INCLUSIVITY IN AI GENERATED VIRTUAL TRY-ONS

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Keywords: Virtual try-on tools, the consumer journey, generative AI, fashion, inclusivity, well-being, self-perception, body image

Description: This study provides insights on the negative impact Virtual Try-on tools have on consumers' psychological well-being, body image, their consumer journey and their perception of brands.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

This research intends to develop a deeper understanding of the potential negative impact Virtual Try-on (VTO) tools have on consumers. Specifically, this study aims to understand the impact of the inaccurate representation and the lack of inclusivity in VTO tools on consumers' psychological well-being, self-perception, and the consumer journey. Given the significance of the effect VTO tools might have on consumers' psychological well-being when integrated inefficiently especially in the fashion industry where consumers are highly sensitive when it comes to their bodies, it is imperative to thoroughly assess potential risks these tools might pose. Given the gap in the existing literature on the negative impact VTO tools have on consumers' well-being and self-perception, this paper aims to explore these effects. It also aims to examine the impact VTO tools have on consumers' perception of brands, and on the consumer journey.

Method and Data:

Considering the limited literature on the negative impact of VTO tools, this study employs an exploratory approach to address the research questions. This study adopted a qualitative research method to gain broader understanding of the negative impact VTO tools have on consumers' psychological well-being, self-perception, and body image. In-depth interviews were conducted interviewing both consumers and experts. The interviews were conducted until no further insights were gained, hence, 23 interviews with consumers were conducted and 8 experts were interviewed as well coming from different backgrounds: marketing, AI, and the fashion industries. The sample was selected using the snowball sampling technique where interviewees were asked to request

other participants they might know are interested in fashion and shopping, the same goes for experts in the fashion, marketing, and AI industries. The in-depth interviews were conducted using a set of semi-structured questions online via Google Meet, averaged 30 minutes, and all interviews were voice recorded based on a previous consent signed by participants.

Summary of Findings:

Based on the interviews conducted with consumers and experts, the findings revealed that VTO tools are still in the developing phase and lack accuracy and inclusivity in their designs which is heavily affecting consumers' psychological well-being, self-perception, and body image. Brands integrating VTO tools have their own idea of what a consumer of a certain size should look like ignoring that consumers come in infinite unique body shapes even if they are under the same size category. This lack of representation is affecting consumers' confidence and self-perception. Similarly, consumers with low self-esteem are more sensitive to using VTO tools than consumers with high self-esteem who tend to believe that the problem is from the tools and that this technology lacks development instead of blaming their own bodies. This lack of accuracy and inclusivity is leading consumers to perceive brands as untrustworthy and deceptive and that they only care about selling their products and not about understanding and satisfying consumers' needs. Additionally, according to consumers and experts VTO tools are valuable to consumers in the consideration phase of their consumer journey where consumers can evaluate options and alternatives but would not rely on these tools to complete a purchase.

Key Contributions:

This study fills a considerable gap in the literature on the impact VTO tools have on consumers. While there has been a growing interest in the integration of VTO tools in the fashion industry, its impact on consumers' psychological well-being and body image is yet to be explored. This study is the first to examine the negative impact VTO tools might have on consumers' psychological well-being, self-perception, and body image especially when integrated inaccurately and not inclusively. This research also builds on previous literature that tackle the impact of the integration of models on consumers with low self-esteem versus consumers with high self-esteem. Additionally, this paper is the first to study the potential impact of the integration of VTO tools on the consumer journey, and more specifically in which stage of the consumers journey are consumers more interested in using VTO tools. Moreover, this paper provides a critical guide to marketers, fashion designers, and AI developers on important things to keep in mind when designing these tools to make sure this technology is as inclusive and as accurate as possible since consumers' psychological well-being is at stake.

References are available upon request.

Resilient Global Ecosystems

SUSTAINABLE LUXURY SERVICE PURCHASE INTENTION IN THE CONTEXT OF LUXURY RESTAURANT

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Keywords: Sustainable Luxury Service, Traditional Luxury Service, Egoistic Beliefs, Altruistic Beliefs, Perceived Value for Money.

Description: This study examines the interaction between sustainable and traditional luxury service claims in luxury restaurants and consumers' psychological beliefs (egoistic or altruistic) to influence dining intentions, with perceived value for money serving as a mediating factor.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As sustainability gains prominence, luxury restaurants face the challenge of integrating eco-friendly practices while maintaining their hallmark of exclusivity and indulgence. This study examines how service claims emphasizing sustainable luxury versus traditional luxury influence consumers' dining intentions, moderated by their psychological beliefs egoistic (self-indulgence) or altruistic (ethical and environmental concerns). Additionally, it explores the mediating role of perceived value for money in this relationship. By addressing these factors, the study fills a gap in understanding how psychological beliefs and perceived value shape sustainable consumption in the luxury dining context. The findings aim to provide

actionable insights for luxury restaurant marketers to align their offerings with consumer values, enhancing appeal in a market increasingly driven by sustainability concerns.

Method and Data

Data were collected through an online Qualtrics survey from a subject pool at a university in the Southwest United States. Of 129 responses, 119 were usable after excluding incomplete or patterned responses ($n=119$; 58.9% male; mean age=23.02 years; $SD=2.45$ years). The survey comprised 21 questions measuring egoistic beliefs (adapted from Joireman et al., 2001, $\alpha=.85$), altruistic beliefs (adapted from Joireman et al., 2001, $\alpha=.90$), and purchase intentions (adapted from Spears & Singh, 2004, $\alpha=.94$). Dining frequency at luxury restaurants and demographic characteristics (age, gender) were included as control variables. Additionally, knowledge of vegan products (adapted from Bloch et al., 1989, $\alpha=.94$) was measured as a control variable due to its relevance, as individuals with greater knowledge of vegan products tend to exhibit increased concerns about ethical decision-making and health, which influence their attitudes toward sustainable products (Ruby, M. B., 2012; *Appetite*, 58(1), 141-150). All items used validated seven-point Likert scales (7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree) or bipolar scales. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally, 1978). Hypotheses were tested using PROCESS macros (Hayes, 2017).

The study employed a 2x2 between-subjects factorial design, manipulating restaurant service claims (sustainable luxury vs. traditional luxury) and psychological orientation (egoistic vs. altruistic). Participants were randomly assigned to read about a luxury restaurant emphasizing either sustainability (e.g., eco-friendly sourcing, community engagement; $n = 59$) or exclusivity ($n = 60$). An attention check ensured participants understood the service claims.

Summary of Findings

This research examined how sustainable versus traditional luxury service claims influence dining intentions in luxury restaurants, focusing on the moderating role of psychological beliefs and the mediating effect of perceived value for money. The manipulation check confirmed that participants in the sustainable luxury condition rated the service as more focused on sustainability ($M=5.75$ vs. 3.18 ; $F(1,117)=80.42$, $p<0.001$), while those in the traditional luxury condition rated it as more focused on exclusivity ($M=6.37$ vs. 1.59 ; $F(1,117)=733.15$, $p<0.001$). Linear regression analysis revealed that service claims had a significant influence on purchase intentions ($R^2 = 0.06$, $\beta = -0.242$, $t = -2.699$, $p = 0.008$). PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017) revealed a significant interaction between service claims and egoistic beliefs (effect= -0.56 , $SE=0.23$, 95% CI: -1.02 to -0.10 , $p=0.0162$), with higher egoistic beliefs linked to greater purchase intentions for traditional luxury services ($M=4.71$ vs. 3.34 , $p<0.05$), but not for sustainable luxury services ($M=3.24$ vs. 3.33 , $p>0.1$). Similarly, a significant interaction was found with altruistic beliefs (effect= -0.41 , $SE=0.20$, 95% CI: -0.83 to -0.00 , $p=0.0471$), with higher altruistic beliefs driving greater purchase intentions for sustainable luxury services ($M=4.79$ vs. 3.21 , $p<0.05$), but not for traditional luxury services ($M=3.14$ vs. 3.49 , $p>0.1$). PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2017) confirmed that perceived value for money mediated the relationship between service claims and purchase intentions (indirect effect= -0.28 , $BootSE=0.15$, 95% BootCI: -0.59 to -0.01), with a marginal direct effect (effect= -0.46 , $SE=0.2430$, $p=0.0569$).

Key Contributions

This study advances the literature on sustainable consumption by exploring the interplay between psychological beliefs and service claims in the understudied context of luxury restaurant dining. By demonstrating that egoistic beliefs drive preferences for traditional luxury services and altruistic beliefs enhance preferences for sustainable luxury services, it enriches consumer behavior frameworks, bridging the gap between luxury and sustainability.

The finding that perceived value for money mediates the relationship between service claims and purchase intentions highlights its role in aligning consumer values with dining choices, extending theories of perceived value in luxury contexts. The inclusion of knowledge of vegan products as a control variable, supported by its significant effect ($b = 0.38$, $SE = 0.08$, $t = 5.04$, $p < 0.001$), underscores its relevance, as individuals with greater knowledge of vegan products exhibit heightened ethical and health concerns (Ruby, 2012). Practically, the findings guide luxury restaurant marketers in crafting targeted campaigns that emphasize sustainability for altruistic consumers or exclusivity for egoistic ones, enhancing perceived value and dining intentions. By promoting sustainable practices, luxury restaurants can differentiate themselves, attract environmentally conscious consumers, and contribute to broader sustainability goals within the hospitality sector.

References are available upon request.

CONSUMER SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSES TO PRODUCT RECALLS: THE ROLES OF BRAND WARMTH AND COMPETENCE

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Keywords: product recalls, warmth and competence, social media, user-generated content.

Description: In analyzing social media posts related to product recalls, this research demonstrates that perceptions of a brand's warmth and competence play a pivotal role in shaping consumer responses to these incidents.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the prevalence of social media and digital communication, consumers are highly aware of product recalls and may respond immediately with punitive actions against the brand. Recalls are incidents in which a brand, jointly with a supervising government agency, informs consumers about a product hazard, stops selling the product, and assists consumers in handling it appropriately. As social media platforms allow users to rapidly and widely share their initial reactions to recalls, negative posts from consumers can be particularly harmful, potentially affecting the respective brand's sales and stock returns. Importantly, even if brands attend to consumers' reactions and communicate their plans to resolve the issues, the detrimental consequences of the initial negative responses cannot be recouped. Therefore, gaining insights into factors that can mitigate social media complaints upfront is essential.

Research in consumer psychology suggests that consumer perceptions of brand behavior resemble perceptions in human interactions. These studies propose that consumers use cognitive shortcuts to evaluate brands based on perceived warmth and competence. The dimensions predict individuals' behavioral tendencies toward other social entities—and brands. Consequently, we

examine how warmth and competence perceptions of brands affect the sentiment valence of consumers' *brand-directed social media responses* after a recall.

Method And Data

We leveraged the recalls of the 700 most famous YouGov brands in the U.S reported between January 2015 and December 2020, which we extracted from the CPSC website. Through the X API, we gathered all English-language posts directed at the recalling brand within a 20-day event window. This approach identified 316 distinct recall announcements of 80 different brands, resulting in 5,528,599 brand-directed social media responses on X. Posts were classified as recall-specific if published within an 11-day window, starting one day before the official announcement and ending nine days after. This resulted in a dataset of 3,058,899 recall-specific posts. These posts were refined by filtering for keywords gathered from the CPSC Handbook. This procedure identified 17,858 posts related to 293 recall announcements of 75 brands. The posts, published during our 20-day event window but before the recall-specific window, were used for investigating the effects of warmth and competence in the absence of recall information. To determine the valence of brand-directed social media responses, we conducted a sentiment analysis. Warmth and competence perceptions were measured in two survey waves, with a six-month interval.

Summary of Findings

First, we examined the impact of warmth and competence perceptions on sentiment in brand-directed social media responses when no recall information was present. Even when brand awareness is controlled for, the results showed that both warmth and competence had significant positive effects on sentiment valence.

Based on the recall-specific posts, we examined the effects of warmth and competence perceptions during recall events. We fitted a linear mixed model in which we regressed sentiment valence on warmth and competence, while controlling for the volume of an individual recall, the number of parallel recalls, and consumers' awareness of the recalling brand. The results revealed a significant positive effect of warmth and a significant negative effect of competence. This indicates that post-recall sentiment of posts was more negative for brands

perceived as highly competent (vs. low in competence) and more positive for brands perceived as highly warm (vs. low in warmth).

Statement of Key Contributions

Our findings reveal that brands perceived as higher in warmth and competence generally receive the most positive responses when not conducting recalls. However, this pattern shifts during recall events. In this case, we found that negative sentiment tends to increase with higher perceptions of competence and decrease with higher perceptions of warmth. This nuanced understanding of consumer sentiment enriches academic research in marketing, which has traditionally focused on the effects of warmth and competence in the absence of negative brand events and utilized these dimensions to explore how brands should phrase apologies to elicit consumer forgiveness following product recalls. Yet, apologies cannot fully recover from the damage of initial negative reactions, emphasizing the importance of understanding strategies to mitigate social media complaints early on.

The results help well-established brands predict initial consumer responses based on their positioning, enabling them to select appropriate strategies for managing recalls effectively. For startups, which often prioritize strengthening their competence dimension to address skepticism, the findings demonstrate that such a unidimensional strategy can backfire when conducting product recalls.

References are available upon request.

CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION: INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ON SOLID VS. LIQUID CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Cultural Dimensions, Solid Consumption, Liquid Consumption, Consumer Behavior, Cross-Cultural Marketing

Description: This study examines how cultural dimensions, specifically - individualism, uncertainty avoidance, and indulgence - affect consumer preferences for solid versus liquid consumption, providing theoretical and managerial insights for global marketing strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates how cultural values, as captured by Hofstede's dimensions of Individualism–Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Indulgence–Restraint, influence consumer preferences for solid consumption (ownership-based, durable goods) versus liquid consumption (access-based, flexible experiences). Although prior research has linked culture to general consumption patterns, limited empirical evidence exists on these cultural dimensions' direct impact on the emerging dichotomy between solid and liquid consumption. This study addresses the gap by empirically testing whether these cultural

traits serve as reliable predictors of consumption preferences in a rapidly evolving, globally connected marketplace.

Method and Data

Study 1 uses secondary, country-level data, employing the Sharing Economy Composite Index 2024 as a proxy for liquid consumption and Hofstede's national scores for Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Indulgence as independent variables. Separate regression models examine the unique effect of each cultural dimension on liquid consumption, ensuring minimal multicollinearity. Data cleaning involved listwise deletion of missing values and validation of variable formats. Study 2 will adopt a survey-based experimental design with participants from six countries strategically selected for their extreme cultural scores. Respondents will make consumption choices (buy vs. rent) across four product categories, enabling regression analysis of cultural influences at the individual level.

Summary of Findings

In Study 1, Individualism showed a positive but marginally significant effect on liquid consumption ($\beta = 0.0215$, $p = 0.0764$, $R^2 = 0.054$), suggesting cultural nuances beyond ownership norms. Uncertainty Avoidance exhibited a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.0322$, $p = 0.0025$, $R^2 = 0.149$), indicating high uncertainty-avoidance societies tend to avoid liquid consumption due to perceived risks and unpredictability. Indulgence showed a significant positive association ($\beta = 0.0222$, $p = 0.0359$, $R^2 = 0.076$), aligning with theories that indulgent cultures favor experiential and hedonic consumption. These results support the hypotheses for Uncertainty Avoidance and Indulgence, partially

support the Individualism hypothesis, and highlight cultural dimensions' varying predictive power for consumption mode preferences.

Key Contributions

This research advances cross-cultural consumer behavior literature by directly linking Hofstede's cultural dimensions to solid versus liquid consumption patterns. Theoretically, it integrates Hofstede's framework with Self-Determination Theory, Prospect Theory, and the Hedonic Consumption Framework to explain how cultural traits shape ownership, risk tolerance, and experiential motivations. Empirically, it provides one of the first cross-national tests of these relationships using both secondary data and planned experimental survey methods. Managerially, it offers actionable insights for global marketers - emphasizing trust and stability in high uncertainty-avoidance markets, highlighting hedonic and experiential benefits in indulgent cultures, and tailoring ownership versus access appeals based on cultural orientation. Policymakers can also use these findings to craft culturally attuned regulations for the sharing economy.

DIGITAL PUBLIC SQUARES AND MARKETING: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

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Keywords: Digital public squares, marketing, issues, implications

Description: The purpose of this review and survey paper is to explore and discuss digital public squares and their significance in marketing and related areas.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question. What are the issues and relevance of digital public squares in marketing that impact firms as well as consumers in the U.S. and global markets?

Summary of Findings. The paper's main aim was to investigate, analyze and discuss the topic of digital public squares (also known as digital town square, digital commons, digital public forums, etc.) that emerge from social media platforms and ecosystems in marketing. Drawing upon the literature of digital public squares, the paper specifically pursues the topic regarding its review-based discussion and survey. In recent years, academic and practitioners' interest in digital public squares and their ecosystems have been heightened because of the availability of large-scale social media platforms, digital public forums, advances in information technology, and user-generated content. Equally important are the issues and topics of misinformation, disinformation, mistrust, distrust, fake news, etc. These issues, topics and research domains influence marketing and ecosystems in domestic and global markets. The topic is particularly important when dealing with digital markets and technology innovations. Regulatory circles and watchdog groups equally play an important role as well regarding dealing with digital

public squares and digital platforms. The paper adds a useful value to literature when dealing with digital public squares, digital platforms and ecosystems.

Key Contributions. Key contributions of this paper are as follows:

- (1) Marketing literature and related disciplines confirm that digital public squares play an important role because of consumers' interest and industry-specific applications.
- (2) The literature of digital public squares remains to be inherently interdisciplinary and multifaceted because of diverse applications and academic research.
- (3) Because of the emergence of digital public forums, digital public squares now take new forms and incorporate complex business models because of a wide array of applications and market demand. Also important are the issues of consumer interest and industry-specific proprietary technologies that influence and control digital public squares. Examples of established digital public squares and ecosystems in marketing include X, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, Linked In, and messaging apps. Countries and regions often pursue distinct digital public squares that represent national cultures, local markets, and user-driven content.

References are available upon request.

Identifying the Drivers of Net Promoter Score (NPS) and their Impact on the Recommending Exports? A Study of Turkish Exports in the U.S. Market

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Keywords: Net promoter score (NPS), Turkish Exports, The U.S. market, international marketing

Description: This study extends the application of NPS to an international marketing context with a focus on Turkish exports in the United States.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Net Promoter Score (NPS), introduced by Reichheld (2003), measures customer satisfaction and loyalty by assessing the likelihood of a customer recommending a company, product, or brand. NPS is a simple yet effective tool that fosters stronger customer relationships, encourages product promotion, and drives sales. This study extends the application of NPS to an international marketing context with a focus on Turkish exports in the United States. The research objectives are: 1) Investigate the likelihood of recommending Turkish exports marketed in the United States and determine the corresponding NPS, 2) Examine how respondent demographics influence the likelihood of recommending Turkish exports, and 3) identify the significant factors that predict the likelihood of recommending Turkish exports. The factors

influencing the likelihood of recommending Turkish products and brands in the U.S. market are categorized into five groups: consumer-related, emotional factors, product-related, country-related, and company-related factors.

Method and Data

To address the research objectives (ROs), a survey instrument was developed that includes scaled questions compiled from relevant literature. Data was collected using the pretested online survey distributed to respondents from MTurk's panel.

Summary of Findings

The findings, based on 269 survey responses, show that a) NPS indicates that U.S. customers have a favorable experience with Turkish products and brands and are willing to recommend Turkish exports, b) individuals who are female, highly educated, younger, and have used Turkish products for a longer duration are more likely to recommend them, and c) customer, product, company-related factors were identified as significant predictors of recommending Turkish exports.

Key Contributions

These findings provide valuable insights for export managers seeking to design strategies that enhance the likelihood of receiving recommendations in export markets, ultimately increasing sales. Given the benefits associated with NPS, companies can leverage these significant predictors to influence the likelihood of being recommended, enhance export sales and profitability. The study contributes theoretically by expanding the application of the NPS concept to the international marketing field and makes significant contribution to NPS literature.

**INFLUENCING FACTORS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ENROLLMENT
DECISION IN PRIVATE RELIGIOUS-AFFILIATED UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED
STATES**

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Keywords

Higher Education Marketing, Higher Education, Push-Pull Framework, International Student,
University Selection

Description:

This study offers insights into factors affecting international students' university selection within the specific context of religious-affiliated universities in the United States.

ABSTRACT

Universities in the United States increasingly rely on international students due to declining domestic enrollment and financial pressures. However, the recruitment strategies and enrollment challenges of private religious-affiliated universities remain underexplored. The study investigates international student mobility within the specific context of religious-affiliated universities in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Universities in the United States (US) are facing significant challenges, including budget deficits and declining enrollment caused by a shrinking domestic college-entering population. This demographic shift has forced higher education institutions to increasingly rely on international students to sustain their operations (Copley & Douthett, 2020; Weber et al., 2023; CBS News, 2024). Religiously affiliated universities are particularly affected, as reports show substantial enrollment declines among Catholic schools and universities in recent years, driven by tuition-dependent models, rising costs, and families' inability to afford private education (Crary, 2021; Moody, 2023).

Despite these unique vulnerabilities, higher education research and marketing discussions in the US often treat the sector as a single, homogeneous category—one that is typically centered around large public research institutions that enroll higher numbers of international students (e.g., Bound et al., 2021). As a result, the distinct needs and positioning strategies of private, religiously affiliated institutions are often underrepresented. This lack of focus may hinder institutional diversity and the development of targeted recruitment strategies. There is a pressing need to better understand the enrollment dynamics of religious-affiliated private universities and the unique pull factors that shape international student decision-making in this context.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the pull factors that influence international students to enroll at a Midwestern, religiously affiliated private university in the United States. Specifically, this study explores how financial considerations, career outcomes, and perceptions of religious and community belonging shape student decision-making across regions. The research is guided by the following research question: Which factors influence international students to choose a private religious-affiliated university in the US, and what is their decision-making process structure at the cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels?

By applying the push-pull framework (Kallio et al., 2024) in the specific institutional context, the study offers actionable insights for religiously affiliated universities seeking to enhance their pull factors and develop effective branding and recruitment strategies. Moreover, by exploring variations in international students' decision-making processes, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of higher education.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Current State of International Students

The international education sector has a direct economic impact of nearly \$500 billion across major study destination countries, including revenue from tuition, living expenses, insurance, and related costs (HolonIQ, 2024). In the United States, international students contribute significantly to higher education institutions by helping meet skilled workforce demands and supporting economic growth (Cantwell, 2015; Malay et al., 2024). Although the US remains a preferred destination, the number of international students is projected to grow to 1.5 million by 2023.

Pandit (2007) refers to international students as “hot commodities” due to the value they bring at both national and institutional levels. A high percentage of international students is often

viewed as a marker of global recognition, and students with ties to their home regions contribute to the internationalization of research networks (Pandit, 2007). Table 1 displays the top five net flows of international mobile students between 2017 and 2022, by the estimated number of students.

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Existing literature confirms that studying abroad presents new and promising opportunities for international students (Netz, 2021; Sisavath, 2021). The US has long held a leading position as a host country due to its strong academic reputation and career-oriented postgraduate pathways (Cantwell, 2015). However, growing competition in the global education market has increased US universities' reliance on international student revenue (Scott, 2021). At the same time, declining domestic enrollment has added further pressure to attract international students (Copley & Douthett, 2020; Findlay et al., 2017).

International Student Mobility

The push-pull framework is commonly used to analyze international student mobility (Kallio et al., 2024). In this model, push factors refer to the educational or economic challenges in students' home countries that motivate them to study abroad. Pull factors, by contrast, refer to features of host countries or institutions—such as academic reputation, affordability, or employment opportunities—that attract international students (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Historically, the US has benefited from strong pull factors, including high-quality education and favorable postgraduate work options (Cantwell, 2015). Moreover, countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada have enhanced their appeal through lower tuition fees, shorter program durations, and more favorable immigration policies, resulting in substantial increases in

international student enrollment since 2017 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.; Costas-Fernández et al., 2023).

PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

When students decide to study abroad, choosing a university is one of the most critical decisions they make. In their university selection process, international students evaluate a variety of institutional characteristics—such as ranking, tuition, career support, cultural fit, and religious values, among others—that influence both application and enrollment decisions. One of the most widely reported factors in university selection is affordability. Tuition fees and living expenses are particularly important for international students, who often rely on family support or loans to finance their education (Moskovkin & Zhang, 2024). Within the push-pull framework, affordability represents a major pull factor for students from emerging economies or price-sensitive backgrounds. Institutions that offer competitive tuition and flexible financial arrangements are more likely to be considered viable options, especially among students with limited resources.

Proposition 1: Lower tuition and affordable living expenses increase the likelihood that international students will choose a university.

Another key institutional factor is the perceived quality of career support and postgraduate employment opportunities. International students increasingly evaluate universities not just on academic programs, but also on the extent to which those programs lead to meaningful career outcomes. Prior research shows that studying abroad can enhance job prospects, and many students actively seek universities that offer internship support, employer networks, or job placement assistance (Pollock, 2014; Cantwell, 2015; Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). Institutions that communicate strong career support mechanisms—such as CPT/OPT pathways, industry

partnerships, and alumni outcomes—may gain a competitive edge in attracting international students.

Proposition 2: Strong institutional career support and employment outcomes positively influence international students' enrollment decisions.

Finally, while financial and academic considerations are often prioritized, emotional and cultural alignment also plays a role—particularly in institutions with distinct value orientations. Religiously affiliated universities may appeal to international students who value community, identity, or spiritual alignment. Prior studies suggest that shared values and inclusive communities can enhance perceived fit, especially for undergraduate or longer-term students (Astrachan et al., 2020; Sherry et al., 2010). Thus, we anticipate that, in religiously affiliated institutions, the alignment between institutional identity and student expectations may function as an important pull factor.

Proposition 3: Religious alignment and a sense of emotional or community belonging positively influence international students' enrollment decisions.

METHOD

Survey Procedures

This study chose a religious-affiliated midwestern private university in the US with high research activities and a decent university ranking as proof of academic excellence. Our survey included all international students enrolled in this university in the academic year starting August 2024, irrespective of their program level or year of study. We collected samples using an online questionnaire (the Qualtrix platform) and a snowball method to reach the survey population. Because this study targeted current students, and the university has a relatively small international student population, the number of collected responses was limited. We received a total of 87

responses, and after removing 38 incomplete responses, we analyzed data from 49 participants ($n = 49$), the majority of whom were from Asia ($n = 41$).

Survey Results

Survey data reveal that a large portion of students come from three regions: South Asia (44.90%), East Asia (26.53%), and Southeast Asia (12.24%). The three regions show distinctive results regarding the importance of three factors. Using a 5-point Likert scale, South and Southeast Asian students consider financial and expense factors more important, while East Asian students are neutral. However, students from all three regions consider religion and community factors less important when making enrollment decisions. Interestingly, approximately half of the students from each region rely on parents or guardians for tuition and living expenses support, with South Asian students showing a larger percentage relying on personal funds compared to the other two regions.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

This preliminary survey result provides a foundation for the second phase of the research, which includes conducting a qualitative study with interviews. It helps construct interview questions to gain an in-depth understanding of how students from different regions are affected by various factors and how these factors collectively shape their university selection decisions. Furthermore, it offers insights into how the university should brand itself to attract students from diverse regions.

Interview Procedures

To complement the survey findings and gain a deeper understanding of the psychological decision-making processes of international students at the same religiously affiliated Midwestern private university in the US, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. We adopted a

grounded theory approach to explore the factors in-depth and identify other factors that influence international students' university selection decisions. A total of seven international students participated in the interviews: one undergraduate, three Master's students, and three Ph.D. students. Reflecting the demographic structure of the university, most participants were from South Asia. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, and all sessions were recorded and transcribed per the Internal Review Board guidelines and with participant consent. We applied grounded theory methods to analyze the transcripts. Open and axial coding were used to identify key concepts and patterns, and a constant comparative method helped refine emerging categories and develop deeper thematic insights.

Themes Emerged from Axial Coding

1. Structural fit and practical value: Across the interviews, students consistently emphasized the importance of academic fit and practical value when selecting a university. Themes such as program structure, career preparation, and personal growth opportunities were frequently mentioned. Students chose programs based on how well they aligned with their academic and professional goals and whether they provided meaningful connections to the field and mentorship from faculty.

“Look at a school that they want to apply into, how is connected to their fields” (P1, PhD)

“I sought out more for opportunities with professors” (P2, Undergrad)

2. Economic rationality: The survey results indicated that financial considerations are extremely important to international students. The interviews reinforced this finding, revealing financial viability as a dominant concern. While Ph.D. students often received scholarships for tuition, they still relied on stipends, personal income, or family support to cover living expenses. For Master's students, affordability and access to on-campus work were often decisive factors.

“I have the stipend to taking care of the tuition and then my pay or salary at work, taking care of me and my family” (P5, PhD)

Across interviews, nearly all participants mentioned some level of family support, suggesting that families are important stakeholders in the enrollment decision.

“And my parents helped me with my room and board” (P2, Undergrad)

“Some of it was from my earnings because I was working in India... some of it was from my parents” (P3, Masters)

3. Emotional belonging and identity alignment: While the survey results suggested that community and belonging were less important, the interviews revealed a more nuanced picture. For Master’s students, community played a limited role, but for Ph.D. and undergraduate students—who typically spend more time at the institution—emotional support and a sense of belonging were significant.

“That part ... University has too many Indian people...not at all a deciding factor... in my mind, it had 0% impact.” (P3, Masters)

“I think that those personalized experience not only made it easy for me to decide, but for my parents said” (P2, Undergrad)

[Insert Figure 1 About Here]

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contribution

This study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on a specific context: a Midwestern private religious-affiliated university. While numerous such institutions exist in the US, academic discourse tends to focus more heavily on top-ranked or public research universities. These smaller, values-driven institutions are often overlooked, despite their unique challenges in attracting

international students. The findings of this study deepen our understanding of the decision-making process in this underrepresented segment and offer a new perspective on how such institutions can position themselves within competitive global education markets.

This study also enriches the literature by examining the role of external actors, such as parents and professional agencies, in international students' decision-making processes. Furthermore, this study re-examines critical pull factors in the context of international student enrollment. While affordability and career outcomes remain consistently important, findings from both the survey and interviews reveal regional variations in how students prioritize these factors.

Practical implications

This study provides several practical implications for enrollment strategies in religious-affiliated and lower-ranked universities. First, the findings show that financial factors are the most influential in international students' university selection decisions. Therefore, affordability must remain a top priority in institutional marketing. Competitive tuition, low deposit requirements, and accessible living costs are especially critical in attracting students from South and Southeast Asia. Second, career preparation and postgraduate employment opportunities must be integral components of the university's value proposition. This study affirms that international students consider long-term return on investment when selecting where to study. Third, the study identifies professional agencies as influential vertical partners in international recruitment. These agencies possess local knowledge and act as trusted intermediaries between students and institutions. They offer services such as test preparation, university selection, visa support, and scholarship advising. Institutions should collaborate more actively with trusted agents in key markets to build visibility, streamline the application process, and enhance university brand recognition.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Top 5 net flow of international mobile students during 2017 and 2022

Indicator	Net flow of internationally mobile students (inbound - outbound), both sexes (UIS estimate) (number)					
Year/Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
United States of America	898025.61	901082.65	874493.84	848728.16	730392.02	758550.05
United Kingdom	399175.00	412814.00	449552.00	510789.00	561016.00	633392.00
Australia	367034.00	430464.00	495039.00	443645.00	364961.00	368478.00
Canada	160335.00	176099.31	230061.86	271935.00	264160.00	285018.00
Germany	135858.00	189156.00	210525.00	245224.00	250248.00	277232.00

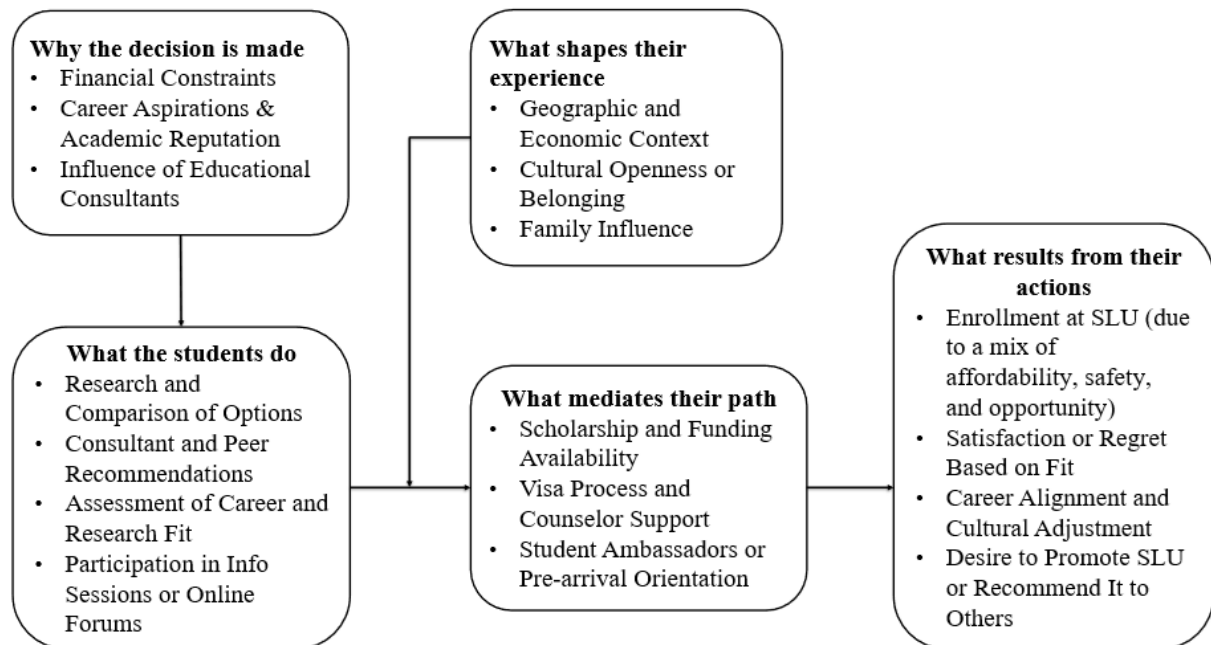
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Table 2: Average of each factor (1 = least important, 3 = neutral, 5 = most important)

Region	Average Expense Factor	Average Career Factor	Average Community Factor
Central America	4.00	2.80	2.13
East Asia	2.92	3.16	2.52
East Europe	5.00	3.60	2.75
Middle-East	2.50	2.40	2.50
South Asia	4.14	3.99	2.56
Southeast Asia	4.00	4.33	3.17
West Africa	5.00	5.00	3.00
West Europe	3.00	5.00	3.50
Other	3.00	3.00	3.00
Total Average	3.73	3.71	2.64

Source: prepared by authors

Figure 1: Causal Model: International Students' University Selection Decision Process



Title: MSME's Retail Digitalization for Resilience: Study of India's ONDC Ecosystem

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Keywords: ONDC, Ecosystem Legitimacy, Ecommerce, MSME, Ecosystem, Digital Public Infrastructure, DPI

Description: Ecosystem Case Research on Open Networks for Digital Commerce (ONDC) as a Digital Public Infrastructure for enhancing MSME's digitalization

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

- 1) How does a new retail ecosystem establish its legitimacy across stakeholders and competitive retail ecosystems to overcome its newness?
- 2) How do Digital Public Infrastructure such as Open Networks for Digital Commerce enhance the digitalization of MSMEs?

METHOD AND DATA

In the field of digital public infrastructures (DPI), a novel ecosystem that is emerging is that of open networks (e.g., Open Network for Digital Commerce -ONDC in India) that allows platform interoperability, such that a buyer on one platform has access to seller (e.g. micro-enterprise) on another platform thereby enhancing MSME's digital market access. ONDC aims to create an inclusive digital commerce ecosystem in India. The study, through the theoretical lens of ecosystem legitimacy emergence, analyzed archival data over 36 months and interviews with ONDC stakeholders to establish findings on the digitization efforts of micro-enterprises in India.

This research employs a case study methodology to examine the emergence and growth of ONDC (unit of analysis) as an orchestrator of new retail business models. The case study method is particularly suited for this investigation as it enables an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-world context, facilitating a holistic understanding of ONDC's unique role and the dynamics of its ecosystem.

Data Collection

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of ONDC and its ecosystem, this study triangulates data from multiple sources. The primary sources of data include Archival Data from Newspaper Articles the study analysed newspaper articles published over a 36-month period in prominent and widely circulated outlets in the popular press. The data accessed publicly available talks and speeches delivered by key position holders in ONDC. Twelve **Stakeholder Interviews** to complement secondary data, These included founders and key employees of the seller apps and buyer apps, sellers on ONDC and large organizations that had started operations on the network, management students interning at organizations that were implementing on ONDC.

By combining archival, observational, and interview data, the research captured both the macro-level dynamics and micro-level interactions within the ONDC ecosystem.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study defined a two-fold research objective of exploring how a new ecosystem in the retail environment establishes its legitimacy and how open networks can enhance digitalization MSMEs resulting from interoperability principle of open networks.

Establishing Ecosystem Legitimacy

The ONDC ecosystem's novelty is its positioning of a network that allows interoperability across diverse platforms and apps to enable transactions. There is strong evidence of the *discursive legitimacy* process through media and public speaking in conferences. Discursive legitimacy is developed through a process of framing, sensemaking, positioning and recognizing (Thomas and Ritala, 2022).

Framing consists of the construction of meaning and guiding collective action. The metaphor created for ONDC, as elaborated by one of the creators of the Beckn protocol (the protocol on which ONDC operates), is that of a “forest, while a platform that is a curated garden. The forest

provides an ecosystem for all sorts of species to grow just as the ONDC network provides the tools for various business models to evolve by connecting with one another”.

Network participants on ONDC who are complementors, contribute to *sensemaking* and restructure the narrative offered by the orchestrator to implement various business models such as the attempt of sellerapps to develop local business model in Tier 2 towns in India. Examples of *positioning* of discursive legitimacy have emerged - cab aggregator Ola that has successfully expanded as a buyer app for food deliveries on ONDC.

However, findings from the content analysis of secondary sources and public news journalism, suggests that users (e.g. sellers) and external actors, comprising of the media and in some cases the regulator, perceive ONDC as a platform of platforms. The narrative shows evidence of strong platform mindset that makes it difficult to grasp the concept of “interoperability” and “unbundling” and how the transaction between parties will be structured on an open network. The abstract nature of the value proposition of the ecosystem is an interesting aspect of the ecosystem that can inform the literature on ecosystems.

The *Performative legitimization* processes of *strategic action*, *value realization* and *intervention* are evidenced in the growth of the number of seller apps, sellers and buyer apps leading to an increased transaction volume of 150 Mn orders in 36 months since its launch. The narratives suggest that while unbundling of the value chain is a perceived value proposition that the orchestrator promotes, the complementors and users in the ecosystem find it difficult to grasp and operationalize the value proposition, thus threatening ecosystem legitimacy emergence. The process model of ecosystem legitimacy emergence (Thomas and Ritala, 2024) suggests a reinforcing loop fuelled by performance driven discursive legitimization and discursive driven performance legitimization. The Open network ecosystem, however suggests a friction when value proposition is abstract and restricts the operationalization of the value realization. The study therefore enhances the theory of ecosystem legitimization by incorporating the aspect of friction caused by the ability of complementors and users to extract value during the process of performance legitimization.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS:

The study contributes to academia by substantiating and extending the growing literature on retail ecosystem management by focusing on the literature of ecosystem legitimacy emergence and its applicability in a novel retail phenomenon of open networks for digital commerce (ONDC) that is unfolding in India. The study contributes significantly to practitioners such as for-profit and non-profit MSME's, platform marketplaces and policy bodies focussing on the growth of MSME's in emerging economies, and how they can develop resilience in ecommerce in the face of growing domination of a few online retail platforms. The findings, through analysis of a case study, reveal frictions in the digitalization process through open networks. While micro-enterprises have enhanced their digitalization efforts motivated by the discursive legitimation processes adopted by ONDC, they are yet to realize the full value realization that the network has to offer to develop resilience and independence from large platforms. The findings suggest how the ecosystem legitimacy literature can incorporate friction resolution as an integral part of performance legitimization thereby extending the literature on ecosystem legitimacy literature.

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References will be provided on request.

PERCEIVED BRAND CIRCULARITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON BRAND-RELATED OUTCOMES

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Keywords: Brand Circularity, Purchase Intention, Willingness-to-Pay, 9R Framework

Description: The study develops a scale to measure perceived brand circularity and provides evidence to show that certain dimensions, in particular Product Conditioning and Product Technology, have significant positive effects on consumers' Purchase Intention and Willingness-to-Pay.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Environmental protection and sustainability are increasingly relevant for society and science. The concept of circular economy has emerged as potential solution in this context, aiming for the optimal utilisation of finite resources. This is achieved by promoting practices like repairing, reusing, and recycling of products. Therefore, consumers play a key role.

Especially, raising awareness and influencing their perceptions and behaviour towards circular practices is essential. Additionally, circularity demands changes in business models making the implementation more complex. Therefore, businesses may be rather motivated to adopt circular practices if these efforts improve brand perceptions and market success.

To test the assumption that perceived brand circularity influences outcome variables, we need an appropriate scale. Developing measurement scales for latent constructs, such as perceived brand circularity, is essential for improving our understanding of this concept and for

developing measures based on the results. Consequently, our study focuses on two specific objects:

First, we develop a scale to measure perceived brand circularity. To the best of our knowledge, no measurement scale is available to assess the perception of brand circularity. Second, we demonstrate the initial effects of perceived brand circularity on brand-related outcomes that determine market success, namely Purchase Intention and Willingness-to-Pay.

Method and Data

A literature review using EBSCOhost and Business Source Premier revealed few published articles on brand circularity. The 9R framework is useful for generating items on the concept. The framework comprises ten dimensions belonging to three overarching aspects: Smarter product use and manufacture comprise the dimensions of refuse, rethink, and reduce. The extended lifespan of products comprises the dimensions of reuse, repair, and refurbish. The useful application of materials comprises the dimensions of remanufacture, repurpose, recycle, and recover.

We used ChatGPT to develop a scale with 40 items and a company description illustrating brand circularity across all ten dimensions. Additionally, we measured Purchase Intention and Willingness-to-Pay using a scale consisting of two items in each case with a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. We translated these into German in a double-blind process. A pretest and an exploratory factor analysis reduced the number of items to three for each dimension. We collected the data using an online questionnaire and a sample of students from a German university. To get the data for the main study, we used an online panel. 300 people completed the study, half of whom were women and the average age was 46 years.

Summary of Findings

We conducted a principal components analysis with Varimax rotation on the items. This resulted in a model comprising five distinct factors with three to four items each. We denominated the five factors as follows: Product Conditioning, Repair, Recycling, Waste Management, and Product Technology. These three of the five factors exactly mirror the 9R Framework: Repair, Waste Management, and Product Technology. The factor Product Conditioning consists of three items from product conditioning and one item from refurbishment. The factor Recycling consists of two items from recycling and one item relating to the processing of products with recycled materials.

We subsequently conducted two multiple regressions. The model for Purchase Intention showed significant effects. The factors Product Conditioning, Recycling, and Product Technology demonstrated a significant influence on this outcome. The Willingness-to-Pay model also evidenced significant effects. The factors of Product Conditioning, Repair, and Product Technology had a significant influence in this model.

Statement of Key Contributions

For academics, initiatives to develop a measurement scale provide a foundation for a better understanding of the construct of perceived brand circularity. A scale is the basis to further investigate the antecedents and consequences as well as outcome variables of the construct, and to derive valuable implications. In this manner, research findings can be expanded.

However, it is equally important to acknowledge the necessity of further research to be conducted in order to establish relations between the construct and other outcome variables.

For practitioners, the development of a scale for perceived brand circularity allows measuring the perception of brand circularity and gaining an understanding of stakeholders' perceptions concerning a specific brand. Based on this measurement of perceptions, suitable measures can be implemented to guide perceptions in the desired direction by targeted communication.

In this context, the dimensions of Product Conditioning and Product Technology are particularly important, as they have the strongest influence on Purchase Intention and Willingness-to-Pay.

Additionally, the knowledge of influences of perceived brand circularity on brand-related outcomes can provide incentives to adapt company processes towards more circularity. This understanding can further emphasize the significance of perceived brand circularity for companies.

References are available upon request.

TITLE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO UNDERSTAND VEGANISM THROUGH THE LENS OF GEN ZERS IN INDIA

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Keywords: Veganism, Gen Z, Exploratory Study, Plant-Based Beliefs and Practices, Gender, Food Preferences.

Description: An exploratory study of Indian Gen Z's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices highlighting the influence of gender and food preferences on attitudinal dimensions towards veganism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Given the growing popularity of veganism worldwide and its increasing resonance with Generation Z, how do gender differences and food preferences shape the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Indian Gen Z toward veganism? Specifically, to what extent do known knowledge, ethical considerations, health concerns, environmental awareness, and cultural factors influence their willingness to adopt or sustain plant-based diets? Drawing on the Knowledge – Attitude – Beliefs – Practices (KABP) model, this study investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors which influence the beliefs, attitudes and practices (behaviors) of Generation Z consumers?
2. What is the effect of gender on multiple dependent variables based on beliefs, attitudes and practice (behaviours) related to veganism among Generation Z consumers.
3. What is the effect the effect of food preferences (Veg and Non-Veg) on multiple dependent variables based on beliefs, attitudes and practice (behaviours) related to veganism among Generation Z consumers.

Furthermore, the research seeks to explore the personal values, societal norms, and practical considerations in influencing these choices, with the aim of identifying key influencing determinants towards veganism among this cohort. By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the limited body of empirical work on veganism in the Indian context.

Method and Data

This exploratory study investigates the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Indian Generation Z toward veganism, with a focus on how gender and food preferences (vegetarian vs. non-vegetarian) influence these orientations. Guided by the Knowledge – Attitude – Beliefs – Practices (KABP) model, the research followed a two-step approach: first, identifying the key factors influencing attitudes toward veganism, and second, examining the impact of independent variables—namely gender and food preferences—on the factor scores of the identified factors, which were treated as dependent variables. Generation Z was targeted due to their demographic significance (40% of India’s population) and influence on ethical and sustainable consumption trends. College students, who represent nearly 99% of Gen Z in India, were selected via convenience sampling, reflecting the cohort’s digital nativity and social consciousness. A 23-item scale, refined through literature review, expert input, and pre-testing with 30 respondents, assessed veganism-related beliefs, attitudes, and practices. The pre-test evaluated clarity, relevance, comfort, and length, leading to refinements for accessibility and comprehension.

The final structured questionnaire comprised two sections: (1) 7-point Likert-scale items capturing factors influencing veganism adoption, and (2) demographic variables. Responses from 230 Gen Z college students were analyzed to identify underlying attitudinal dimensions.

Summary of Findings

Factor analysis of the 23-item scale revealed three key attitudinal dimensions toward veganism among Indian Gen Z: (1) Attitude towards animals, (2) Attitude towards meat consumption, and (3) Attitude towards milk and milk products. These factors together explained a substantial portion of the variance in participants’ responses. Six one-way ANOVAs were conducted to examine differences across gender and food preferences. Results showed that attitudes toward animals and

meat consumption differed significantly by gender, with females expressing stronger pro-animal sentiments and greater aversion to meat. Food preference (vegetarian vs. non-vegetarian) was also a significant predictor of attitudes toward meat and dairy, with vegetarians showing more favorable views toward plant-based alternatives. However, food preference did not significantly influence attitudes toward animal welfare. The findings highlight that while ethical considerations are important, dietary choices and gender norms play a decisive role in shaping veganism-related attitudes. Overall, health, environmental, and cultural knowledge emerged as important belief-shaping factors, influencing not just attitudes but also self-reported practices. These results provide empirical evidence of the demographic and psychological underpinnings of plant-based dietary adoption in India's Gen Z and point toward the importance of culturally sensitive strategies for promoting ethical consumption.

Key Contributions

This study offers three theoretical contributions. First, it enhances our understanding of how Gen Z individuals perceive vegan diets by unpacking their attitudinal dimensions drawing on the Knowledge-Attitude-Beliefs-Practice (K-A-B-P) model. It shows how the attitudinal dimensions shape Gen Z's perceptions of vegan diets, offering a nuanced understanding of how awareness and beliefs influence food choices. Second, it advances food consumption literature by highlighting gender differences in attitudes toward meat consumption, dairy products, and animal slaughter practices, deepening insights into gender-based variations in ethical and sustainable eating. Third, the research further explores how individual food preferences—specifically vegetarian versus non-vegetarian orientations—influence attitudes toward meat and dairy consumption, as well as ethical considerations related to animal slaughter.

For practitioners, the findings provide three actionable insights. First, marketers can design more effective awareness campaigns by aligning messages with Gen Z's ethical, environmental, and health concerns. Second, gender-based differences suggest the value of targeted communication strategies—such as emphasizing animal welfare or plant-based alternatives differently for male and female audiences. Third, recognizing the influence of personal food preferences enables segmentation of campaigns for vegetarian and non-vegetarian consumers, using transitional or reinforcement messaging accordingly in a culturally diverse context of India.

WHEN AND HOW MANY SEGMENTS: A NEW APPROACH TO TARGETING STRATEGY

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Keywords: Strategy, Targeting, Survey, Modelling, Growth

Description: An empirically tested model of Targeting Strategies is proposed in this study, which aims to advance our understanding of Marketing Strategy and compliment marketeers with a tool of targeting deployment.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

According to Morgan *et. al.* (2019), the twenty years between two major reviews of strategic marketing literature revealed a significant paucity of research on the core domain of marketing strategy. While market segmentation, albeit its shortcomings, has added value to marketing decision making during the last 40 years (Cortez, Clarke & Freytag, 2021), targeting, is nowhere close to making a similar claim.

Following the significant changes that have occurred during the last twenty years on our understanding of marketing strategy (Hunt, 2018), this research aspires to re-focus academic research on targeting, an important facet of the STP strategic process. A critical content analysis of the material under Targeting, revealed one and only typology: Kotler (eg. 1994) as adapted from

Abell (1980), which places all available targeting strategies along variations of (a) the number of products a firm offers (one, few or many), and (b) the number of segments the firm targets (one, some or all). The authors borrowed the dimension of time (i.e. the speed of expansion into new segments) from the international expansion strategies domain to enrich the framework. The final model examines antecedents of targeting strategy and its effect on firm's capabilities and performance.

Method And Data

The perceived deployment of targeting strategies was investigated through an e-mail cross-sectoral survey. The Targeting Strategy Type was assessed using a short paragraph description, an approach that has been previously used in both strategic management research (e.g., James and Hatten, 1995) and marketing strategy research (McDaniel and Kolari, 1987; McKee et al., 1989).

The same approach was adopted (McKee, Varadarajan, & Pride, 1989; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003; Slater, Hult & Olson, 2010) to measure the adopted corporate strategies. For the development of the short descriptive paragraphs of the adopted strategies, scales presented by Slater & Olson (2000, 2001), Olson, Slater & Hult (2005), Slater, Hult, & Olson (2010) and Slater, Olson & Finnegan (2011) were used.

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to position the selected targeting strategy along three distinct dimensions. Firstly, they had to indicate their adopted strategy regarding the number of products they were offering, then the number of segments (markets) they were serving and finally the (historic) speed of entrance to these segments (markets), using in all cases a 20-point scale. The remaining constructs were measured with well-established scales.

Summary of Findings

The analysis of the results followed a multi-step procedure of alternating univariate and bivariate analyses. The first step was to combine the existing targeting typologies (i.e. Kotler's framework) with widely adopted corporate strategies (Olson, Slater & Hult, 2005) to form coherent company clusters regarding the adopted targeting strategy. Four main company clusters emerged which possessed varying strategic emphases, i.e. Market Coverage Innovators, Market Niche Followers, Market Coverage Followers and Market Focused Brand Leaders.

In all four models, as expected, Firms' Capabilities is a significant determinant of all major Performance indicators such as Customer Satisfaction, Market Effectiveness and Profitability. Differences among the four clusters appear in their deployment of the Targeting Strategy. More specifically, Market Coverage Innovators are targeting multiple segments with a greater variety of products, while Market Niche Followers are targeting multiple segments with a more focused product portfolio. In both clusters, speed of targeting (i.e. time) is a pure moderator of customer satisfaction, for the Coverage Innovators, and of profitability for the Niche Followers.

The segment of Market Coverage Followers relies almost solemnly on Time to form their marketing mix offers, whereas Market Focused Brand Leaders, without ignoring Time, rely most heavily on the number of Products they offer to the market.

Statement of Key Contributions

Empirical research on the actual targeting strategies of firms is rare and very hard to find. This research sheds ample light to the holistic concept of targeting strategies within the boundaries of the overall marketing strategy and investigates the actual targeting alternatives pursued by firms. To that effect, the impact of the followed targeting strategy on firm's performance is empirically tested.

The results confirm the validity of the proposed model as a means of describing targeting alternatives and measuring targeting effects. The ad hoc development of specific marketing capabilities has also been confirmed, revealing a significant causality link of strategic planning to strategy deployment through specific resources.

Finally, the concept of time or speed of expansion (growth) has emerged as an moderator of firm's performance, an early but strong indication of its vital role in enhancing the development of strategic vision to a real battlefield blueprint.

It is a legitimate goal to provide managers with an empirically developed and verified framework for targeting strategies, encompassing all its pivotal dimensions, i.e. timing of entry, number of segments and product variations. Managers can use this framework to form and implement the appropriate targeting strategy.

“References are available upon request.”

Technology-Driven Behavioral Insights

AWE IN AUGMENTED REALITY: UNLOCKING CONSUMER POSSIBLE SELVES**Ruyu Yun***, Loughborough University**Jie Meng**, Loughborough University

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Keywords: Augmented reality, Awe, Possible selves, Purchase behavior.

Description: This study explores how awe-inspiring contextual cues in augmented reality (AR) environments influence consumer emotions, identity projection, and purchase behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Research Question**

This research investigates how immersive and awe-inspiring augmented reality (AR) environments influence consumer emotions and purchase behaviors through the lens of embodied cognition and the Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (PAD) model. Specifically, we examine two core questions: (1) How do awe and interactivity within AR environments influence core affect (pleasure and arousal) and dominance? (2) How do these emotional responses shape identity exploration (possible selves) and drive purchase intention and behavior? While prior research has often focused on functional or static AR features, this study explores how emotion-rich AR environments that blend virtual and physical stimuli can shift consumers’ psychological and behavioral engagement. We further assess how interactive control may amplify or diminish emotional resonance, and whether motivational constructs like possible selves mediate the path from emotion to decision. By combining emotional, cognitive, and behavioral constructs in a single framework, the study aims to uncover how digitally immersive environments not only evoke feelings, but also inspire consumer action and identity transformation.

Method and Data

We conducted a web-based quasi-experiment using immersive AR simulations developed through HoloLens 2, targeting consumers' responses to three different AR scenarios with varying levels of awe and interactivity. A total of 214 participants, recruited via Credamo, were randomly assigned to view one of three experimental videos and complete a simulated shopping task. The AR environments were designed to evoke natural awe (e.g., waterfalls, mists, and lush foliage) and included gesture-enabled controls for interactivity. Participants engaged in three stages: pre-test (e.g., prior AR experience, outdoor preference), behavior task (simulated AR demonstration with product interaction and button choice), and post-test (survey on emotional and motivational variables). We employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among awe, core affect, dominance, possible selves, and purchase intention. Additionally, multinomial logistic regression was used to analyze behavioral button choice (e.g., "Order Now"). Manipulation checks validated the effectiveness of awe and interactivity variations. Measurement model validation showed strong reliability, discriminant validity, and model fit. Moderation and mediation analyses confirmed the interactive and emotional dynamics embedded in AR experiences, while behavioral data added depth to traditional intention measures.

Summary of Findings

The results demonstrate that awe significantly enhances both core affect and dominance, thereby increasing emotional engagement and the salience of aspirational identity (possible selves). Interactivity further strengthens dominance but paradoxically weakens awe's emotional impact when overemphasized. Core affect and dominance significantly predict the emergence of possible selves, which in turn positively influences purchase intention. Importantly, both purchase intention and awe directly predict consumers' button choices during the simulated AR shopping task. A moderated mediation analysis reveals that at lower

levels of interactivity, awe has a stronger indirect effect on purchase intention through core affect and possible selves. However, high interactivity dampens these effects, suggesting a trade-off between engagement and emotional immersion. Multinomial logistic regression supports the predictive validity of both awe and intention on behavioral choices (“Order Now” vs. “Not Interested”), addressing the intention-behavior gap. These findings offer robust evidence that AR-induced emotions, particularly awe, not only shape affective and cognitive states but also translate into tangible behaviors. This emotional-cognitive-behavioral pathway provides a deeper understanding of how digital environments can activate meaningful consumer responses.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to marketing literature by integrating the PAD model and embodied cognition theory into a novel framework that connects immersive AR design with emotion, identity, and behavior. First, it extends existing AR research by emphasizing emotional richness (especially awe) as a critical, underexplored dimension influencing consumer motivation and behavior. Second, it advances theoretical understanding of how emotions like awe and dominance not only affective states are but also precursors to identity exploration through possible selves. Third, the study addresses the long-standing intention-behavior gap by incorporating both self-reported and behavioral measures (button choice), illustrating how emotional and motivational variables influence actual decisions. Practically, the findings guide marketers, designers, and non-profit organizations in crafting AR experiences that balance interactivity and immersion. Awe-inspiring elements should be thoughtfully integrated to stimulate emotional and aspirational responses, while excessive interactivity may dilute affective engagement. Governmental and educational institutions can also leverage these insights for ethical and impactful AR deployment in consumer-facing

campaigns. By aligning emotional design with identity-driven motivation, this research offers a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing digital consumer experiences across sectors.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE DUAL ROLES OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON SERVICE HETEROGENEITY

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Keywords: Generative AI, Service Heterogeneity, Customization, Service Management, Service Quality

Description: This research examines the implications of generative artificial intelligence for heterogeneity as a service characteristic

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

A review of the literature demonstrates a significant research gap. No research has focused on how a new brand introduction changes inter-tier price competition dynamics using an analytical approach. Since new brands are continually being introduced in the marketplace, examining the impact of such new brand introduction on price competition between brand tiers is vital for developing pricing strategies for existing brands. Our research aims to fill this gap by examining how a new brand introduction impacts price competition between brands in different tiers in the marketplace.

Summary of Findings

This paper explores the concept of service heterogeneity in the context of generative AI, proposes a conceptual framework and research propositions, and delineates future research directions.

Key Contributions

Our article contributes to academia and managerial practice by exploring the transformative impact of generative AI on service heterogeneity. The paper provides a new and comprehensive framework for academia to explore how generative AI introduces new dimensions of variability in service delivery. The research extends existing service management theories by examining the dual role of generative AI in enhancing customization and introducing inconsistency simultaneously. The research propositions and future directions offer a helpful roadmap for scholars to investigate the nuanced effects of AI-driven variability on service quality, customer satisfaction, and operational efficiency. The work contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of how advanced AI technologies can be integrated into service management, building on and adding to the traditional notions of service consistency and customization.

The paper also underscores the importance of managing the inherent variability of AI outputs to maintain service consistency. Real-life examples from industries like marketing, customer service, and healthcare illustrate the practical opportunities and challenges of integrating generative AI into service operations. By addressing these managerial implications, the paper provides a valuable guide for practitioners aiming to leverage the benefits of generative AI while mitigating its risks. This research offers a nuanced view of how generative AI can reshape service heterogeneity in contemporary and traditional industries.

CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION JOURNEY(S)

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Keywords: adoption, consumer technology adoption, consumer journeys, adoption journeys, adoption process.

Description: The study focused on the conceptualization of the consumer technology adoption journey(s), establishing its dimensions, typologies, and characteristics, and developing a novel theory to understand consumer adoption through a journey-based and temporal dynamics lens.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study conceptualizes consumer technology adoption journey(s) and extends the literature's understanding of consumer adoption as a type of consumer journey and a multifaceted concept. Psychological attitude theory and the customer journey framework served as bases for the conceptualization approach, supported by a series of qualitative studies.

Method and Data

To achieve the objectives of conceptualizing consumer technology adoption journeys and developing a typology of such journeys, our research relies on multiple data collection methods: 44 consumers participating across six focus groups, eight in-depth interviews, and thirteen written essays providing approximately a hundred pages of transcripts. A phenomenological approach was used to analyze consumers' lived experiences (Thompson et

al., 1989). This is in conjunction with 21 interviews of academic and industry experts from marketing, consumer behavior, and the technology adoption fields, contributing approximately thirty pages of transcripts.

Summary of Findings

This study presents a journey-based perspective and theoretical framework for understanding consumer adoption, detailing the characteristics of different consumer technology adoption journeys and mapping their corresponding psychological pathways. The findings are presented through four key achievements. *First*, we formulated a comprehensive definition, positing that the consumer technology adoption journey represents a psychological progression toward enhanced cognitive acceptance, positive affective engagement, and the incorporation of new technology-based products into routine consumption behaviors.

Second, we developed and proposed three dimensions—cognitive adoption journey, affective adoption journey, and behavioral adoption journey—as the focal points in the formation of the consumer technology adoption journey. By extracting the concept’s characteristics, we identified the facets and indicators of each dimension.

Third, we identified a robust mechanism of progressive adoption throughout the journey. This mechanism, grounded in the co-construction between the parties, explains how the alignment between consumer psychology and technology evolves over time, ultimately shaping the adoption journey.

Fourth, our data analysis revealed that individuals experience different types of adoption journeys, which can be examined distinctly. This led to the identification of 27 adoption journey types—such as constant learning journey, convenience-driven journey, stickiness-driven journey, collaboration-driven journey, and honeymoon journey—grouped into five clusters: exploration-driven, pragmatic-driven, enjoyment-driven, social and community-oriented, and balance-oriented.

We mapped the psychological journeys people undertake when adopting technologies, based on the sequences of cognitive, affective, and behavioral states. For example, in a constant learning journey, the alignment sequence is typically Cognitive → Affective → Behavioral. This means the psychological alignment begins with curiosity and deliberate information-seeking, which fosters cognitive alignment as the individual develops understanding and clarity. This growing awareness then sparks emotional engagement and excitement about potential outcomes, leading to affective alignment. Energized by this emotional connection, the individual is motivated to act, resulting in trial or exploration and ultimately behavioral alignment through consistent action. Conversely, a convenience-driven journey typically follows a Cognitive → Behavioral → Affective sequence, whereas a stickiness-driven adoption journey more often progresses through a Behavioral → Cognitive → Affective sequence.

Key Contributions

The findings of the study provide several theoretical and managerial contributions. *First*, the study enriches theoretical understanding and practical applications by conceptualizing the consumer technology adoption journey in three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. This perspective expands the scope of adoption beyond purchase to include continued usage and integration into consumption routines. It also explores different types of consumer journeys, challenging the idea of a uniform adoption process.

Second, the study examines the progressive psychological alignment between consumers and technology as a key mechanism in the technology adoption journey. By integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, it provides a comprehensive view of how consumers' evolving psychological states drive adoption. This approach highlights the diversity in consumer adoption and identifies barriers due to misalignments between product attributes and consumer psychological dimensions. It also addresses the role of emotions,

filling a gap in cognitive-focused models, and advances technology adoption research with a dynamic, journey-oriented perspective.

Third, the study contributes to the literature on consumer journeys by emphasizing the importance of temporal dynamics in marketing constructs. It highlights that constructs such as consumer journeys, engagement journeys, and loyalty journeys unfold over time rather than instantaneously. This temporal perspective provides a more realistic understanding of consumer behavior and decision-making processes. The study reinforces that consumer experiences are inherently temporal and argues that consumer behavior and attitudes can be conceptualized as a journey. This perspective offers valuable insights for theoretical development and practical applications, such as developing frameworks and formulating effective strategies.

From the managerial perspective, the results provide valuable insights for marketers, product developers, managers, and policymakers by utilizing diverse adoption journeys to inform the development of effective marketing strategies. It introduces adoption journeys as a novel segmentation tool, enabling the segmentation of consumers across various stages and the creation of tailored marketing strategies. By understanding psychological alignment at different stages, the study aids in the formulation of personalized strategies and the identification of adoption barriers. This approach also enhances consumer journey mapping, identifying critical touchpoints and improving post-adoption support and engagement, thereby potentially increasing customer retention and loyalty.

DORAEMON’S TAKE-COPTER AND DISNEY’S SOARING: INCREASING USE INTENTION FOR FLYING TAXIS VIA IMAGINATION MECHANISMS

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Key Words: flying taxi; imagination; animation; personal innovativeness

Description: Consumers’ interest in *Doraemon’s Take-copter* and *Fantastic Flight Attraction “Soaring”* at Tokyo Disney Resort significantly increases their imagination and perceived usefulness of flying taxis, enhancing their intention to use them.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI 23K12567.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Taking flying taxis as a focal new technology, this study aims to demonstrate the concept of imagination mechanisms on increasing use intention. Research on effective methods to increase consumers’ acceptance of flying taxis is lacking. Consequently, while companies and governments look forward to adopting flying taxis, many potential consumers have contrary views. This study proposes an imagination mechanism as a novel approach to marketing the new technology, flying taxis, to the

public and winning consumers' use intention. In the literature, the applications of the imagination effect are limited to the acquisition of skills and knowledge, especially in education fields. In business, animation that stimulates imagination is being used as a means of storytelling in marketing strategies; but its effects have seldom been examined in academic marketing research. Therefore, to fill the knowledge gap and to contribute knowledge in marketing new technologies, this study answers the following research question: Does the stimulation of imagination by animation (e.g., Doraemon's Take-copter) and theme park immersive attractions (e.g., Fantastic Flight Attraction "Soaring" at Tokyo Disney Resort) increase the intention to use flying taxis?

Method and Data

Since most participants have not taken flying taxis, images that make respondents imagine using flying taxis were presented as stimuli to survey participants. To avoid bias caused by stereotypes toward existing transportation and technology companies, the authors generated a new flying taxi design in the presented stimuli with no brand logo. The background depicts a modern city, where flying taxis are mainly used for intra-city transportation. The research population is limited to residents of the Japanese metropolitan area (i.e., Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama) where Tokyo Disney Resort is located. Data collection of the online survey was conducted in Japan from July 28 to August 1, 2023, and was targeted at 500 people from their 20s to 60s (Mean: 41.116 years, Median: 39 years; standard deviation: 12.941). Of all the participants, 47.4% were men and 52.6% were women. The content of the survey includes demographic information, use intention of flying taxi, perceived usefulness, perceived risk,

imagination, interest in Doraemon, interest in Soaring. Then, the proposed hypotheses were examined using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Summary of Findings

The confirmatory factor analysis model's compatibility was confirmed as follows: CFI=0.937, GFI=0.881, SRMR=0.055, RMSEA=0.076. Moreover, this result exceeds the standard value of Cronbach's alpha of 0.8, average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.5, and composite reliability (CR) of 0.7. Each of the constructs' square roots of AVE were higher than their correlation coefficients with other constructs, demonstrating good discriminant validity. Based on the above, the measures are reliable and valid and can support the next stage of hypothesis testing. The SEM result showed that imagination did not directly impact the intention to use flying taxis. Imagination positively influenced use intention through perceived usefulness. On the other hand, imagination did not significantly affect use intention through perceived risk. Thus, H1 was supported, whereas H2 was rejected. Interest in Doraemon positively impacted imagination, perceived usefulness, and perceived risk. Interest in soaring at Tokyo Disney Resort was positively related to the imagination and perceived usefulness and negatively related to perceived risk. Hence, H3a-c and H4a-c were supported.

H1: Perceived usefulness mediates the relationship between imagination and the intention to use flying taxis.

H2: Perceived risk mediates the relationship between imagination and the intention to use flying taxis.

H3: Interest in Doraemon's Take-Copter is positively related to (H3a) imagination, (H3b) perceived usefulness, and (H3c) perceived risk.

H4: Interest in Soaring at Tokyo Disney Resort is positively related to (H4a) imagination and (H4b) perceived usefulness, and negatively related to (H4c) perceived risk.

Key Contributions

First, we demonstrate a specific marketing communication to increase consumer acceptance of flying taxis via entertainment-generated imagination. In the public transportation industry, efforts to gain consumer understanding are thus essential in launching services. Nevertheless, there is a surprising lack of research on concrete ways to increase consumer acceptance of flying taxis. This study demonstrates a novel perspective to show that animation and theme park attractions contribute to attitudes toward flying taxis, a public service requiring high safety. These entertainment experiences do not provide a complete flying experience. Nonetheless, the restriction of not being able to know the complete performance of flying taxis stimulates curiosity about this subject. Second, we focus on consumers' imagination to increase consumer acceptance of flying taxis and expand the scope of imagination effects to improve their intention to use products. This study introduces the imagination to innovative technology services and demonstrates that consumers' imagination increases the perceived usefulness of flying taxis. It implies that future flying taxi firms can sponsor flying-related rides at theme parks so that consumers can better connect with flying-related businesses with flying-related rides at theme parks, transforming their imagination during an entertainment experience into the perceived usefulness of the promoted flying-related businesses.

DYNAMIC PRICING IN FASHION RETAIL: INCORPORATING SEGMENT LEVEL RESERVATION PRICE

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Keywords: Reservation price, Dynamic price, Brand choice, Modelling & Simulation

Description: A data-driven approach to estimating segment-level reservation prices for optimizing pricing strategies in the fashion apparel industry.

ABSTRACT

This study estimates segment-level reservation prices by applying multiple consumer utility models, under the assumption that purchase decisions are driven by individual reservation prices. Using real-world data from a fashion apparel retailer, the research demonstrates how integrating this model into pricing improves strategic decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

One of the key challenges in revenue management is determining the “right” price for each product line to maximize overall profitability. Companies must strike a good balance between setting prices that capture consumer value and ensuring competitive positioning in the market. Central to this pricing strategy is the concept of the reservation price (RP), which refers to the highest amount a consumer is willing to pay for a specific product or service (Shioda et al. 2007). This concept has been crucial in understanding consumer purchase behavior and shaping competitive pricing strategies (Kohli and Mahajan, 1991). Neglecting the RP can result in suboptimal pricing decisions that undermine profitability and market competitiveness. In recent years, the adoption of dynamic pricing has expanded into retail and other sectors, where companies must possess detailed

consumer insights and the capability to adjust prices efficiently (Elmaghraby and Keskinocak, 2003).

In fashion retail, dynamic pricing faces unique challenges due to the interplay between price and the fashion level of products. Unlike traditional products, high fashion garments are heavily influenced by style, color, and material. These elements not only drive their initial market value but also contribute to a decline in value over time as trends evolve (Chen et al. 2019). As a result, fashion retailers must frequently revisit pricing strategies to address diminishing demand and inventory backlogs. Incorporating dynamic pricing strategies tailored to consumer demand enables apparel retailers to remain competitive while maximizing sales and profitability. This paper estimates consumer reservation prices using utility-based models in fashion retail, illustrating their application to complex pricing decisions and discussing broader implications.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Since the 1980s, pricing research has focused on behavioral aspects, with consumer choice models suggesting that individuals choose brands maximizing their surplus - the gap between reservation price and actual price. Understanding RP is crucial, as they vary across segments, requiring advanced models to capture their theoretical and practical implications. Pricing models address both single- and multi-product scenarios by aligning prices with segment-level reservation prices. While single-product models focus on surplus effectively, multi-product models balance pricing consistency with varying consumer preferences and sensitivities (Shioda et al., 2007).

Dynamic pricing has become essential for firms to adapt to market dynamics and consumer behavior, often using RP distributions to set optimal prices (Kohli and Mahajan, 1991). In uncertain demand scenarios, such as limited inventory settings, firms can maximize revenue by treating each consumer's RP as a random variable influencing purchase likelihood. This approach

is particularly relevant in fashion retail, where demand is shaped by seasonality, fast-changing trends, and shifting consumer preferences. High fashion items lose appeal over time, leading to declining demand and inventory backlogs (Chen et al. 2019). Additionally, consumer uncertainty further complicates RP estimation, requiring flexible pricing models (Wang et al., 2007). Despite its relevance, the integration of RP models into dynamic pricing strategies in fashion retail remains limited.

Recent studies have begun to explore the potential of dynamic pricing in fashion retail, particularly in addressing the challenges posed by declining fashion levels and shifting consumer preferences. Chen et al. (2019) proposed a dynamic pricing framework that incorporates experiential services and design enhancements to maintain product value over time. Such approaches highlight the need for holistic pricing strategies that address both consumer-specific and market-level factors. However, the application of RP models in these contexts remains underexplored, presenting a significant opportunity for further research. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on pricing by examining the role of RPs in dynamic pricing strategies, with a focus on the fashion retail sector. By leveraging insights from existing research and applying a share-of-surplus model, this paper seeks to address key gaps in understanding how RPs can be effectively utilized to optimize pricing decisions. Insights from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of dynamic pricing strategies for fashion retailers.

METHODOLOGY

This paper estimates segment-level reservation prices for fashion apparel using transaction and demographic data. Given the fast-paced market, we adopt RP models over traditional methods to better capture dynamic customer behavior. We established two key assumptions – first, we can identify customers with similar RPs based on the data and second, RPs remain stable throughout

the estimation period. Our approach involves selecting a suitable RP based choice model using transaction data, along with product selection, customer segmentation, and parameter estimation.

We outline each of these steps in detail in the following sections.

Reservation Price-Based Choice Model

Our approach for estimating reservation price can incorporate a variety of RP-based choice models. In this study, we adopted the choice models described in Shioda et al. (2007), such as uniform model and share-of-surplus model, as they are simplistic in nature with the assumption that customers' product choices are determined entirely by their RP. However, we are not limited in terms of including a more complex model, provided the RP term is static. In the uniform model, each segment selects products based on a uniform distribution, considering only those products with a nonnegative surplus.

In contrast, in the share-of-surplus model, the purchase probability increases with the surplus - higher surplus leads to a larger fraction of the segment buying the product. Specifically, the likelihood of a customer purchasing a product is influenced by both their RP and the product's price, and this relationship can be described by a monotonically increasing function between probability and surplus.

Uniform Model: Probability that segment i buys product j is given by

$$Pr_{ij} = \frac{R_{ij}\beta_{ij}}{\sum_{k=1}^m R_{ik}\beta_{ik}}, \text{ if } \sum_{j=1}^m R_{ij}\beta_{ij} \geq 1 \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

Here, Pr_{ij} is the probability that segment i will choose product j , R_{ij} is RP of segment i for product j , p_j is the price of product j , β_{ij} is a decision variable which equals to 1, iff $R_{ij} - p_j \geq 0$, otherwise 0.

Share-of-surplus Model: Probability that segment i buys product j is given by

$$Pr_{ij} = \frac{(R_{ij} - p_j)\beta_{ij}}{\sum_k (R_{ik} - p_k)\beta_{ik}} \quad (\text{Equation 2})$$

assuming that $\sum_k (R_{ik} - p_k)\beta_{ik} > 0$, for all $i = 1, \dots, n$

Product Selection

We focus on seasonal, high-fashion products, where consumers perceive value for a specific season. Therefore, the assumption that reservation price (RP) remains static is valid for the duration of that season.

Seasonal Products: We manually assign a ‘season’ to products based on their sale patterns during specific months, aligned with seasonal peaks according to the fashion calendar of the respective geography. If sales of a product in *Feb-Mar* account for a significant portion (greater than a threshold) of its annual sales, it is labelled as an Autumn/Winter product. Similarly, other seasons are Spring/Summer, Pre-Winter, Cruise/Resort are assigned. The threshold value is not universal and varies depending on the region and demography. For our analysis, a threshold of 60% of annual sales was used.

High Fashion-Value Products: Fashion value is a metric designed to gauge the trendiness or popularity of a product based on its sales performance within a specific timeframe. Higher fashion value is assigned to products with higher transaction volumes shortly after their launch, assuming that increased sales reflect greater market demand and fashion relevance. The fashion value is given by:

$$FV_a = \frac{S(a)_{t60}}{S(a)_{t360}} * \frac{S(a)_{t60}}{S(H)_{t60}} = \frac{(S(a)_{t60})^2}{S(a)_{t360} * S(H)_{t60}} \quad (\text{Equation 3})$$

where, $S(a)_{t60}$ - total sale of product a in first 60 days, $S(a)_{t360}$ - total sales of product a in first 60 days, $S(H)_{t60}$ - total sales of the highest selling product H in the first 60 days, where products H and a belongs to the same product evoke set.

Product Grouping

We perform product clustering/grouping to generate a list of evoke sets (a set of similar alternatives) for consumers. Product attributes such as MRP, category/type, color are typically present in the product data may not be sufficient for a retailer with larger number products and further refinement is necessary to create a more realistic evoke set. In our data, clustering on key attributes resulted in about 30 products per evoke set. While manageable, smaller groups are preferred to minimize estimation errors when generating RPs at the customer segment level.

LLM Generated Features: To create smaller, more meaningful sub-groups, we turn to the additional key attributes that are present in product descriptions. For instance, consider the following description – “Shirt in a cotton weave with a *button-down collar*, classic front and yoke at the back. *Open chest pocket*, *short sleeves* with sewn-in turn-ups, and a *rounded hem*. *Regular Fit* - a classic fit with good room for movement and a gently tapered waist to create a comfortable, *tailored silhouette*”. Many relevant attributes can be identified from this, such as:

- *Fit*: “Loose fit”, “Regular fit”, “Relaxed fit”, “Slim fit”
- *Sleeve-length*: “Long sleeve”, “Short sleeve”
- *Collar type*: “Button-down”, “Straight”, “Club”, “Cut-away”
- *Style*: “Shirt jacket”, “Slit”, “tailored silhouette”
- *Pattern*: “Checked”, “Patterned”, “Solid color”, “Spotted”, “Striped”

To automate this process of attribute extraction, we use a LLM(GPT-3.5-turbo). The LLM model is able to accurately identify ~80% of the relevant features, which is used for creating smaller and more refined product groups. We apply a clustering technique - KPrototypes clustering - combining both the extracted product attributes (fit, style, sleeve-length, etc.) and available attributes (MRP, color group, and product type). This method allows us to handle both categorical

and numerical data effectively, which ensures that the resulting sub-groups are more smaller and more targeted evoke sets, leading to more accurate RP estimation with reduced estimation errors.

Customer Segmentation

Customer segmentation (grouping customers having similar RP) presents a significant challenge, especially when limited customer data is available. In this study, we leverage three customer factors - age, synthetic income, and purchase delay, to create customer segments. Additional data would help in creating refined segments having similar RP.

Purchase Delay: the average time from the product launch to the customer's actual purchase date. It provides insight into customer urgency and decision-making patterns. A customer who purchases early at a higher price is expected to have a greater willingness to pay.

Synthetic Income: Since we lack direct income data, we generate income estimates based on baseline value and adjustment factors. A baseline annual income of \$25,000 for all customers, which serves as a normalized starting point. Two key adjustments to this base income are:

- a. Average MRP of products: This adjustment reflects whether customers tend to buy products that are more expensive or cheaper than the average for their category. Customers purchasing higher MRP items are likely to have higher incomes.

$$mrp_{adj} = \frac{mrp}{Avg.MRP \text{ for the evoke set}} - 1 \quad (Equation 4)$$

- b. Actual Price Paid: This indicates the average price the customer actually paid, which can indicate their willingness to pay or reliance on discounts.

$$price\_paid_{adj} = \frac{price \text{ paid}}{Avg.price \text{ for the evoke set}} - 1 \quad (Equation 5)$$

Therefore, we estimated the synthetic income by:

$$income_{synth} = income_{base} \left(1 + \beta_{mrp} * mrp_{adj} + \beta_{price\_paid} * price\_paid_{adj} \right) \quad (Equation 6)$$

where beta factors, β_{mrp} , β_{price_paid} are 0.75 and 0.25 respectively, indicating that more weight is given to MRP than the actual price paid after applying promotions discounts/deals customer might find. Using synthetic income, purchase delay, and age data, we executed a clustering algorithm (K-means) to segment the customers into n clusters. The optimal number of clusters, n , is determined based on the silhouette score, which measures how well data points are grouped within their assigned clusters compared to data points in other clusters to identify the most suitable number of segments.

Estimation Problem

Let's assume that $B_i, i = 1, \dots, m$ represents the product evoke set of a customer segment i . The price of product j for segment i is denoted by p_{ij} . Now, using transaction data, we can determine the customer fractions f_{ij} , which represent the proportion of customers within segment i who purchased product j , where $j \in B_i$. The fractions should be proportional to the probabilistic choice given by the customer choice model (i.e., share-of-surplus model).

$$\hat{f}_{ij} = \frac{R_{ij} - p_{ij}}{\sum_{k \in B_i} R_{ik} - p_{ik}} \quad (\text{Equation 7})$$

Thus, we can fit the unknown Reservation price R_{ij} present in the choice model. The problem can be formulated as optimization problem, where the goal is to find the values of R_{ij} for $j = 1, \dots, m$ that minimize the following objective function, for each customer segment i :

$$\min \sum_{j \in B_i} \left(f_{ij} - \frac{R_{ij} - p_{ij}}{\sum_{k \in B_i} R_{ik} - p_{ik}} \right)^2 \quad (\text{Equation 8})$$

$$\text{Subject to: } R_{ij} - p_{ij} \geq 0$$

$$\sum_{k \in B_i} R_{ik} - p_{ik} \geq \delta$$

$$\delta > 0$$

The above optimization problem is solved using a *non-linear optimization* tool (Interior Point OPTimizer, available in python IPOPT package).

Dataset

This study uses the publicly available H&M Personalized Fashion Recommendations dataset (source: Kaggle dataset¹), covering transactions from September 2018 to September 2020. The data spans five main product groups - Ladies wear, Baby, Menswear, Sport, and divided with further segmentation by product type, department and index. The daily transaction volume ranges from 25,000 to 80,000. For our analysis, we focus on ‘Shirts’ within the Menswear category.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

We estimate the RP for customer segments across different product clusters (evoked sets). Each customer in one segment may purchase different products. The below figure (refer Fig. 1a) illustrates the average RP (in blue) for various product clusters alongside the average price paid for these products (in red).

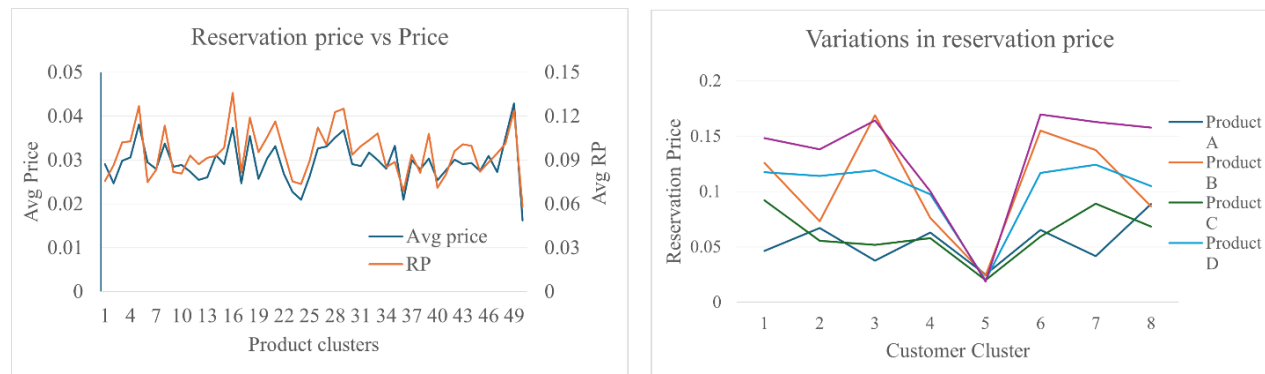


Fig. 1a. Reservation price vs price (left), 1b. Reservation price variation (right)

The RP curve closely tracks the average price paid, with a multiplicative factor of approximately 2.84. Furthermore, we observe how RP for products within the same evoked set differs across segments. Fig. 1b displays the RP of these five products (depicted in different colors). Some

¹ <https://www.kaggle.com/competitions/h-and-m-personalized-fashion-recommendations>

customer segments (4 and 5) exhibit relatively stable RPs, while others display significant variability in the RP within the evoke set. This could be of particular interest to retailers, as it suggests that even within a product cluster with similar items, certain segments perceive some products as more valuable than others, highlighting differences in consumer preferences.

Validation

Given that we made several approximations, both in the choice model and in the specification of the RP, we want to assess the estimation errors and validate the resulting parameters. For this purpose, we first predict the fractions $\hat{f}_{ij}$ in equation 7, using estimated RP values. Then, we measure the distance of these predictions from results obtain from data through Mean Absolute Error (MAE) root mean squared error (RMSE) which is $\sqrt{(\hat{f}_{ij} - f_{ij})^2}$. The prediction error values for all clusters fall within an acceptable range (refer Table 1) indicating that the approximations and estimated parameters are reasonably accurate.

	Overall	Product Cluster1	Product Cluster2	Product Cluster3	Product Cluster4
MAE	0.017	0.007	0.026	0.016	0.03
RMSE	0.027	0.011	0.04	0.023	0.04

Table 1. Prediction accuracy - MAE and RMSE values

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Academically, the study extends the body of knowledge on RP modelling by bridging theoretical constructs with practical applications. It introduces an innovative use of transaction data combined with machine learning techniques for attribute extraction, thereby advancing traditional RP estimation methods. The research validates the share-of-surplus and uniform models in a fashion retail context, providing empirical evidence of their applicability and reliability. By emphasizing the dynamics of high-fashion, seasonal products, the study opens new avenues for research into

pricing strategies in industries with short product life cycles and rapid value depreciation. Furthermore, the framework's adaptability across various market conditions and industries underscores its scholarly relevance, offering a foundation for future studies on dynamic pricing and consumer behaviour in complex environments. This study provides a significant contribution to the practice of pricing and revenue management by presenting a robust framework for estimating RP at the customer segment level. Unlike traditional RP models, this approach leverages readily available transaction and demographic data, enabling faster and more practical implementation in dynamic market environments. The methodology equips managers with tools to assess the value of attributes, products, and customer segments, facilitating informed pricing decisions that are tailored to consumer preferences. Moreover, the integration of behavioural factors, such as purchase delay and synthetic income, provides deeper insights into customer behaviour, enabling personalized pricing strategies that maximize revenue while minimizing estimation errors. These insights are particularly critical for industries characterized by high variability in consumer preferences and product life cycles, such as fashion retail.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In the field of revenue management, this study attempts to estimate RPs at the customer segment level which can be applied to dynamic pricing strategies in the fashion retail context. By integrating transaction and demographic data, this RP estimation method is faster and scalable. The application of probabilistic choice models, such as the Share-of-Surplus Model, demonstrates how pricing strategies can be aligned with consumer preferences to maximize revenue (Shioda et al., 2007). Additionally, the focus on seasonal, high-fashion products highlights the framework's adaptability to industries with short product life cycles. Validation metrics, including MAE and RMSE, ensure the reliability of the model for real-world decision-making, while the integration of

behavioral factors, such as purchase delay and synthetic income, enhances its practical utility for informed pricing decisions. Future research could extend the framework by incorporating additional behavioral indicators and contextual factors, such as time spent evaluating competing offers and transaction timing and location, to provide deeper insights into consumer behavior. Expanding the model to analyze cross-category interactions and employing advanced machine learning techniques could further enhance its predictive power. These developments would not only enhance the theoretical understanding of consumer behavior but also provide actionable insights for practitioners in dynamic and competitive markets.

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E-LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL B2B SALES: CHALLENGES AND COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR SALES MANAGERS

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Keywords: sales management, e-leadership, international B2B sales, communication competence

Description: The paper explores the challenges of leading remotely working people in international B2B sales, and the requirements for sales managers' communication competence

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sales managers' effective use of digital communication to coordinate increased remote work and interact online with employees and customers has become a necessity. In this mode, called electronic leadership (e-leadership), digital communication may cause challenges, such as lack of clarity, miscommunication, and excessive complexity, especially when interacting with people from various cultures. To manage and overcome the challenges, e-leaders' interpersonal communication competence is crucial. However, sales managers' perceptions of these challenges and the required competence have not been explored in marketing research. Thus,

in this study, we aim to shed light on these two issues when leading remotely working sales teams. We set the following research questions:

RQ 1. What types of challenges do sales managers face when e-leading remotely working sales teams?

RQ 2. What kinds of ICC do sales managers perceive as necessary for overcoming challenges and leading remotely working sales teams?

Method and Data

In this qualitative study, we used an abductive research approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, 2014). Data was collected through interviews with sales managers involved in international B2B sales and leading remote sales teams. Interviewees met five criteria: 1) working as a sales manager, 2) leading remote teams, 3) conducting international B2B sales, 4) having e-leadership experience, and 5) working in the IT sector. The IT sector was selected due to its pioneering role in virtual work and e-leadership (Kunda, 2006; Salin and Koponen, 2024).

We conducted 26 interviews with sales managers from 14 IT companies between June 2021 and May 2022. Interviews lasted 38 to 85 minutes (average 57), totaling nearly 25 hours and 475 transcribed pages. Participants' job titles included sales manager, global sales director, and account director. Their ages ranged from 29 to 61 (average 46), with 14 years of leadership and 8.5 years of e-leadership experience on average.

We conducted theory-driven theme analysis using Atlas.ti. Two researchers independently coded the data. First-order codes were inductively formed; second-order categories were linked to literature on ICC (Spitzberg, 2015; Spitzberg and Cupach, 2011), sales

communication competence (Koponen et al., 2019), and AI-integrated leadership (Koponen et al., 2025).

Summary of Findings

Our findings indicate that the main challenges of e-leadership are difficulties in building trust via digital channels, time-management issues, intercultural communication barriers, and insufficient engagement through digital communication.

We identified four core components of interpersonal communication competence (ICC), which were affective, cognitive, behavioral communication, and sales acumen. Together, these components form the foundation of professional sales management (Koponen et al., 2019) and are therefore essential for sales managers to effectively address e-leadership challenges. While our findings align with previous studies' results, behavioral communication, emphasizing communication skills, differs in the digital work context. Leading remote sales teams requires both traditional competencies (such as motivation to communicate, cultural sensitivity, leadership skills, and strategic understanding of B2B sales) and new skills (including online presentation, remote meeting leadership, and task-oriented team communication).

Statement of Key Contributions

First, while some researchers in the sales and marketing field have investigated virtual sales teams (Badrinarayanan et al., 2011; London and Lucas, 2012; Rapp et al., 2010), we are among the first to pay attention to sales managers' perceptions of leading remotely working sales teams. Our findings produce a new understanding of the sales field, since previous studies that have examined e-leadership challenges (Kulshreshtha and Sharma, 2021; Van Wart et al., 2019) have not focused specifically on sales management. Although the importance of building trust (Savolainen, 2014), and challenges such as communication overflow (Van Wart

et al., 2019), have been recognized, problems related to intercultural communication have not been highlighted.

Second, we provide fresh insights into sales managers' ICC requirements. According to our findings, the sales managers' ICC consists of four key components: affective communication, cognitive communication, behavioral communication, and sales acumen. Although we have identified components similar to those highlighted in previous studies (see Koponen et al., 2019), communication skills differ due to the digital work context. Therefore, we claim that leading remotely working salespeople requires sales managers to possess not only traditional competencies but also new types of communication skills.

EFFICIENT EMOTIONAL BITS

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Keywords: Emotions; Cognition; Social Media; Information Theory.

Description: Users in social media are cognitive and emotionally efficient because the amount of information (bits) they convey in text messages depends both on the emotion to transmit and the relative prevalence of that emotion in the social media platform.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Do social media users transmit more information for certain emotions, and do they do so efficiently?

Method and Data

Data was collected from openly available sources. The final set had 922,209 tweets, 224,512 Facebook messages, and 5,842 messages from economy blogs/news. For computational efficiency, we randomly sampled 3,000 text instances per dataset. All data sets had emotional valence labels. Each data set had a different source for the labels,

humans or AI. The statistical analyses include data set identity as a fixed effect to control for this heterogeneity. The Bayesian regression dependent variable was amount of information on each message (bits) and explanatory variables included emotional valence and concentration of that emotional valence in a particular social media. The Bayesian posterior estimates for the β s were obtained with the Python package Bambi, with the default weakly informative priors and normal likelihood.

We estimated the amount of information on each tweet using single word frequencies. Shannon entropy is the average surprisal in the message m (in bits). Higher entropies are more surprising messages i.e. the words are less frequent, or tweets are longer, and carry more bits. We estimated $p(\text{word})$ using the unigram frequencies from an external twitter data set representative of general conversations. For robustness, also with the unigram frequencies derived from the Google Web Trillion Word Corpus.

Summary of Findings

For twitter, negative emotions have the highest number of bits, followed by positive emotions, and then neutral emotions. Critically, higher concentrations of a valence in a twitter data set led to a diminishing effect of such valence in the number of bits in the message. This is efficient according to the efficient coding hypothesis, as fewer bits should be devoted to high-probability events, while more bits should be devoted to low-probability events.

The adaptation looked efficient in other social media too. In Facebook negative and negative posts have the highest number of bits. Previous research reports that Facebook is mostly positive and negative comments. Regarding economic news, neutral posts have the

highest entropy and previous findings indicate that economic news are concentrated around neutral comments.

Overall, users are being efficient in the sense of adapting their information transmission to increase their signal according to the context, full of similar emotional noise.

Key Contributions

We report that social media users transmit varying amounts of informational bits depending on the emotional content of their messages. Furthermore, this variation is influenced by the distributional properties of emotions on social media platforms. This phenomenon aligns with the efficient coding hypothesis where information processing is optimized relative to the context: that the receiver reads a message in a giant haystack of text.

Traditionally, social media research has prioritized understanding emotional expression and sentiment dynamics. However, this work pivots towards an analysis of the cognitive properties inherent in social media communication, focusing on the informational bits encoded in unstructured text. By examining the interplay between cognitive processes and emotional distribution, we introduce a novel lens to study digital communication.

Our findings have implications for marketers. The distribution of emotions in a platform matter. Users are not simply driven by their emotions; rather, they deploy cognitive resources efficiently. Communication strategies should align with user cognition and specific emotional tendencies in social networks.

EXPLORING THE GENDERED BRAIN: EEG ANALYSIS OF ATTENTION IN ADVERTISING STIMULI

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Keywords: gender differences, EEG, advertising, attention

Description: The study investigates how gender influences attentional brain responses to text and graphic elements in advertising using EEG measurements.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

1. How do gender differences influence attentional responses to text intertitles in advertising as measured by EEG?
2. Does emotional valence (positive vs. negative) of text intertitles differentially affect attention in male and female viewers?
3. How do males and females differ in their attentional engagement with graphic intertitles

in advertising?

4. Does the emotional valence of graphic intertitles modulate attentional responses differently between genders?

Method and Data

This study investigated gender differences in neural responses to advertising stimuli using EEG. One hundred participants (50 males, 50 females) aged 17 to 36 from Taiwan were recruited via university social media. Participants were screened for mental health and normal or corrected vision and hearing. They received instructions on EEG procedures and gave informed consent. Custom ads promoting French learning included four intertitle types: positive text, negative text, positive graphic, and negative graphic, designed to evoke varied cognitive and emotional responses while minimizing brand bias.

EEG data were recorded using a wireless 32-channel system with electrodes placed according to the international 10-20 system and mastoid references, maintaining impedance below 20 k Ω . Signals were sampled at 500 Hz and preprocessed with MATLAB and EEGLAB, including filtering, down-sampling to 250 Hz, and epoch extraction aligned with intertitle onset. Event-related potential (ERP) analysis and time-frequency plots across theta, alpha, beta, and gamma bands were generated for frontal, central, parietal, and occipital regions. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests ($p < 0.05$) assessed gender differences in neural activity. This approach enabled robust evaluation of gender-specific attentional and emotional processing in advertising contexts.

Summary of Findings

The study reveals significant gender differences in neural responses to advertising stimuli,

highlighting distinct attentional engagement with text and graphic intertitles. Females showed stronger activation in the left frontal and parietal regions, particularly in response to text intertitles with negative emotional content, indicating heightened cognitive and emotional processing. This activity was predominantly reflected in beta wave frequencies, associated with focused attention and decision-making. Conversely, males exhibited greater occipital and central activation when exposed to graphic intertitles, demonstrating a preference for visually dynamic and spatially complex stimuli. Beta wave dominance in these regions further supported their enhanced visual engagement. Notably, negative graphic intertitles elicited increased parietal and occipital responses in females, suggesting that combining emotional framing with visual elements intensifies female attentional focus. These findings support the use of gender-tailored advertising strategies: emotionally charged, text-based content for females and visually striking graphics for males. The results contribute to neuromarketing by identifying neural markers of gender-specific attention and cognitive processing, offering practical implications for designing more effective, audience-specific marketing campaigns.

Key Contributions

This research offers novel insights into gender-based neural differences in response to advertising stimuli, addressing a significant gap in marketing literature. Using EEG technology, it objectively captures real-time cognitive and emotional engagement with textual and visual advertising elements, moving beyond traditional self-reported methods. Findings reveal that males respond more strongly to visually dynamic content, while females show greater engagement with emotionally framed, text-based content. This advances neuromarketing theory by elucidating how gender influences the processing of advertising stimuli.

The study's practical implications extend to various stakeholders. For-profit firms can tailor advertising strategies by emphasizing emotional messaging for female consumers and visually engaging content for males. Non-profit organizations may enhance public awareness campaigns by adopting gender-specific approaches, such as emotional storytelling for females and data-driven visuals for males. Government agencies can improve public service messaging effectiveness by considering these gender-based cognitive and emotional preferences.

By bridging neuroscience and marketing practice, this research provides evidence-based strategies for developing targeted, inclusive, and impactful campaigns. It demonstrates how integrating scientific insights into marketing can enhance effectiveness across commercial, social, and governmental sectors, contributing valuable knowledge to both academic and applied fields.

HIDDEN FEES TO OPEN BOOKS: IMPACT OF PRICE OBFUSCATION RELATED DISCLOSURES ON PRICING AND DEMAND

Extended Abstract

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Research Question

Price obfuscation - concealing part of the total cost until late in the purchase process, increases consumer search costs and can distort competition. In platform-based sharing economy markets, hidden fees such as cleaning charges are common. While transparency policies aim to reduce such practices, theoretical predictions are mixed: greater price visibility may intensify competition and lower prices, or it may enable tacit collusion that increases prices. This study asks: How do anti-obfuscation price transparency policies affect pricing and demand in platform markets, and do these effects differ for sellers who previously engaged in obfuscation?

Method and Data

We exploit Airbnb's November 2022 policy change requiring total price disclosure in search results. Using VRBO—a comparable platform unaffected by the policy—as a control, we implement a difference-in-differences (DiD) design with inverse probability treatment weighting to address platform heterogeneity. The dataset includes weekly panel data for over 78,000 short-term rental listings in Texas (July 2022–June 2023), covering prices, occupancy, amenities, ratings, and fee structures. We estimate the average treatment effect of transparency on prices and demand, and assess heterogeneity by prior obfuscation (presence of cleaning fees).

Summary of Findings

Transparency increased average weekly prices by \$5–\$7 per listing and reduced occupancy by ~1.1 percentage points. Hosts who previously charged cleaning fees raised prices by an additional \$3.95 post-policy, consistent with tacit collusion facilitated by increased price observability. Demand effects were heterogeneous: listings with partitioned fees saw smaller occupancy declines, suggesting consumers may accept some cost components as justified. The results highlight that transparency can unintentionally consolidate seller pricing power, undermining competitive benefits.

Key contributions

Theoretically, our results bridge marketing, economics, and information systems perspectives on price transparency. We show that transparency interventions in highly observable platform markets can trigger strategic seller coordination, undermining the competitive benefits transparency is expected to deliver. From a behavioral standpoint, consumers' acceptance of certain add-on fees (e.g., cleaning charges) moderates the price–demand relationship, aligning with theories of price justification and fairness perceptions.

Managerially and for policymakers, the findings caution against one-size-fits-all transparency mandates. While the intention is to improve fairness and reduce search costs, transparency can also consolidate pricing power among sellers, harming consumer welfare. Regulatory designs must account for platform structure, seller observability, and heterogeneity in price partitioning practices. Our work contributes one of the first causal, platform-level evaluations of anti-obfuscation policy, revealing its nuanced, context-dependent effects on both prices and demand.

Keywords: price obfuscation, price transparency, sharing economy, consumer welfare, tacit collusion

IDENTIFYING DRIVERS AND BARRIERS OF IN-STORE TECHNOLOGIES ADOPTION: INSIGHTS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Keywords: In-store technology adoption, Customer Behaviour in Retail, Drivers and Barriers, Retail Innovation, Technology Acceptance in Physical Retail

Description: This paper explores the drivers and barriers influencing consumer adoption of in-store technologies in Indian retail malls through a qualitative, theory-driven lens using Behavioral Reasoning Theory.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: With the growing technologization of the '*Bricks-and-Mortar Stores*', an understanding of how consumers relate to In-store technologies (ISTs) has become imperative for marketers and retailers (Bonfanti *et al.*, 2023; Riegger *et al.*, 2021). Although tools such as smart mirrors, digital kiosks, and self-checkouts have seen wider implementations, mixed consumer reactions still prevail (Grewal *et al.*, 2023). Some consumers readily embrace them, while others hesitate or outright reject the adoption. Existing literature primarily focuses on aspects like technological readiness or perceived usefulness from the standpoint of different theories like TAM and UTAUT (van de Sanden *et al.*, 2022; Wolpert & Roth, 2020). However, these studies are missing or overlooking the reasons for acceptance or rejection of technology that reside on a subtle psychological, symbolic, and contextual dimension in a physical retail setting (Alexander & Varley, 2025; Botschen & Wegerer, 2017). Therefore, this study tries to fill this gap by applying *Behavioral Reasoning Theory* (BRT) to discern the reasons for and against the acceptance of ISTs from the consumers' viewpoint. The guiding question of this study is: *What are the key drivers and*

barriers that influence consumers' adoption of in-store technologies in Indian retail malls, and how do these factors vary across emotional, symbolic, functional, and risk-based dimensions?

Method and Data: The qualitative paradigm was adopted for this study as it aims to develop a nuanced theoretical framework comprising the drivers and barriers of ISTs adoption in physical retail shops. Based on the BRT, the study aims at identifying both the "reasons for" and "reasons against" through consumers' narratives and lived experiences. For this, the researchers conducted 30 in-depth and semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling in 11 Indian cities, including Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Bhubaneswar, etc. This study involves those customers who have recently engaged with various digital technologies in shopping malls (e.g., smart mirrors, self-checkout, digital kiosks). Interviews were conducted for 30 to 40 minutes. Thematic analysis was applied to the data analysis, supported by [Corbin and Strauss \(1990\)](#) framework: open, axial, and selective coding. Two researchers coded the data independently to maintain reliability and minimize potential bias ([Hazée et al., 2025; Miles, 1994; Saldaña, 2021](#)). This rigorous qualitative method led to the identification of seven drivers (e.g., symbolic value, perceived autonomy) and five barrier categories (e.g., privacy risk, functional complexity), thus yielding rich insights into the underpinning cognitive and affective states impacting IST adoption behavior.

Summary of Findings: The findings suggest a complex consumer adoption scenario of ISTs in Indian retail malls, consisting of psychological, functional, social, and symbolic factors. A thematic analysis of 30 consumer interviews resulted in seven key drivers: *symbolic value, emotional engagement, functional convenience, uniqueness, social value, sustainability orientation, and perceived autonomy*. The consumers were attracted by ISTs because of their purely modern and tech-savvy image, further offering opportunities for personalized experiences and the injection of control into their shopping journey ([El Abed & Castro-Lopez, 2024](#)). Many

reported feelings of accomplishment, entertainment, and emotional attachment to the brand while using smart devices like self-checkouts, smart mirrors, and AR/VR interfaces.

The study also identifies a set of barriers to IST acceptance. Participants identified *Privacy Risks*, *Financial Risks*, *Functional Risks*, *Social Discomfort*, and *Psychological Concerns* as major obstacles. According to participants' views, the data can be misused, the system can malfunction, the device can lessen human interactions, it can be a fear of social judgment, and lastly, there may be a lack of trust in technology itself. In short, a significant emotional-cognitive tension shaped adoption behavior (Roe et al., 2022). Interestingly, two scarcely investigated constructs, i.e., sustainability value and perceived autonomy, emerged as novel factors toward IST acceptance and extended the extant technology adoption models. Altogether, the findings demonstrate that the decision to adopt IST is not only a matter of reason but also one rooted deeply in consumers' symbolic identities, emotional needs, and perceived technological risks.

Statement of Key Contributions: This study contributes several important aspects from the theoretical and practical perspectives of retail marketing and consumer technology adoption. Theoretically, the BRT is induced into the retail technology context, providing a two-sided perspective of drivers ("reasons for") and barriers ("reasons against") to IST adoption. Prior research has primarily oriented itself around models such as TAM and UTAUT, which contemplate rational and functional dimensions (Davis et al., 2024; Legris et al., 2003). But this study brings symbolic, emotional, and psychological reasoning behind consumer acceptance and resistance, and therefore offers a holistic view of retail technology behavior. Moreover, this study proposes two new constructs (sustainability and perceived autonomy) as emerging drivers of IST adoption. These findings further deepen the understanding of consumer motivations in tech-enabled shopping environments and open a new scholarly path for research.

From a practical perspective, the paper provides practical guidelines to retail and mall operators by identifying six key value drivers as well as five blocks of risk-based barriers that inhibit IST adoption. These findings will ultimately inform marketers on how to design interfaces that resonate emotionally with consumers, making them feel secure and granting them autonomy. The study provides practitioners with a human-engineering approach toward the digital-transformation effort on brick-and-mortar retail, which is more aligned with consumer expectations and concerns.

Reference: “References are available upon request.”

MEASURED MOVES: UNVEILING USER RESTRAINT IN CRYPTO AIRDROP PARTICIPATION

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Keywords: Cryptocurrency Marketing Tactics; Airdrops; Decentralized Finance; Investor Attention; Incentives; User Heterogeneity.

Description: This paper exploits the quasi-experimental assignment created by Uniswap's September 2020 retroactive airdrop to show that token giveaways spur short-lived, low-risk experimentation rather than sustained economic commitment, with responses shaped by experience and attention.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper investigates how users of a decentralized exchange respond to a large, unexpected token airdrop, and which mechanisms influence that response. Using the September 2020 retroactive UNI airdrop by Uniswap, I ask: (i) Does receiving an airdrop alter trading frequency (breadth) and trade value (depth) on the platform? (ii) Are these effects transitory or persistent? (iii) How do wallet age (as a proxy for blockchain experience), token-based governance participation, and platform salience (proxied by search intensity) moderate post-airdrop behavior? While popular narratives portray airdrops as triggering speculative frenzies, there is limited causal evidence on their true behavioral impact. This study addresses this gap by

comparing near-identical users separated only by an unannounced eligibility cutoff, leveraging naturally occurring variation to draw credible inferences.

Method and Data

The empirical setting is the September 2020 Uniswap UNI token airdrop, which distributed 400 tokens (worth about USD 1,200) to any Ethereum wallet that had interacted with Uniswap prior to 00:00 UTC on September 1, 2020. Eligibility was not pre-announced, creating a sharp cutoff that allows for a quasi-experimental design. I construct a panel of 23,424 unique Ethereum wallets that first interacted with Uniswap within ± 3 days of the cutoff, observed weekly from mid-September 2020 to October 2023 (~478,000 wallet-weeks). Primary outcomes are: (i) **ACTIVITY**—log count of weekly swaps; and (ii) **SPENDING**—log weekly USD value of swaps. The treatment is a binary indicator for airdrop receipt. I estimate average treatment effects using inverse-probability-weighted regression adjustment (IPWRA), controlling for wallet balances, transaction counts, returns, gas fees, liquidity provision, and platform-level ETH price changes, liquidity turnover, and daily active users. Standard errors are clustered at the wallet level. Robustness checks include narrowing the window to ± 2 days, excluding wallets created after a competing token launch (SushiSwap), and using alternative functional forms.

Summary of Findings

The results show that receiving the airdrop increases trading frequency by roughly 4–5% per week but does not increase, and may slightly decrease, the total dollar value of trades. This suggests that recipients respond with exploratory, low-value transactions rather than committing significant capital. Effects are concentrated in the first year post-airdrop, after which behavior converges to that of nonrecipients. User heterogeneity is substantial: less-experienced wallets

exhibit short bursts of high-frequency, low-value trading, while experienced wallets trade less frequently but at higher value per transaction. Spikes in platform salience, measured by Google Trends, stimulate increased activity primarily among nonrecipients close to the cutoff, consistent with attention-induced trading and informational cascades. Governance participation does not significantly deepen engagement, challenging the assumption that symbolic ownership translates into sustained platform use.

Key Contributions

This paper contributes to the economics of digital platforms by offering one of the first user-level causal analyses of a large-scale crypto airdrop, showing that such giveaways catalyze breadth of engagement but not depth. It advances behavioral finance research by linking platform salience to activity surges among nonrecipients, highlighting attention and FOMO dynamics in decentralized settings. Methodologically, it demonstrates how public blockchain data and quasi-experimental variation can be combined with modern program evaluation techniques to study emerging markets. For platform designers, the findings suggest that airdrops function best as onboarding mechanisms, warranting follow-up incentives to retain engagement. For policymakers, the evidence of measured rather than frenzied responses underscores the importance of tailoring consumer protection and regulatory interventions to user heterogeneity and the temporary nature of incentive effects.

References are available upon request.

LEVERAGING PRE-LAUNCH ADVERTISING DATA TO OPTIMIZE MOVIE MARKETING STRATEGIES

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Keywords: Advertising, Movies, Advertising Budgets, Advertising Competition

Description: This paper examines the impact of prelaunch advertising on movie demand and how studios allocate prelaunch advertising budgets.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines the strategic role of prelaunch advertising in the motion picture industry, focusing on both its direct demand-stimulating effects and its influence on how studios allocate promotional budgets across a portfolio of films. Prior research has documented that advertising affects box-office outcomes, but much of this work treats films in isolation and focuses on post-release spending. We extend this literature by asking whether studios behave as short-term profit maximizers at the individual movie level or as long-term portfolio managers seeking to optimize profits across multiple releases over an extended planning horizon. We further investigate how allocation strategies vary between major studios with extensive resources and franchise-based products versus smaller studios with more limited slates. A key question is whether differences in competitive positioning, product type, and resource constraints lead to distinct returns to

advertising. The study also considers the role of cross-product cannibalization, seasonal clustering, and competitive release timing in shaping budget allocation decisions. By integrating consumer demand estimation with structural supply-side models, this work aims to identify the decision framework that best explains observed prelaunch advertising patterns, thereby advancing theoretical understanding of marketing resource allocation in high-stakes, multi-product industries.

Method And Data

We construct a comprehensive dataset of 1,276 U.S. theatrical releases between January 2009 and July 2012 by merging weekly box-office revenue data from BoxOfficeMojo, advertising expenditure data from Kantar Media's Ad Spender, and detailed movie attributes from IMDB, including production budgets, genres, MPAA ratings, critical reviews, star values, and sequel/franchise indicators. Demand is estimated using a logit diffusion model with latent class heterogeneity, allowing for differences in consumer responsiveness to advertising, reviews, and competition across audience segments. The model controls for seasonal effects, genre trends, holiday clustering, and simultaneous releases. On the supply side, we develop three alternative structural profit maximization models: PAM1 (movie-level), PAM2 (quarterly slate-level), and PAM3 (annual slate-level). These models use demand estimates as inputs to simulate optimal advertising allocation under different strategic horizons. Model performance is compared using Vuong tests, and we conduct extensive policy simulations, including changes in advertising effectiveness, shifts in portfolio composition, and specialization in particular genres such as animation. Robustness checks explore alternative demand specifications, exclusion of outliers, and sensitivity to different functional forms of advertising response, ensuring the stability and credibility of our findings.

Summary of Findings

Our findings provide compelling evidence in favor of the annual slate-level model, demonstrating that studios optimize prelaunch advertising decisions with a portfolio-wide perspective rather than focusing solely on individual films. The estimated average elasticity of 0.35 confirms that prelaunch advertising has a substantial effect on box-office demand, even after controlling for competing releases, seasonal clustering, and genre-specific trends. Policy simulations reveal that switching to a purely movie-level approach would increase advertising spending by 4.89% but lower profits by 2.75%, illustrating how short-term decisions can lead to misallocation of resources. A 10% improvement in advertising effectiveness results in a 50% surge in spending industry-wide, with major studios being the primary drivers of the change. We also find that strategic specialization, such as Disney focusing more heavily on animated releases, could yield a 4.44% profit increase, underscoring the benefits of aligning brand strength with portfolio composition. Robustness checks confirm these results across alternative model specifications and demand structures, while heterogeneity analysis reveals that smaller studios tend to prioritize immediate returns, potentially sacrificing long-term gains. Overall, the results highlight the economic value of forward-looking, integrated portfolio planning in managing promotional investments in competitive entertainment markets.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances the literature and managerial practice in four important ways. First, it offers one of the earliest structural econometric analyses of slate-level prelaunch advertising allocation, bridging consumer demand modeling with firm-level profit maximization in a unified empirical framework. This integration allows for direct testing of strategic allocation hypotheses that have previously been examined only in theoretical or case-based work. Second, it demonstrates

empirically that annual portfolio-based planning yields superior profitability compared to short-term, movie-specific budgeting, providing concrete evidence for strategic resource allocation theories in marketing and operations. Third, the methodological innovation lies in extending the logit diffusion model to incorporate latent class heterogeneity, enabling richer insights into how different audience segments respond to advertising and how these responses shape optimal budget decisions. Fourth, the study delivers actionable managerial guidance: adopting longer planning horizons, accounting for cross-product cannibalization, aligning portfolio composition with brand strengths, and dynamically adjusting to changes in advertising effectiveness can yield significant returns on investment. Finally, the modeling framework and insights are adaptable to other multi-product industries, including streaming, gaming, and consumer packaged goods, offering a generalizable approach to optimizing prelaunch promotion in dynamic competitive environments.

TITLE

Leveraging Strategic Friction in AI-Enhanced E-Commerce: Optimizing Decision Quality and User Satisfaction

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Keywords

AI in e-commerce, strategic friction, consumer trust, post-purchase regret, decision quality

Description

This paper investigates how AI and strategic friction interact to shape consumer decision quality, satisfaction, and trust in digital shopping environments.

Research Question

This study explores the role of strategic friction in AI-enhanced e-commerce interfaces, focusing on how deliberate interruptions in the shopping process affect decision quality, satisfaction, trust, and post-purchase regret. While AI systems streamline online shopping by offering personalized recommendations and simplifying choices, they may also encourage impulsive decisions. Strategic friction (design features that slow down the decision-making process) has been proposed as a way to promote reflection and mitigate regret. The central research questions are: (1) To what extent can

strategic friction in AI-supported shopping influence decision quality? (2) How does AI transparency shape perceptions of usability and trust? (3) Do different friction levels impact satisfaction and post-purchase confidence? This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by analyzing the interaction between intelligent systems and friction elements, offering insights into whether these interventions enhance or hinder user outcomes in fast-paced digital retail environments.

Method and Data

A 2x2 between-subjects experimental design was implemented using a custom-built e-commerce platform simulating a smartwatch shopping experience. A total of 1,917 U.S.-based participants were initially recruited through a nationally representative online panel. After excluding incomplete responses, duplicates, inattentive participants, and those who failed manipulation checks, the final analytic sample consisted of 1,316 participants. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (AI vs. no AI, high vs. low friction). The platform featured a fictional smartwatch brand (*Chronos*) and manipulated the presence of an AI recommendation chatbot and varying levels of strategic friction. In the high-friction condition, friction was operationalized through multi-step confirmations, deliberate pauses, and follow-up questions from the AI chatbot designed to encourage reflection. These prompts directed the participants to clarify their preferences and consider their decision confidence before proceeding to checkout.

After the shopping task, participants completed a post-decision survey assessing ease of use, trust, satisfaction, purchase intention, and regret. Additional behavioral data (e.g., time spent on product pages) were collected. Statistical analysis included two-way ANOVA to test main and interaction effects, and mediation analysis to examine the indirect effects of friction and AI on trust and satisfaction via perceived usability. Manipulation checks were used to validate experimental conditions, and inattentive responses were excluded. The robust sample and behavioral tracking allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how interface design and decision support systems interact to influence digital consumer behaviour.

Summary of Findings

Results showed that AI significantly improved ease of use, trust, purchase intention, and reduced post-purchase regret. However, it did not increase overall satisfaction. Strategic friction, in contrast, had no significant direct effect on any outcome. The delayed responses and reflective prompts failed to improve decision quality or satisfaction and were instead associated with lower perceived trust and usability. Mediation analysis revealed that friction indirectly lowered satisfaction by reducing ease of use and trust, highlighting that light-touch friction may backfire in environments where speed is expected. No significant interaction effects between AI and friction were found, suggesting that AI's influence is independent and dominant in shaping user behaviour. These findings challenge the assumption that friction always promotes better decision making and suggest that its efficacy may depend on contextual factors like product relevance, emotional investment, and perceived urgency. In this study, the fictional and low-stakes nature of the shopping task may have undermined participants' motivation to engage meaningfully with friction elements. Ultimately, AI-supported interfaces outperformed friction interventions in improving key decision outcomes, indicating that optimizing transparency and usability may be more impactful than slowing down the decision process in fast-paced digital commerce settings.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it integrates concepts from dual-process theory, cognitive load, the technology acceptance model, and rational inattention to propose a new framework for understanding friction in AI-mediated environments. By combining these perspectives, the study challenges the dominant assumption that friction automatically enhances deliberation and satisfaction. It highlights that friction's psychological impact is context-sensitive and that AI can either mitigate or overshadow its effects. Practically, the findings offer guidance for e-commerce platform designers, marketers, and policymakers. For developers, the results emphasize the importance of designing interfaces that promote usability and trust through transparent, adaptive AI rather than relying solely on frictional pauses. For retailers, the study provides evidence that AI can improve behavioural outcomes such as purchase intention and reduce regret, even without slowing the customer journey. For policymakers and ethical designers, the research suggests that while friction

can still play a role, its success hinges on careful calibration to consumer expectations, product relevance, and emotional engagement. This work ultimately provides a roadmap for building ethical and effective AI-driven retail experiences that prioritize informed decision making, user satisfaction, and long-term trust.

References are available upon request.

METAL MEETS MUSCLE: WHAT SHAPES HUMAN-AUTONOMOUS DELIVERY ROBOT COLLABORATION IN LAST-MILE DELIVERY?

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Keywords: Autonomous Delivery Robots, Technology Acceptance, Employee-Robot Collaboration, TAM, sRAM

Description: This research investigates the factors influencing delivery workers' willingness to collaborate with autonomous delivery robots (ADRs), where a field survey as well as an online survey have been conducted to test the relationships of interest.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The current era of Logistics 4.0 has accelerated the automation of logistics processes and activities, increasing the related technology adoption across various industries (Winkelhaus and Grosse, 2020; Tsaramirsis et al., 2022) and attracting attention from the academia (e.g., Hossain, 2023; Yuen et al., 2022). Autonomous Delivery Robots (ADRs), in particular, represent a major

advancement in logistics and service delivery. As ADRs become more prevalent in Logistics 4.0 environments, understanding human-technology collaboration is critical for supporting both operational efficiency and decent work.

This research aims to explore factors influencing parcel delivery workers' acceptance of ADRs. While some workers fear job loss, others view ADRs as being helpful for challenging tasks. Either way, the trend toward robot integration is inevitable. Therefore, this research addresses two research questions: **1)** Can delivery workers and ADRs collaborate/coexist, or do they simply substitute each other? **2)** What are the factors affecting delivery workers' willingness to collaborate with ADRs?

Method and Data

Drawing on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Service Robot Acceptance Model (sRAM), a model was developed to examine the impact of functional, social, and relational factors on delivery workers' willingness to collaborate with ADRs. To test the related hypotheses, a field survey (N = 483) and an online survey (N = 292) were conducted.

Specifically, Study 1, a survey-based field study, was conducted at package delivery stations across different Chinese provinces (e.g., Guangdong, Henan, and Shandong), where local delivery workers were invited to participate by scanning a QR code linking to the survey. Participants first watched a video introducing ADRs, followed by a manipulation check to confirm their understanding of the video's theme. The survey included questions on perceptions of ADRs, such as usefulness, ease of use, anthropomorphism, social influence, insecurity, procedural fairness, and willingness to collaborate. Participants were also asked about prior experience in ADR collaboration.

Study 2, an online-survey-based investigation, aimed to replicate Study 1. Study 2 involved participants from the transportation, distribution, and logistics sectors in the Western countries (e.g., the U.S., the UK, and Canada), to test hypotheses using data collected via an online Qualtrics survey. Participants were adults fluent in English, recruited through Prolific.

Summary of Findings

It was found in Study 1, a survey-based field study, that all the proposed motivators (i.e., perceived usefulness, ease of use, anthropomorphism, and social influence) had a positive and direct effect on employees' willingness to collaborate with ADRs. In contrast, the proposed inhibitor, namely the perceived insecurity of ADRs, had a negative and direct effect on employees' willingness to collaborate with ADRs. In addition, Study 1 tested whether these direct relationships were mediated by procedural fairness as perceived by employees. The related results showed that the relationship between each proposed motivator and employees' willingness to collaborate with ADRs was partially mediated by perceived procedural fairness.

Study 2, an online survey-based investigation involving participants from various countries in the Western world, was conducted to replicate the findings of Study 1 and assess the generalizability of these results. It was found that each proposed motivating or inhibiting factor directly influenced employees' willingness to collaborate with ADRs, consistent with the related findings of Study 1. Regarding the proposed mediating effect of perceived procedural fairness, no significant relationship was found between each motivator or inhibitor and employees' willingness to collaborate with ADRs. This was inconsistent with the related findings in the earlier Study 1.

Statement of Key Contributions

Theoretically, this research elaborates on how TAM and sRAM apply to employees' adoption of ADRs, identifying boundary conditions and mediating factors like procedural fairness. Moreover, this research validates motivators such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and social influence and the inhibitor of insecurity, bridging a gap in extant literature, which often focuses predominantly on the functional aspects of technology adoption while overlooking the interplay of emotional, social, and relational factors.

Practically, this research suggests that delivery workers' willingness to adopt new technologies (e.g., ADRs), is influenced by not only functional factors but also social and relational factors. Managers and policy makers can leverage findings in this manuscript to identify factors motivating the use of ADRs by delivery workers. Specifically, managers should ensure that ADRs are highly useful and user-friendly for employees. Second, managers should design ADRs with humanlike features, such as voice modulation and gestures, to build trust and foster collaboration, while considering cultural and contextual sensitivities to reduce resistance. Third, managers should leverage social influence by encouraging peer networks to share positive adoption experiences and emphasize job enhancement benefits. Finally, managers should address security concerns through robust cybersecurity measures, fail-safe mechanisms, and transparent communication to build worker confidence.

References are available upon request.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE IDENTITIES OVERLAP AND SUSTAINABLE ONLINE BEHAVIORS

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Keywords: online identity, identities overlap, online sustainable behavior, self-attribution of responsibility

Description: This paper explores how the overlap between online and offline identities influences sustainable online behavior.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates how the perceived overlap between consumers' real and online identities influences their willingness to adopt sustainable online behaviors. While most online behaviors seem harmless, everyday online actions such as storing unused files in cloud storage,

streaming high-resolution videos, and archiving countless emails collectively contribute to significant energy consumption and carbon emissions. Despite this mounting digital pollution, consumers often fail to recognize the ecological cost of their internet use, and when informed, they tend to deflect responsibility onto corporations or public authorities rather than take personal action. This lack of individual accountability highlights a critical barrier to fostering widespread sustainable online behaviors.

The internet's unique psychological landscape may play a role. Online environments offer anonymity and reduced social accountability, allowing individuals to adopt virtual identities that may differ from their real-world selves. Drawing on self-discrepancy theory and norm-activation theory, this research examines how identity differences influence environmental responsibility in digital contexts. Specifically, we ask: How does the perceived overlap between a consumer's real and online identities influence their willingness to engage in environmentally sustainable online behaviors? This research seeks to uncover the psychological mechanisms behind moral disengagement online and identify potential levers for promoting personal responsibility in the online environment.

Method And Data

We conducted three pre-registered empirical studies ($N = 780$) to investigate the relationship between identity overlap and sustainable online behavior. Study 1A employed a correlational design to measure participants' perceived overlap between their online and offline identities and their willingness to adopt eco-friendly online behaviors across domains such as emailing, streaming, and data storage. Study 1B established causality by manipulating identity overlap through a priming task. This study confirmed that individuals prompted to view their identities as integrated were more willing to engage in sustainable online practices. We also ruled out

participants' environmental consciousness as an alternative explanations. Study 2 replicated the findings and extended them by examining the psychological mechanism underlying the observed effect. Specifically, it tested the mediating role of self-attribution of responsibility in a marketing context, where participants evaluated sustainable digital products such as green cloud services and data-cleaning software. Across all three studies, results consistently indicated that greater identity overlap predicted a stronger intention to engage in sustainable online behavior. Moreover, this relationship was mediated by the extent to which individuals felt personally responsible for the environmental impact of their online actions, revealing a critical pathway for encouraging digital sustainability.

Summary of Findings

Our findings demonstrate a robust relationship between online-offline identity overlap and sustainable digital behavior. In Study 1A, participants with higher identity overlap reported significantly greater willingness to engage in digital sustainability, such as reducing unnecessary emails and cloud storage use. Study 1B established a causal relationship, showing that participants primed to see their online and offline identities as integrated exhibited stronger intentions to engage in eco-friendly online behaviors. Study 2 provided further support by identifying self-attribution of responsibility as a key psychological mechanism. Mediation analysis revealed that identity overlap indirectly influenced sustainable online behavior through increased feelings of personal responsibility. This relationship held true even in consumer decision-making contexts, such as choosing green cloud services and adopting data-cleaning software. These findings underscore the power of identity integration as a driver of sustainable digital practices. They suggest that targeting individuals' perceptions of their virtual self can

effectively promote behavioral change. Our research offers both theoretical advancement and practical applications for encouraging environmentally responsible internet use.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes several contributions to the literature on sustainability and digital behavior. Theoretically, it introduces an identity-based perspective to the emerging field of sustainable online practices. By linking online-offline identity overlap to self-attributed responsibility and sustainable behavior, it expands self-discrepancy theory into the digital realm. It also contributes to the understanding of the online disinhibition effect by demonstrating how perceived separation between selves reduces moral accountability. Practically, the findings provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders. Policymakers can craft messages that emphasize the integration of real and virtual selves, enhancing personal accountability for digital actions. CSR managers can implement campaigns to reduce digital waste, such as decluttering cloud storage or optimizing streaming. IT companies can embed identity-based messaging in the marketing of eco-friendly services. For example, integrating identity appeals into advertisements for green software or energy-efficient data solutions can enhance their effectiveness. Overall, this research opens new avenues for both academic inquiry and practical interventions aimed at promoting sustainable internet use. By tapping into identity psychology, organizations can foster long-term digital habits that align with environmental goals.

Robot vs. Human Assistant: How Brand Authenticity is affected by the Service Agent

Type

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Keywords: Keywords: Brand Authenticity, Digital Assistant, Artificial Intelligence,
Salesperson Authenticity

The current article investigates the effect of sales assistant type (human vs. robot) on brand authenticity.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers are striving for authenticity (Nunes et al., 2021) and authenticity is viewed as “one of the cornerstones of contemporary marketing” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 21). Authenticity relates to a holistic consumer assessment involving accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency judgements (Nunes et al. 2021). For retailers it is highly relevant due to its ability to yield positive marketing outcomes such as, increased emotional brand attachment (Morhart et al., 2015), increased word-of-mouth behavior (Morhart et al., 2015; Nunes et al., 2021), as well as higher customer willingness to pay a price premium (Bartsch et al., 2022; Fritz et al., 2017).

As service robots are becoming ever-more important and their growth has been rocketing and expected to reach around \$62.35 billion by 2030 (Fortune Business Insights 2023), retailers have started to adopt robots to interact directly with their customers at organizational frontlines (Huang and Rust, 2024; Larivière et al., 2024). Today’s service robots are based on artificial intelligence allowing them to exchange and analyze information, communicate, and deliver interactive services to customers in various settings (Choi et al., 2021), offering the opportunity of more efficient high-quality interactions with customers (Larivière et al. 2024). While much research has explored the concept of brand authenticity (Södergren, 2021), with studies highlighting the critical role of salespeople in building brands (e.g., Morhart et al., 2009), as well as the impact of replacing human salespeople with service robots in frontline roles (e.g., Lee and Yi, 2024), there is currently no research examining how such substitutions affect the brand itself. In order to fill this gap, we examine how the type of sales assistant affects retailer brand authenticity, and explore the boundary conditions that moderate this relationship.

Method and Data

To answer our research question, we used a 2 (salesperson type: human vs. robot) by 2 (purchase motive: utilitarian vs. hedonic) between-subjects design, with salesperson authenticity, satisfaction with the salesperson and retailer brand authenticity as measured variables. We used well-established multi-item scales and adapted them to our context

Our final sample consists of 295 consumers from Germany who knew IKEA (54.6 % women; median age, 33 years). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. Participants were able to take part in the survey only if they knew the assigned brand.

Summary of the Findings

We proposed a negative effect of salesperson type on salesperson authenticity, but do not find support for this hypothesis (standardized estimate: .057; $p > .1$). We also proposed that the relationship between salesperson type and salesperson authenticity is moderated by consumers' purchase motive. The interaction effect of salesperson type and consumers' purchase motive is negative and significant (standardized estimate, $-.51$; $p < .05$).

Results also reveal a non-significant effect of salesperson type on salesperson authenticity when consumers have a utilitarian purchase motive (.024; $p > .1$), and a significant negative significant effect when consumers have a hedonic purchase motive ($-.206$; $p < .05$).

The main effect of salesperson type on satisfaction with the salesperson is negative and significant ($-.504$; $p < .01$).

Further, we proposed salesperson authenticity and satisfaction with the salesperson, to have a positive effect on retailer brand authenticity. We find a positive relationship between salesperson authenticity and brand authenticity (.16; $p < .05$), and a positive relationship between satisfaction with the salesperson and brand authenticity (.119; $p < .05$). Moreover, our results show a significant indirect effect of salesperson type to brand authenticity through satisfaction with the salesperson (indirect effect = $-.060$, $SE = .042$, $CI_{95} = \{-.137 - -.003\}$).

Further, the indirect path from salesperson type to brand authenticity through salesperson authenticity and moderated by purchase motive is significant (indirect effect= $-.082$, $SE=.064$, $CI95 = \{-.203 - -.001\}$). We find a significant indirect effect of salesperson type to brand authenticity through salesperson authenticity in the hedonic purchase motive condition (indirect effect= $-.073$, $SE=.048$, $CI95 = \{-.159 - -.007\}$), while the indirect effect is insignificant in the utilitarian purchase motive condition.

Overall, the results suggest that satisfaction with the salesperson and salesperson authenticity fully mediate the effect of salesperson type on brand authenticity, with the effect through salesperson authenticity being contingent on consumer purchase motive.

Key Contributions

We are the first to demonstrate that the type of salesperson significantly influences perceptions of brand authenticity. Specifically, our results indicate that substituting human sales agents with robot sales agents can negatively impact customers' perceptions of the brand. This finding extends the existing literature on brand authenticity by introducing the critical role of salesperson type, an area that has received limited attention.

Our research uncovers and provides evidence for the mechanisms through which salesperson type affects brand authenticity. Specifically, we show that salesperson authenticity and satisfaction with the salesperson act as key mediators in this relationship. By highlighting the central role of salesperson authenticity and satisfaction with the salesperson, we contribute to a deeper understanding of how frontline interactions shape broader brand perceptions. This insight bridges the gap between organizational frontline research and brand authenticity studies, offering a more integrated perspective.

Lastly, we emphasize that the effectiveness of building salesperson authenticity is highly context-dependent. In low-emotion contexts, such as utilitarian purchase scenarios, robots can achieve levels of perceived authenticity comparable to human sales agents. However, in

emotionally charged settings, such as those driven by hedonic motives, robots struggle to establish authenticity at the same level as humans. This context-dependent finding underscores the importance of aligning salesperson type with the emotional dynamics of the shopping environment.

References are available upon request.

STUCK ON THE SCREEN: EXPLORING CONSUMERS' SMARTPHONE OVERUSE AND TIME MISESTIMATION

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Keywords: smartphone overuse, screen time, behavioral pricing, consumer well-being, digital marketing

Description: This research uncovers a significant discrepancy between consumers' perceived and actual smartphone use, identifying key drivers of this overuse and demonstrating its negative impact on purchase likelihood in social media environments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research investigates a crucial yet underexplored paradox in modern consumer behavior: the disconnect between how consumers use their smartphones and how they perceive that use. We address three key questions: First, what is the extent of the discrepancy between consumers' ideal, estimated, and actual smartphone screen time? Second, what are the specific factors that contribute to this time misestimation and overuse? We investigate the roles of push notifications, phone pickups, and social media engagement. Third, what are the downstream marketing implications of this phenomenon? We specifically explore whether making consumers aware of their screen time influences their subsequent responses to advertising within a social media context.

Method and Data

We employed a mixed-methods approach across four studies. Studies 1A, 1B, and 1C were quantitative surveys using samples from CloudResearch. In these studies, participants were asked to report their ideal, estimated, and actual daily screen time, with the actual time pulled directly from their phone's usage reports. Study 1B added questions about notifications and phone pickups, and Study 1C focused on the role of social media. Study 2 was a randomized experiment where participants were assigned to either a "Screen Time First" or "Screen Time Second" condition. Participants in the first condition reported their screen time before making purchase likelihood decisions, while the second group did so afterward. We also conducted an analysis of market data from the Google Play Store, examining download numbers and performing a thematic analysis of user reviews for fifteen popular screen time management apps.

Summary of Findings

Our findings reveal a clear and consistent pattern of smartphone overuse and time misestimation. Across three studies, we found that consumers' ideal screen time was significantly less than their estimated screen time, which was in turn significantly less than their actual screen time. We identified that frequent push notifications, a higher number of phone pickups, and social media usage were all significant predictors of this overuse and estimation error. Furthermore, our experiment demonstrated a crucial marketing implication: when prompted to reflect on their screen time, participants reported a significantly lower purchase likelihood for products advertised on social media. This suggests that awareness of overuse can trigger a negative metacognitive process that impacts consumer behavior. This quantitative evidence is supported by our qualitative analysis of app reviews, which highlights a widespread consumer desire for tools to manage their digital well-being.

Key Contributions

This research offers significant contributions to the marketing literature by shifting the focus from the smartphone as a tool for marketing to the smartphone as an object of consumption itself. We are the first to quantify the extent of consumers' misperceptions of their usage, providing robust evidence of a major self-regulation challenge in the digital age. By linking objective usage data to self-reported perceptions, we establish a new foundation for understanding consumer-technology relationships. Our work also reveals a critical, previously unexamined, downstream consequence: making screen time salient can reduce advertising effectiveness. This insight is highly relevant for marketers developing digital strategies. For public policy, our findings provide empirical justification for promoting digital well-being and responsible technology use, advocating for a more balanced relationship between consumers and their devices.

**THE DARK SIDE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA:
TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

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Keywords: dark side, influencer marketing, social media

This paper uses a systematic literature review and qualitative analysis, to identify key themes related to the dark side of influencer marketing on social media.

Extended Abstract

Research Questions

The growing popularity of influencer marketing has led to concerns about the transparency and ethics of such practices. Influencers often fail to disclose their commercial relationships with brands, leading to a lack of transparency that can mislead consumers (Ali et al. 2024). Brands may also use influencers to manipulate consumer behavior, raising ethical questions about the potential for exploitation and blurring of the line between authentic endorsement and paid promotion (Hu and Flynn 2024). Influencers are often not upfront about being paid to promote a product or service, causing concerns about their authenticity (Leban 2022) and confusion among consumers, who may not be able to distinguish between genuine product recommendations and paid endorsements (Aw and Agnihotri 2024).

Influencers may also face huge pressures, in their relentless pursuit of likes and followers, resulting in mental health issues and a loss of privacy (Allende et al. 2024). The ethical implications of influencer marketing also arise as the tactics may not always prioritize transparency and authenticity, potentially misleading followers about the nature of endorsements (Gupta and Edunuri 2023). Thus, influencer marketing can be a powerful tool for driving brand engagement and consumer purchasing decisions, but it also comes with a dark side that warrants closer examination (Bentley et al. 2024). This paper aims to explore the darker aspects of influencer marketing on social media by reviewing the extant literature to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework that addresses its negative consequences.

Theoretical Background

Scholars discuss the ethical issues and impact of disclosure in influencer marketing on online users and brands (De Jans et al. 2018; Wellman, 2020), to identify the challenges posed by the covert nature of influencer marketing, where brand messages are often embedded in organic

user-generated content (Ye et al. 2021). This blending makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content. Such circumstances raise ethical concerns, especially regarding the potential for consumers—particularly children and adolescents—to be influenced without their awareness because they may erroneously believe that influencers are genuine customers who authentically endorse the products they promote.

To address these ethical concerns, influencers should disclose the commercial nature of their digital content, typically through sponsorship disclosures. Studies in this area can be divided into two subthemes: the ethics of influencer marketing and the effectiveness of sponsorship disclosures (Ye et al. 2021; Boerman, 2020; Wellman, 2020). Researchers (Ye et al. 2021; Wellman 2020) have been exploring the ethical implications of compensating influencers for positive reviews, resulting in calls for influencers to be transparent about their compensation. The focus is on the ethics of authenticity, encouraging influencers to build credibility with their audiences by being sincere and open about their partnerships with brands (Wellman 2020). Boerman (2020) examines how sponsorship disclosures can alleviate ethical concerns.

Conceptual Framework

A review of the extant literature on the dark side of influencer marketing on social media highlights systemic issues that affect all stakeholders involved—brands, consumers, and influencers themselves. Addressing these challenges requires a critical examination of the diverse theoretical perspectives, including the ethical practices within influencer marketing, the socio-psychological implications of these innovative marketing strategies, and the structural issues underlying their impact on the attitudes, behaviors, and subjective well-being of influencers and their followers. We use our extensive literature review to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework to help understand the dark side of influencer marketing on social media by integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and key themes identified from our extensive literature review, namely a) ethical implications, b) psychological effects, c)

structural dynamics. We discuss each of these elements in detail and also identify their sub-dimensions, which collectively drive this phenomenon.

Key Contributions

This paper makes many important contributions. First, it identifies and categorizes various negative aspects of influencer marketing, such as authenticity issues, consumer deception, and the potential for mental health impacts among followers. By highlighting these concerns, the paper emphasizes that while influencer marketing can be effective for brand promotion, it also poses risks that need to be addressed by marketers and platforms alike. Second, the paper integrates extant literature on social media influence, consumer behavior, and digital marketing ethics to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework. This framework serves as a tool to understand how different factors interact within the influencer marketing ecosystem, including the roles of influencers, brands, and consumers. Third, it discusses regulatory implications and suggests that policymakers should consider developing guidelines to protect consumers from misleading practices in influencer marketing. Fourth, the research highlights the importance of ethical considerations in influencer partnerships, advocating for responsible practices that prioritize consumer welfare over mere profit maximization. Finally, this conceptual paper recommends that future researchers to conduct empirical studies using both qualitative and quantitative methods with both primary and secondary data to explore real-world scenarios where influencer marketing has led to adverse outcomes. These may include longitudinal studies on influencer and follower well-being, comparison of human and virtual influencers, using diverse theoretical perspectives such as regulatory focus, fear of missing out, personality, and cross-cultural differences. Overall, this work contributes significantly by shedding light on an often-overlooked aspect of digital marketing using a multi-faceted approach that considers the psychological, ethical, cultural, and behavioral dimensions.

Note: References are available upon request.

The impact of branded NFTs on brand attitude: A TAM and perceived risk application

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Keywords: Branded NFTs, Perceived risk, TAM, Brand attitude

Description: This study investigates how branded NFTs shape consumer brand attitudes by balancing perceived usefulness, ease of use, and risk.

Extended Abstract

Brand adoption of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) offer new avenues for consumer engagement, but its impact on brand attitudes change and the underlying mechanisms driving consumer attitudes toward NFTs and brands remain underexplored. By integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and risk perception framework, this study examines the drivers that influence consumer attitudes toward branded NFTs and ultimately brand attitude. This study measures brand attitude change caused by branded NFT, providing an integrated framework on how digital assets influence consumers' perception of brand. Our findings contribute to the literature and practice on technology perception and branding.

Research Question

The rapid rise of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) has drawn increasing attention from both academics and practitioners as a novel tool for branding and consumer engagement. While branded NFTs are often promoted for their functional value, such as exclusivity, ownership,

playfulness, and economic benefits, they also introduce considerable uncertainty and risk, including volatility, privacy concerns, and unclear ownership rights. Despite their growing adoption in marketing practice, there remains limited understanding of how these opposing forces of value and risk jointly influence consumer brand perceptions.

This study addresses this gap by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with risk perception theory to explore how consumers evaluate branded NFTs. Specifically, it examines how perceived usefulness and ease of use, alongside perceived risk, shape consumer attitudes toward NFTs, and how these attitudes subsequently affect overall brand attitude.

Accordingly, the central research question guiding this investigation is: How do perceived usefulness, ease of use, and perceived risk interact to shape consumer attitudes toward branded NFTs and influence subsequent changes in brand attitude?

Method and Data

All measurements are developed based on previous studies. The questionnaire was initially pretested with a group of 17 individuals in Adelaide, Australia, comprising university graduate students and professionals. The pre-test aimed to assess the clarity and flow of the survey questions and gather feedback for refinement. Following this, the finalized survey was distributed through the professional panel provider, Qualtrics, to collect data from a sample of adults with prior knowledge of the Bose brand and NFTs.

At the survey page, participants were asked to report their pre-existing brand attitudes toward Bose. Then, participants were exposed to the comprehensive description of the characteristics of Stickmen Toys. After the exposure, they were asked to complete the survey questions regarding perceptions of the NFT collection, their attitude toward the NFT and adoption intention. Since participants' attention to the introduction was crucial for this study, they had

to pass an attention check after the exposure. In the introduction text, the respondents were directed to click on an NFT image instead of the continue button; if they failed to do this, they were screened out. Finally, the respondents were asked to report the demographic information in terms of age, gender and education background.

Summary of Findings

A total of 382 responses were received from the frequent shopper group, and after removing outliers, there were 364 usable responses. Using the responses, we analyzed the reliability and validity of the scale.

The result show that all constructs demonstrated strong reliability and validity, confirming internal consistency. These results support the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model.

Based on the analysis, we first identified a decline in brand attitude from pre-NFT to post-NFT phases, indicating a gap between consumer expectations and their actual experiences with NFTs. This decline highlights the importance of understanding the factors that drive positive and negative influences on brand attitudes. Brands should capitalize on the diverse performance benefits to engage consumers.

On the one side, performance-related constructs together as significant drivers of favorable branded NFT attitudes. Among these, authenticity and playfulness were particularly influential, demonstrating that consumers are drawn to branded NFTs that build trust and credibility while delivering engaging and interactive experiences. While ease of use contributes marginally, it is drive positive branded NFT attitudes.

Key Contributions

First, this study advances the application of the TAM in the context of branded NFTs by conceptualizing perceived usefulness as a higher-order construct consisting of authenticity, ownership, economic benefits, and playfulness. This refined framework provides an integrative model for future research on new technology attitude.

Finally, this study contributes to the branding literature by challenging the common assumption that innovative technologies inherently enhance brand attitudes. By identifying and empirically demonstrating negative brand attitude changes as a potential outcome of branded NFT activities, this study deepens the understanding of the nuanced relationship between consumer perceptions of emerging technologies and brand equity, and provides a new perspective on the risks of incorporating innovative technologies into brand strategies.

This study also provides valuable insights for brand managers and marketing practitioners by identifying the positive drivers and risk issues that influence consumer attitudes toward branded NFTs. By exploring the interplay between these drivers and barriers, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how branded NFTs influence overall brand attitudes, laying the foundation for smarter and more strategic decisions in digital branding initiatives.

THE POWER OF STREAMERS: EXAMINING THEIR INFLUENCE ON IMPULSE BUYING AND SOCIAL HERDING IN LIVE STREAMING COMMERCE

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Keywords: live streamer, social herding, flow experience, impulse buying, retransmission intention

Description: This study examines how live streamers' characteristics and content strategies influence consumers' impulse buying and retransmission intentions, mediated by flow experience and social herding. A structural equation modeling approach was used to validate the framework, offering theoretical and practical insights for enhancing engagement in live streaming commerce.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Live streaming commerce has emerged as a powerful channel that combines real-time interaction, immersive shopping experiences, and social influence, distinguishing it from traditional e-commerce. Although prior studies have explored platform features and consumer emotions, the influence of streamers (i.e., the key facilitators in this environment) has been relatively overlooked. Given their unique ability to shape consumer perceptions and behaviors, understanding how streamer characteristics (i.e., expertise, charisma, homophily) and content strategies (i.e., visibility, self-disclosure, interactivity) affect consumer actions is essential. This study investigates how these factors drive consumers' impulse buying and retransmission intentions during live streaming commerce. Furthermore, it examines the mediating roles of flow experience and social herding in explaining how psychological mechanisms channel the effects of streamer performance into concrete behavioral outcomes. By addressing this research gap, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer engagement and decision-making processes in the evolving landscape

of live streaming commerce.

Method and Data

To empirically examine the proposed framework, this study adopted a quantitative approach using an online survey distributed via the InsightXplorer Panel. Participants first watched a 2-minute 30-second edited live shopping video featuring crystals (a commonly sold credence product in live streaming commerce) before completing a structured questionnaire. The survey measured streamer characteristics, content strategies, flow experience, social herding, impulse buying intention, and retransmission intention, all assessed using validated multi-item scales on a 6-point Likert scale. A total of 230 valid responses were collected from consumers with prior live streaming commerce experience. All participants had previously encountered crystal-related live streams, indicating that crystals are a widely recognized and representative product. Respondents ranged from 19 to 76 years old, with balanced gender distribution and diverse occupational and income profiles. Shopee (74.3%) and Facebook (48.3%) were the most used live streaming platforms. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to validate the measurement model and test the hypothesized relationships.

Summary of Findings

Structural equation modeling results supported most hypotheses. Flow experience significantly enhanced impulse buying intention ($\beta = 0.48, t = 6.91, p < 0.001$) and retransmission intention ($\beta = 0.84, t = 13.25, p < 0.001$). Social herding positively influenced impulse buying ($\beta = 0.29, t = 4.35, p < 0.001$) but did not affect retransmission ($\beta = 0.02, t = 0.28, p = 0.78$). Among streamer characteristics, charisma ($\beta = 0.30, t = 3.87, p < 0.001$) and homophily ($\beta = 0.18, t = 2.26, p < 0.05$) significantly improved flow experience, while expertise showed no significant effects. For content strategies, visibility, self-disclosure, and interactivity all enhanced flow, but only visibility ($\beta = 0.22, t = 2.47, p < 0.05$) and interactivity ($\beta = 0.21, t = 2.72, p < 0.05$) significantly boosted social herding. Interactivity emerged as the strongest driver for both consumer engagement and social influence, underscoring the critical role of real-time interaction in live streaming commerce.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances the understanding of live streaming commerce by highlighting the

underexplored role of streamers beyond platform characteristics and price promotions. By integrating streamer attributes, content strategies, and psychological mechanisms into a unified framework, it clarifies how flow experience and social herding mediate the relationship between streamer performance and consumer behavior. The findings challenge the traditional emphasis on expertise by showing that charisma, homophily, visibility, and interactivity play stronger roles in driving engagement and impulse buying. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for brands and merchants in selecting streamers and optimizing content strategies to maximize consumer engagement and sales effectiveness. It also provides streamers with guidance on how to enhance audience immersion and influence through strategic persona building and real-time interaction. By bridging theoretical gaps and offering practical applications, this research contributes to the evolving field of digital commerce and consumer psychology.

References are available upon request.

THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCES, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND TRUST, AND THE LOYALTY JOURNEY IN TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED BANKING SERVICES

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Keywords: Cognitive experience; Affective experience; Customer satisfaction; Customer trust; Customer loyalty

Description: This paper investigates the impact of cognitive and affective experiences on satisfaction, trust, and loyalty intentions among Generation Z customers using self-service banking technology in South Africa.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

What are the most effective approaches to improving satisfaction, trust, and loyalty intentions among self-service banking customers in a developing economy? The study asks how cognitive and affective experiences influence Gen Z users' perceptions in South Africa's rapidly evolving digital banking environment.

Method and Data

The study employed a quantitative survey methodology targeting literate Generation Z consumers in South Africa who had prior experience with self-service banking. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants, balancing cost-effectiveness and suitability. Respondents completed structured questionnaires measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A total of 370 valid responses were collected, with over 80% of respondents being students. Ethical approval

was secured before data collection. SmartPLS 3.0 software was applied for data analysis. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and validity was examined through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity measures. The measurement model confirmed construct reliability and validity. Structural equation modeling was then employed to test the hypothesized relationships among cognitive experience, affective experience, customer satisfaction, customer trust, and loyalty intentions. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples provided additional robustness for mediation testing.

Summary of Findings

The analysis confirmed that both cognitive and affective experiences significantly influence satisfaction and trust, which in turn predict loyalty intentions. Mediation analysis showed satisfaction mediates the link between cognitive experience and trust, while trust mediates the link between affective experience and satisfaction. Among predictors, affective experience emerged as the stronger driver of both satisfaction and trust. This suggests that Gen Z customers' emotional responses to self-service banking technologies weigh more heavily than purely cognitive evaluations of performance or functionality. Loyalty intentions were found to be jointly shaped by satisfaction and trust, underscoring the interdependence of these constructs. Indirect effects further confirmed that both cognitive and affective experiences influence loyalty through these mediators. The findings highlight the importance of designing engaging, emotionally resonant digital banking experiences to strengthen customer trust and long-term loyalty, particularly for younger consumers.

Key Contributions

This study advances theoretical and practical understanding of customer loyalty in technology-mediated services. By integrating the Cognitive-Affective-Normative and Trust-Commitment frameworks, the model demonstrates how cognitive evaluations and affective responses jointly shape satisfaction, trust, and loyalty intentions. The results expand prior research by clarifying the mediating roles of satisfaction and trust, offering new insights into how consumer experiences transfer into loyalty outcomes. For theory, the findings reinforce the value of combining rational and emotional perspectives when explaining technology adoption and loyalty behaviors. For practice, the study provides actionable implications for managers in the banking sector: prioritizing affective experience design, embedding entertainment or gamification features, and investing in trust-building mechanisms. These strategies can ensure digital self-service platforms remain engaging and credible for Gen Z customers. The insights are particularly relevant for banks in emerging markets seeking to attract and retain young, tech-savvy consumers. Future research could extend this framework to other sectors and demographics to test its broader utility.

References are available upon request.

**THE SHADING DILEMMA: BALANCING UNBIASED EXPECTATIONS
WITH INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO DO SO**

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Keywords: Winner's Curse, Shading Adjustment, Choice-Set Bias, Willingness-to-Pay

Description: This paper shows how the "winner's curse" skews choices and how a statistical shading fix can curb overvaluation and improve decisions.

ABSTRACT

Under uncertainty, consumers face a winner's curse: the perceived best option is overestimated. We formalize shading, the statistical adjustment restoring unbiased expectations, and test it experimentally. Consumers systematically under-shade, inflating willingness-to-pay

and degrading choices. Our framework quantifies shading by choice-set structure and offers actionable guidance for pricing, positioning, and forecasting.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine entering an auction where the winning bid is almost always too high, not because bidders are irrational, but because the very act of “winning” selects the most overestimated value. Consumers face this same *winner’s curse* in everyday choices. Whenever they select the apparent best option from a set, whether a headache remedy, a smartphone, or a stock, the statistical structure of incomplete information makes the top option look better than it really is. If it looked worse than it really is, then it would be less likely to be chosen.

This paper examines shading, i.e., the statistical adjustment needed to correct that overestimation. Unlike cognitive biases, shading arises from the inherent properties of choice set sampling, not from flawed reasoning. Without shading, the expected utility of the chosen option is inflated, leading to suboptimal decisions, distorted willingness to pay, and pricing errors.

We develop a novel framework for shading within individual-level quantal choice models, showing: (1) why shading is mathematically required under stochastic incomplete information; (2) how choice set size and heterogeneity amplify the gap between perceived and true value; and (3) that consumers rarely shade enough, if at all. The result is a systematic bias that grows with set size, mirroring auction theory’s logic of bid shading.

Our findings reveal that most consumers face a shading dilemma, i.e., balancing the need for statistical correction against the lack of tools, data, or expertise to implement it. We reframe choice by embedding shading as a core statistical necessity, offering both theoretical insights and actionable strategies for marketers to improve pricing, positioning, and decision support systems.

SHADING AND QUANTAL CHOICE MODELS

When choosing the “best” option from an uncertain set, the odds are stacked against them, i.e., not by deception but by math. Selecting the top option from noisy, incomplete information creates a statistical trap: the “winner” is more likely to be overvalued than undervalued.

Quantal choice models (QCMs) formalize this process. In these models, each option in the set has an anticipated payoff, x_j , based on the consumer’s incomplete and stochastic information. The option with the highest x_j appears best largely because of a favorable realization of noise, not necessarily because it is truly superior. This overestimation is not a behavioral bias; it is a predictable outcome of stochastic sampling.

Shading adjusts for this inflation. By reducing the anticipated payoff of the chosen option, shading recalibrates expectations toward the true underlying value. In QCMs, this adjustment is a statistical necessity: it improves decision accuracy, corrects inflated willingness-to-pay, and prevents systematic misallocation of resources.

Statistical Foundations of Shading

Shading emerges from a simple yet powerful statistical fact: the maximum of a set of noisy estimates is almost always too high. When consumers evaluate a choice set, the highest anticipated payoff, $\max(x_j)$, will on average exceed the true expected payoff μ , because incomplete information is stochastic. Larger choice sets amplify this effect, increasing the odds of encountering extreme, upward-biased estimates.

The corrective step, called shading, realigns the inflated $\max(x_j)$ with the statistically expected value of the true maximum across all possible information states. We formally derive propositions that quantify the required degree of shading under varying conditions. These results extend directly from statistical identities, holding across diverse choice sets and heterogeneity.

Factors Influencing Shading

Shading depends on choice-set size and composition. Larger sets amplify overestimation by increasing the chance of extreme payoffs. In homogeneous sets (identical payoff distributions), shading is uniform and driven mainly by set size. In heterogeneous sets, shading varies with each option's distribution: superior options require more adjustment, while stochastically dominated ones require less.

Implications of Shading for Decision-Making

Shading errors inflate willingness-to-pay (WTP), distorting pricing, satisfaction, and follow-on decisions such as purchasing complements or switching products. The core challenge is balancing statistical accuracy with limited information: most consumers cannot compute shading corrections, producing systematic bias. Standard models (e.g., logit, probit) miss these effects because shading alters unobserved components like WTP, not observed choices.

Shading and Information States

Information states—stochastic snapshots of consumer knowledge from reviews, ads, or experience—drive anticipated payoffs. Shading corrects the statistical inflation of the best option's payoff across these states. The principle holds for both discrete (e.g., cure probability) and continuous (e.g., utility, price) outcomes: adjust the top payoff toward its true expectation.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

Theoretically, this work formalizes shading as a statistical property of QCMs and generalizes it to varied choice environments, extending models of decision-making under uncertainty. Practically, shading informs strategies to either mitigate or exploit overestimation. It guides pricing, positioning, and choice set design to balance perceived value with decision accuracy.

AN EXAMPLE

We begin with an example of shading under uncertainty

Consider a product with a true utility of $u = 2$. Due to uncertainty, its perceived utility can

$$\text{take one of three values: } u = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{with probability } 1/3 \\ 2 & \text{with probability } 1/3 \\ 3 & \text{with probability } 1/3 \end{cases}$$

Let $P(\max=x)$ represent the probability that the maximum perceived utility in a choice set equals x . As we increase the size of the choice set, the expected maximum utility, denoted $E[\max(u_1, u_2, u_3, \dots, u_{1n})]$, increases due to the statistical sampling effect. This creates a bias that must be corrected by 'shading.' For example...

The Single Product. For a single product, the expected utility is $E[u_1] = (1/3)(1) + (1/3)(2) + (1/3)(3) = 2$. This matches the true utility, so no shading is needed in this case.

The Two-Product Choice Set. Now consider a choice set with two products, each independently drawn from the same distribution. $E[\max(u_1, u_2)]$ is calculated as:

$$E[\max(u_1, u_2)] = \sum P(\max = x) * x$$

Where $P(\max = x)$ is the probability that x is the highest utility observed. These probabilities are:

$$P(\max = 1) = P(u_1=1 \text{ and } u_2 \leq 1) = (1/3)(1/3) = 1/9,$$

$$P(\max = 2) = P(u_1=2 \text{ and } u_2 \leq 2) + P(u_2 = 2 \text{ and } u_1 \leq 1) = 2 * (1/3)(1/3) = 2/9,$$

$$P(\max = 3) = 1 - P(\max = 1) - P(\max = 2) = 1 - 1/9 - 2/9 = 6/9.$$

Thus: $E[\max(u_1, u_2)] = (1/9)(1) + (2/9)(2) + (6/9)(3) = 23/9$ or approximately 2.56.

The expected utility has now increased from 2 to approximately 2.56, requiring shading to correct the overestimation.

Three-Product Choice Set. For a set with three products, the expected maximum utility,

$E[\max(u_1, u_2, u_3)]$, is calculated similarly: $E[\max(u_1, u_2, u_3)] = \sum P(\max = x) * x$, where:

$$P(\max = 1) = P(u_1 = 1 \text{ and } u_2 \leq 1 \text{ and } u_3 \leq 1) = (1/3)(1/3)(1/3) = 1/27,$$

$$P(\max = 2) = 3 * (1/3)(1/3)(2/3) = 6/27,$$

$$P(\max = 3) = 1 - 1/27 - 6/27 = 20/27.$$

Substituting these values: $E[\max(u_1, u_2, u_3)] = (1/27)(1) + (6/27)(2) + (20/27)(3) = 73/27$ or approximately 2.70. So, the expected utility increases further from 2.56 to approximately 2.70.

Key Insight: Why Does the Expected Utility Increase?

As the number of products increases, the chance of observing at least one product that looks better than it is increases. This is not due to human error but an inherent statistical property. Without shading, consumers systematically overestimate the utility of the chosen product.

Conclusion: Shading Is Necessary, but Consumers Lack the Information to Shade

Although the true utility of each product remains $u = 2$, the expected maximum utility increases with the size of the choice set. To avoid biased decisions, consumers must shade their expectations back to $u = 2$. Without shading, they risk making overly optimistic choices that deviate from reality.

EXPERIMENTS

We test whether consumers naturally apply shading, quantify deviations from optimal benchmarks, and identify drivers of these deviations. Statistical methods, numerical results, and rigorous analyses link the experimental evidence to the theoretical framework.

Experiment 1: Do Consumers Naturally Apply Shading?

Objective. Experiment 1 tests whether consumers instinctively apply shading in stochastic, incomplete-information choice sets and measures resulting overestimation and its effect on willingness-to-pay (WTP).

Design and Procedure. Participants (N=300) were presented with hypothetical scenarios involving choice sets of varying sizes (2, 5, and 10 options). Each option's payoff (μ_j) was

described as the probability of a product achieving a desirable outcome, such as curing a headache within two hours. Payoffs were drawn from a uniform distribution ($\mu_j \sim \text{Uniform}(0,1)$).

Participants were informed of these probabilities and asked to choose the option they perceived as best, then indicate their WTP. No additional information about statistical overestimation or shading was provided. Payoff distributions varied to represent both homogeneous sets (all options drawn from $\mu_j \sim \text{Uniform}(0,1)$) and heterogeneous sets (e.g., half drawn from $\mu_j \sim \text{Uniform}(0,1)$ and half from $\mu_j \sim \text{Uniform}(0.2,0.8)$).

Statistical Benchmarks. We derived optimal shading benchmarks for each choice set size and structure using the expected maximum payoff ($E[\max(\mu)]$) and the population mean payoff (μ_{average}). E.g., in a homogeneous two-option set, $E[\max(\mu)] = 0.75$, while $\mu_{\text{average}} = 0.5$. Thus, optimal shading is $E[\max(\mu)] - \mu_{\text{average}} = 0.25$. Similar calculations were made for larger sets.

Results. Results indicate that participants consistently failed to apply shading. Observed WTP exceeded optimal WTP derived from shading-adjusted payoffs. For two-option sets, the average WTP was 0.74 ($\sigma = 0.12$), compared to the optimal 0.5. The deviation increased with set size, with the average WTP for five-option sets reaching 0.86 ($\sigma = 0.14$) versus an optimal 0.64.

Homogeneous sets exhibited less deviation (mean deviation = 0.18) than heterogeneous sets (mean deviation = 0.29), highlighting the greater challenge of shading in diverse choice sets. Statistical tests confirmed significant overestimation ($t(299) = 8.21, p < 0.001$).

Experiment 2: Quantifying Shading Deviation

Objective. This experiment aimed to quantify the extent of deviation from optimal shading benchmarks and test whether feedback could improve shading accuracy over repeated rounds.

Design and Procedure. Participants ($N=200$) completed 10 decision-making rounds with choice sets structured similarly to Experiment 1. After each round, they received feedback on the actual

payoff of their chosen option compared to the optimal shading-adjusted value. This feedback was intended to prompt learning.

Payoffs (μ_j) were normally distributed with varying means and variances to test robustness.

For example, in a five-option homogeneous set, $\mu_j \sim N(0.5, 0.1)$. In heterogeneous sets, two options were drawn from $\mu_j \sim N(0.5, 0.1)$ and three from $\mu_j \sim N(0.7, 0.05)$.

Key Metrics. Shading accuracy was measured as the difference between observed WTP and optimal WTP, normalized by the optimal value:

Results. Feedback significantly improved shading accuracy over the rounds. Initial shading accuracy was 62% ($\sigma = 10\%$), increasing to 81% ($\sigma = 8\%$) by the final round. Homogeneous sets improved more (from 65% to 85%) than heterogeneous sets (from 58% to 77%).

Statistical tests revealed significant learning effects: a repeated-measures ANOVA showed a main effect of round ($F(9, 199) = 12.34, p < 0.001$). Post-hoc comparisons indicated that most improvement occurred within the first five rounds.

However, despite improvements, many participants still underestimated the required shading, especially in larger sets. For 10-option heterogeneous sets, final-round WTP remained 12% higher than optimal values on average.

Experiment 3: Factors Influencing Shading

Objective. This experiment investigated how information presentation, framing, and explicit instructions about shading influence shading behavior.

Design. Participants ($N=400$) were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions:

- **Information Presentation:** We presented payoff distributions as (a) numerical probabilities, (b) graphical probability density functions (PDFs), or (c) descriptive summaries.
- **Framing:** Choices were presented either as isolated selections (“choose the best product”) or

as interdependent decisions (“optimize outcomes across multiple choices

- **Instructional Intervention:** Half of the participants received a tutorial on shading, statistical overestimation, and optimal decision-making. All participants then completed 10 tasks varying in set size (2, 5, 10 options) and composition (homogeneous vs. heterogeneous). Measures included WTP, shading accuracy, and decision time.

RESULTS

- **Information Presentation:** Shading accuracy was highest with graphical PDFs (82%, $\sigma = 7\%$), followed by numerical probabilities (76%, $\sigma = 9\%$) and descriptive summaries (68%, $\sigma = 10\%$). ANOVA confirmed a significant format effect, $F(2, 397) = 15.87, p < 0.001$.
- **Framing:** Interdependent decision framing led to higher shading accuracy (79%, $\sigma = 8\%$) compared to isolated framing (71%, $\sigma = 9\%$). The effect was particularly strong in heterogeneous sets ($t(198) = 4.56, p < 0.001$).
- **Instructional Intervention:** Tutorial participants achieved higher shading accuracy (84%, $\sigma = 6\%$) than controls (68%, $\sigma = 9\%$), with the largest gains in large heterogeneous sets (54% to 78%).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The experiments reveal that shading is a non-intuitive process for most consumers, who rely on observed payoffs without accounting for statistical overestimation. Key findings include:

- Shading accuracy decreases as choice set size increases, particularly in heterogeneous sets.
- Feedback and instructional interventions significantly improve shading accuracy, although some residual overestimation persists in larger sets.
- Presentation formats that make statistical properties salient (e.g., graphical PDFs) and framing choices as interdependent decisions enhance shading behavior.

Despite these improvements, even with optimal conditions, many participants failed to reach perfect shading accuracy, underscoring the inherent challenges of statistical decision-making under uncertainty. These results have important implications for both theory and practice, as they highlight the need for models and tools that assist consumers in adjusting for overestimation biases.

CONCLUSION

This paper addresses the fundamental challenge of decision-making under uncertainty: the tension between generating unbiased expectations and the lack of sufficient information to achieve this goal. Through the lens of the shading dilemma, we demonstrate that statistical overestimation of the best option in a choice set is an inherent property of decision contexts involving stochastic and incomplete information. Shading—the adjustment required to align anticipated payoffs with statistical reality—is both necessary and often absent in consumer decision-making.

Our theoretical framework shows that the magnitude of shading depends on the structure of the choice set, including its size and heterogeneity. Larger and more diverse sets exacerbate the overestimation bias, demanding greater shading corrections. However, our empirical findings reveal that most consumers do not naturally apply shading, leading to inflated willingness-to-pay, suboptimal choices, and distorted evaluations of product utility. Even when provided feedback, many participants struggled to fully internalize shading adjustments, underscoring the complexity of integrating statistical principles into real-world decision-making.

These insights have significant implications for marketing and policy. Firms can design choice environments that mitigate biases, such as simplifying choice sets or providing decision aids to enhance statistical understanding. Conversely, businesses may strategically exploit shading-related biases to influence consumer behavior, for example, by increasing choice set size

to elevate perceived value.

This work bridges statistical theory and behavioral decision-making at a broader level, emphasizing the interplay between cognitive limitations and the mathematical properties of uncertainty. By advancing our understanding of the shading dilemma, this paper provides a foundation for improving consumer decision-making and offers actionable strategies for both researchers and practitioners.

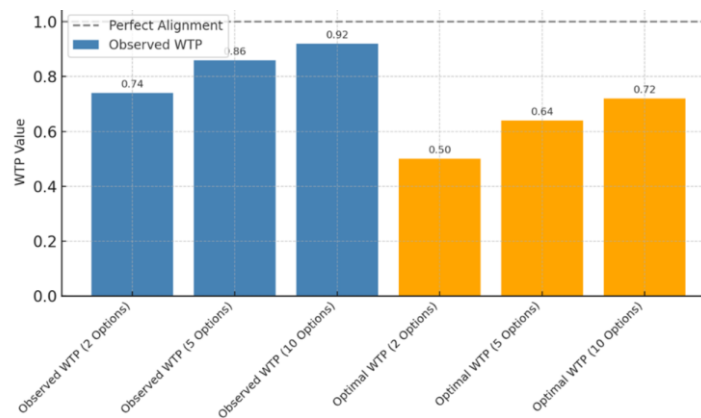


Figure 1. Larger Choice Sets Exacerbate Under-Shading, Increasing Willingness-to-Pay Bias. As choice set size increases, the gap between observed and optimal willingness-to-pay widens, indicating insufficient shading in larger choice environments.

The figure demonstrates that as choice set size increases, the gap between observed and optimal willingness-to-pay (WTP) widens, highlighting the compounding effects of insufficient shading. This reveals that choice set size has statistical implications beyond consumer behavior, amplifying the need for shading as a corrective adjustment to mitigate inherent sampling biases. Our paper establishes shading as a statistical necessity, validated by empirical evidence showing consumers consistently under-apply it, especially in larger choice sets, leading to inflated valuations, suboptimal decisions, and firm opportunities to either correct or exploit it.

These findings provide actionable insights for marketers to design tools and choice

environments that enhance decision-making and optimize pricing strategies, improve predictive analytics, and either mitigate or strategically exploit consumer overestimation in ways that enhance trust, satisfaction, and market efficiency.

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TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENTIAL AND PERCEPTUAL EFFECTS OF AUGMENTED REALITY ADVERTISING

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Keywords: Augmented reality, Affordances, Consumer engagement, User experience, Advertising strategy

Description: This paper develops the AR Advertising Effects Framework, theorizing how core and common affordances of augmented reality advertising shape consumers' experiential and perceptual outcomes through dual action and cue routes, moderated by advertising strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In an era of divided consumer attention, advertisers are turning to augmented reality (AR) to create more engaging experiences. However, many current AR campaigns are criticized for being superficial, suggesting that advertisers do not fully grasp how to leverage the technology's capabilities for real value creation. While academic interest in AR is growing, the literature remains fragmented, lacking a comprehensive overview of AR's specific technological affordances and a clear understanding of how these affordances systematically shape consumer responses to advertising. This research addresses this gap by asking: How do the technological

affordances of augmented reality advertising shape consumer experiences and perceptions, and what strategic factors moderate these effects? By applying the theory of interactive media effects (TIME), this study seeks to create an overarching conceptual framework to guide future theoretical and managerial efforts in the burgeoning field of AR advertising.

Summary of Findings

This study proposes the AR Advertising Effects Framework to explain how consumers respond to AR advertising. Drawing from TIME, the framework posits that AR influences consumers through a dual-pathway mechanism. These pathways are driven by five key technological affordances, which are categorized as core and common affordances. The single core affordance, situatedness, is AR's essential ability to embed virtual content into a user's physical environment. This is supplemented by four common affordances: embodied control, customization, modality interactivity, and sociability. The framework then theorizes that these affordances influence consumers through two distinct but interacting pathways: the action route, where interactive engagement drives cognitive and emotional responses, and the cue route, where interface features act as symbolic heuristics shaping perceptions. Additionally, the framework identifies four moderators, advertising content, consumption context, consumer heterogeneity, and product characteristics, that influence how affordances translate into experiential and perceptual outcomes. The analysis highlights that affordance effects are not inherently linear and that excessive or misaligned affordances can diminish effectiveness.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes five main contributions. First, it synthesizes a fragmented body of research to identify and conceptualize five key AR affordances, providing clarity on the driving forces behind AR advertising's effectiveness. It pioneers a structured classification of these affordances

into core and common types, offering methodological insights for future study designs. Second, by developing a comprehensive framework, it extends the theory of interactive media effects to the AR context. The framework uniquely articulates a dual-pathway model, detailing how AR impacts consumers through both an action route (experiential effects) and a previously under-explored cue route (perceptual effects). Third, it incorporates the moderating role of advertising strategies, offering guidance for tailoring AR campaigns. Fourth, it outlines a detailed agenda for future research on affordance-driven effects, including optimal affordance combinations, psychological mechanisms, measurement development, and longitudinal impacts. Fifth, from a managerial perspective, the framework offers practical insights into leveraging AR affordances strategically to design campaigns that enhance consumer engagement, perception, and brand relationships.

References are available upon request

VIRTUAL AND PHYSICAL SYNERGY: HOW VR-BASED OMNICHANNEL PROMOTIONS ENHANCE CONSUMER RESPONSES IN VR

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Keywords: virtual reality, omnichannel promotions, construal level

Description: This study investigates how integrating offline elements into VR-based promotions enhances consumer experiences and, in turn, improves consumer engagement.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Virtual reality is increasingly adopted by brands seeking to deliver immersive experiences, yet evidence remains mixed regarding its ability to sustain consumer engagement when used in isolation. This study investigates the potential of VR-based omnichannel promotions to enhance consumer responses compared to virtual-only promotions.

Method and Data

Two experiments, each contrasting VR-based omnichannel and virtual-only conditions, reveal consistent effects: participants exposed to omnichannel promotions reported higher behavioral intentions. The findings suggest that the perceived closeness and sensory richness created by linking VR with offline touchpoints significantly amplify consumer engagement.

Summary of Findings

This research advances theoretical understanding of immersive marketing by extending construal level theory into VR contexts and highlighting the value of blending virtual and physical experiences. From a managerial perspective, the results offer actionable guidance for crafting VR promotions that create more connected, memorable, and impactful brand interactions, particularly for digitally savvy audiences seeking seamless, multi-channel experiences.

Statement of Key Contributions

Theoretically, this research extends construal level theory in VR marketing by identifying key mediators of engagement and highlighting the added value of integrating physical elements into immersive promotions. Methodologically, it offers robust evidence from two experiments with varied tasks. Practically, it provides guidance for designing VR-based omnichannel strategies that connect digital and physical spaces, boost engagement, and appeal to tech-savvy consumers such as Gen Z. The findings also inform public and nonprofit sectors in creating inclusive VR campaigns with tangible real-world impact.

YOU MUST CALCULATE THAT: DEVELOPING AN AUTOMATED TOOL TO MEASURE LANGUAGE ASSERTIVENESS

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Keywords: Language Assertiveness, Linguistics, Text-analysis, Consumer Language

Description: We develop, validate, and highlight applications of an automated tool to measure language assertiveness in English text.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Language assertiveness intensifies whatever is being said (Grinstein and Kronrod 2016) and indicates the ‘refusability’ of a directive (Brown and Levinson 1987). Assertiveness has been investigated with regard to consumer compliance with requests (Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004; Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012a), brand perceptions (Zemack-Rugar, Moore, and Fitzsimons 2017), purchase intentions (Kronrod, Grinstein, and Wathieu 2012b) and signaling reviewer expertise (Packard and Berger 2017). However, current assertiveness research focuses almost exclusively on company-generated advertisements and relies on limited, oversimplistic, manual operationalizations. Recent expansion attempts to product reviews (Yu and Liu 2023) rely solely on researcher-generated phrases in experimental conditions. These limitations restrict the contribution that assertiveness research can offer.

To address these gaps, we developed an automated text-analysis tool called the Text Assertiveness Detector (TAD) that measures language assertiveness using linguistic rules (e.g., Brown and Levinson 1987) and natural language processing techniques. The new tool provides a continuous score that represents a sentence's degree of assertiveness, ranging from 1 (very low assertiveness) to 5 (very high assertiveness). We then validated the tool with human annotators and an LLM and implemented it within the context of customer complaints and company posts.

Method And Data

We developed a taxonomy, assigning numerical scores to linguistic structures with higher/lower assertiveness. This allowed us to not only incorporate structures already included in the extant literature, such as directives (Zemack-Rugar et al. 2017), some modal verbs ("*can*" and "*should*"; "*can*" and "*must*"), but also other modal verbs ("*ought to*", "*may*"), negatives ("*you must not*"), a more comprehensive range of verbs ("*I request you*", "*I command you*"), and directive phrases ("*I recommend you to...*", "*You are requested to...*"). To each directive phrase in a text, TAD assigns an assertiveness score ranging from 1 (least assertive) to 5 (very assertive) – with 0 for non-directives.

After developing the tool, we tested the TAD tool on new data from two sources. A set of participants from Prolific and Chat GPT 4-o1 were provided a definition of language assertiveness and then asked to provide examples of texts that were either less or more assertive. The text was rated as 0 if not considered a directive by TAD – which was true for 16.8% texts. From the remaining phrases, 91.4 % items were rated correctly by the tool (assertiveness level 1-3 for less assertive texts, and assertiveness level 4-5 for more assertive texts).

Summary of Findings

TAD was then applied in multiple contexts: company communication and consumer complaints. We first analyzed 12,102 Facebook posts and 29,413 Twitter posts from 8 consumer brands belonging to a wide range of industries - food, manufacturing, apparel, and retailing (Villarroel Ordenes et al. 2019). We found that more assertive language leads to fewer likes and shares for the company ($p < 0.01$) in all models, irrespective of the platform (Facebook/Twitter), with and without the control variables.

We then analyzed a dataset of 661,694 complaints from the CFPB for the calendar year 2024 about 2543 companies. I found an inverted-U effect (see Figure 6) of a complaint's language assertiveness on the likelihood of it being resolved. Namely, while a medium level of language assertiveness in consumer complaints led to an increased likelihood of compensation ($p < 0.001$), complaints on both extreme ends of the assertiveness spectrum (that is, using very assertive or very non-assertive language) were less likely to get compensated.

Statement of Key Contributions

The current research contributes to theory, method, and practice. Firstly, the automated tool TAD offers a consistent, rule-based measure for an established construct within marketing: language assertiveness. Researchers can leverage the tool to analyze large textual datasets and derive conclusions that are not feasible with existing manual operationalizations. Additionally, we highlight an important yet often ignored aspect of consumer welfare: the language of effective influence. Future research can expand the application of our assertiveness detection tool to other social influence contexts, such as Word of Mouth, peer support on social networks, conversations, AI-agents, and self-help in healthcare domains.

Human-Centered AI and Digital Marketing

AI VS. HUMAN-GENERATED CONTENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING: A DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CONSUMER PREFERENCES ON INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study examines consumer preferences between AI-generated and human-written Instagram advertising content using Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DOI) and Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Analysis of 337 responses reveals younger, educated users prefer AI content while older demographics favor human-written content, providing evidence-based strategies for demographic-targeted AI deployment.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, social media marketing, consumer preferences, demographic analysis, content generation

Description: This study examines how demographic factors influence consumer preferences between AI-generated and human-written Instagram advertising content, revealing age and education significantly predict AI content acceptance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing social media marketing by enhancing personalization, content creation, and campaign optimization (Singh & Ahmed 2024; Elkhatabi & Benabdelouhed 2024). Machine learning algorithms and natural language processing technologies are transforming content curation and predictive analytics in social media marketing (Aggarwal et al. 2024). While AI offers unprecedented efficiency in targeting and ad optimization (Gao et al. 2023), it raises ethical concerns including algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the need for human oversight (Alam 2025).

The emergence of Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) technology has revolutionized content creation and digital marketing (Kumar Sharma & Sharma 2023). However, research on AI-generated content reveals complex consumer perceptions. While some studies find no significant differences in perceived credibility between AI and human-written content (Huschens et al. 2023), others report advantages for human-written content in quality and readability (Lockwood et al. 2024). The disclosure of AI authorship generally leads to lower ratings (Graefe & Bohlken 2020), suggesting human bias rather than AI aversion (Zhang & Gosline 2023).

Recent studies highlight varying public trust in AI-mediated communication, with perceived AI involvement often decreasing trust in content creators (Rae 2024). Demographic factors significantly influence AI perception, with opinions ranging from excitement to worry (Kelley et al. 2019). This study addresses these challenges by examining consumer preferences for AI-generated versus human-written content in Instagram advertising through analysis of 337 participant responses.

This research employs DOI Theory (Rogers 2003) and ELM (Petty & Cacioppo 1986) to examine demographic variations in AI content preferences. DOI provides insights into how demographic characteristics influence technology adoption patterns, with younger and more educated populations typically demonstrating earlier adoption (Kelley et al. 2019). ELM's dual-processing framework explains how individuals process persuasive content based on motivation and ability, with education levels influencing processing routes (Huschens et al. 2023). Both frameworks operate synergistically - DOI predicts who might be more receptive to AI content, while ELM explains how they evaluate it.

2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Instagram has emerged as a crucial platform for brand communication with over 1.440 billion users worldwide (Datareportal 2022). The integration of AI in content creation offers significant opportunities for personalization and enhanced user engagement (Florido-Benítez 2024). AI applications span various areas including personalized recommendations, chatbots, and content optimization (Bulchand-Gidumal 2020; Dogru et al. 2024).

Current literature lacks comprehensive theoretical frameworks explaining demographic influences on AI content acceptance. Existing research has not applied established behavioral theories such as DOI or ELM to AI content contexts. Additionally, empirical evidence examining age, education, and gender effects on AI-generated advertising content remains limited, particularly in social media contexts where demographic targeting is crucial.

This study aims to: (1) assess consumer preferences between AI-generated and human-written Instagram advertising content, (2) analyze demographic influences (age, gender, education) on AI

content acceptance patterns, and (3) develop practical guidelines for demographic-specific AI content deployment.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed quantitative methodology, examining consumer preferences through systematic content evaluation. Figure 1 outlines the comprehensive research design process.

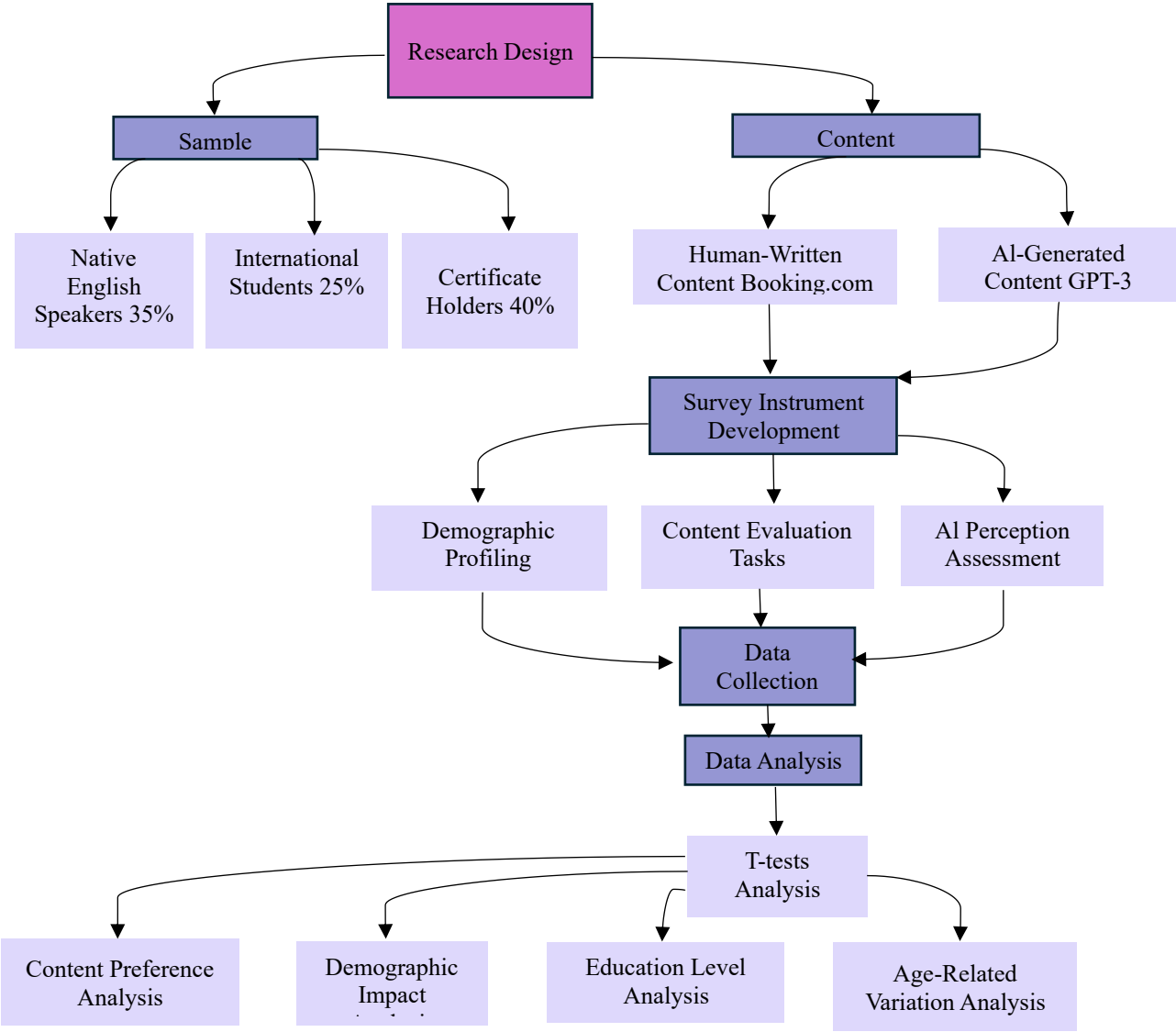


Figure 1 Step-by-step Research Design

Data was collected from 337 respondents through purposive sampling ensuring English proficiency across three groups: native speakers/long-term residents (35%), international students with English-medium education (25%), and certified B2/C1 proficiency holders (40%). The study utilized Instagram content from Booking.com's verified account (2.4+ million followers). Ten pairs of captions were created: original human-written captions and AI-generated alternatives using GPT-3 technology. Content categories covered travel destinations, sustainable accommodations, local festivals, and promotional content. AI-generated captions maintained identical structural elements including length, tone, emoji usage, and hashtag implementation. The survey instrument underwent a comprehensive four-stage validation process as illustrated in Figure 2.

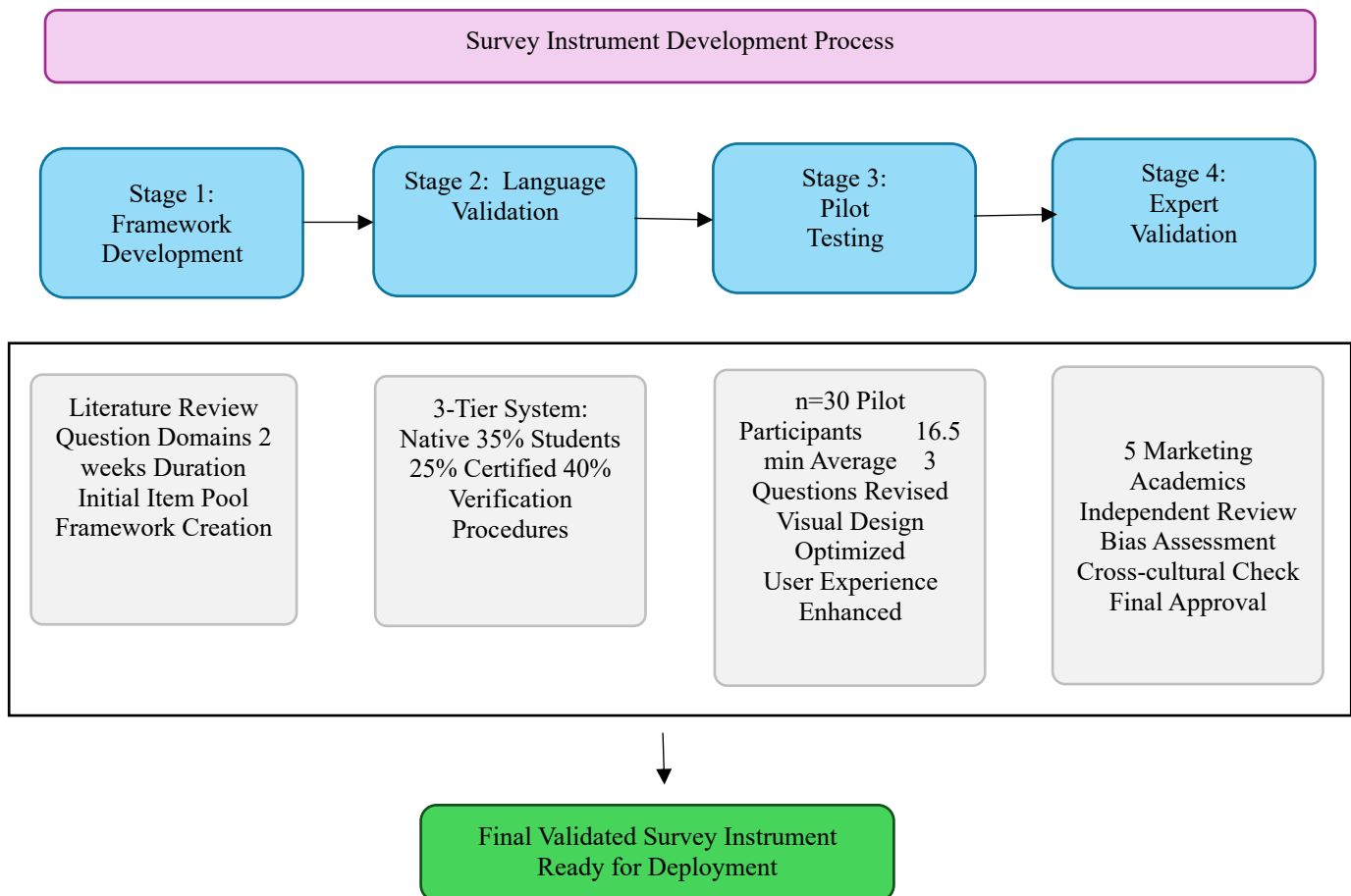


Figure 2 Survey Development Process

Quality control measures included minimum completion time requirements, attention checks, and response pattern analysis, resulting in removal of 12 responses (3.4%) due to inconsistencies. The final validated instrument comprised multiple measurement components designed to capture comprehensive data on participant demographics, content preferences, and AI perceptions, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Survey Components and Measurement Scales

Component	Measures	Scale/Format	Source
Demographic Profiling	Age Groups, Gender, Education Level	Categorical Selection	Kim et al. (2020)
Content Evaluation	Content Appeal, Preference Selection, Comparative Assessment	5-point Likert Scale & Binary Choice	Huschens et al. (2023)
AI Perception	AI Awareness, Trust Level, Perceived Effectiveness	5-point Likert Scale & Open Response	Graefe & Bohlken (2020)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

T-test analysis ($\alpha = 0.05$) revealed that AI-generated captions achieved significantly higher preference rates: 85.9% for travel destinations, 68.6% for promotional materials, and 78.2% for general advertising content ($p < 0.001$). Average ratings for AI-generated content reached 4.6 out of 5 points, compared to 3.6 for human-written content. The comprehensive findings across all research dimensions are summarized in Table 2.

Age emerged as a critical determinant with strong negative correlation (-0.68) with AI content acceptance. The 25-34 age group demonstrated highest preference for AI-generated content, while

respondents over 55 consistently favored human-written material. Educational attainment showed significant influence, with master's and PhD holders preferring AI-generated content compared to those with secondary education. Male respondents were 20% more likely to prefer AI-generated content compared to female respondents. While 57.6% of participants correctly identified AI-generated content, 42.4% misattributed content sources, highlighting sophisticated AI content generation.

Table 2 Summary of Key Research Findings

Research Dimension	Category	AI-Generated Content (%)	Human-Generated Content (%)	Statistical Significance
Overall Content Preferences	Travel Destinations	85.9	14.1	p < 0.001
	Promotional Materials	68.6	31.4	
	General Advertising	78.2	21.8	
Gender Distribution	Male	60.0	40.0	r = -0.57
	Female	40.0	60.0	
Age Groups	18-24	50.0	50.0	r = -0.68
	25-34	60.0	40.0	
	35-44	50.0	50.0	
	45-54	50.0	50.0	
	55+	70.0	30.0	
Education Level	Secondary School	40.0	60.0	p < 0.05
	Bachelor's Degree	50.0	50.0	
	Master's Degree	60.0	40.0	
	PhD	60.0	40.0	
Content Recognition	Correct Identification	57.6	-	
	Misidentification	42.4	-	

Particularly noteworthy was perception among participants aged 30-56, where the majority (52.63%) attributed human-written content to AI sources.

While 57.6% of participants correctly identified AI-generated content, 42.4% misattributed content sources, highlighting sophisticated AI content generation. Particularly noteworthy was perception among participants aged 30-56, where the majority (52.63%) attributed human-written content to AI sources.

Our findings validate the integrated DOI-ELM framework. The demographic progression follows the DOI curve, with the 25-34 age group reflecting early adopter characteristics. The preference-recognition disconnect (57.6% correct identification vs. 78.2% preference) supports ELM's dual-processing routes, suggesting educated demographics engage central route processing where content quality supersedes source credibility.

5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Based on our analysis, we propose a systematic implementation framework for AI-generated content in advertising practice:

Phase 1: Assessment - Demographics analysis revealing audience composition and preferences; content audit evaluating existing performance metrics; resource evaluation for technological capabilities.

Phase 2: Implementation - Target younger demographics, particularly 25-34 age group (60% acceptance); education-based targeting with sophisticated content development; quality monitoring systems tracking performance and engagement.

Phase 3: Optimization - Regular performance analysis across demographic segments; strategy refinement based on audience responses; scaled deployment expanding successful approaches.

This structured approach addresses both opportunities and challenges identified in our research, particularly considering the strong age-related correlations ($r = -0.68$) and educational background influences. Organizations following this framework can effectively maximize the benefits of AI-generated content while maintaining audience trust and engagement levels.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study advances AI content marketing literature through systematic integration of DOI Theory and ELM with contemporary technology contexts. Key contributions include: (1) first application of DOI to AI content acceptance, establishing demographic-specific patterns; (2) extension of ELM explaining preference-recognition disconnects; (3) integrated framework explaining both adoption likelihood and evaluation processes; and (4) evidence-based strategies for demographic-targeted AI content deployment.

Several limitations warrant consideration. Extreme over-representation of higher education participants (96.1% vs. 42.1% in general Instagram population) likely inflates AI acceptance rates. Age distribution compression around professional demographics (58.8% aged 25-34) limits generalizability to broader consumer segments. Focus on Instagram travel content limits

generalizability to other platforms and advertising categories. AI content preferences might be influenced by specific prompting decisions rather than inherent AI-human differences.

Priority future research should include blind testing protocols, random sampling for demographic representativeness, multiple AI systems testing, and systematic prompt variation studies. Longitudinal designs tracking preference changes as AI technology evolves, cross-platform validation across TikTok, LinkedIn, and Facebook would provide comprehensive insights. Cultural extensions examining AI content acceptance across collectivist versus individualist cultures, industry-specific studies comparing high-authenticity sectors versus AI-favorable contexts would advance understanding while providing practical guidance for marketers navigating AI integration across diverse platforms and cultural environments.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Dr Massimo Airoidi from University of Milan for his valuable insights during the original development of this research. His guidance on methodological considerations, particularly regarding the relationship between AI prompting decisions and content aesthetics, has contributed to strengthening this study's analytical framework

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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF GENERATIVE AI TOOLS FOR SHORT-TEXT SOCIAL MEDIA COPYWRITING USING UNIFORM PROMPTING

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Keywords: Generative AI, LLMs, Higher Education Marketing, Digital Marketing

Description

This paper evaluates the effectiveness of five widely used Generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Jasper, and Pi) in generating social media content in higher education marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How effective are leading generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Jasper, and Pi.ai for generating short-form social media content in higher education marketing? Our

study investigates their performance across readability, emotional tone, content diversity, and semantic coherence. With small marketing teams increasingly relying on GenAI, this study addresses the urgent need to evaluate which tools produce the most effective short-form content. While prior research has emphasized academic concerns like AI detection or plagiarism, there is limited empirical work on how Generative AI tools can be leveraged in higher ed marketing. This study addresses the critical gap by analyzing 3,560 AI-generated captions and surveying 76 marketing professionals. It aims to help small marketing teams choose the GenAI tools that best fit their communication goals and platform strategies.

Method and Data

We evaluated content from five GenAI tools across readability, emotional appeal, and engagement potential. Our analysis combined quantitative evaluations of AI-generated content (AIGC) with practitioner ratings from marketing professionals. Each tool generated social media captions (80–150 characters) in stage one using 20 consistent prompts. A structured survey was emailed to 500 marketing professionals in stage two, yielding 76 responses. The survey included a question on familiarity with GenAI and 16 Likert-scale items (0–5) rating the AIGC. We measured readability using Flesch-Kincaid and Gunning Fog Index Scores, based on length and syllables (Baobin & Hong-yun, 2013). While these tools offer quick assessments of text complexity, they do not capture tone or context. We used Python libraries, including TextBlob and VADER, to analyze sentiment in social media content, slang, and emojis. We categorized tone (positive, negative, neutral) to evaluate empathy, a crucial factor for user engagement. We measured the content diversity for each tool using a cosine similarity test. This method offers more intuitive comparisons than topic modeling (Jelodar et al., 2019). We also used SPSS software to analyze survey responses.

Summary of Findings

Pi.ai generated social media content with the most positive tone, with a sentiment score 0.622. It also had the highest Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) coherence score (0.4608), indicating strong emotional appeal and logical consistency. Claude was slightly more positive in tone than ChatGPT and produced the most diverse content, followed by Jasper and Gemini. Jasper had the lowest sentiment (0.181) but the highest in readability with a Flesch-Kincaid score of 12.68 and a Gunning Fog score of 16.49. In contrast, Pi was the hardest to read, with scores of 16.13 (Flesch-Kincaid) and 19.12 (Gunning Fog), indicating higher complexity. All tools produced highly diverse outputs, shown by an average cosine similarity of 0.09. ChatGPT's higher similarity score suggests it generated more consistent but less varied content. Claude (0.4383) and Gemini (0.3839) outperformed ChatGPT (0.3647) in content coherence. Jasper scored lowest on coherence (0.3223), indicating more disjointed content. This study revealed striking differences between automated textual analysis and how marketing professionals perceived the content. Despite a low readability score, content from Pi and Claude received high engagement ratings from human evaluators. While Jasper scored highest on readability, marketers rated its content less engaging.

Key Contributions

This research offers one of the first comparative analysis of unimodal (text-only) Gen AI in higher ed marketing. It addresses a critical gap in understanding AI's role beyond academic integrity and positions Gen AI as a strategic communication tool. We combined quantitative analysis and practitioner feedback to evaluate how well LLMs generate readable, emotionally varied, and coherent content. The study presents a replicable framework combining natural

language processing (NLP) metrics with human evaluations. It offers a scalable model for future GenAI benchmarking. Drawing on Media Richness Theory and Service-Dominant Logic, we explored how GenAI can enhance engagement and co-create value in marketing. Our findings provide practical insights for higher-ed marketing professionals, helping them select AI tools based on computable content quality. While we did not test real-world engagement across platforms, our findings highlight the importance of aligning AI tools with specific content goals. It contributes to interdisciplinary discourse across ethical AI and digital marketing. It calls for future research on AI's ethical use policies and platform-specific content testing.

References are available upon request.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND LEARNING: TRANSFORMATIVE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Learning technologies, Educational transformation, Machine learning, Human-AI collaboration

Description: This paper systematically reviews recent research on artificial intelligence applications in education, highlighting opportunities, challenges, and strategies for responsible integration.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the question: *How can artificial intelligence (AI) be integrated into education to maximize learning benefits while addressing ethical, practical, and professional challenges?*

The research investigates how AI tools—including adaptive learning systems, intelligent tutoring systems, and natural language processing applications—transform learning experiences, improve educational outcomes, and alter teacher roles. It also examines the unintended consequences of AI adoption, including data privacy risks, algorithmic bias, and the potential deskilling of educators. The study aims to provide a balanced, evidence-based perspective by identifying best

practices, common pitfalls, and critical considerations for equitable AI deployment. In doing so, it seeks to inform educators, policymakers, and technology developers on how to navigate the dual promise and peril of AI in education. The central research question thus integrates technological potential with social responsibility: *How can AI-powered education be both innovative and ethical, ensuring that advancements do not come at the cost of learner rights, equity, or educational integrity?*

Method and Data

This study employs a **systematic literature review methodology** to analyze recent scholarship on AI in education from 2015 to 2024. Searches were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar using targeted keywords including “artificial intelligence,” “machine learning,” “education,” “learning technologies,” and “adaptive learning.” Inclusion criteria required that sources be peer-reviewed, published in English, and directly address AI applications in educational contexts. Both empirical studies and review articles were considered.

From 243 initially identified records, duplicates were removed, leaving 198 for screening. Titles and abstracts were reviewed, resulting in 84 full-text articles assessed for eligibility. Of these, 72 met the methodological and topical criteria for inclusion in the synthesis. Data from the selected studies were extracted and coded thematically in four domains: (a) AI technologies deployed, (b) educational contexts and outcomes, (c) challenges encountered, and (d) proposed solutions. The analysis employed qualitative synthesis and thematic coding to identify patterns and trends.

Findings were cross-referenced to ensure reliability and triangulated with policy reports and

thought leadership publications to contextualize academic insights within real-world educational environments.

Summary of Findings

The review finds that AI integration in education offers substantial benefits. Adaptive learning platforms improve mastery rates by up to 25% compared to traditional instruction, while intelligent tutoring systems enhance knowledge retention and motivation across diverse learner groups. AI enables real-time personalization, automated grading, and advanced data analytics that inform targeted interventions. These features collectively improve efficiency and educational quality, allowing educators to focus on high-value teaching activities.

However, the findings also underscore significant challenges. Data privacy emerges as a critical risk due to extensive learner data collection. Algorithmic bias, if left unaddressed, can perpetuate or worsen existing educational inequalities, particularly for marginalized student populations.

Furthermore, the automation of teaching tasks raises concerns about diminishing the professional role of educators. Mitigating these risks requires transparent governance, diverse and representative training datasets, ongoing algorithmic audits, and teacher training programs that position AI as a complement rather than a replacement. Overall, the study concludes that while AI holds transformative potential for education, realizing its promise equitably demands a deliberate balance between innovation, ethics, and professional empowerment.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper contributes to the AI and education discourse in four key ways. First, it consolidates evidence from the last decade, offering an up-to-date synthesis of how AI technologies are being applied across varied educational contexts. Second, it identifies both the pedagogical benefits and ethical risks, providing a dual-lens analysis that is often missing in technology-focused discussions. Third, it presents actionable recommendations for policymakers, educational leaders, and developers, including the adoption of robust data protection policies, strategies for bias mitigation, and frameworks for human-AI collaboration. Fourth, it emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, suggesting that responsible AI integration in education requires sustained dialogue among educators, technologists, ethicists, and learners. By bridging empirical evidence with practical recommendations, this paper serves as a strategic guide for stakeholders navigating the rapidly evolving landscape of AI-powered education. It moves beyond theoretical discussion to address real-world implementation considerations, ensuring that AI's transformative capabilities are harnessed for equitable, effective, and ethically sound learning environments. The paper's comprehensive perspective positions it as a foundational resource for those seeking to understand not only what AI can do for education, but how it should be deployed to serve the public good responsibly.

References are available upon request.

BEYOND THE CLICK: THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMER ONLINE BROWSING ON PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE AND PURCHASE INTENTION

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Keywords: Consumer Online Browsing (COB), Product Knowledge, Purchase Intention, Hedonic consumption, online behavior

Description: This paper investigates how different types of consumer online browsing (exploratory vs. goal-directed) influence product knowledge and purchase intentions, demonstrating through three experimental studies that browsing behavior's effects are moderated by product involvement and hedonic/utilitarian motivations, with important implications for e-commerce marketing strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study examines how Consumer Online Browsing (COB) - which includes both exploratory (pleasure-driven) and goal-directed (efficiency-driven) search behaviors - influences product knowledge acquisition and purchase intention. While existing research typically views online shopping as a linear process, this paper argues that COB is an iterative process shaped by product involvement (high versus low) and motivational drivers (hedonic versus utilitarian). This research

addresses three core questions: First, how do exploratory versus goal-directed browsing modes differently affect product knowledge and purchase intent? Second, does product involvement strengthen COB's impact on these outcomes? Third, how do hedonic (enjoyment-focused) and utilitarian (goal-focused) motivations moderate COB's effects? By combining insights from Decision-Making Theory, Product Involvement Theory, and the Hedonic/Utilitarian Framework, the study challenges conventional models and suggests that COB's non-linear nature requires marketers to develop adaptive strategies to effectively convert browsing activity into sales.

Method and Data

The research employed three experimental studies with diverse samples totaling 1,814 participants after validity checks. Study 1 involved 549 participants in a 2x2 design comparing exploratory versus goal-directed search with incidental versus intentional browsing, simulating real e-commerce browsing on platforms like Kith.com. Results indicated that exploratory browsing enhanced product knowledge, while goal-directed browsing had a limited effect on purchase intention. Study 2 with 611 participants used a 2x2 design contrasting COB with prepurchase search across high and low involvement products, revealing COB's stronger impact on both knowledge and intention for high-involvement items like furniture compared to low-involvement products like spa treatments. Study 3 with 654 participants manipulated hedonic (fun-focused) versus utilitarian (efficiency-focused) motivations, confirming that hedonic browsing increased product knowledge while utilitarian browsing boosted purchase intent. All studies included control variables like prior brand familiarity and incorporated manipulation checks to validate experimental conditions.

Summary of Findings

The research yielded several key findings. Exploratory browsing significantly enhanced product knowledge, while goal-directed browsing showed only a weak influence on purchase intention. High product involvement amplified COB's effects, as COB proved more effective than prepurchase search for knowledge retention. The study found that hedonic motivations drove deeper engagement and knowledge acquisition, whereas utilitarian motivations prioritized efficiency and increased purchase intent. Intentional browsing improved product knowledge but did not significantly affect purchase intention, suggesting differences in cognitive processing. Notably, participants reported higher frustration during intentional browsing in Study 1, while hedonic browsing led to more return visits in Study 3. These results highlight COB's dual role in both educating consumers and driving conversions, with effects varying based on levels of product involvement and consumer motivations. The findings collectively demonstrate that different browsing modes serve distinct purposes in the consumer decision journey, with important implications for marketing strategy and website design.

Key Contributions

This research makes several critical contributions to the understanding of consumer online browsing behavior and its implications for marketing strategy. First, it challenges the traditional linear perspective on online shopping by framing Consumer Online Browsing (COB) as an iterative and dynamic process, influenced by both motivational drivers (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and levels of product involvement. By employing three experimental studies across different product categories and browsing contexts, the study provides robust empirical evidence on how

exploratory (hedonic, pleasure-driven) browsing and goal-directed (utilitarian, efficiency-driven) browsing differently impact product knowledge acquisition and purchase intention.

The research further highlights the moderating role of product involvement, revealing that COB is especially effective for knowledge retention and purchase intention in high-involvement scenarios. Additionally, the findings uncover that hedonic motivations foster deeper engagement and knowledge, while utilitarian motivations drive purchase intent. The work also demonstrates that intentional browsing leads to greater knowledge, although it can cause user frustration, a nuance often overlooked in prior studies. Collectively, these insights offer actionable implications for e-commerce marketing, suggesting that adaptive strategies tailored to different browsing modes and motivational profiles can more effectively convert online interactions into sales and informed consumer decisions.

References available upon request.

CONSUMER EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO AI GENERATED ADVERTISING

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Keywords: AI-generated advertising, facial emotion recognition, DeepFace, consumer emotions, advertising effectiveness

Description: This study compares DeepFace facial emotion recognition technology with traditional self-report measures to assess consumer emotional responses to AI-generated advertising and their impact on advertising effectiveness.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study addresses the critical need to compare the effectiveness of AI-powered emotion recognition tools versus traditional self-report measures in capturing consumer emotional responses to AI-generated advertising content. As AI transforms advertising creation,

understanding whether biometric and self-report methodologies yield consistent results in emotion detection becomes crucial for advertising effectiveness measurement. The primary research question investigates: To what extent do DeepFace facial emotion recognition technology and self-report measures achieve convergent results in identifying consumer emotional responses to AI-generated advertisements? Secondary questions examine how demographic factors (gender, age, income, education) moderate emotional responses within each measurement approach, and whether emotions captured by each method similarly predict advertising effectiveness metrics (attitude toward advertisement, attitude toward brand, and purchase intention). This research specifically focuses on AI-generated advertising content to understand unique emotional triggers that differentiate these advertisements from traditional human-created content. By systematically comparing these measurement approaches, this study seeks to establish the reliability and validity of biometric emotion recognition as a complement or alternative to traditional self-report methods in advertising research.

Method and Data

The study employed a controlled experimental design comparing DeepFace biometric analysis with self-report questionnaires among 150 participants (94 female, 56 male, ages 18-60) representing diverse occupational backgrounds. Participants viewed a single AI-generated

advertisement for ITO EN's green tea featuring an AI virtual actor created using advanced AI modeling tools. The dual-method approach captured emotional responses simultaneously: DeepFace facial recognition technology recorded and analyzed seven emotions (happy, surprise, sad, angry, disgust, fear, neutral) from video footage at 30fps, while participants completed validated self-report scales measuring the same emotional constructs. Established scales assessed advertising effectiveness: attitude toward advertisement (Aad), attitude toward brand (Ab), and purchase intention (PI). Statistical analysis employed linear regression to compare predictive validity between measurement methods and examine demographic moderating effects. The study design controlled for advertisement exposure timing and environmental factors. While the sample size of 150 provides adequate statistical power for medium effect sizes, generalizability limitations across broader consumer segments and cultural contexts are acknowledged. Data preprocessing converted 15-second video recordings into frame-by-frame emotion analysis using Python and the DeepFace library.

Summary of Findings

The comparison between DeepFace and self-report measures revealed significant methodological differences in emotion detection capabilities and predictive validity.

DeepFace demonstrated superior sensitivity by identifying all seven emotions as significant predictors of advertising effectiveness ($p < 0.1$), while self-report measures primarily

captured happy and surprise emotions as significant predictors. This suggests biometric tools detect broader emotional spectrums including subtle negative emotions often underreported in self-assessments. Demographic moderating effects varied by measurement method: DeepFace revealed gender influences on brand attitudes, while self-report showed income effects on the same outcome, indicating different demographic sensitivities across methodologies. Both approaches supported core hypotheses linking emotional responses to advertising effectiveness, but with different explanatory power (self-report $R^2 = 0.148-0.216$; DeepFace $R^2 = 0.102-0.155$). The findings indicate partial convergent validity between methods for positive emotions but divergent results for negative emotions. DeepFace captured dynamic, moment-to-moment emotional fluctuations that self-report measures missed, suggesting complementary rather than substitutional relationships between methodologies. These results highlight the unique value of each approach in comprehensive emotion measurement.

Key Contributions

This research makes four key contributions addressing current gaps in advertising research methodology and AI-generated content effectiveness. First, it establishes methodological benchmarks for comparing biometric and self-report emotion measurement approaches, demonstrating that while both methods predict advertising effectiveness, they capture

different emotional dimensions with DeepFace revealing unconscious negative emotions missed by self-reports. Second, it provides initial theoretical framework for understanding demographic moderators in emotion measurement, showing that gender and income effects manifest differently across methodologies, suggesting measurement method selection should consider target demographic characteristics. Third, it offers practical guidelines for advertising practitioners implementing dual-method emotion measurement, recommending DeepFace for capturing comprehensive emotional profiles including suppressed negative responses, while self-reports remain valuable for conscious positive emotional validation. Fourth, it contributes to AI-generated advertising literature by demonstrating that biometric measures can effectively assess emotional responses to AI-created content, providing validation for using automated emotion recognition tools in evaluating AI-generated advertising effectiveness. The study establishes that combining both methodologies provides the most comprehensive understanding of consumer emotional responses, with practical implications for optimizing AI-generated advertising content based on objective emotional feedback loops.

References are available upon request.

CONSUMER EXPERIENCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: ENHANCING TACTILE ENGAGEMENT IN ONLINE SHOPPING

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Keywords: Need for Touch, Online Apparel Shopping, Social Media Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Cross-Modal Correspondence.

Description: This experimental study examines how Need for Touch (NFT) influences clothing preferences in online shopping through tactile cues in Instagram Reels.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Need for Touch (NFT) on online apparel shopping using Instagram Reels as a sensory stimulus. Segmenting participants into Autotelic and Instrumental NFT groups, the research highlights how tactile cues in videos shape clothing preferences, with distinct preferences for Casual, Ethnic, and Formal wear.

INTRODUCTION

While online shopping is convenient, the lack of touch limits product evaluation, especially in apparel where fabric, texture, and fit matter (Peck & Childers, 2003; Bellman et al., 1999). Technologies such as haptics, VR, AR, and wearables simulate tactile cues, improving engagement and purchase intentions (Yim et al., 2017; Lim & Yap, 2024; Vona et al., 2025; Borpujari, 2025; Racat & Plotkina, 2020). Cross-modal cues also strengthen evaluations (Kim et al., 2023; Tsai et al., 2023; McLean & Wilson, 2023). Since high-NFT consumers rely on tactile input (Racat & Plotkina, 2020; Kim et al., 2023), this study examines how Instagram video stimuli with cross-modal design affect female consumers' tactile perceptions and garment preferences using an experimental design with 56 participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. TACTILE ENGAGEMENT AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE SHOPPING

Tactile feedback shapes product evaluation and purchase decisions (Peck & Childers, 2003), but its absence in e-commerce creates a sensory gap that lowers confidence and increases returns in apparel shopping (Carter & Chittenden, 2021).

2. THE ROLE OF HAPTIC FEEDBACK IN E-COMMERCE

Haptic technology simulates touch through vibrations or forces, enhancing online shopping by conveying textures, weight, and other attributes. It improves product evaluations and realism (Yim et al., 2017), with mid-air haptic interfaces increasing satisfaction (Lim & Yap, 2024) and VR hand-based interactions creating more natural, immersive experiences (Vona et al., 2025), helping bridge the sensory gap in digital shopping.

3. CROSS-MODAL SENSORY ENGAGEMENT

Cross-modal correspondence, or integrating multiple senses, enhances consumer engagement by allowing visual cues to evoke tactile sensations, improving product evaluations and purchase intentions (Kim, Han, & Hyun, 2023). Studies show that AR features combining visual and tactile feedback improve accuracy in assessing apparel fit and texture (Tsai et al., 2023) and create more immersive shopping experiences (McLean & Wilson, 2023).

4. NEED FOR TOUCH (NFT) AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Need for Touch (NFT) reflects consumers' desire for tactile interaction, influencing behavior in both physical and digital retail (Peck & Childers, 2003; Racat & Plotkina, 2020). High-NFT consumers respond strongly to sensory cues like haptic feedback, making tactile elements vital in online apparel shopping (Racat & Plotkina, 2020).

THE ROLE OF INSTAGRAM VIDEOS AND CONTENT IN CONSUMER NEED FOR TOUCH ASSESSMENT

1. VISUAL CONTENT AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Instagram's shift to a shopping ecosystem helps bridge the tactile gap in online apparel shopping. Branded content shapes consumer attitudes (De Cicco, 2023), while high-quality visuals enhance engagement and interest (Aiello et al., 2017).

2. THE ROLE OF VIDEOS IN ENHANCING TACTILE PERCEPTION

Instagram videos enhance online shopping by simulating texture, fit, and functionality, especially appealing to Gen Z and Millennials. Though they reduce the sensory gap, technologies like AR and haptic feedback are needed to better replicate touch for high-NFT consumers.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess the impact of Instagram content with cross-modal cues on tactile perceptions of apparel.
- To investigate the role of instrumental and autotelic needs for touch in shaping consumer behavior and engagement with online apparel content.

HYPOTHESIS:

H1: Consumers with higher Autotelic Need for Touch (ATNFT) will prefer Casual Wear over Evening Wear and Formal Wear.

H2: Consumers with higher Instrumental Need for Touch (INFT) will prefer Evening Wear over Casual Wear and Formal Wear.

H3: Consumers with higher Autotelic Need for Touch (ATNFT) will prefer Formal Wear over Casual Wear and Evening Wear.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This study applies the S-O-R model to test how Instagram Reels with 360-degree views and texture cues enhance tactile perceptions and influence online apparel shopping. NFT-instrumental and autotelic-mediate this process, with higher NFT expected to increase engagement and purchase intentions.

METHODOLOGY

PILOT STUDY

An exploratory study of 156 Indian female professionals found that 62% preferred Instagram for apparel content, compared to Facebook (33%) and Snapchat/YouTube (5%). Instagram's visual and interactive features, especially influencer videos, shape tactile perceptions of fabric, drape, and fit, while fostering trust and purchase confidence (Marwick, 2015; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). This pilot examines how such content simulates tactile experiences, influencing perceptions and decision-making in online apparel shopping.

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY DESIGN

This study aims to explore how cross-modal correspondence and sensory synergy within curated Instagram content influence tactile perceptions and consumer purchasing behavior, specifically for female consumers engaged in online apparel marketing on social media platforms.

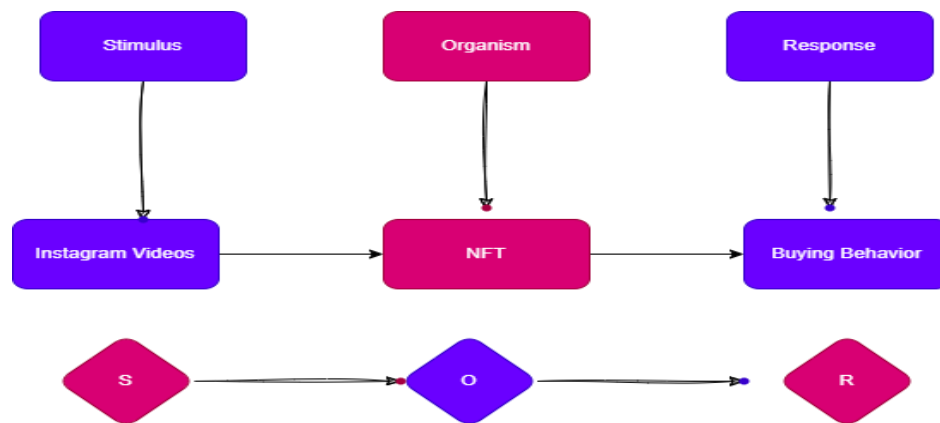


Figure: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

The sample included active female Instagram users aged 18–35 who consistently engaged with fashion and lifestyle content. Selection was based on demonstrated interactions with apparel-related posts, and informed consent was obtained after briefing participants on the study’s aims, methods, and ethics.

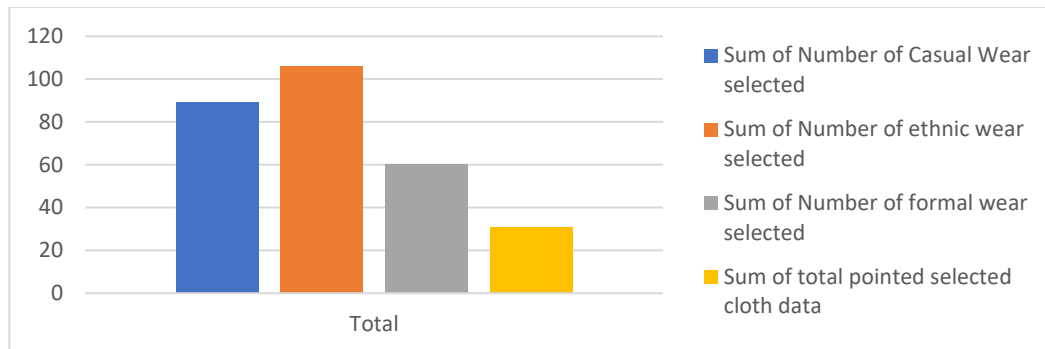
EXPOSURE PHASE

Participants viewed curated Instagram Reels (15–30 seconds) featuring casual, evening, and formal wear. The Reels provided 360-degree apparel views and cross-modal elements to simulate fabric texture, enabling assessment of fit, fabric, and drape without physical interaction.

EVALUATION PHASE

After viewing the Instagram content, participants completed a 12-item Need for Touch (NFT) questionnaire, using a Likert scale to assess instrumental (decision-oriented) and autotelic (pleasure-oriented) tactile preferences, capturing individual differences in tactile engagement.

Total Apparel Categories Selected via Instagram: Casual, Ethnic, and Formal Wear



BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

Following the evaluation phase, participants engaged in an online shopping simulation featuring the same apparel items. Behavioral metrics—including products viewed, items added to cart, and purchase decisions—were recorded to assess how cross-modal tactile evaluations influenced e-fashion shopping behavior.

DATA ANALYSIS

Repeated Measures ANOVA revealed significant effects of Need for Touch (NFT) on clothing preferences among 56 participants, divided into Autotelic (ATNFT, $n = 34$) and Instrumental (INFT, $n = 22$) groups. Multivariate analysis showed a significant influence of NFT on clothing selection (Casual, Ethnic, Formal) (Pillai's Trace = .094, $F(2,55) = 2.640$, $p = .041$). The NFT $\times$ Buying Behavior interaction was also significant (Pillai's Trace = .081, $F(2,55) = 2.280$, $p < .012$). Further analysis confirmed a main effect for NFT ($F(2,104) = 2.576$, $p = .041$), a strong NFT $\times$ Buying Behavior interaction ($F(2,104) = 8.625$, $p < .001$), and a significant linear trend ($F(1,52) = 4.854$, $p = .032$). Overall, ATNFT participants preferred Casual Wear, while INFT participants showed stronger preferences for Ethnic Wear.

Analysis showed that Autotelic Need for Touch participants preferred casual wear over formal wear, while Instrumental Need for Touch participants favoured ethnic wear. This indicates autotelic individuals value comfort and sensory pleasure, whereas instrumental individuals prioritize functional, practical clothing.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This study shows that Need for Touch (NFT) significantly shapes online apparel shopping via Instagram Reels, with ATNFT consumers preferring casual wear and INFT consumers leaning toward evening wear. NFT effects, moderated by purchase behavior, support prior research on tactile engagement (Racat & Plotkina, 2020). Cross-modal cues like fabric visuals and 360-degree views enhanced tactile engagement (Kim et al., 2023), while Instagram's visual-centric features and influencer content further boosted trust and purchase intentions (De Vries et al., 2012; Marwick, 2015; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). These findings highlight the value of tailoring marketing strategies to NFT profiles in online apparel retail.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION:

This study applies the S-O-R model to show that NFT shapes online apparel choices: ATNFT consumers prefer casual wear for sensory pleasure, while INFT consumers Favour ethnic wear for practicality. Instagram Reels with cross-modal cues and influencer marketing further influence perceptions and purchase behavior, offering insights into sensory marketing.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study has limitations, including a small INFT sample (22 participants), which may restrict generalizability. Future research should use larger, more diverse samples and examine additional psychological factors, such as self-concept and social influence. Moreover, comparing Instagram

Reels with other content types (e.g., Stories, static images) could yield deeper insights into optimizing social media marketing.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NFT shapes online apparel preferences, with ATNFT consumers favoring casual wear and INFT consumers preferring ethnic wear. The study underscores the role of tactile engagement and highlights Instagram Reels as an effective tool for creating immersive, sensory-driven shopping experiences that enhance consumer perceptions and purchase intentions.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCER'S ENDORSED POSTS, THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BELIEVABILITY

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Keywords: Virtual Influencers, Believability, Social Media Marketing, Interaction Style

Description: This study explores how the interaction style of a virtual influencer's endorsed post impacts the effectiveness of the endorsement for social media users who do not follow any virtual influencers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Virtual influencers are digital personas or computer-generated imagery who mimic the actions of a human influencer (Arsenyan & Mirowska, 2021). Virtual Influencers are increasingly becoming a popular choice among brands for endorsing products or services. However, a significant portion of social media users do not follow any virtual influencer on the internet. It is possible that brands may facilitate exposure of endorsed posts created by virtual influencers to social media users who may not follow any virtual influencer. Such social media users are likely to judge the endorsed post based on the content as well as the virtual identity of the influencer. As the influencer is an artificial agent, the believability of the post becomes important. Based on the virtual nature of such influencers, subjects are likely to make a judgement whether they are interacting with an inanimate object or whether the virtual influencer is there just like any other

human. Thus, two research questions emerge. First, what is the impact of virtual influencer's interaction style on believability of endorsed posts? Second, how does believability of endorsed posts, and the social presence of virtual influencer mediate the effect of interaction style on endorsement effectiveness.

Method and Data

An experiment was conducted to empirically test the hypothesis. A single factorial design was implemented. The factor of concern was the interaction style of virtual influencer (task-based vs. socio-emotional). Participants for the study were recruited from the survey platform of Prolific. The participants were briefed about the non-human nature of virtual influencers. A total of one hundred and fifty-one participants were recruited. One participant failed an attention check, and thirty participants did follow virtual influencers on social media, thus making them ineligible for participation. These thirty-one participants were eliminated from the final data set. The eligible one hundred and twenty participants were shown endorsed Instagram posts from a fictitious social media influencer called anita_b who endorsed a mobile phone brand of Oppo. Half were shown a post with a task-based interaction style whereas the other half were shown a post where the same virtual influencer adopted a socio-emotional interaction style. After viewing the post, the participants were asked to record their responses on the dependent variables of purchase intentions, attitude towards the ad, brand, as well as the influencer. Furthermore, the participants also recorded their responses on the variables of believability of the post, perceived competence and social presence of virtual influencer.

Summary of Findings

An independent sample *t*-test demonstrated that participants attributed a significantly greater level of perceived competence to the task-based interaction style stimuli vs. socio-emotional stimuli. Thus, the manipulation check was successful. All measures had Cronbach's α within acceptable ranges. A one-way ANOVA analysis with believability as the dependent variable and the interaction style as the independent variable suggested that participants attributed a significantly greater level of believability to the task-based interaction style stimuli. The results suggest that participants who do not follow a virtual influencer, attribute greater level of believability to endorsed posts crafted with task-based interaction style. The mediating effect of interaction style on endorsement effectiveness was tested using Hayes PROCESS model 6. The results of analysis suggest that believability did mediate the relationship between interaction style & the attitude towards the influencer, the ad, and the brand. However, believability did not mediate the relationship between interaction style and purchase intention. The serial mediation analysis also revealed an indirect effect between interaction style as the independent variable and the dependent variables of attitude towards the influencer, the ad, the brand as well as purchase intentions. The serial mediation analysis does not suggest a significant direct effect of interaction style on the dependent variables.

Statement of Key Contributions

The literature stream of virtual influencers is quite extensive and offers an insight into the practice of endorsement by virtual influencers. However, the literature stream relies on the assumption that social media users are aware of the origin and identity of the virtual influencers. This study extends the literature stream of virtual influencers by specifically understanding how social media users who do not follow any virtual influencer react to a virtual influencer's

endorsement. This study also offers significant managerial implications as well. Even though not all social media users follow virtual influencers, brands partner with virtual influencers and show endorsed posts to a wide variety of audience. The results of the study suggest that social media users who do not follow any virtual influencer find endorsed posts from virtual influencers as more believable when the virtual influencer utilizes a task-based interaction style. Furthermore, believable posts generate better attitudes and purchase intentions among social media users, and the effect is mediated by social presence of the virtual influencer. The study can offer guidance to practitioners in terms of shaping the interaction style of the virtual influencers based on the intended audience for the endorsements.

References available upon request

EXPLORING GENERATION Z'S INTERACTION WITH VOICE ASSISTANTS IN ONLINE SHOPPING: A MULTI-METHOD APPROACH

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Keywords: Voice assistants, Online Shopping, Product Recommendation, Multi-Method Research.

Description: Our paper reveals that voice assistants' recommendations are more effective for low-enjoyability products due to reduced cognitive load but have limited influence on emotionally driven purchases, highlighting the need for strategic marketing approaches that can be individualized through personalized interactions with voice assistants.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research question – The multi-method study triangulates multiple research questions. First, the research considers, using a quantitative survey, whether customers are willing to engage with voice assistants for online shopping. Second, the study extends these findings with a qualitative exploration. The in-depth interviews target the reasons and circumstances of Generation Z regarding using voice assistants for online shopping and following product recommendations of voice assistants when making a product selection. Finally, neurophysiological methods examine whether voice assistants' recommendations affect overall product choices during online shopping and whether they influence Generation Z's attention to the recommended product.

Method and data – To study the three main research objectives, a qualitative survey with 246 Generation Z was conducted to resolve the prerequisite of using voice assistants for online shopping. Next, 29 participants were interviewed following the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Techniques (ZMET). These in-depth interviews explore why and under which circumstances Generation Z would use VA for online shopping and if they would follow VA recommendations when making product choices. Lastly, a product choice experiment combined with an eye-tracking study tests the effect of product recommendations given by voice assistants on visual attention and cognitive processing. The total sample consisted of 203 Generation Z participants.

Summary of findings – The ZMET reveals that although voice assistants help reduce the cognitive effort for low-enjoyability products, users remain skeptical in categories where emotional attachment and personal preferences are stronger. These results are supported by the survey data, which indicate a low willingness to adopt voice assistants, primarily due to doubts about their usefulness and ease of use. The product choice experiment also shows that voice assistant-recommended items draw more visual attention, measured by the number of fixations, especially for less enjoyable products like detergents and drills. However, as reflected in longer average fixation durations, participants favor their preferences for more emotionally engaging items, such as bicycles and couches.

Key contributions – This study provides insights into Generation Z's interaction with voice assistants during online shopping by integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Media Richness Theory (MRT), and Visual Attention Theory. Findings show that Generation Z appreciates voice assistants for simplifying decisions, especially for low-enjoyability or utilitarian products like detergents and drills. However, emotional engagement and product type significantly influence their reliance on voice assistants. While TAM constructs—perceived usefulness and ease of use—explain voice assistant adoption for simple, functional items, these factors are less predictive for emotionally significant purchases. The study also extends MRT by showing that while voice interfaces are persuasive and reduce cognitive effort, their effectiveness diminishes when personal preference is high. Eye-tracking data further reveal that voice assistants increase visual attention for complex or low-enjoyment items, supporting attention and cognitive load theories. However, users prioritize personal preferences over voice assistant suggestions for high-enjoyability products, challenging the assumption that attention leads to behavioral alignment. Overall, this research advances the understanding of how cognitive, emotional, and contextual factors shape Generation Z's adoption of voice assistants, offering a more nuanced, product-specific view of human-AI interaction.

FINE-TUNED LLMS FOR PERSONALIZED, GAMIFIED BRAND ADVOCACY

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Keywords: Large Language Models, Brand Advocacy, Gamification, Personalization, Marketing AI

Description:

This research explores how fine-tuned large language models (LLMs) can power brand advocacy campaigns by combining personalized storytelling with gamification to better align with brand tone and increase user engagement.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Advocacy marketing strategies have often struggled to scale personalization without losing authenticity. Before LLMs, there wasn't a practical way to create high-quality personalized content on the fly; even with LLMs, base models often produce generic or unreliable content. This research investigates whether fine-tuning an open-source LLM on brand-specific data, coupled with gamification mechanics, can create scalable yet emotionally resonant advocacy campaigns. In a hypothetical Patagonia-inspired "Save the Planet" sustainability campaign, does this approach outperform a base model on tone alignment, personalization, and engagement?

Method and Data

This sustainability campaign was designed to incorporate gamified elements like eco-points and challenges to get users to take eco-friendly actions. Meta's LLaMA 3 8B model was fine-tuned

using Low-Rank Adaptation (LoRA) on a brand-consistent dataset built from brand statements, blog posts, and simulated user-engagement prompts. Evaluation involved presenting identical prompts to both the fine-tuned model and the base model, with a brief length guideline on the base for response length normalization. Three scenarios reflecting different components of advocacy design were tested, each with the same inference settings and anonymized outputs to reduce bias. Using the LLM-as-a-judge evaluation technique, a separate LLM (“judge”) scored outputs on tone alignment, personalization, and engagement potential (1–5 scale).

Summary of Findings

The fine-tuned model outperformed the base model on tone alignment (4.83 vs. 4.43), personalization (4.60 vs. 4.30), and engagement potential (4.93 vs. 3.97). It produced concise and on-brand language, did better at converting user preferences into an actionable challenge, and was more consistent in using gamified content like eco-points which lifted engagement. In comparison, the base model often generated longer, less targeted responses and sometimes defaulted to sales-oriented language like free gift cards or product offerings, which the judge penalized. Qualitatively, the results revealed that the fine-tuned model’s predictable structure (congratulate, suggest action, reward with eco-points) enabled a more robust production-grade system by reducing off-brand deviations while still leaving room for creativity.

Key Contributions

This research demonstrates that fine-tuning open-source LLMs on brand-specific data, plus light gamification, outperforms base models and can substantially improve advocacy campaign performance while maintaining authenticity at scale. Practically, this works because a small, curated dataset keeps data preparation efforts and compute costs low. The recent LLM-as-a-judge technique offers further potential to simplify the process with basic quality assurance ratings at

scale, which are then verified by humans. For companies, this approach can strengthen loyalty and word-of-mouth referrals, and nonprofits can amplify social or environmental causes leading to more advocates and more donors.

MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USER EXPERIENCE OF ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCY (OTA) APPS

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Keywords: User Experience, Online Travel Agency, Sentiment Analysis, Topic Modeling, Mobile Applications

Description: This study analyzes 40,000 user reviews from four major online travel agencies (OTA) applications to identify key user experience (UX) factors through sentiment analysis and topic modeling.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study addresses two research questions: (1) Which sentiment analysis model best classifies user reviews of OTA apps? and (2) Which dimensions of user experience (UX) are most appreciated and challenged in these reviews? As mobile travel applications become increasingly central to trip planning and booking, understanding the UX factors that influence user satisfaction is critical. Despite the growing body of literature on mobile app performance, few studies have focused specifically on the UX dimensions of OTA apps. This research aims to fill that gap by analyzing user-generated content to uncover the most influential UX factors. The study also compares a dictionary-based sentiment analysis model (VADER) with a machine learning

approach (Multinomial Logistic Regression) to determine which method more accurately captures user sentiment.

Method and Data

The study employed a three-step methodology: data collection, sentiment analysis, and UX factor modeling. A total of 40,000 English-language reviews were scraped from the Google Play Store for four leading OTA apps: Booking, Airbnb, Agoda, and Expedia. Sentiment analysis was conducted using two models—VADER and Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR)—with MLR outperforming VADER across all evaluation metrics (accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score). The MLR model was then used to classify reviews as positive, neutral, or negative. For UX factor modeling, Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) was applied separately to positive and negative reviews to identify dominant topics. These topics were then mapped to UX dimensions based on prior literature. The analysis revealed four key UX factors in positive reviews and six in negative reviews. The methodology ensured a robust and data-driven approach to identifying the most impactful elements of user experience in OTA apps.

Summary of Findings

The sentiment analysis revealed that 65% of reviews were positive, 22% negative, and 13% neutral. Positive reviews were primarily associated with four UX factors: attractiveness, ease of use, helpfulness, and feature/functionality. Users praised the overall experience, intuitive navigation, service quality, and accommodation features. In contrast, negative reviews highlighted six UX issues: customer support, user profile, accuracy, cost, misleading app behavior, and requests for improvement. The most frequent complaints involved poor customer service, inaccurate booking information, and refund issues. The study also confirmed a strong correlation between review ratings and sentiment classification, validating the reliability of the MLR model. These findings provide a comprehensive view of what users value and criticize in

OTA apps, offering actionable insights for developers and marketers aiming to enhance user satisfaction and app performance.

Key Contributions

This study makes four key contributions to marketing and tourism research. First, it identifies ten critical UX dimensions—four positive and six negative—that directly influence user satisfaction with OTA apps. Second, it establishes clear relationships between user sentiment and specific UX factors, offering a nuanced understanding of how users evaluate app performance. Third, it provides actionable recommendations for OTA developers and tourism companies, such as improving customer support and ensuring information transparency, to enhance user satisfaction and loyalty. Fourth, it advances digital marketing research by demonstrating the value of user-generated content and machine learning techniques in understanding consumer behavior in mobile environments. By analyzing a large dataset of user reviews, the study bridges the gap between academic theory and practical application, offering a scalable model for UX evaluation in other app-based services. These contributions are particularly relevant in a highly competitive tourism market where superior UX can be a key differentiator.

THE APPLICATION AND IMPACT OF THE UNCANNY VALLEY EFFECT IN INTELLIGENT VOICE CUSTOMER SERVICE: ANALYZING THE MODERATING ROLES OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC TENDENCIES AND ATTACHMENT ANXIETY ON WAITING EXPERIENCES

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Keywords: Intelligent Voice Customer Service, Voice Anthropomorphism, Uncanny Valley Effect, Waiting Experience, Anthropomorphic Tendency

Description: Grounded in the Uncanny Valley Theory, this study adopts scenario-based experiments and survey methods to examine how voice anthropomorphism in intelligent voice customer service within the banking sector affects consumers’ waiting experiences, testing the U-shaped relationship between voice anthropomorphism and voice affinity, the mediating role of voice affinity on perceived waiting time and waiting experience, and the moderating effects of individual differences such as anthropomorphic tendency and attachment anxiety, thereby offering both theoretical and practical implications..

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

1. How does the level of voice anthropomorphism influence consumers’ perceived waiting time and overall waiting experience in intelligent voice customer service?

2. To what extent does voice affinity mediate the effects of voice anthropomorphism on perceived waiting time and waiting experience?
3. How do individual characteristics, such as anthropomorphic tendencies and attachment anxiety, moderate the effects of voice anthropomorphism and voice affinity on consumers' perceived waiting time and waiting experience?

Method and Data

This study adopted a scenario-based experimental design with five levels of voice anthropomorphism. Two pretests using ANOVA and t-tests confirmed the clarity and manipulation of perceived anthropomorphism. Participants in Taiwan were recruited via social media and randomly assigned to one of five conditions. After listening to simulated voice messages from a bank's AI system, they completed questionnaires measuring voice anthropomorphism, voice affinity, perceived waiting time, waiting experience, anthropomorphic tendency, attachment anxiety, and waiting tolerance. A total of 1,100 valid responses are targeted to ensure statistical representativeness. Data will be analyzed using SPSS and AMOS, with polynomial regression models to explore nonlinear effects and the PROCESS Macro to test mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation relationships.

Summary of Findings

The study confirms an inverted U-shaped relationship between voice anthropomorphism and both voice affinity and user waiting experience, suggesting moderate anthropomorphism yields optimal outcomes. Voice affinity significantly reduces perceived waiting time and enhances waiting experience, while perceived waiting time negatively impacts overall experience. Individual differences moderate these effects: anthropomorphic tendency amplifies affinity responses at low-to-moderate anthropomorphism levels, while attachment anxiety strengthens the

negative link between affinity and perceived waiting time, but weakens its positive effect on user experience. These results validate the application of Uncanny Valley Theory to AI voice systems and highlight the need for tailored voice designs that align with user traits.

Key Contributions

This study addresses a critical gap in AI service research by applying Uncanny Valley Theory to voice-based interfaces, an area traditionally dominated by visual anthropomorphism studies. It demonstrates a nonlinear relationship between voice anthropomorphism and voice affinity, and reveals that user traits—such as anthropomorphic tendency and attachment anxiety—moderate perceptions of waiting time and overall experience. The findings offer novel insights into how psychological and personality variables shape human–AI interaction. From a practical standpoint, the study provides design guidance for intelligent voice systems: maintaining moderate anthropomorphism helps avoid the Uncanny Valley effect, enhances consumer acceptance and satisfaction, and reduces perceived waiting time. These results are particularly valuable for banking and service industries aiming to integrate AI while minimizing user discomfort and improving service quality. By bridging theoretical frameworks with real-world application, this research lays a foundation for future studies on personalized AI system design and contributes to the advancement of intelligent customer service.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Effect of Context-Specific Thinking on Perceived Ease of Use of Generative AI: The Moderating Role of Self-Efficacy.

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Keywords: construal level theory, psychological distance, perceived ease of use, self-efficacy.

Description: Using experimental data from 67 participants, we find that participants primed with a proximal construal report significantly higher perceived ease of use than those with a distal construal and that self-efficacy fully mediates this relationship: proximal framing increases users' confidence in their ability to use the AI, which in turn boosts ease of use perceptions.

Research Questions

This study investigates how construal level framing of generative AI (GenAI) usage scenarios influences users' perceptions of its ease of use, and whether this relationship is mediated by task-specific self-efficacy. While prior technology adoption literature highlights the role of self-efficacy in shaping ease-of-use perceptions, limited empirical work examines how construal level (i.e., proximal, low-level vs. distal, high-level thinking) influences these perceptions through cognitive and motivational pathways. We pose the following overarching question: Does low-level construal framing enhance perceived ease of use of GenAI tools through increased self-efficacy? Our conceptual model, grounded in Construal Level Theory and the Technology Acceptance

Model, proposes that low-level construal prompts users to focus on concrete, actionable steps, thereby increasing their confidence (self-efficacy) in operating GenAI. This elevated self-efficacy is expected to translate into higher perceived ease of use. The study addresses a gap in marketing technology research by integrating psychological framing with technology adoption drivers, offering insights into designing AI adoption strategies for diverse user groups. By examining the indirect pathway via self-efficacy, we also provide a nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms that underlie AI usability perceptions, with implications for marketing, product design, and AI communication strategies.

Method And Data

We conducted a mediation analysis using data from 67 participants, drawn from a larger sample of 106 MTurk participants who engaged in a controlled experimental task involving the hypothetical use of a popular generative AI tool. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two construal framing conditions—low-level (concrete, step-focused) or high-level (abstract, goal-focused)—by manipulating task instructions. Following the manipulation, participants completed validated scales measuring task-specific self-efficacy (SE) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) of the AI tool. The primary analysis employed structural equation modeling (SEM) in lavaan with bootstrapping (5,000 samples) to estimate direct, indirect, and total effects, along with bias-corrected confidence intervals. The mediation model tested PEOU_type (0 = high-level, 1 = low-level) as the independent variable, self-efficacy as the mediator, and perceived ease of use as the dependent variable. Model fit was saturated with zero degrees of freedom, ensuring exact parameter recovery. Standardized coefficients, standard errors, and p-values were reported following AMA reporting guideline. This design allowed for causal inference regarding the

mediating role of self-efficacy while controlling for randomization. The experimental and analytical rigor ensured robust estimation of mediation effects, enabling precise conclusions about the psychological pathways linking construal framing to AI usability perceptions.

Summary of Findings

The mediation analysis revealed that self-efficacy significantly mediated the relationship between construal framing (PEOU_type) and perceived ease of use of the generative AI tool. Path *a* (PEOU_type → SE) was positive and significant ($B = 0.497, p = .009$), indicating that participants in the low-level construal condition reported higher self-efficacy than those in the high-level condition. Path *b* (SE → PEOU_score) was also significant and strong ($B = 0.891, p < .001$), showing that higher self-efficacy strongly predicted greater perceived ease of use. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($B = 0.443, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.085, 0.792], p = .015$), supporting mediation. In contrast, the direct effect of construal framing on perceived ease of use was non-significant ($B = -0.014, p = .876$), indicating full mediation. The total effect ($B = 0.429, p = .028$) was significant, suggesting that construal framing influenced perceived ease of use entirely through self-efficacy. R^2 values indicated that the model explained 9.4% of the variance in self-efficacy and 76.5% in perceived ease of use. Overall, results suggest that concrete, step-focused instructions (low-level construal) enhance users' AI usability perceptions by boosting their confidence in completing AI-related tasks, rather than by directly altering ease-of-use judgments.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the intersection of technology adoption and consumer psychology by demonstrating that construal level framing affects perceived ease of use of generative AI tools through the mediating role of self-efficacy. First, it extends the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by incorporating Construal Level Theory (CLT) as a framing mechanism that indirectly influences usability perceptions. Second, it identifies self-efficacy as the critical psychological channel linking message framing to adoption-related perceptions, offering a theoretically grounded explanation for why low-level construal boosts ease-of-use beliefs. From a practical standpoint, the findings suggest that marketers, educators, and AI product developers can enhance user adoption by designing onboarding materials, training, and marketing content in a low-level construal format—emphasizing concrete steps and actionable details rather than abstract benefits. This has particular value in marketing contexts where user confidence is a barrier to adoption, such as introducing AI tools to non-expert or skeptical audiences. For the practitioners, the study provides both empirical evidence and actionable guidance for leveraging psychological framing in AI marketing strategies. It addresses current industry challenges in AI adoption and offers a replicable experimental framework for future research exploring motivational and cognitive mechanisms in technology acceptance.

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The Effect of Human Involvement and Personalization in Building Consumer Trust in AI: An fMRI Approach

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Keywords: AI trust, human-AI collaboration, fMRI, chatbot personalization, service marketing

Description: This study investigates how human involvement and chatbot personalization shape consumer trust and compliance in AI-based service delivery, using an fMRI approach.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the growing use of AI in service delivery, consumers remain hesitant to trust AI-based recommendations, especially when human oversight is absent. This research addresses the question: How do human involvement and personalization of chatbot interactions influence consumer trust and uncertainty in AI-mediated service recommendations? Drawing on social identity theory, we hypothesize that human-led service teams will elicit greater consumer trust due to perceived ingroup alignment. We also examine whether the uniqueness of chatbot interactions (i.e., adaptive personalization vs. rule-based replies) contributes to increased trust and reduced uncertainty. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), we explore the neural correlates of trust (e.g., activation in the caudate nucleus, anterior paracingulate cortex, and orbitofrontal cortex) and uncertainty (e.g., anterior insula, amygdala). The study seeks to uncover the cognitive mechanisms that underlie trust and decision-making in human-AI collaborations, contributing to the development of AI systems that are both effective and psychologically attuned to consumer needs.

Method and Data

The study uses a mixed-factor experimental design combining between-subjects manipulation of chatbot personalization (high vs. low) with a within-subjects manipulation of human involvement (present vs. absent). Participants (N = 20) recruited via HEC Montréal's research panel interact with two types of chatbots: one rule-based and one generative AI-driven, simulating restaurant recommendations. Human involvement is operationalized through visible validation by a human expert. During the fMRI scan, participants view AI-generated recommendations and indicate their acceptance via button press. Neural activity is recorded using a 3-Tesla Siemens Prisma MRI scanner. The analysis focuses on blood-oxygen-level-dependent (BOLD) signals in brain regions associated with trust and uncertainty. Preprocessing and statistical modeling are performed in SPM. Behavioral measures include self-reported trust and compliance levels, while neural responses are analyzed to examine the impact of human

involvement and personalization. This design allows for the assessment of both subjective and neurological dimensions of trust in AI.

Summary of Findings

We hypothesize that both human involvement and high personalization will positively affect trust and compliance. Participants are expected to exhibit greater neural activation in trust-related regions (e.g., caudate nucleus, orbitofrontal cortex) when receiving recommendations validated by a human. Conversely, recommendations lacking human validation are anticipated to activate uncertainty-related regions (e.g., anterior insula, amygdala). Similarly, adaptive, personalized chatbot interactions are predicted to enhance trust and satisfaction, reflected in both increased BOLD activity in trust-related brain regions and reduced activation in areas linked to uncertainty. Behaviorally, recommendations involving human validation and personalized interactions are expected to yield higher trust scores and greater compliance rates. These findings underscore the importance of human-centered design in AI services, suggesting that incorporating human oversight and personalization features into chatbot systems can significantly influence user acceptance, engagement, and satisfaction. The anticipated neural and behavioral results align with prior research indicating that human involvement reduces algorithm aversion and enhances perceived reliability in AI systems.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to service marketing and human-computer interaction literature in three significant ways. First, it extends social identity theory by demonstrating that consumers neurologically perceive human-led service teams as ingroup members, resulting in higher trust. Second, it provides empirical evidence from fMRI data that uniquely captures unconscious cognitive responses to AI-human collaboration—offering a deeper understanding of the trust mechanisms at play. Third, it highlights personalization as a crucial feature in chatbot interactions, showing that adaptive, user-specific responses enhance both subjective trust and neural markers of decision confidence. For practitioners, the findings emphasize the strategic value of embedding human oversight and conversational adaptivity into AI systems. Service organizations can improve user compliance, satisfaction, and loyalty by prioritizing hybrid team configurations and designing chatbot experiences that feel personalized and human-like. Moreover, this research contributes methodologically by integrating fMRI into service marketing, paving the way for future studies to explore the neurological foundations of consumer behavior. Ultimately, the study offers actionable insights for enhancing trust in AI while aligning with ethical standards and consumer expectations in high-stakes decision environments.

References are available upon request.

The Impact of AI Conversation Style on Consumer Attitudes

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Keywords: AI Conversation Style; service context; regulatory focus

Description: This study investigates the impact of AI voice assistants' Conversational Styles on consumer attitudes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Do usage scenarios (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and regulatory focus (promotion vs. prevention) moderate the relationship between AI language style and consumer attitudes?

Method and Data

Two pre-test and two experiments were performed in major university in China. Experiment 1 was conducted to examine the interaction effect between conversation style (abstract vs. concrete) and service context (hedonic vs. utilitarian) on consumer attitudes. A total of 322 participants were recruited from a major university in China and randomly assigned to a 2 (conversation style: abstract vs. concrete) $\times$ 2 (service context: hedonic vs. utilitarian) between-subjects experimental design. Upon completion, participants received course credit as compensation.

Experiment 2 was performed to examine the interaction effect between conversation style (abstract vs. concrete) and regulatory focus (prevention vs. promotion) on consumer attitudes. A total of 360 participants were recruited from a major university in China and randomly assigned to a 2 (conversation style: abstract vs. concrete) $\times$ 2 (regulatory focus: prevention vs. promotion) between-subjects experimental design. Upon completion, participants received course credit as compensation.

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Summary of Findings

The results indicate a significant interaction effect between Conversational Styles, usage context, and regulatory focus. In hedonic contexts, abstract Conversational Styles enhances consumers' positive attitudes, whereas in utilitarian contexts, a concrete Conversational Styles has a more pronounced effect. Additionally, consumers with a promotion focus tend to show higher attitude evaluations towards abstract Conversational Styles, while those with a prevention focus exhibit more favorable attitudes towards concrete Conversational Styles.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the academic marketing discipline by advancing knowledge on the interaction between AI voice assistants' Conversational Styles, service contexts, and consumer regulatory focus. By integrating psychological distance theory and regulatory focus theory into AI-human interaction studies, this work adds novel insights into optimizing communication for diverse usage scenarios and psychological states. These findings fill a gap in the marketing literature, offering a new insights on understanding of consumer responses to AI communication.

Managerial implications are also manifold. Non-academic stakeholders such as AI developers, marketing managers and policy makers would find important insights from this research findings.

References are available on request.

THE IMPACT OF LIVE CHAT AVAILABILITY AND USAGE ON CUSTOMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: Live chat, e-commerce, causal inference, customer engagement, online shopping

Description: This study investigates how the availability and usage of live chat influence customer purchase behavior in online retail.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study explores whether and how live chat—either human- or AI-operated—affects online customer purchasing behavior. While existing research focuses largely on the impact of chat usage, the broader effect of making live chat available to all users remains underexplored. Does merely offering the option to chat influence how much customers spend or how frequently they shop? We separate these two effects—chat availability and chat usage—to assess their independent contributions to consumer behavior. In particular, we examine whether the presence of a chat function affects per-visit spending, visit frequency, and total purchases, and whether these effects differ across product types, especially those with low customer ratings. The study also investigates whether the presence of chat offsets the uncertainty that deters purchases,

offering insights into its role in enhancing trust and service quality. By disentangling these mechanisms, we provide both theoretical and practical implications for the design of digital customer service tools.

Method and Data

We employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach to examine the causal impact of live chat availability. A North American online retailer introduced live chat only to iPhone users for one month, while Android users served as a control group—creating an exogenous shock to chat access. Our dataset covers January–April 2019, including nearly 20,000 customers across both platforms and over 21,000 unique SKUs. To estimate the impact of chat usage, we use a two-stage conditional mixed-process model that corrects for self-selection bias. The first stage models the likelihood of chat usage based on observable characteristics (e.g., app usage frequency, product ratings), while the second estimates how chat usage influences the probability of purchase. Key outcome variables include average spending per visit, total spending per week, and number of visits. Robustness checks include placebo tests, instrumental variable analysis, and inverse probability weighting. This rigorous empirical strategy allows us to isolate both the direct effect of making live chat available and the downstream impact of engaging with it.

Summary of Findings

We find that live chat availability significantly increases total weekly customer spending by raising the average purchase amount per visit, even as the number of visits decreases. These findings suggest that chat availability enhances purchase efficiency and may reduce uncertainty, leading to higher-value transactions with fewer interactions. Specifically, customers with access to chat spend \$7.41 more per visit and \$4.03 more per week, on average, relative to the control group. Our analysis of chat usage shows that initiating a chat session significantly increases the

likelihood of purchasing a product, particularly for those with lower customer ratings. This indicates that live chat can mitigate perceived product risk and build customer trust. Together, these results suggest that live chat—both in its availability and active use—can generate incremental revenue rather than merely accelerating existing purchases. The findings remain robust across multiple model specifications and hold strong managerial implications for optimizing online customer experience and driving sales.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to marketing theory and practice in several key ways. First, it distinguishes between the effects of live chat availability and usage, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how digital customer service tools influence consumer behavior. Second, by leveraging a natural experiment and correcting for self-selection bias, our methodology provides credible causal evidence—addressing major limitations in prior observational research. Third, we uncover the role of live chat in shaping consumer behavior across different product types. The interaction between chat usage and customer reviews reveals that live chat is particularly effective in reducing uncertainty for poorly rated products. Practically, these findings guide e-commerce firms in evaluating the costs and benefits of launching or expanding chat functions. Our results suggest that even non-users of chat may be influenced by its availability, as it signals service quality and builds trust. For policy makers, the study highlights how tools like live chat can enhance transparency and fairness in online marketplaces. Overall, the paper offers actionable insights for optimizing digital communication strategies, enhancing customer satisfaction, and improving sales performance in competitive e-commerce environments.

THE KEY TO ROBO-ADVISOR ADOPTION: WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT BEHAVIORAL BIASES!

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Keywords: Robo-advisor, Artificial Intelligence (AI), behavioral biases, trust, transparency

Description: Our research reveals that (i) consumer awareness of behavioral biases leads to greater use of robo-advisors, (ii) this relationship is mediated by trust in the technology, and, (iii) transparency moderates the indirect effects of awareness of biases via trust on robo-advisor use.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Behavioral biases are deviations from rational judgements, a cognitive shortcut that results in flawed and costly financial investment decisions (Kahneman & Riepe, 1998; Andreu et al., 2020). Robo-advisors (i.e., AI-based online platforms delivering automated financial services with little human involvement) have been found to reduce behavioral biases (Back et al. 2023). Thus, encouraging robo-advisor adoption is crucial. Studies indicate that robo-advisor perceived usefulness and ease of use affect adoption (see Cardillo & Chiappini, 2024). However, despite its performance and advantages, the usage rate remains sluggish (Jung et al., 2018). While studying consumer characteristics-adoption link (Cardillo & Chiappini, 2024) is useful to inform segmentation, the means to increase robo-advisor adoption across all types of investors remains underexplored. Furthermore, while trust is a determinant of robo-advisor use (e.g., Eren, 2023), transparency has been found to both positively and negatively influence trust in AI systems (Omran et al., 2022; Glikson & Woolley 2020; Pflanzner, 2025; Schmidt et al., 2020). This invites further boundary condition investigations. Therefore, our research questions are: 1) Does awareness of behavioral biases increase robo-advisor use?; 2)What is the role of trust in this relationship; 3) Is transparency a boundary condition of the direct and the indirect relationship?

Method And Data

Study 1 tests the direct effect of behavioral bias awareness on robo-advisor use and the mediating effect of trust. It involves a questionnaire shared among customers of a robo-advisor company (N = 1094; return rate = 14.6%). Intention to use was measured as participants' likelihood of continuing to use robo-advisors. Actual investment behavior is the alternative dependent variable, measured by the percentage of monthly income invested using robo-

advisors. Trust in robo-advisor is a four-item measure ($\alpha = .86$). The independent variable is the extent that participants are aware of behavioral biases in financial decision-making.

Study 2 tests if transparency moderates the direct and indirect effects of awareness of behavioral biases on the intention to use robo-advisors via trust ($N = 400$; online panel). We used a between-subjects experimental design: 2 (awareness of behavioral biases vs. control) $\times$ 2 (transparency: high vs. low). In the awareness condition, the text describes behavioral biases in financial investment domain (vs. university choice in control condition). The high transparency condition explains detailed information e.g., the inputs behind the robo-advisor decisions. The dependent variable was the intention to use the robo-advisor (3 items, $\alpha = .97$). Trust in robo-advisors are operationalized using 8 items ($\alpha = .94$).

Summary of Findings

In study 1, first, a hierarchical regression modeling was employed. After including controls, awareness of behavioral biases remains a significant predictor of intention to continue using robo-advisor and actual investments made using robo-advisors. Thus, awareness of behavioral biases increases the use of robo-advisors. Next, we used PROCESS Model 4 to estimate the mediation model. When we added trust in robo-advisors to the models, the effects of awareness of biases became non-significant for both dependent variables. Furthermore, the indirect effect of awareness of biases through trust in robo-advisors was significant. Therefore, trust in robo-advisor mediates the effect of awareness of behavioral biases on intention as well as actual use of robo-advisors.

Study 2 tests if transparency moderates the direct and indirect effects of awareness of behavioral biases on the intention to use robo-advisors via trust. Thus, we used PROCESS Model 8 for the estimation. For the indirect effect via trust, the mediating relationship is contingent on

transparency levels (insignificant for low transparency and significant for high transparency). In sum, the effect of awareness on trust becomes stronger as transparency increases. Lastly, transparency was not found to moderate the direct effect between awareness of biases and intention to use the robo-advisor.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, our study contributes to the algorithm aversion literature (Dietvorst et al., 2018). We shifted research focus from consumer characteristics and robo-advisor features to consumer awareness of behavioral biases as an antecedent of technology adoption (Cardillo & Chiappini, 2024). Second, we extend research on the role of robo-advisors in reducing behavioral biases (Back et al., 2023). Specifically, a simple strategy of creating behavioral bias awareness increases robo-advisor use; thus, avoiding irrational and costly financial decisions. Third, the finding that transparency moderates the indirect effects of awareness of behavioral biases on the intention to use robo-advisors via trust offers insights on how to boost the effect of trust in robo-advisors and in turn, its use. Thus, we contribute to the discussion on the role of trust in technology adoption (Komiak & Benbasat, 2006). This finding also sheds light on the conflicting findings of the effect that transparency has on trust; that is, their link may be nuanced due to overlooked moderation effects. Finally, our research suggests that managers who want to increase robo-advisor adoption need to highlight the risks of behavioral biases instead of only focusing on features of robo-advisors (e.g., usefulness, ease of use, and personalization) when communicating with customers.

**THE NONLINEAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ANTHROPOMORPHISM OF
APPEARANCE AND VOICE IN AI VIRTUAL COMPANIONS AND USER RESPONSES:
A THREE-WAY INTERACTION OF SYMPATHY AND PERFECTIONISM**

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Keywords: AI Virtual Companions, Appearance Anthropomorphism, Uncanny Valley Effect, User Responses, Sympathy and Perfectionism

Description: This study investigates how different levels of visual and vocal anthropomorphism in AI virtual companions affect user responses, revealing a nonlinear relationship moderated by users’ sympathy and perfectionism, and offering new insights into the uncanny valley effect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

1. How do different levels of visual and vocal anthropomorphism in AI virtual companions affect user responses, including attitudes, usage intentions, and word-of-mouth recommendations?
2. Does sympathy moderate the effects of visual and vocal anthropomorphism on user responses?

3. Does user perfectionism re-moderate the moderating effects of sympathy on the relationship between anthropomorphism and user responses?

Method and Data

This study employed a 3 (visual anthropomorphism levels) $\times$ 3 (vocal anthropomorphism levels) between-subjects experimental design. Stimuli included AI companion images and voices pretested to represent low, medium, and high anthropomorphism. A total of 1,200 participants in Taiwan were randomly assigned to view a gender-opposite AI companion and completed questionnaires assessing attitudes, usage intentions, and word-of-mouth. Moderating variables, sympathy and perfectionism, were measured via validated Likert-scale instruments. Data were collected through online platforms and analyzed using polynomial regression and moderated moderation analysis with SPSS and AMOS. The model tested an inverted U-shaped relationship and examined multi-layered moderation effects.

Summary of Findings

This study confirmed an inverted U-shaped relationship between AI virtual companion anthropomorphism and user responses, with moderate levels of visual and vocal anthropomorphism generating the most favorable attitudes, usage intentions, and word-of-mouth. Sympathy was found to moderate this curve by shifting the peak leftward and flattening the right-side slope, indicating that high-sympathy users were more tolerant of less-than-perfect anthropomorphism. Furthermore, perfectionism re-moderated this relationship: high-perfectionism users reacted less favorably under both low and high anthropomorphism, especially when combined with low sympathy. These findings validate the uncanny valley effect and

emphasize the need for personalized anthropomorphism strategies based on user psychological traits, offering practical guidance for AI design in companionship and service contexts.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study theoretically confirms the inverted U-shaped relationship between anthropomorphism and user responses, extending the uncanny valley theory to AI virtual companions that incorporate both visual and vocal human-like features. It addresses a gap in previous research that focused primarily on single anthropomorphic cues. On a practical level, the findings highlight that a moderate degree of anthropomorphism significantly enhances user experience. The study also underscores the importance of psychological traits—such as sympathy and perfectionism—in shaping user acceptance. These results suggest that tailoring AI interaction designs to users' psychological profiles can help companies more effectively target customer segments, develop products that meet market demands, and enhance competitiveness and acceptance.

TOWARD DEVELOPING A UNIFIED GLOBAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Global AI Governance

Description: This research develops the building blocks of a global governance framework for artificial Intelligence.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research proposes a global artificial intelligence (AI) governance framework using a triple stakeholder approach encompassing consumers, governments, and businesses. It synthesizes AI governance in the United States, the European Union, and China through reflexive thematic analysis.

Key Contributions

This study makes significant contributions to the field of AI governance. First, it provides a novel, integrated framework that combines the strengths of diverse regional approaches, offering a more comprehensive model for global AI governance. Second, the research introduces a triple stakeholder perspective, ensuring that the interests of consumers, governments, and businesses

are adequately represented in AI policy formulation. Further, we apply reflexive thematic analysis to AI governance policies, offering a methodologically rigorous approach to policy synthesis and comparison. Our research bridges the gap between academic research and practical policy implementation by incorporating insights from scholarly literature and real-world governance initiatives. By developing this comprehensive global artificial intelligence governance (GAIG) framework, our research aims to foster globally collaborative AI governance that addresses diverse challenges while promoting responsible AI innovation. This framework will provide valuable insights for policymakers, businesses, and researchers navigating the complex landscape of global AI governance.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN AI ACCEPTANCE

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Keywords: AI, social signal, risk aversion, negativity bias

Description: This study examines how media framing, particularly positive versus negative narratives, interacts with individual risk aversion to influence public acceptance of Artificial Intelligence

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how media framing influences public acceptance of artificial intelligence (AI), specifically through the lenses of negativity bias and risk aversion. With the rise of generative AI tools and widespread media coverage, public discourse on AI often swings between utopian optimism and dystopian fear. The central research question is: How does the valence of media information impact public attitudes toward AI, and to what extent are these attitudes moderated by individuals' levels of risk aversion? Grounded in behavioral economics, this research explores how cognitive heuristics shape individuals' interpretations of AI narratives. While previous literature acknowledges media's influence on technology diffusion, few empirical studies have addressed how emotional tone in media content and individual psychological predispositions interact to influence acceptance of emerging technologies. This

study fills that gap by analyzing how risk-averse individuals disproportionately respond to negative information, potentially impeding technology adoption.

Method and Data

This empirical study employed a 3x2 between-subjects experimental design, featuring three media exposure conditions, control, positive, and negative, crossed with two levels of self-reported risk aversion: high and low. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups. The control group responded to the statement “AI will have a net positive impact on humanity” without any media priming. The positive exposure group saw media content which highlighted the benefits of AI. The negative exposure group saw media content that emphasized risks of AI. Participants rated their agreement on a three-point scale - yes, neutral, or no.

Additionally, risk aversion levels were measured using validated inventories. Participants were classified into high or low risk aversion groups based on their scores. An ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in AI sentiment across conditions and risk aversion levels. This methodological framework allowed for controlled comparisons of how media narratives influence attitudes toward AI and how individual psychological traits mediate this influence.

Summary of Findings

The study revealed several significant findings. First, individuals generally exhibited neutral to slightly optimistic attitudes toward AI in the absence of media influence. However, exposure to positive or negative media content shifted these attitudes significantly. Participants exposed to the positive content demonstrated greater optimism, while those who viewed the negative

content were more likely to view AI negatively. Interestingly, the impact of negative media framing was significantly stronger than that of positive framing - corroborating the negativity bias. This pattern held across participants but was especially pronounced among those high in risk aversion. Highly risk-averse individuals were far more likely to internalize negative messaging and report concerns about AI, whereas their less risk averse counterparts were more receptive to positive framing. ANOVA results revealed statistically significant differences between groups exposed to media content with varying valence, particularly within the high-risk aversion segment ($F = 4.19, p < 0.04$). These findings suggest that negative narratives not only carry more weight but also have a stronger capacity to influence public sentiment, potentially stalling broader AI acceptance. Overall, the findings shows how psychological predispositions interact with media content to influence perceptions of emerging technologies, offering nuanced insight into the socio-psychological dynamics underlying technology adoption and resistance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four primary contributions to the fields of communication studies, behavioral economics, and technology acceptance. First, it empirically establishes the disproportionate influence of negative media narratives on public perceptions of AI, affirming the role of negativity bias in shaping attitudes toward emerging technologies. Second, it introduces risk aversion as a moderating factor in media influence, providing a more granular understanding of how psychological traits shape media effects. While previous studies often treated media exposure as a homogeneous influence, this study differentiates its impact based on individual-level behavioral tendencies, thus bridging macro-level media framing with micro-level psychological processing. Third, it contributes a methodological innovation by combining

media exposure experiments with psychometric profiling of participants, enabling a deeper causal analysis of attitude formation. Finally, the study provides actionable insights for communicators, educators, and policymakers. By demonstrating that balanced and constructive narratives are essential to fostering informed public dialogue, it corroborates the importance of responsible journalism in the digital era. These findings suggest that effective communication strategies, especially those tailored to risk-averse populations, could play a critical role in mitigating fear and promoting AI adoption.

References are available upon request.

Marketing Interventions in Digital First Environments

A STUDY OF GLOBAL MOTION PICTURE LAUNCH STRATEGY: BOX OFFICE PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS OF SEQUENTIAL VS. SIMULTANEOUS GLOBAL LAUNCH STRATEGY

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Keywords: Motion Pictures, Distribution Strategy, Word-of-Mouth, Sequential Release Strategy, Simultaneous Release Strategy

Description: This paper proposes a conceptual framework to provide a better understanding of how the global distribution of entertainment products affects firm performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

While substantial research has focused on the drivers of success for movies, such as critic and user reviews, advertising expenditure spent, whether the film is a sequel, and the star power of the main cast and crew, prior literature in marketing largely ignores how international markets may differentiate in box office performance from domestic markets. With this study we aim to examine the product launch strategy of a day-to-date release (vs. having separate release dates per country) for movies, and ask whether or not a day-to-date release would result in higher box office revenue for a given movie. As the day-to-date release strategy is now technologically

feasible and commercially explored by several movie studios, a study which closely examines simultaneous release strategy and compares it to the more traditional sequential release strategy is warranted.

Summary of Findings:

This paper proposes a conceptual framework to provide a better understanding of how the global distribution of entertainment products affects firm performance. Specifically, focusing on the movie industry, the current paper compares the simultaneous global launch strategy (Day-to-date launch) for distributing motion pictures with a sequential release strategy, which involves distributing movies sequentially in different country markets over time. The main proposition is that a sequential release strategy for a given movie will result in enhanced box office revenue globally compared to a day-to-date release strategy, and that this effect will be moderated by the volume and valence of word-of-mouth (WOM) that the movie generates globally. We expect WOM to nullify or reverse the main effect.

Statement of Key Contributions:

The paper fills a gap in international marketing literature, as research that focuses on product launch strategies for motion pictures is scarce and provides theoretical contributions to the wider fields of experiential and entertainment products. As for managerial implications, we highlight eWOM as an important factor for determining the box office effects of launch strategies for film studios. Specifically, we separate our implications for movie studio managers threefold: First, if the valence of eWOM for a given movie is positive in the domestic market, movie studios should follow a sequential release strategy, as the positive “consumer buzz” surrounding the movie from the domestic market will extend to the international market and will lead to more consumers

being informed about the perceived quality of the movie. Second, if the valence of eWOM is average in the domestic market, movie studios should follow a Day-to-Date release strategy, as the Word-of-Mouth from the domestic market will not be very compelling for potential consumers in international markets. Third, if the valence of eWOM is negative in the domestic market, movie studios should consider not releasing the movie in some international markets.

BRAND LOVE AND WORD-OF-MOUTH: SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG USERS OF DIGITAL BANKING SERVICES

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Keywords: Digital banking services quality, Satisfaction, Customer loyalty, Brand love, Word- of-mouth

Description: The article investigates how the quality of digital banking services influences customer satisfaction and, in turn, how this satisfaction, mediated by brand love and positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), impacts loyalty intention, also considering the mediating role of the added value of digital functionalities.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

1. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study seeks to address the following research question: How does the quality of digital banking services influence customer satisfaction, and how does this satisfaction, when mediated by brand love, positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and the added value of digital functionalities, affect customer loyalty intentions in the Brazilian banking context? Drawing on the E-S-QUAL (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Egala et al., 2021) and BSQ (Bahia & Nantel, 2000) models, the research examines the impact of key service quality dimensions (ease of use, efficiency, privacy/security, responsiveness, reliability, service fees, and service portfolio) on satisfaction (Lin, 2019; Song et al., 2019), considering the mediating effect of value-added functionalities (Rajaobelina, 2021; Hossain et al., 2023). Furthermore, it investigates whether emotional and behavioral mediators such as brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail, 2022) and e-WOM (Litvin et al., 2018; Adam et al., 2022) strengthen the link

between satisfaction and long-term loyalty intentions, in line with studies emphasizing that satisfaction alone may not guarantee loyalty (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016; Maladi et al., 2019).

2. METHOD AND DATA

The study proposed a theoretical model to analyze the relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and mediators such as positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) and brand love, as well as other factors influencing satisfaction, including efficiency, privacy, service fees, and service portfolio. To validate the model, a quantitative survey was conducted with 617 users of digital banking services in Brazil, using self-administered questionnaires distributed via social media. A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure 12 variables, adapted from the E-S-QUAL and BSQ models (Egala et al., 2021), the e-WOM and value-added features scale (Rajaobelina et al., 2021), and the brand love scale (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The sample was predominantly female (54%), aged between 36 and 45 years (46%), residing in the Northeast region (56.5%), and holding postgraduate degrees (64.2%). Confirmatory factor analysis indicated convergent and discriminant validity. Predictive analysis revealed significant R² values, highlighting the model's strong explanatory capacity, particularly for constructs related to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The proposed model examined the relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and mediators such as brand love, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and value-added features. H1 confirmed that satisfaction with digital banking services increases e-WOM, reinforcing loyalty intentions, aligning with evidence that satisfied customers share positive experiences and strengthen brand bonds. H2 showed that brand love directly impacts loyalty, mediating the satisfaction, loyalty link, with emotional bonds acting as key differentiators in digital services. H3, predicting that ease of use mediated by value-added features would influence satisfaction, was not supported, as ease of use was seen as a basic expectation for a tech-savvy sample. H4

indicated that efficiency boosts satisfaction through perceived value, while H5 found privacy and security directly influence satisfaction but without significant mediation. H6 revealed responsiveness directly affects satisfaction but does not gain from mediation, being an essential yet non-differentiating attribute. H7 showed reliability impacts satisfaction only through value-added features. H8 demonstrated that fair service fees enhance perceived value, increasing satisfaction. H9 confirmed that a diverse, high-quality service portfolio improves satisfaction, with mediation by value-added features. Overall, results highlight that beyond functional quality, emotional engagement and innovative features are critical to strengthening customer loyalty in digital banking.

4. STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study advances marketing knowledge by deepening the understanding of customer satisfaction and loyalty in digital services, framing satisfaction as a dynamic element across the customer journey rather than a static outcome. By integrating the E-S-QUAL and BSQ models, it offers a comprehensive assessment of digital service quality and its influence on satisfaction. The research introduces emotional mediators—brand love and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)—as crucial in digital banking, where personal interactions are replaced by digital experiences. It also positions the added value of digital functionalities as a key driver linking service quality, satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The findings provide actionable insights for digital banking managers and marketers, emphasizing the need to improve service efficiency, security, and service portfolio diversification. They also highlight the strategic role of fostering emotional connections, such as brand love, and promoting e-WOM to strengthen loyalty. Additionally, the study advises prioritizing investments in innovative features that enhance user experiences and deliver tangible value, creating a competitive edge. Ultimately, these insights support financial institutions in designing targeted strategies that address modern

consumer expectations, thereby boosting both customer loyalty and acquisition in an increasingly competitive digital banking environment.

“References are available upon request.”

DECODING INFLUENCER INTERACTIVITY: A DUAL-PERSPECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

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Keywords: Interactivity; influencer marketing; digital engagement; social media

Description: This paper develops a dual-perspective framework that distinguishes functional and contingent interactivity in influencer-generated content and shows that functional interactivity has an inverted U-shaped relationship with engagement, whereas contingent interactivity generally reduces engagement unless personalized.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This research examines how distinct forms of interactivity in influencer-generated content affect digital engagement on social media. We address two questions: (1) Which forms of interactivity do influencers strategically incorporate into posts? and (2) How do these forms shape engagement outcomes such as likes and comments? Building on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, we develop a dual-perspective framework that differentiates functional interactivity (platform-enabled features) from contingent interactivity (message content that invites reciprocity). This framework integrates technological and communicative views of interactivity to clarify mechanisms through which influencers guide audience processing and response. By

articulating how these dimensions operate and may trade off, we aim to reconcile fragmented findings and offer actionable guidance for optimizing interactive content.

Method and Data

We analyze 54,170 Instagram posts from 705 fashion influencers collected July–December 2022 via an industry partner. Functional interactivity is an additive 0–4 index of platform features (e.g., hashtags, mentions, location/music tags). Contingent interactivity is coded with a fine-tuned language model trained on 1,443 hand-labeled posts (micro-F1=0.906) to classify dialogic levels (0–3). Engagement is measured with log-transformed likes and comments. We estimate multilevel linear models with random intercepts for influencers and rich post- and account-level controls to address nesting and unobserved heterogeneity.

Summary of Findings

Functional interactivity exhibits an inverted U-shaped relationship with engagement: moderate use of platform features maximizes response, whereas excessive feature stacking depresses engagement, consistent with cognitive-load accounts. In contrast, contingent interactivity—such as calls-to-action or questions—tends to suppress engagement, likely because directive or effortful prompts disrupt the frictionless browsing rhythm of social media feeds. Robustness checks with alternative outcomes and controls yield consistent patterns; effects are directionally stable across model specifications.

Key Contributions

First, we reconcile competing views by formalizing a dual-perspective construct that separates functional and contingent interactivity, offering clearer theoretical boundaries for future work.

Second, we advance the influencer-effectiveness literature by showing these dimensions work through distinct cognitive mechanisms and can have opposing effects—challenging the assumption that “more interactivity is always better.” Third, we offer actionable guidance: calibrate functional features to moderate levels and use contingent prompts sparingly and personally. Together, the study reframes interactivity as a strategic design choice rather than a quantity to maximize.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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August 12, 2025

Key words: Ownership structure, service quality, LLM, competition, online review platforms **Description:** This paper investigates how the restaurants under different ownership structures impacts service quality response to competition.

1 Research Questions

How does intensified competition from new market entrants impact the service quality of incumbent firms? How do the service quality responses of incumbents differ between different ownership structures?

2 Method and Data

2.1 Data and Measure

The data comes from a variety of sources: (1) Texas restaurant mixed beverage gross receipts data from the Texas Comptroller Office of Public Accounts. Moreover, it tracks the entry/exit dates and taxpayer (owner) information of each restaurant from January, 1995 to December, 2019. (2) Restaurant characteristics and review data collected from Yelp and Google, including snapshots of overall average ratings on each platform, prices in \$ ranges and restaurant cuisine types. and (3) consumer demographics data gathered from sources such as the decennial census, the American Community Survey. Although the Texas mixed beverage gross receipts dataset contains all establishments with liquor licenses, we restricted the sample to only full-service restaurants. In total, we have 19412 unique restaurants in the dataset.

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2.2 Empirical Method

The main econometric specification is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 S_{jt} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{competitors}_{jt-1} + \beta_2 \text{store\_number}_{jt} \times \text{competitors}_{jt-1} \\
 & + \beta_3 (\text{store\_number}_{jt})^2 \times \text{competitors}_{jt-1} \\
 & + \beta_4 \text{store\_number}_{jt} + \beta_5 (\text{store\_number}_{jt})^2 \\
 & + \beta_6 \text{experience}_{jt} \times \text{competitors}_{jt-1} + \beta_7 \text{experience}_{jt} \\
 & + \mathbf{X}_{jt}\boldsymbol{\theta}_x + \theta_{j\text{mth}} + \theta_{Mt} + \xi_{jt}
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where the subscript jt refers to restaurant j at time t . The dependent variable S_{jt} is the service quality score for restaurant j at time t as defined in Section ?? . $\text{competitors}_{jt-1}$: The number of competitors within 1000 meters of restaurant j in the previous month. store_number_{jt} : The number of stores owned by the same owner as restaurant j at time t . experience_{jt} : The cumulative operating experience of restaurant j at time t . $\mathbf{X}_{jt}$ includes time-varying restaurant or county-level characteristics such as population, income, etc., while $\theta_{j\text{mth}}$ and θ_{Mt} represent restaurant-month and market (metro-region-time)-time fixed effects, respectively. A metro region is a core-based statistical area (CBSA) as defined by the US Census Bureau. The error term ξ_{jt} captures any unobserved factors affecting service quality.

In this regression, our key parameters of interest are the interaction term between the number of competitors and the number of stores owned by the same owner (β_2) and the quadratic terms ($\text{store\_number}_{jt}^2 \times \text{competitors}_{jt-1}$). The former allows us to examine how the effect of competition varies with ownership structure. The latter captures the potential non-linear relationship between the number of stores and the effect of competition.

The sample for this regression includes all services after March 2005, the start time of online review platforms.

3 Summary of Findings

For independent restaurants, we observe a non-monotonic, inverted U-shaped relationship between the number of competitors and service quality. This pattern reveals that independent restaurants with either very few or very many stores under the same ownership show a negative response to competition, while those with a moderate number of stores demonstrate a positive response.

In contrast, chain restaurants show a consistently positive response to competition that remains stable across different scales of operation.

4 Contribution

Firstly, we find that the influence of new entrants varies significantly based on the ownership structure and size. Thirdly, we explore the mechanisms behind these results, specifically examining the competing effects of resource advantage and flexibility on service quality responses. This study contributes to our understanding of competitive dynamics, resource management, and ownership structure in service industries, particularly in the context of the restaurant sector. Our findings enrich and extend several theoretical frameworks, including those related to incumbent responses to new entrants, service quality, and resource management in different ownership structures.

**ONLY PAY WHEN THE WORK IS OKAY:
CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR OUTCOME-BASED PAYMENTS**

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Keywords: consumer payments, behavioral pricing, payment preferences, outcome-based pay, anticipated regret

Description: In our paper, we demonstrate that consumer preferences for outcome-based payments are not universal and depend on whether the outcome is financial or non-financial, with these choices driven by a desire to minimize anticipated regret.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Our research explores how the nature of a service's outcome—specifically, whether it is financial or non-financial—influences consumer preferences for outcome-based pricing. We question the assumption that consumers always prefer to pay only when a service is successful. We hypothesize that these preferences are moderated by the type of outcome and are driven by a psychological mechanism: the desire to minimize anticipated regret. We examine two distinct types of regret: the regret of paying for a failed financial outcome and the regret of overpaying for a successful non-financial outcome. By empirically investigating these factors, our research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in response to this increasingly popular pricing model.

Method and Data

We conducted a series of five experiments with participants recruited through CloudResearch. Across the studies, we used various scenarios (e.g., pizza delivery, pest control, recovering money) to represent services with either financial or non-financial outcomes. In Studies 1A and 1B, we measured expected willingness to pay (eWTP) for non-financial outcomes under standard vs. outcome-based payment models, manipulating or measuring the firm's success rate. Studies 2A and 2B used a binary choice task, directly comparing preferences for financial versus non-financial outcomes across a range of success rates. Finally, Study 3 directly tested our proposed psychological mechanism by asking participants to rate their anticipated regret in different

payment and outcome scenarios. Our total sample size across all studies was over 3,600 participants.

Summary of Findings

Our findings demonstrate a clear and consistent pattern. For services with non-financial outcomes, such as on-time delivery or pest removal, consumers consistently prefer standard payments, especially when the success rate is perceived as low. This preference holds true even when we allow participants to estimate their own subjective success rates. In contrast, for services with financial outcomes, such as recovering lost money, consumers show a significant preference for outcome-based payments. We also found that the effect of success rates on payment preferences is stronger for financial outcomes, where a higher success rate makes the outcome-based model even more appealing. Crucially, we found that this pattern of preferences is driven by a desire to minimize anticipated regret.

Key Contributions

This research makes several key contributions to the fields of consumer behavior and pricing strategy. First, it provides robust empirical evidence that challenges the simplistic assumption that consumers universally prefer outcome-based pricing. We show that the effectiveness of this model is highly contingent on the nature of the outcome. Second, we identify anticipated regret as a core psychological mechanism driving these choices, offering a more nuanced understanding of the emotional factors at play in consumer payment decisions. This extends existing theories on behavioral pricing and consumer choice. For firms, our findings offer practical guidance. Outcome-based pricing may be a powerful tool for services with financial outcomes, signaling confidence and reducing consumer risk. However, for services with non-financial outcomes, a transparent, fixed price may be a more effective strategy to align with consumer preferences and avoid feelings of overpaying.

REDEFINING TOUCHPOINTS: DIGITAL MEDIA, STORYTELLING AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN INDUSTRIAL MARKETING

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Keywords: Digital media, B2B touchpoints, Storytelling, thought leadership, eye tracking.

Description: This study bridges the shift from physical-first to digital-first industrial marketing by using mixed methods, including eye-tracking and facial expression analysis, to examine how digital platforms engage B2B managers, advancing theoretical models of digital engagement and offering practical strategies for customer-centric, emotionally resonant digital marketing.

ABSTRACT

This study examines how digital touchpoints reshape industrial B2B marketing amid AI advances and post-pandemic shifts. Using surveys, eye-tracking, FEA, and case studies, it highlights storytelling, thought leadership, and visual content as key to trust, engagement, and digital strategy optimization in the evolving B2B customer journey.

INTRODUCTION

Industrial companies, central to global manufacturing, face distinct challenges in adapting to the accelerating shift from "physical first" to "digital first" Sheth (2022). Digital platforms such as LinkedIn, corporate websites, e-commerce web shops, web-based configurators, and newsletters are now essential for engaging B2B audiences, enabling firms to communicate complex value propositions, strengthen trust and market positioning. Yet, many technical B2B companies underutilize these digital touchpoints, indicating a need for research (Lundin and Kindström 2023). Recent practitioner literature highlights the importance of digital strategies in industrial sectors. Breakthrough Marketing Technology underscores visual storytelling's role in simplifying complexity and boosting engagement (Rosa-Mendoza 2024), while Forbes promotes thought leadership through the INFLUENCE framework to build brand authority and trust (Forbes 2024). These insights reflect practitioners' demand for actionable strategies to improve digital marketing. In industries reliant on communicating complex technical information, storytelling and thought leadership are particularly relevant for influencing high-stakes decision makers (Anaza et al. 2020). Storytelling helps clarify technical content (Dykes 2015) and shapes customer engagement and purchasing behavior (Mavilinda, Putri, and Nazaruddin 2023), yet research on their optimization for B2B remains limited.

This study addresses that gap by examining digital touchpoints and their impact on industrial B2B respondents. It explores how technical professionals perceive visual content and identifies presentation styles that enhance the appeal of companies and products. Drawing on academic frameworks, such as customer perception (Singh, Kotler, and Keller 2018) and B2B digital engagement models (Järvinen and Taiminen 2016), alongside industry insights, the research bridges theory and practice.

The findings advance understanding of digital marketing in industrial contexts and offer actionable strategies for platform optimization. By integrating academic rigor with practical relevance, this study guides industrial marketers in enhancing digital presence and engagement, underscoring the value of underutilized strategies for B2B success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature examines key strategies and frameworks in B2B marketing, focusing on the role of digital touchpoints, storytelling, and thought leadership in enhancing engagement and influencing decision-making within technical and industrial contexts.

Digital touchpoints, such as websites, social media, newsletters, web shops, web-based product configurators etc. are foundational in B2B customer interactions, serving as repositories for product information while reflecting a company's values, mission, and technical expertise. Effective websites should simplify complex information, offer intuitive navigation, and build trust through professional aesthetics and transparent communication (Solberg Söilen 2024). In the technical B2B sector, a well-designed website can function as a decision-making hub, addressing the specific needs of engineers and procurement professionals (Järvinen and Taiminen 2016).

Professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn play an equally critical role in B2B marketing. LinkedIn enables businesses to position themselves as thought leaders by sharing influential content, engaging with industry peers, and fostering professional networks. LinkedIn's content-sharing capabilities enable companies to reach niche audiences with tailored messages that address industry-specific challenges (Michaelidou, Siamagka, and Christodoulides 2011).

While traditional touchpoints such as newsletters and trade fairs remain relevant, their integration with modern digital strategies amplifies their effectiveness. Newsletters incorporating interactive elements and data-driven personalization strategies enhance customer engagement, while trade

fairs combined with digital pre-event marketing campaigns strengthen brand visibility and loyalty (Holliman and Rowley 2014).

Storytelling has gained prominence as a strategic tool in B2B marketing, fostering emotional connections and trust by humanizing brands (Anaza, Kemp, and Borders 2018). Narratives highlighting sustainability, innovation, and real-world applications are particularly impactful in the technical and industrial contexts, allowing companies to differentiate themselves in competitive markets (Nhedzi, Pritchard, and Fabian 2023). Storytelling facilitates the communication of complex technical solutions by framing them within relatable scenarios, enhancing their appeal to non-technical decision-makers (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Thought leadership positions companies as authoritative voices within their industries, elevating their credibility and visibility (Neuhaus, Millemann, and Nijssen 2022). By consistently sharing innovative insights, research findings, and best practices, companies influence purchasing decisions while fostering long-term relationships with customers and partners. Studies emphasize the role of thought leadership in enhancing brand perception and engagement, particularly in sectors where technical expertise is a key differentiator (Hrytsenko 2024). Thought leadership strategies, when combined with tools like LinkedIn and webinars, amplify their reach and impact, offering valuable opportunities for audience engagement and industry recognition (Forbes 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study employed a mixed methods approach to assess digital engagement among industrial managers across roles. A quantitative survey (n=106) captured expectations and usage of websites, LinkedIn, newsletters, and other B2B touchpoints, with respondents primarily mid-career professionals (70% under 40, 60% male, 45% in purchasing/logistics, 45% in marketing/sales, 10% C-level). Eye-tracking and facial expression analysis (FEA), using the iMotions

(2024) platform, evaluated user engagement and emotional responses-such as anger, surprise, joy, confusion, and concentration-during content interaction. This provided insights into emotional impact and attention patterns influencing digital decision-making. Respondents included twelve part-time students and ten employees of a technical B2B company, completing four tasks (evaluating LinkedIn posts, newsletters, product sheets, and a web shop), with pre- and post-experiment surveys.

A two-step methodology guided the social media content analysis. First, a literature review examined storytelling and thought leadership in B2B marketing, highlighting their roles in brand authenticity and engagement (Barry and Gironde 2019; Bonnin and Alfonso 2019). Second, social media profiles of leading B2B firms were analyzed for practical applications, integrating academic and industry insights to identify effective storytelling patterns.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This analysis investigates the behavioral patterns of business professionals across age, gender, and occupational groups concerning digital touchpoints as well as practical insights into storytelling and thought leadership in the B2B arena.

Study 1: Quantitative study

Clear product information is the most trusted source, scoring 3.98/5 across both age groups. Case studies follow closely, rated 3.80/5 (over 40) and 3.77/5 (under 40). Women favor customer success stories (3.91/5) and product videos (3.85/5), while men prioritize industry certifications (3.91/5). Thought leader insights are more valued by women (3.97/5) and younger respondents (3.98/5), indicating a strong interest in expertise. Videos are the preferred content format, chosen by 69% under 40 and 64% over 40. Procurement professionals favor product demos (62%), while

women prefer infographics (59%) and webinars (54%). Marketing professionals prioritize interviews and design guides; procurement groups favor tutorials (58%) and specifications. Websites are nearly universally preferred (~100%), while younger respondents (85%) and women (78%) rely more on search engines. Older respondents (73%) and men (68%) prefer trade fairs. LinkedIn is popular among procurement professionals (68%), while marketing and sales roles engage more with newsletters (54%) and magazines (49%). Email is the top update channel (87%), followed by social media (68%) and video calls (56%). Women show higher preferences for live chats (44%) and virtual consultations (41%). Interactive product demos are rated most valuable for introducing services, especially by procurement (62%). Procurement professionals value product specifications (4.5/5) and case studies (4.2/5), while marketing and sales prioritize benchmark studies (3.8/5) and customer success stories (4.0/5), reflecting differing practical and strategic needs.

Study 2: Behavioral analysis using facial expression analysis and eye-tracking

Behavioral analysis using facial expression analysis and eye-tracking provided key insights into emotional engagement. Relatable narratives elicited joy and interest, while technical jargon or poor structure triggered confusion and frustration. Content from thought leaders and case studies fostered trust, underscoring the value of authoritative, evidence-based communication. LinkedIn posts with images of individuals were perceived as more engaging and personal than those featuring objects or abstract scenes. While emotional reactions such as anger, joy, confusion, and surprise were minimal, engagement peaked at headlines and initial sentences, then declined after the third, indicating text length as a barrier. High engagement in comment sections was driven by curiosity about acquaintances' contributions, emphasizing the role of concise text, personal imagery, and interactive elements. Newsletters, which were content-controlled, showed high engagement due to clear structure and concise headings. Outdated thumbnails and color schemes were noted for improvement. Participants responded well to headlines and images of people, though occasional

content-headline mismatches led to confusion and surprise. Emotional reactions were minimal, suggesting a need for better alignment between design and message. In the product database tasks, participants reviewed specifications with strong engagement in general descriptions, but complex definitions caused confusion. Emotions such as anger, joy, and surprise were minimal, supporting the importance of clear, user-friendly data. In the second task-searching for a product-participants mostly used the homepage search bar, while the “list of products” tab was underused. Pop-ups were distracting, and small result layouts confused users by hiding clickable areas. Engagement remained high despite these challenges. Technical details continued to prompt confusion, echoing patterns from the first task.

In the final phase, participants interacted with the company’s web shop. In the first task, the login button was hard to find, overshadowed by a dominant “continue” button. Confusion arose from dual filter bars; the more clearly labeled bottom bar (“web shop”) was used more frequently. Although engagement remained high, locating the shopping cart proved difficult, often leading to surprise and frustration when it was found in an unexpected location. Pop-ups elicited mixed reactions, occasionally causing joy but more often frustration. In the second web shop task, participants struggled to notice the product customization tool due to poor visibility. Familiarity from the first task improved use of filters and cart navigation, but the customization tool continued to cause confusion, which turned to surprise and eventually joy upon successful use. The unfixed filter bar, combined with page scrolling from the guided pop-up tour, contributed to recurring difficulties. Emotional response patterns mirrored the first task, reinforcing the need for intuitive interface design, especially for essential functions.

Platform/Task	Eye-Movement Patterns	Emotional Responses	Key Takeaways
LinkedIn	- Engagement highest at headlines and initial sentences. - Drop in attention after third sentence. - Comment sections attract significant attention.	- Minimal emotions (anger, joy, confusion, surprise). - High curiosity in comments. - Engaging images featuring individuals enhance attention.	- Use concise text and personal imagery. - Leverage comment sections for user interaction.
Newsletter	- Headlines and images featuring people attract attention. - Clear structure and concise headings improve readability.	- Minimal joy and anger. - Confusion and surprise arise from headline-content discrepancies. - Overall satisfaction with clear structure but outdated design.	- Align design and content for clarity. - Update visual elements like thumbnails and color schemes.
Product Database	Task 1: View product specifications: - High engagement with general specifications. - Confusion from technical complexity. Task 2: Find a product: - Search bar highly utilized; "List of products" rarely used. - Distracted by excessive pop-ups. - Unclear layout of search results.	- Minimal emotions (anger, joy, surprise). - High frustration from pop-ups. - Confusion with search results layout.	- Present data clearly. - Simplify technical details. - Reduce distractions (e.g., pop-ups).
Web Shop	Task 1: Purchasing product: - Confusion from dual filter bars. - Struggled with shopping cart discovery. Task 2: Use customization tool: - Poor visibility caused initial confusion. - Familiarity from Task 1 improved navigation.	- Frustration and occasional joy from pop-ups. - Surprise at shopping cart and customization tool location. - Joy upon eventual success using customization tool.	- Ensure key functions are visible. - Improve filter bar design and functionality.

Table 1: Summarized findings of study 2: Eye-tracking and facial expression analysis.

Study 3: Case studies and industry insights on thought leadership and storytelling

The quantitative study indicates that storytelling, especially narratives about successful product use, can shape perceptions of expertise in industrial B2B firms. To identify best practices in storytelling and thought leadership, the authors analyzed social media pages of technical-sector B2B companies, where complex, expertise-driven communication is most relevant.

General Electric (GE) uses storytelling to highlight sustainable energy efforts and real-world innovations, engaging audiences through polls and content on company milestones and technology. Sullair's "Speaking with Spencer" video series offers a personalized format, with field service engineers breaking down technical topics and showing practical impacts. Siemens adopts a quasi-neutral tone, positioning itself within broader high-tech and infrastructure developments in the U.S., reinforcing its innovation leadership. Caterpillar focuses on relatable, low-threshold narratives by showcasing real-life challenges and solutions for individuals and small businesses.

These companies humanize their brands through relatable storytelling, use testimonials to illustrate impact, and simplify technical content for wider accessibility. They enhance communication with visuals, analogies, and outcome-driven messaging to boost credibility and relevance.

Thought leadership builds trust and drives innovation by positioning individuals as authoritative voices who share knowledge and insights. In German-speaking regions, Prof. Dr. Hans Ferkel (SMS Group) exemplifies this through work on Industry 4.0, using AI and predictive analytics to optimize manufacturing. Axel Eggert (EUROFER) champions steel industry competitiveness and sustainability through policy engagement. Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Dudenhöffer shapes automotive innovation by researching sustainable transport and mobility resilience. Platforms like Thinkers360.com rank top thought leaders in industry and manufacturing annually (Sembergman 2024). Social media amplifies these figures' influence by enabling broad dissemination of insights, white papers, and technology updates. By merging academic expertise with practical application, thought leadership fosters progress and deepens stakeholder relationships. One good hint comes from Ian Bruce and Lisa Gately: *"Building a good thought leadership program starts with listening to conversations in the market. [...] it's about building consensus on how your company can use its expertise to contribute to those discussions. It involves all aspects of your company."* (Bruce and Gately 2022, n.p.).

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the critical role of digital touchpoints, storytelling, and thought leadership in reshaping industrial B2B marketing. Platforms like LinkedIn and corporate websites can enhance engagement, trust, and decision-making when used strategically. To strengthen LinkedIn presence, firms should maintain structured content schedules featuring white papers, webinars, and case studies. Participation by executives boosts reach and credibility. Respondents favored visual formats such as videos and infographics, combined with concise messaging. Reducing long text in posts and product descriptions improves clarity and user engagement. Digital touchpoints, especially websites, should offer intuitive navigation and actionable content. Tools like eye-tracking and facial expression analysis help identify pain points, while AR and VR enhance product understanding through immersive demos. A varied content mix of webinars, podcasts, infographics and blogs engages diverse audiences and should reflect trends and customer narratives. Thought leadership depends on consistent, high-quality content. Collaborating with experts, publishing evidence-based insights, and speaking at industry events reinforces authority. Leaders should also contribute on topics like sustainability and innovation to align with broader societal themes. LinkedIn enables knowledge-sharing and brand authority. Websites must balance technical depth with accessibility, supported by visual and interactive elements like infographics and videos. Calls to action should be clear, and distracting features avoided. A digital presence also improves visibility in B2B prospecting. As AI tools become common in supplier searches (Stadlmann and Zehetner 2022), optimizing digital assets is pivotal to boost discoverability and relevance.

LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite their advantages, digital touchpoints pose challenges, particularly in technology-intensive B2B sectors, where balancing technical accuracy with engagement is difficult. Ensuring consistent

messaging across platforms and addressing the diverse preferences of audiences, from younger professionals to seasoned leaders, requires strategic coordination. While the study's mixed-method approach yields valuable insights, limitations remain. Inferring cognitive processes from eye movements and facial expressions is complex, as gaze behavior is influenced by multiple factors (Kok and Jarodzka 2017). Future studies should integrate physiological measures to improve emotion recognition accuracy (López-Gil et al. 2016). Moreover, the study's industrial sector focus may limit generalizability. Cross-industry research is needed to uncover specific differences in digital engagement and storytelling, enhancing the applicability of these strategies across B2B contexts.

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SECOND-PERSON PRONOUNS AS CUSTOMER-OWNED TOUCHPOINTS

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KEYWORDS: pronouns, touchpoints, customer experience, electronic word-of-mouth, online reviews

DESCRIPTION: This study investigates second pronouns in electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as customer-owned touch points.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study examines whether the use of second-person pronouns in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences customer experience and business outcomes. Customer experience, defined as consumers' responses to stimuli across the customer journey (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Goyal & Deshwal, 2024), is increasingly shaped by multiple actors in a service ecosystem rather than solely by firms (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Lipkin & Heinonen, 2022). While prior research has explored pronouns in firm-owned touchpoints such as websites and blogs (Barcelos et al., 2018; Chang et al., 2019; Cruz et al., 2017; Labrecque et al., 2020; Packard et al., 2018; Sela et al., 2012), little attention has been given to their role in customer-owned touchpoints like eWOM. This research asks: (1) Do second-person pronouns and their moderators in eWOM affect consumer experience? (2) Do they influence business outcomes? Findings aim to show that even seemingly ordinary linguistic elements in eWOM can enhance satisfaction and drive

sales, offering practical implications for designing, managing, and monitoring customer experience.

Method and Data

We test our hypotheses using Amazon customer reviews in the Movies & TV category over 18 years (McAuley et al., 2015). Two analyses are conducted: (1) review-level, examining pronoun use and helpful votes, and (2) product-level, assessing pronoun use and sales. For helpful votes, we analyze 5,652,723 reviews with at least one vote.

Variables include rating, word count, total votes, second-person pronouns (“you,” “your,” etc.), the word “if,” first-person pronouns, and exclusive words. Helpful votes, a count variable, are modeled using Poisson regression:

$$\text{Helpful} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{rating} + \alpha_2 \text{rating}^2 + \alpha_3 \text{word} + \alpha_4 \text{vote} + \alpha_5 I + \alpha_6 I \times \text{exclusive} + \alpha_7 \text{we} + \alpha_8 \text{you} + \alpha_9 \text{you} \times \text{if} + \varepsilon.$$

For sales, we examine 82,735 products with SalesRank data (lower rank = higher sales).

Variables include price, time on Amazon, review volume, valence, variance, average word count, second-person pronouns, “if,” and controls. A linear regression estimates:

$$\log(\text{SalesRank}) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{TV} + \alpha_2 \text{price} + \alpha_3 \text{time} + \alpha_4 \text{valence} + \alpha_5 \text{variance} + \alpha_6 \text{volume} + \alpha_7 \text{word\_a} + \alpha_8 I\_a + \alpha_9 I\_a \times \text{exclusive\_a} + \alpha_{10} \text{we\_a} + \alpha_{11} \text{you\_a} + \alpha_{12} \text{you\_a} \times \text{if\_a} + \varepsilon.$$

Summary of Findings

All estimates are significant ($p < 0.001$). The second-person pronoun (“you”) has a positive estimate of 0.0476 on helpful votes, suggesting second-person pronouns are positively associated with helpful votes. However, the interaction of “you” with “if” (-0.0068) reduces this effect, suggesting with more “if”, the positive association between second-person pronouns and helpful votes is weaker. The estimate for second-person

pronouns (you_a) on product sales is 0.0197, showing a negative association, supporting that second-person pronouns are negatively associated with product sales. The interaction between you_a and “if” ($you_a \times if_a$) has an estimate of 0.0169, strengthening the negative relationship between second-person pronouns and product sales.

Key Contributions

This research fills the gap in the use of second-person pronouns and their moderator conditional word “if” as consumer-owned touch points in the context of eWOM/online user review. Our results thus answer the call to expand the touchpoints in a broad service ecosystem where customer experience is central, and values are co-created by firms and consumers. Our results reveal two new insights regarding the usage of second-person pronouns and the moderator: eWOM senders’ politeness and presumption about eWOM receivers, and show how they influence receivers’ experiences, and how they lead to narrow-targeting and lower sales. Our results contribute to the literature by showing consumer-owned touch points differ from firm-owned ones due to different consumer status, and the choice between a consumer-centric view and company-centric view matters in marketing decisions. Our research helps practitioners design, manage, and monitor customer experience. Specifically, it suggests companies how to design user review guidelines, recruit polite influencers, and inform the practice of firm-owned communications.

SINGLE- VS. DUAL-PRODUCT PROMOTIONS: THE IMPACT OF BRAND PLACEMENT AND AD COMBINATIONS ON YOUTUBE

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Keywords: Brand Placement, YouTube Advertising, Brand Memory, Brand Attitudes

Description: This study examines how single-product versus dual-product promotional strategies on YouTube, combining brand placements with advertisements, affect consumer brand memory and attitudes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

YouTube offers a unique environment for combining traditional advertisements with in-content brand placements. While prior studies have examined the combined effects of ads and placements for the same product, little is known about whether promoting the same product (single-product strategy) versus promoting different products from the same brand (dual-product strategy) produces stronger outcomes. This study investigates: (1) whether single-product promotions enhance brand memory compared to dual-product promotions, and (2) whether dual-product promotions lead to more favorable brand attitudes by reducing perceived commercial intent.

Method and Data

A between-subjects experiment was conducted with 437 U.S. adults recruited through an online panel. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: single-product or dual-product promotions for two focal brands (Hellmann's and Pyrex).

Stimuli consisted of 5–6 minute cooking show episodes from a popular YouTube chef, interspersed with two commercial breaks (one before and one after the episode). In the single-product conditions, both the brand placement and the ad featured the same product from the focal brand (Hellmann's mayonnaise or a Pyrex measuring cup). In the dual-product conditions, the placement and the ad featured different products from the same brand—for example, a placement for Hellmann's mayonnaise paired with an ad for Hellmann's ketchup, or a placement for a Pyrex measuring cup paired with an ad for a Pyrex whisk.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal significant differences in brand recall across advertising formats. Respondents exposed to single-product promotions were more likely to recall the brand than those exposed to dual-product promotions. Consistent with the predictions, the findings also indicate that dual-product promotions lead to more favorable brand attitudes compared to single-product promotions.

Key Contributions

This study makes several notable contributions to the literature on brand placements and digital advertising, particularly in the context of YouTube videos. By examining the interplay between brand placements and advertisements, it directly addresses calls in prior research to explore the

combined effects of product placements and other Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) elements. The results enrich IMC research by demonstrating how multiple promotional elements can be strategically combined to enhance their overall effectiveness.

Furthermore, while previous research has primarily focused on single-product promotions, this study is among the first to directly compare single-product and dual-product strategies in digital media. The findings provide empirical evidence that single-product promotions are more effective in enhancing brand recall, whereas dual-product promotions are more effective in improving brand favorability. These insights contribute to the ongoing debate over the relative merits of repetition versus variation strategies in marketing communications.

Strategic Leadership in the Digital Era: How CEO Characteristics Shape Digital Transformation Trajectories

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

How does the predominance of CEO promotion focus influence the firm's digital transformation efforts?

What factors, internal and external, shape the relationship between predominance of CEO promotion focus and digital transformation?

Methods and Data

We assembled our sample from CEOs of S&P 500 firms for the period extending from 2011 through 2019. For those firms, we measured the degree of digital transformation using a content analysis of CEO's letters to shareholders (Qi et al., 2022) and CEO's regulatory focus from CEO's letters to shareholders and annual reports (Gamache et al., 2015; Kashmiri et al., 2019). This content analysis approach also allowed us to obtain an unobtrusive measure (i.e., CEO's regulatory focus), which helped us avoid the issues of low response rates and response bias associated with survey research. We collected these letters to shareholders from a number of sources, including annual reports found on company websites and in the Mergent database. We obtained CEO- and board-related data from Execucomp and firm-related data from Compustat for the same

observation period. We merged the data based on firm-year observations. After accounting for all missing data, our final data set consisted of 1,566 firm-year observations from 245 firms.

Summary of Findings

A Generalized Least Squares (GLS) random effects regression model was employed, using the firm's digital transformation as the dependent variable and the CEO's promotion focus relative to their prevention focus as the independent variables.

The findings provide strong support for H1, demonstrating that greater CEO promotion-focus predominance is significantly associated with lower levels of firm digital transformation ($\beta_1 = -0.10, p < 0.001$). Consistent with H2, CEO tenure significantly moderated this relationship, such that the negative effect of promotion-focus predominance on digital transformation became stronger as tenure increased ($\beta_{\text{tenure interaction}} = 0.01, p < 0.05$). Further, the results support to H3, indicating that marketing capability also moderated the focal relationship in a positive and statistically significant manner ($\beta_{\text{marketing capability interaction}} = 0.05, p < 0.01$). Specifically, the influence of promotion-focused CEOs—relative to prevention-focused CEOs—on digital transformation was more positive under conditions of higher marketing capability than under lower levels of marketing capability.

Key Contributions

Our research offers several significant contributions to the existing body of literature on the role of CEOs' psychological traits and firm's strategic decisions. First, we advance upper echelon theory by proposing and empirically demonstrating that the influence of CEOs' promotion-focused predominance extends beyond corporate actions, such as socially oriented activism and firm stakeholder strategy (as proposed by Gamache et al., 2020). We also contributed to the CEO's regulatory focus theory by hypothesizing the nature of CEO's involvement in adopting digital technologies by highlighting the CEO's psychological traits.

Second, our research identifies the boundary effects of a CEO's regulatory foci in shaping digital transformation in different levels, internal and external. Although promotion-predominant CEOs may be reluctant in driving digital transformation due to the uncertain gains and opportunities, they will be more likely to speed up digital transformation as their tenure lengthens in time by obtaining confidence with possible routes to maximize gains from digital transformation. They will also drive digital transformation when a firm has a higher level of marketing capabilities than others by being able to align the needs and changes of consumer and market trends more effectively in the phases of digital transformation maximizing the possibility of success of digital transformation. However, this research emphasizes severe environmental turbulence will demotivate promotion-predominant CEOs in driving digital transformation.

Finally, we offer actionable recommendations for corporate boards on how they can leverage these factors to monitor and manage the marketing impact of CEOs' regulatory focus in driving digital transformation. They can enhance their hiring processes and establish guidelines for selecting new leaders and structuring their tenure packages when digital transformation is critical for a firm's success. Corporate boards can utilize these insights to inform decisions regarding CEO selection and the adoption of digital technologies, ensuring alignment with the firm's strategic objectives.

References are available on request.

THE BLAME GAME: THE EFFECT OF SERVICE FIRM RESPONSES TO ILLEGITIMATE NEGATIVE ONLINE REVIEWS

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Keywords: Online reviews; attributions, credibility; firm response strategies; purchase intentions

This research examines how a firm's response to illegitimate negative online reviews influences third-party observers' purchase intentions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

1. How do defensive responses (i.e., a “callout”) to illegitimate negative reviews affect third-party purchase intentions?
2. What role do blame and credibility play in mediating this effect?

Method and Data

Two experimental studies were conducted to test our hypotheses. In both studies, participants were shown a set of four randomized reviews (3 positive and 1 negative) about fictional catering businesses. Pretests verified that the reviews were consistent in their tone using a four-item semantic differential scale ($\alpha = .880$), which indicated clear differences between positive and negative reviews, with no significant variation within each group. The order of the reviews and the companies’ responses (i.e., no response, apology, redirecting the complainant offline, or a “callout”) were randomized.

In Study 1, 75 university students from the southern United States were randomly assigned to one of three groups to evaluate various firm response strategies. After reading through the reviews, they selected a catering company for a hypothetical event. The primary focus of the study was on their binary choice between two companies, one of which was always the company that responded to the illegitimate negative review using a “callout”.

For Study 2, 287 U.S. adults were recruited via CloudResearch. Participants were presented with one of three firm response manipulations. They then indicated their purchase intentions, blame, reviewer credibility, and review deservingness on seven-point Likert scales.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, calling out reviewers who post illegitimate negative reviews was the most effective response strategy. In Study 1, participants selected the service firm that called out the illegitimate reviewer more often than the firm that employed other methods (i.e., no response, apology, redirecting the issue offline). This indicates that callouts can mitigate the damage from an illegitimate negative review.

Study 2 further explored this phenomenon and found that callouts significantly boosted purchase intentions by shifting the blame from the service firm to the reviewer. This shift made the reviewer seem less credible and the firm less deserving of the negative review. Notably, there was no significant difference in purchase intentions between the apology and no-response conditions. This is mainly explained by a nonsignificant difference in blame, suggesting that the service firm takes the brunt of the blame when a negative review is posted. Only after making it clear that the review is misleading do third-party observers (i.e., readers) reassign the blame to the reviewer, leading to higher purchase intentions.

These findings highlight the power of attributional framing and suggest that strategic, well-executed callouts may be a viable tool for defending firms against unfair criticism.

Key Contributions

This research emphasizes the powerful role that online reviews (eWOM) play in shaping consumer behavior, especially the harm caused by illegitimate negative reviews. While previous studies typically advise companies to respond with apologies, this study reveals that using defensive tactics, particularly effective callouts, can successfully mend brand perceptions and enhance purchase intentions when reviews are illegitimate.

Theoretically, these findings align with an appraisal theory perspective, indicating that consumers' perceptions about blame and credibility mediate the effectiveness of firm response strategies. We show that companies can “flip” blame from themselves to the reviewer through a defensive response, recovering lost purchase intentions. Additionally, in digital contexts with low social presence, maintaining social norms in the tone and delivery of a defensive message can lead to favorable outcomes. This underscores the significance of nuanced cognitive appraisals in the decision-making process of consumers when assessing online reviews.

From a managerial standpoint, these studies offer practical advice. When companies encounter illegitimate negative reviews, they can effectively use callouts to lessen the blame and improve third-party evaluations. Companies that apologized or remained silent were still blamed, negatively affecting purchase intentions. By contrast, calling out illegitimate reviewers reduced service firm blame and boosted purchase intentions.

THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION OF DISTRIBUTOR BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF CHENG SENG GROUP'S TRANSFORMATION

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Keywords: B2B Distributor, Distributor Branding, Digital Transformation, Omnichannel

Description: This paper examines how B2B distributors can leverage digital transformation and branding strategies to evolve from passive intermediaries to active brand builders, using Cheng Seng Group's six-decade transformation as a case study to develop a four-phase framework for distributor brand development.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study addresses a critical gap in B2B branding literature by examining how distributors can leverage branding strategies to transform their market position and create sustainable competitive advantages. The research centers on three primary questions:

- (1). How can distributors leverage branding to differentiate themselves, create competitive advantages, and strengthen their position within the supply chain?*
- (2). What strategies and trade-offs enable distributors to balance relationships with manufacturers while developing their own corporate identity?*
- (3). In what ways can distributors integrate digital innovation, including specific technologies, to adapt to changing consumer expectations and market conditions?*

These questions emerge from the contemporary challenge facing distributors as manufacturers increasingly adopt direct-to-consumer strategies, potentially bypassing traditional intermediaries. The study recognizes that while existing literature extensively examines manufacturer-led branding initiatives, there remains limited understanding of how distributors can develop independent brand equity while maintaining strategic partnerships with suppliers. By investigating these questions through the lens of digital transformation and omnichannel integration, this research seeks to understand the mechanisms that enable distributors to evolve from passive intermediaries to active brand builders capable of creating

distinct value propositions in an increasingly competitive and technology-driven marketplace.

Method and Data

This study employs a qualitative single-case study methodology, focusing on Cheng Seng (CS) Group as the primary subject of investigation. The selection of CS Group was strategically motivated by the company's six-decade evolution from a traditional B2B distributor to a multi-channel enterprise representing over 200 premium brands, including industry leaders such as Leica. The research design adopts an interpretive approach, combining retrospective and real-time data collection to capture the dynamic processes underlying distributor brand transformation. Primary data collection involved semi-structured interviews with key personnel, including company's Vice President and marketing and sales division leaders. The interview protocol focused on historical brand development, strategic decision-making processes, stakeholder relationship management, and current branding practices. Secondary data sources included CS Group's websites, online and offline marketing materials, press releases, and Youtube interviews. Data analysis followed a systematic three-stage process: coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and critical incidents; relationship mapping to establish connections between strategic decisions, organizational capabilities, and market conditions; and framework development to synthesize findings into actionable insights. This methodological approach ensures comprehensive understanding

while maintaining analytical rigor through triangulation of multiple data sources and validation through follow-up discussions with key informants.

Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals a systematic four-phase process framework for distributor brand development.

1. **Foundation Building** establishes core competencies through operational excellence, including efficient inventory management, reliable logistics, and robust financial systems, while positioning distributors as strategic partners through demonstrated market knowledge and consistent service standards.
2. **Brand Development** focuses on creating distinct identity that balances manufacturer brand representation with independent value proposition development through strategic investments in service capabilities, employee training, and knowledge management systems.
3. **Channel Expansion** involves building market presence through geographic growth and portfolio diversification, supported by advanced market analysis and relationship management systems while maintaining consistent service quality across touchpoints.
4. **Digital Transformation** represents the integration of physical and digital channels to create omnichannel experiences through investments in technology infrastructure, data

analytics systems, and virtual service tools.

The framework demonstrates that successful distributor branding requires continuous attention to stakeholder relationships and market dynamics, with the ability to revisit earlier stages for capability strengthening. This systematic approach enables distributors to evolve from intermediaries to branded entities with distinct market presence, mitigating disintermediation risks while maintaining productive manufacturer relationships and creating sustainable competitive advantages in increasingly digital markets.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes notable contributions to both academic discourse and practical applications in the field of B2B distributor branding. It enhances scholarly understanding by presenting a detailed analysis of the processes that underpin a distributor's brand transformation. Using the case study of CS Group, the research examines the evolution from a conventional B2B distributor model to an advanced, multi-channel strategy, highlighting the pivotal strategic decisions and organizational adaptations necessary for such a transition. The study specifically explores the underexamined domain of how distributors, leveraging their intermediary roles in supply chains, can cultivate brand equity. By prioritizing distributor-centric branding, this research fills a critical gap in the literature, which has traditionally focused on manufacturer-led branding initiatives.

Beyond its academic contributions, this study provides a structured framework to guide distributors through the intricate stages of brand transformation. It offers valuable insights for practical implementation by various stakeholders. Distributors can derive actionable strategies for building robust corporate brands, enhancing customer loyalty, and achieving sustainable competitive advantages. The research illustrates how CS Group successfully transitioned into a hybrid business model that integrates B2B and B2C operations. This transformation serves as a blueprint for distributors seeking to expand their market influence while minimizing dependency on manufacturers.

The Dual Role of Negative Sentiment: A Framework for Engagement in Influencer Marketing

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Paper Description: This conceptual paper develops a theoretical framework to explain how negative sentiment, often perceived as a reputational threat, can function as a catalyst for audience engagement in influencer marketing. By integrating Emotional Arousal Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Social Exchange Theory, the paper explores the emotional and cognitive mechanisms through which criticism activates participation, visibility, and loyalty. It introduces emotional involvement as a key mediator and identifies platform affordances and influencer credibility as critical moderators. The framework offers both academic and practical insight into how backlash can be strategically managed to foster connection, not just mitigate risk.

Keywords: Negative Sentiment, Parasocial Interaction Theory, Influencer Marketing, Social Media Platforms

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Influencer marketing has redefined how audiences engage with branded content by fostering parasocial relationships that amplify trust, intimacy, and emotional resonance. While most academic discourse and managerial practice treat positive sentiment as the central driver of engagement, this paper challenges that premise. It investigates the counterintuitive potential of negative sentiment, manifested as critique, scepticism, or backlash, to catalyse meaningful interaction when strategically managed. Rather than viewing negative sentiment as a reputational liability, the study reframes it as a high-arousal stimulus capable of triggering audience involvement, discourse, and loyalty. Through the integration of Emotional Arousal Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, and Social Exchange Theory, this conceptual paper develops a framework that elucidates the psychological, relational, and platform-based mechanisms that explain how negative sentiment drives engagement. This theoretical reframing addresses longstanding gaps in the influencer marketing literature and provides actionable guidance for brands and creators navigating critical or contested moments in public discourse.

2. Theoretical Foundations

The conceptual foundation of this study is built on four complementary theories that together explain how negative sentiment can function as an engagement catalyst. Emotional Arousal Theory (Lang, 1995) establishes that high-arousal emotions, whether positive or negative, generate stronger cognitive and behavioural responses. Criticism and controversy, as forms of high-arousal stimuli, can increase attention, recall, and interaction when audiences are emotionally involved. Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) further explains

how the perceived intimacy between influencers and their audiences shapes the interpretation of such criticism. Trusted influencers with high relational capital may be defended by their followers, who interpret the backlash not as a signal of inauthenticity but as a moment of vulnerability or courage.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) contributes a dual-pathway explanation. While some audience segments process critical content analytically (central route), others respond emotionally (peripheral route), resulting in broader forms of engagement such as sharing, commenting, or defending. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) offers yet another layer, highlighting how transparent and fair responses to criticism signal reciprocity and commitment, reinforcing audience trust. Together, these theories suggest that the audience's response to negative sentiment depends not only on emotional arousal but also on the influencer's perceived authenticity and the platform's affordances for interaction and narrative control.

3. Conceptual Framework

The framework developed in this paper is structured around three interrelated dimensions: sentiment triggers, mediating mechanisms, and engagement outcomes. Negative sentiment in influencer marketing is often triggered by perceived brand-influencer misalignment, value dissonance, or ethical insensitivity. These triggers activate emotional arousal, which functions as the first step in the engagement process. Emotional involvement then mediates this relationship by deepening the audience's psychological investment in the event or issue at hand. Influencers with strong parasocial ties can convert backlash into dialogue, as emotionally engaged audiences seek resolution rather than disengagement.

The second layer of the framework involves cognitive elaboration, whereby audiences analyse the criticism and evaluate the influencer's response. This evaluative scrutiny can lead to increased trust when the response is seen as transparent and sincere. The final layer, outcome pathways, maps how this mediated process results in three core engagement outcomes: amplified visibility (as controversy drives virality), constructive dialogue (through comment threads and audience participation), and long-term loyalty (as emotionally satisfied audiences feel heard and respected). These dynamics are shaped by two moderators: platform affordances and influencer credibility. Real-time, visual, and narrative-rich platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube amplify different types of emotional and informational engagement, while influencers' trustworthiness determines whether sentiment escalates or transforms into connection.

4. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Theoretically, this paper challenges the dominant sentiment bias in influencer marketing research by introducing a more dynamic model of emotional and cognitive engagement. It reconceptualizes engagement not as a product of sentiment valence, but of emotional intensity, relational history, and platform interaction mechanisms. The inclusion of emotional involvement as a central mediator extends prior models that treat sentiment and engagement as directly linked, offering a more psychologically nuanced understanding of audience behaviour. By synthesizing insights from multiple disciplinary theories, the framework provides a unified model for understanding sentiment-driven engagement in influencer ecosystems.

Managerially, the study urges brands and influencers to adopt a more strategic approach to criticism. Rather than defensively managing backlash, marketers can treat critical sentiment as an opportunity for dialogue and relational repair. Influencer partnerships should be evaluated not only for reach and relevance but also for resilience and credibility. Furthermore, platform-

specific response strategies, such as live Q&As on Instagram, explanatory videos on YouTube, or real-time replies on Twitter, should be developed to tailor engagement around the nature of the platform and the expected audience reaction. Sentiment monitoring tools and engagement metrics should be adapted to capture not only volume but also the emotional tone and narrative evolution of criticism over time.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This paper advances a novel perspective on negative sentiment in influencer marketing by treating it as a dual-purpose force: both a reputational risk and a strategic driver of engagement. By identifying emotional involvement as a mediator and integrating platform features and influencer credibility as moderators, the study provides a framework that is both conceptually robust and practically relevant. It encourages brands to view emotionally charged critique not as a breakdown in communication, but as an inflection point that, when addressed with authenticity and agility, can strengthen audience connection.

Future research should empirically test the propositions outlined in this framework through experimental studies and longitudinal analysis. Investigating how the effects of negative sentiment evolve over time, especially in high-stakes categories such as health, finance, or social advocacy, can provide deeper insight into sentiment durability and recovery. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could explore how cultural norms mediate the interpretation of criticism, while content format analyses could examine how visual, textual, or video responses differentially affect sentiment reversal. These directions offer rich opportunities to deepen our understanding of how negative sentiment, far from being dismissed or suppressed, can be harnessed as a powerful asset in the evolving landscape of digital brand communication.

The Importance of Perceived Customer Experience in the Pre-purchase and Purchase Stages: Links, Effects and Moderation of Touchpoints

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Keywords: Customer Experience, Customer Journey Stages, Touchpoints, Longitudinal Modeling.

We analyze the importance of the perceived customer experience (CX) in the pre-purchase and purchase phases on satisfaction and repurchase intention (RPI) and provide additional insights into the effects and moderation of touchpoints (TPs).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Omnichannel firms strive for the best possible seamless CX; however, stage-specific CXs are relevant because they cross the boundaries of the pre-purchase and purchase stages, for example (De Keyser et al. 2020; Grewal and Roggeveen 2020).

Research has often studied CX generally (one construct) or dimensionally. Only three scholars have focused on CXs in stages (Barari et al. 2020; online purchase stage; Olsson et al. 2022; post-purchase). Only Gallino et al. (2023) study different stages by suggesting prioritizing CXs in stages. However, they do not theorize or measure CXs at each stage.

Scholars have conceptualized stage-specific CXs and have called for empirical and yet missing analyses of CXs and TPs across stages (Gahler et al. 2023; Gao et al. 2021b). Empirical evidence will provide knowledge on the effects of stage-specific CXs on behavior, including CX links across stages. Pre-purchase-stage CX likely affects purchase-stage CX (De Keyser et al. 2020).

Based on accessibility-diagnostics theory, we aim to address calls and gaps: Does perceived CX in the pre-purchase and purchase stages influence RPI differently, and how does the link between both CXs translate into behavior? How does the use of major TPs in each stage moderate these influences?

Method and Data

Fashion omnichannel firms were selected (it is one of the largest sectors, characterized by high online sales shares, not highly concentrated, and firms have CX as a goal for typical purchase periods of <40 days). We chose six of the 15 top-selling fashion omnichannel firms based on three pre-tests. For the main study, three surveys were carried out in four-month intervals by recruiting regular omnichannel shoppers from an existing panel (N=536).

We used Likert-type scales from extant research: three items capture RPI, two items capture satisfaction (Evanschitzky et al. 2012; Maxham III and Netemeyer 2002; time-point t_3); pre-purchase CX (t_1) and purchase CX (t_2) are captured as a second-order construct by capturing cognitive, affective, social, and physical CX (Nambisan and Watt 2011; Gahler et al. 2023).

We chose major TPs based on nature and on their frequency and usefulness after intensive pretests (Herhausen et al. 2019; De Keyser et al. 2020; measured for both CX stages separately and based on a second-order construct of usefulness, Davis 1989; Han et al. 2020). Gender and age were controlled.

Reliability, validity, CMV, endogeneity checks, partial metric invariance, and stability-checks of within-person variance were satisfactory for latent moderated structural equation modeling with Mplus.

Summary of Findings

We show that omnichannel retailers benefit differently from CX in the pre-purchase and purchase stages. We contribute to the only three stage-specific studies and clarify inconclusive results on indirect vs. direct CX effects. Referring to accessibility-diagnostics theory, we extend stage-specific research by showing that satisfaction acts as intermediate, making accessible cognitions in the consumer's mind diagnostic for RPI.

CX is an easily accessible cognition or cue in both stages. In both stages, contact with a retailer becomes more salient and accessible through CX for RPI by being diagnostic through satisfaction. The total effect is stronger in the pre-purchase (vs. purchase) stage. This result extends research by showing a strong link between accessible pre-purchase information on repurchases, especially for information-related CX in further journey stages (De Keyser et al. 2020). Without the important link of pre-purchase CX for the accessibility of purchase-stage CXs, purchase CX has a stronger effect on RPI.

Concerning our second research question, results show that increasing perceived usefulness of major TPs increases CX effects, i.e., diagnostics increases with increasing TP usefulness. The indirect effect of pre-purchase CX is stronger reinforced than that of the purchase CX, however, only when usefulness is high (vs. low).

Key Contribution

We offer novel insights and contribute to understanding by theorizing and testing the pathways of stage-specific CXs on RPI through satisfaction. Scholars highlight that improving CXs during the journey is important and a benchmark for satisfying customers' expectations (Rahman et al. 2022). We focus on the first two stages, which precede the final decision and influence satisfaction (Pizzutti et al. 2022). Firms depend on customer retention, driven by attitudinal

satisfaction (Riaz et al. 2022). However, we theorize stage-specific CXs' indirect and total effects on RPI. We apply accessibility-diagnostics theory, which posits that mental response to stage-specific CXs becomes more accessible and causes a stronger attitudinal response, with stronger attitude-behavior correlations and diagnostics.

We analyze TPs as moderators of stage-specific CX effects. TPs are crucial for creating positive CX effects (Cambra-Fierro et al. 2021). We argue that in omnichannel, the most useful TPs (De Keyser et al. 2020) affect stage-specific CX effects differently. We extend Bolton et al. (2022), who studied TP as moderators, and respond to calls for respective studies (Becker and Jaakkola 2020). Consumers' perceived usefulness of TPs is a diagnostic cue. We examine whether the relative diagnostics of stage-specific CXs differs if superior cues through TPs are available.

References are available upon request.

THE VALUE OF VISIBLE WORK: OPERATIONAL TRANSPARENCY IN DIGITAL HEALTHCARE INTERFACES

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Keywords: operational transparency, patient experience, digital healthcare, labor illusion, healthcare interface

Description: This study examines how operational transparency in digital healthcare interfaces affects patient experience by comparing patient preferences for watching real-time laboratory analyses versus receiving immediate results.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How does operational transparency, or "labor illusion," in digital healthcare interfaces impact patient experience, specifically regarding patient preferences between observing real-time laboratory analysis processes versus receiving immediate results? As healthcare delivery increasingly shifts to digital platforms, providers face the challenge of maintaining meaningful patient experiences while eliminating the visible cues of effort that have traditionally existed in face-to-face healthcare encounters. This research investigates whether making typically hidden clinical processes visible through digital interfaces can enhance patient satisfaction, even when

this visibility requires additional waiting time, and explores the theoretical mechanisms underlying these preferences.

Method and Data

Two experimental studies were conducted using simulated patient portal interfaces with MBA students from a central Texas university who regularly used patient portals. Study 1 employed a within-subjects design ($n=83$) comparing three conditions: instantaneous result delivery, blind waiting with progress bar only, and transparent waiting showing real-time laboratory analyses being performed. Study 2 utilized a within-subjects design ($n=51$) comparing instant results with pre-process information versus transparent real-time process observation. Participants were randomly assigned to either lipid panel or comprehensive blood panel experiments, with systematic counterbalancing to control for order effects. Patient experience was measured using a validated four-item scale across all conditions, with sessions separated by one-week intervals to minimize memory effects.

Summary of Findings

Results from Study 1 revealed significantly higher patient experience ratings for the transparent condition ($M=5.77$) compared to both blind waiting ($M=5.01$) and instant delivery ($M=4.47$), $F(2,81)=298.18$, $p<.001$. Study 2 demonstrated that patients preferred watching analyses unfold in real-time ($M=6.10$) over receiving pre-process information with instant results ($M=5.04$), $F(1,50)=1973.33$, $p<.001$. These findings indicate that operational transparency enhances patient experience beyond simple information provision or uncertainty reduction. Patients consistently valued interfaces that demonstrated provider effort through visible processes, even when this

meant longer waiting times, suggesting that the timing and method of transparency significantly impact healthcare service evaluations.

Key Contributions

This research makes several theoretical and practical contributions to healthcare service delivery and operational transparency literature. Theoretically, it extends labor illusion theory by identifying timing as a critical boundary condition, demonstrating that when process information is revealed matters as much as what is revealed. The findings challenge traditional assumptions about service speed primacy by showing how transparency can transform negative service aspects (waiting) into value-creation opportunities. Practically, the research provides healthcare managers with actionable insights for enhancing digital patient experiences through strategic implementation of real-time process demonstrations rather than focusing solely on speed optimization. The study represents the first examination of operational transparency effects in digital healthcare interfaces, offering evidence-based guidance for healthcare providers seeking to maintain meaningful patient relationships in increasingly automated service environments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Transitioning from Broad Segmentation to ‘Segment of One’ in Data-Rich Digital Environments

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This conceptual paper defines the ‘Segment-of-One’ model, examines its role as an emergent logic in modern marketing, and puts forward a framework for its strategic adoption and governance.

Keywords

Segment-of-One; Personalization; Segmentation Targeting Positioning (STP); People Marketing; Programmatic Advertising, Governance.

Research Question

We explore what it means to operationalize marketing in a Segment-of-One (S1) approach, and how should firms plan and govern such execution across channels? Specifically, what constructs distinguish S1 from generic personalization, and how do they relate in a coherent nomological net? How does S1 alter Targeting and Positioning at the strategy layer? The goal is to come up with a simple, usable framework of S1 that strategy, analytics, and brand teams can share.

Summary of Findings

We define S1 not as “ever-smaller segments,” but as a live, per-interaction decision policy that selects the best next action and expression for the person–moment within explicit guardrails. Under S1, Targeting in STP shifts from audience selection to a dynamic eligibility policy, and Positioning becomes a brand grammar that preserves coherence across individualized messages. Two operational routes exist for S1 in practice. One is IIP (Identify–Individualize–Position), the identity-resolved path, used when consented, durable

identity and cross-surface continuity are feasible. Second is SIP (Segment-of-1–Individualize–Position), the de-identity path, used when firms act through short-lived, context-rich representations that enable “knowing without naming.” STP doesn’t go away, but goes upstream for strategy on where to play and what we stand for. IIP is favored downstream where consented identity and cross-channel levers are strong; SIP is favored where identity is thin or privacy constraints dominate but representations still support relevance.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper advances academic understanding by extending segmentation theory into a new paradigm: the “segment of one.” The approach is abductive: starting from observed person-moment practice across digital channels, to develop a coherent S1 model that both explains and disciplines that reality, introducing working constructs and delivers a roadmap for its execution across board. Organizations can apply this approach to segmentation in order to align strategic decision-making with the actual real-time targeting that happens when the ad is served. The framework presented here helps managers navigate technological challenges and ethical considerations while transforming to this new approach. Our paper not only clarifies the practical dimensions of “segment of one” marketing for firms but also equips policy makers with critical knowledge for establishing checks and balances that protect citizen interests in an era of pervasive data use.

Understanding Consumer Engagement in Livestream Shopping: Examining the Roles of Social Presence, Reciprocity, and Groundedness

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Keywords: livestream shopping; social presence; groundedness; shopping orientation

Description: The study explores how social presence, altruism, and shopping orientation affect purchase intentions in livestream shopping,

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

This research aims to explore how social presence, reciprocal altruism, and shopping orientation influence consumer behavior in livestream shopping. Specifically, it seeks to answer how social presence affects consumers' intentions to view and purchase products, and how reciprocal altruism moderates the relationship between social presence and the intention to share livestreams. Additionally, the study investigates how groundedness mediates the effect of social presence on purchase intentions and examines how different shopping orientations influence consumers' responses to social presence in livestream shopping. These questions provide insights into the psychological and social factors that drive consumer engagement and decision-making in the evolving landscape of online shopping.

Method:

This study employs experimental designs to examine the hypothesized relationships. Study 1 tested the impact of social presence on viewing and purchase intentions with a 2 (social presence: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Study 2 examined how reciprocal altruism moderates the relationship between social presence and sharing intentions, using a 2 (social presence: high vs. low) $\times$ 2 (reciprocal altruism: high vs. low) design. Study 3 investigated the mediating role of groundedness and the moderating effect of shopping orientation on purchase intentions, with a 2 (social presence: high vs. low) $\times$ 2 (shopping orientation: hedonic vs. utilitarian) design.

Summary of Findings:

The findings showed that social presence influences consumer behavior in livestream shopping. Study 1 confirmed that higher social presence increased both viewing and purchase intentions. Participants exposed to high social presence demonstrated greater engagement with the livestream content. Study 2 revealed that reciprocal altruism moderates the relationship between social presence and sharing intentions. Consumers with higher altruistic tendencies were more likely to share livestreams when they perceived a higher level of social presence, highlighting the role of altruism in fostering engagement. Study 3 showed that groundedness mediates the effect of social presence on purchase intentions. Consumers felt more emotionally connected to the shopping experience in high social presence conditions, leading to higher purchase intentions. However, the study found no significant moderating effect of shopping orientation on the relationship between social presence and purchase intentions, suggesting that social presence directly influences purchasing behavior, regardless

of shopping orientation.

Statement of Key Contributions

The research contributes to both the academic understanding and practical application of consumer behavior in livestream shopping. Academically, it addresses gaps in the literature by exploring the role of social presence in shaping consumer engagement and purchase intentions in an online environment. While prior research on social commerce focused on trust and engagement, this study uniquely integrates the concepts of reciprocal altruism and groundedness to offer a more comprehensive view of consumer behavior in livestream settings. The research also introduces the mediating role of groundedness, showing how social presence can create a sense of emotional connection, thus enhancing purchase intentions. Practically, the findings provide valuable insights for marketers seeking to optimize livestream shopping experiences. By emphasizing the importance of social presence, the research suggests that creating immersive and realistic shopping environments can drive higher consumer engagement and sales. This study contributes to the development of more effective marketing strategies in the rapidly evolving domain of social commerce.

Qualitative Data in Customer-Centric Marketing

Emotion-Driven Segmentation: Revealing Destination Love Types for Destination

Marketing Management

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Keywords: emotions, destination love, destination marketing management, demographics, market segmentation

Description: This study combines the concept of destination love with socio-demographic profiling to reveal distinct forms of tourist–destination attunements, offering new insights for tourist segmentation and destination strategy development.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question.

Throughout the years, academics from diverse fields have explored the influence of culture, including socio-demographic attributes and ethnicity, on the emotion of love (e.g., Doherty et al., 1994; Lykoudi et al., 2023). Love, as a deeply subjective and multifaceted concept, is shaped significantly by individual characteristics, socio-demographic variables, and cultural contexts (Christou, 2018). The purpose of this study is to conceptualize destination love and identify

demographic segments with respect to specific destination love types and determine which one develops each of the destination love types.

This study views destination love as a broader emotional concept than destination *brand* love; it shifts its focus toward understanding destination love as a universal phenomenon across the entire spectrum of destinations, rather than being confined to specific destination brands, to truly grasp its essence (in line with Barker et al., 2015; Langner et al., 2016; Lykoudi et al., 2023).

Understanding visitors' emotive responses is a central issue for study into visitor segmentation since tourists interact with the destination environment during the leisure and tourism experience (Liljander & Strandvik, 1997). This study constitutes the first attempt to identify destination love types with respect to tourists' demographic characteristics.

Method and Data

Two primary research efforts were conducted. The first qualitative research (in-depth, face to face interviews) took place over five months in Greece, followed by a second research (mixed methods) at the same research field lasting seven months. In both studies, sampling was predominantly grounded in theoretical principles (e.g., Tan et al., 2013). 75 tourists in Study 1 and 334 in Study 2, including both national and international individuals, participated. This culturally diverse sample is essential for the generalizability of the results and supports the study's objective to capture a wide range of cultural perspectives about destination love.

Open coding and axial coding techniques were applied to systematically identify discrete concepts, drawing on the methodological guidelines of Tan et al. (2013). Open codes that appeared interconnected were grouped to formulate tentative statements regarding relationships

among identified phenomena (Daengbuppha et al., 2006). Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa and Fleiss' kappa. Ethical considerations, such as anonymity and safeguarding sensitive information, were rigorously observed.

Tourists evaluated whether their most favorite holiday destinations were "loved" using their own love prototype. Following Batra et al. (2012), participants described feelings and perceptions, analyzed via grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) and McCracken's (1988) method.

Summary of Findings

In total, 7 major dimensions of destination love were emerged. This study is focused on two of them namely: "love stemming from locals" and "self-destination-integration".

Tourists describe destination love as emotional solidarity with locals; mutual understanding, creating personal relationships, sharing similar beliefs and behaviors with locals, feeling strong connection, and affinity towards locals. Tourists also anthropomorphize loved destinations through locals, attributing human attributes such as warmth and hospitality to the place.

Moreover, destination love articulated as familiarity, self-expansion, life-meaning & intrinsic rewards, and self-identity.

Both love types are perceived universally across cultures (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992; Doherty et al., 1994; Karandashev, 2015; Lykoudi et al., 2023).

Self-destination integration shows gender discrepancies; women dominate in Study 2. Love stemming from locals shows cross-gender consistency (Doherty et al., 1994).

High monthly income aligns with self-destination integration (in line with Lykoudi et al., 2023); discrepancies for love stemming from locals.

Middle-aged individuals dominate; Average~41–42 years (Lykoudi et al., 2023).

Marital status differs across studies; singles in Study 1, married in Study 2 for both types, contrasting Lykoudi et al. (2023) about self-love.

Highly educated individuals dominate (Lykoudi et al., 2023; Elder & Rockwell, 1979) and high repeat visitation for both types.

Key Contributions

This study conceptualizes destination love as a universal and broader construct, distinct from the narrower notion of destination brand love in the tourism field so far. It deepens the understanding of emotional connections between individuals and destinations, by providing insights into which tourists' types form these two types of destination love.

Moreover, it gives insights into people's mental prototypes, which constitute a major challenge in marketing as they are considered tacit knowledge structures that cannot be easily described.

It provides a robust segmentation framework that tourism professionals can use to identify market segments that are more likely to develop these types of love. Understanding these segments equips destination marketers with insights into designing targeted strategies to successfully position their destination in the hearts and minds of potential and current visitors.

It also reveals schemas, narratives and descriptions that may be used by marketers to design and implement their destination marketing strategy. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from

narrative-based learning (Mayer & Mayer, 2025), destination marketers are encouraged to embrace storytelling to foster integration/belonging, intercultural emotional solidarity, and anthropomorphization. Including the local community in both planning and operational procedures could improve communication quality and ensure more meaningful interactions between visitors and locals.

“References are available upon request.”

EUDAIMONIC TRAVEL: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF MEANINGFUL CONSUMER TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

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Keywords: Travel, Tourism, Eudaimonia, Depth Interviews, Qualitative Research

Description: This paper undertakes a qualitative approach (via depth interviews with consumers) to better understand the themes that underlie consumer experiences of eudaimonic or meaningful travel.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

While the link between travel and well-being has long been a focus of academic research (De Vos et al. 2013; Friman et al. 2017), it is only recently that scholarly work has started exploring the link between travel and experiences of *eudaimonia* (Demeter, MacInnes, and Dolnicar 2023; Sirgy and Uysal 2016). Frequently contrasted with the pursuit of pleasure that the idea of *hedonia* encompasses, *eudaimonia* instead focuses on the pursuit of meaning (Deci and Ryan 2008; Ryff 1989; Vittersø 2016). Given recent arguments within the marketing discipline to adopt a eudaimonic focus (Gupta, Eilert, and Gentry 2024; Schmitt, Brakus, and Zarantonello

2015), it is unsurprising that a growing body of work is trying to understand how consumers experience eudaimonia when they embark on travels (Knobloch, Robertson, and Aitken 2017; Lengieza, Hunt, and Swim 2019; Sirgy and Uysal 2016).

While such work has revealed several interesting insights, extant discourse continues to lack a nuanced understanding of the different ways consumers experience eudaimonia through their travels. This represents a critical gap within marketing literature because all eudaimonic travel experiences do not look alike. Given this background, the central purpose of this study is to uncover the thematic underpinnings of eudaimonic (meaningful) travel.

Method and Data

In line with best practices for phenomenological research (Creswell and Poth 2016), we decided to use in-depth interviews (McCracken 1988) to gather accounts of meaningful travel experiences. Open-ended questions prompted participants to recall travel experiences they associated with meaningful happiness. Additional probes were used wherever necessary to elicit more details about specific incidents or memories. Given the link between age and happiness perception (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014; Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar 2012), we included respondents across age groups. The final sample comprised 23 respondents (11 men and 12 women) with the youngest respondent being 19 and the oldest being 77.

All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, and the transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 12 and read and re-read separately by each author. Both authors met multiple times to discuss individual interpretations and emergent findings, and any disagreements were resolved through discussion. Analyses continued until theoretical saturation was reached and no new themes were needed to provide a comprehensive account of the focal phenomenon

(Charmaz 2003). The overall analytical process was iterative, representing a recursive movement between parts of the data and the emerging themes, and adhered closely to the constant comparative method (Spiggle 1994).

Summary of Findings

We found four major pathways through which travel experiences come to be perceived as personally meaningful to consumers: *bridging*, *construction*, *discovery*, and *escape*. *Bridging* was seen in examples of how travel can become meaningful when it aids in forming or strengthening relational bridges between people. *Construction* was linked to how certain trips became opportunities for self-creation; experiences that gave consumers a better idea about how to flesh out a desired identity and build a more concrete sense of self. *Discovery* was glimpsed in respondent accounts that illustrated how travel helped consumers discover some aspect related to themselves or the larger world of which they are a part. Finally, *escape* revolved around the rejuvenating power of travel given how it facilitated an escape for consumers from their day-to-day stressors and served as a reset in the process.

Collectively, these themes appear to underpin the phenomenological essence of eudaimonic travel in the sense that while not all four themes are likely to be seen in a given eudaimonic travel experience, it would be difficult to think of a travel experience as eudaimonic or meaningful in the absence of any of them.

Key Contributions

We make three contributions to marketing discourse. First, exploring different types of travel enables us to offer a context-independent account of meaningful travel that can accommodate a

variety of experiences and provide a useful starting point for future scholars interested in this topic. Second, we add to the rapidly growing body of work that uses a eudaimonic lens to better understand the nuances of marketing and consumer behavior. Doing so allows us to go beyond the utilitarian and hedonic paradigms that view the benefits of travel primarily in terms of perceived usefulness or pleasure. Third, we add to the broader stream of research on consumer happiness and well-being by illustrating how a widely popular category of experiences (i.e., those related to travel) can augment the lived experience of consumers by providing them with an enduring sense of meaning.

Our findings can also be used to strengthen the design of marketing communications that are used to promote travel-related market offerings. In addition to highlighting the hedonic benefits of travel experiences, marketers could also draw attention to the rich eudaimonic possibilities of such experiences that may help them stand out in a crowded marketplace.

References are available on request.

MARKETING UNIVERSITIES: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO STUDENT BRAND PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Keywords:

University branding, Student perceptions, Higher education marketing, Brand equity, Qualitative research

Description:

This paper explores undergraduate students' perspectives on university branding and the alignment with institutional marketing strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly adopt corporate branding practices to compete in a crowded global market. While the literature on higher education branding is growing, most studies take an institutional perspective, emphasizing rankings, facilities, and

accreditations. Far less is known about how students—the primary stakeholders—perceive their university’s brand. This study asks: (1) What dimensions define a university’s brand from the student perspective? (2) Do these dimensions vary by type of university? (3) What drives students’ university choice? Drawing on Aaker’s brand equity model, Kapferer’s brand identity prism, and the SERVQUAL framework, we investigate the role of humanistic values, identity, student life, people, and physical evidence in shaping brand perceptions. We also examine potential misalignments between students’ priorities and institutional branding narratives. This research addresses a critical gap by centering student voices in the analysis, offering both theoretical refinement of existing branding models and actionable recommendations for HEIs. It further considers how university type—Russell Group, MillionPlus, or unaffiliated—may influence brand perceptions, while identifying universal elements valued across all contexts. The findings aim to guide more authentic, student-centered branding strategies in the higher education sector.

Method and Data

We conducted an exploratory qualitative study using Grounded Theory Method (GTM) to capture authentic student perceptions of university branding. Data were collected from 82 unstructured, in-person interviews across 14 UK universities, representing Russell Group, MillionPlus, and unaffiliated institutions. Sampling combined judgment and convenience approaches to ensure diversity in institutional type, prestige, and geography. Interviews took place in informal settings (e.g., cafeterias, common areas) to encourage open discussion. The central question—“What do you consider to be your university brand dimensions?”—was supplemented with minimal prompts based on prior literature.

Data were transcribed and coded in NVivo using a multi-stage process: open coding (48 initial codes), axial coding (grouping into broader constructs), and selective coding

(identifying five core brand dimensions). Constant comparison and theoretical sampling ensured thematic saturation. Inter-rater reliability was high (codes: 0.91; categories: 0.88; themes: 0.93). The GTM approach allowed theory to emerge from data rather than imposing predefined constructs, making it particularly suited to uncovering nuanced insights in this underexplored area. The analysis linked emergent themes to established branding frameworks, enabling theoretical integration while preserving the authenticity of student voices.

Summary of Findings

Students perceive university brands through five interconnected dimensions: **Values** (e.g., inclusivity, diversity, contribution to society), **Identity** (character, prestige, external recognition), **Student Life** (social environment, extracurricular activities, support services), **People** (faculty, staff, alumni), and **Physical Evidence** (facilities, IT infrastructure, visual identity). Across all institution types, humanistic values emerged as the most influential brand element, surpassing traditional marketing metrics. Russell Group students emphasized prestige, research excellence, and international outlook; MillionPlus students prioritized employability and community impact; unaffiliated university students highlighted unique program offerings and campus culture. Despite institutional differences, the emphasis on values was consistent. A key finding is the misalignment between institutional branding and student priorities: universities focus on rankings and facilities, while students value inclusivity, supportive environments, and lived experiences. The People dimension—particularly faculty–student interactions—was critical in shaping perceptions. Physical evidence mattered, but mainly as a supporting factor. These insights reveal that emotional and relational factors carry greater weight in brand perception than material attributes. The study underscores the need for HEIs to balance aspirational messaging with authentic

reflection of student experiences, aligning external communication with the core values and everyday realities that define their brand from the student viewpoint.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study shifts the focus of higher education branding from institutional self-presentation to the lived experiences and priorities of students. Theoretically, it extends Aaker's brand equity model, Kapferer's brand identity prism, and the SERVQUAL framework by integrating humanistic and experiential elements into their application in HE branding. By identifying five core brand dimensions grounded in student narratives, it demonstrates that values, relationships, and experiences are central to brand equity in HEIs—often outweighing the traditional emphasis on rankings or facilities.

Empirically, the study offers one of the largest qualitative investigations of student brand perceptions in the UK context, providing comparative insights across institutional types. Practically, it provides clear guidance for HE marketing professionals: adopt more student-centric branding strategies, leverage authentic storytelling, foreground values such as diversity and inclusivity, and enhance faculty–student engagement. The findings also inform policymakers by highlighting the role of brand alignment in student satisfaction and retention, suggesting that funding and policy incentives could support more values-driven branding. By bridging the gap between institutional narratives and student realities, this research contributes to both academic understanding and the practical development of higher education branding strategies that resonate with primary stakeholders.

References are available upon request.

NAVIGATING BRAND RELATIONSHIPS WITH BEREAVED CONSUMERS: THE INTENSIFIED CASE OF MOTHERS EXPERIENCING BABY LOSS

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Keywords: grief and loss; consumer brand relationships (CBRs); baby loss; consumer vulnerability, consumer well-being.

Description: We identify key problems and opportunities that create or relieve tension in CBRs to illustrate how brands can effectively navigate relationships with bereaved consumers by applying in-depth interviews with 30 bereaved mothers who experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Nearly one in three women experience miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss (CDC, 2020, 2021; MacDorman & Gregory, 2015). This traumatic event abruptly deprives bereaved mothers¹

¹The term “bereaved mother” can refer to mothers of deceased babies/children at any age (Tan & Ketola, 2013). Our study examines the largest segment of bereaved mothers—those with deceased babies due to miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss (World Health Organization, 2021).

from feeling the joy and anticipation of their baby's arrival—a time filled with hope and emotional elation—and instead, propels them into depths of intense, overwhelming grief that evolves and lingers long after the loss (Mcgee, PettyJohn, & Gallus, 2018). The emotional effects stemming from this grief can upend the bereaved mother's important personal relationships, including those with her partner, family, friends, co-workers (Cacciatore, DveFrain, & Jones, 2008) and even with brands (Alvarez, David, & George, 2023; Fournier, 1998).

A problematic issue arises in these consumer brand relationships (CBRs) because bereaved mothers have no universal mechanism to inform brands of their loss to indicate that their consumption and communication needs have drastically changed as they progress through their journey from pre/post-natal to post-baby loss. Lacking this critical knowledge, brands continue to target this situationally vulnerable group—both online and offline—as if the baby were still alive, creating an asymmetric flow of information that negatively influences consumer emotions and the CBR. How can brands support bereaved mothers who are grieving the loss of their baby over time?

Method and Data

We recruited 30 bereaved mothers who had at least one baby pass away through contacts in baby loss resource organizations and through a snowball sampling method. Participants were recruited to equally reflect each of the three forms of baby loss: miscarriage (loss at or before 20 weeks gestation²), stillbirth (loss after 20 weeks gestation), and infant loss (loss up to one year after birth) (CDC, 2021). Participants varied in recency of loss (ranging from loss two months

² The term “gestation” refers to weeks in the womb prior to birth, with the average pregnancy lasting 40 weeks (CDC, 2021).

prior to 32 years prior to the interview), age (average age of 34.0), and occupation.

We applied semi-structured interviews, consisting of an interview guide (McCracken, 1988) that was constructed using a reflexive process (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). Interviews proceeded with grand tour questions (McCracken, 1988) and then to more specific probing questions to assess participants' feelings regarding their interactions with brands after loss. Data analysis proceeded using a thematic approach (Braun and Clarke 2006; Clark, Braun, and Hayfield 2015) and was categorized using Atlas.ti software. Interviews lasted an average duration of 66 minutes.

Summary of Findings

Findings reveal two problems cause tension in this triadic relationship (i.e., between the mother, baby, and the brand): (1) Western societal norms influence why the marketplace avoids the topics of grief and loss, magnifying the degree to which the bereaved feel silenced and isolated; and (2) Due to an asymmetric flow of information, brands continue marketing to the bereaved as if the deceased were alive, resulting in reduced consumer control and mismatched communication preferences.

These problems change the nature of the CBR, evolving it to either a unidirectional or dissolved relationship in the acute reactionary period after the tragic loss occurs. Most, if not all, CBRs dissipate completely in the prolonged reactionary grief period. Across the three time periods, we identify the outcomes (i.e., sense of control and emotional valence) bereaved mothers experience because of these problems, disrupting their CBRs.

However, these problems generate two brand opportunities: (1) Cultivating awareness of the frequency and severity of grief and loss to normalize marketplace discussions, and (2)

Implementing reporting mechanisms to capture communication preferences surrounding loss events to acknowledge the consumer's altered needs and restore control. Such solutions pave the way for brands to improve outcomes for consumer well-being.

Key Contributions

Our work provides a comprehensive, theoretical examination of grief and loss in marketing and addresses the critical knowledge gap of how grief/loss influences CBRs in three ways. First, we advance the limited marketing research on grief and loss, which largely ignores the influence of Western societal norms on brand behaviors by explaining how norms inform aspects of CBRs. Societal norms isolate and suppress grief expressions, explaining in part why brands distance themselves from consumers in their CBRs. We find that brands can normalize grief and loss conversations by behaving in socially responsible ways to raise awareness of baby loss.

Second, we contribute to research on emotions in CBRs by showing how brands can help restore a sense of control to bereaved consumers who experience negatively charged emotions through the resolution of an information asymmetry problem. Brands can enhance the well-being of bereaved consumers by maintaining an ongoing, supportive presence over time, while respecting the duality of emotions they experience—positive emotions associated with expecting their baby and the deep grief of their loss.

Third, in contrast to recommendations consumer vulnerability researchers offer, we argue that brands should remain in relationship (vs. distancing themselves) with bereaved consumers throughout the liminal grief journey. In sum, our research provides novel insight to the CBR literature as to how brands can foster relationships with bereaved consumers.

Leveraging Data for B2B Marketing Innovation

Interplay of digitalization and customer participation on manufacturers' market sensing capability

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Key words: Manufacturer digitalization; Customer participation; Value co-creation; Market sensing capability; Firm performance

Description: Drawing on dynamic capability, value co-creation theory and digital transformation literature, this study explores the impact of manufacturer digitalization and customer participation on market sensing capability and firm performance, and examines interplay of manufacturer digitalization and customer participation on market sensing capability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Market sensing capability (MSC) refers to a firm's ability to detect market changes, forecast trends, and identify new opportunities, forming a foundation for dynamic capabilities and sustainable competitiveness (Day, 1994; Teece, 2007). In the digital era, digitalization transforms business models and enhances MSC by improving sensing, processing, and integration of market information (Holmström et al., 2019; Ravichandran, 2018). Meanwhile, customer participation in co-creation enables firms to better understand market needs and technological changes (Teece et al., 1997). While prior studies have explored the separate impacts of digitalization and customer participation, little is known about how they independently and jointly influence MSC. Given the

challenges in digital transformation and the need for effective data use, this study investigates both the individual and interactive effects of digitalization and customer participation on MSC.

Method And Data

We conducted a survey in China's manufacturing industry, using questionnaires developed from interviews and literature. After two rounds of training for data collectors, we distributed surveys to 322 manufacturers and obtained 287 valid responses (response rate: 88.8%). The results show that customer participation significantly improves manufacturers' market sensing capability (MSC) ($\beta = 0.165$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. Customer participation also positively influences firm performance ($\beta = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. However, the interaction between customer participation and digitalization negatively affects MSC ($\beta = -0.126$, $p < 0.05$), not supporting H3. Ex-post analyses further confirm the partial mediating role of MSC: it mediates 73% of the effect between manufacturer digitalization and firm performance, and 68% between customer participation and firm performance. Variance explained by digitalization on MSC ($\Delta R^2 = 0.106$) is higher than that of customer participation ($\Delta R^2 = 0.035$), suggesting that digitalization has a stronger impact on enhancing MSC.

Summary of Findings

Based on dynamic capability, value co-creation theory and digital transformation literature, this study empirically examines the impact and consequences of manufacturer digitalization and distributor participation on manufacturers' MSC. The conclusions are as follows: manufacturer digitalization can improve MSC; distributor participation can improve MSC; MSC can improve firm performance. Contrary to our assumption, manufacturer digitalization and distributor participation have a negative interaction effect on MSC. In addition, ex-post analysis finds that MSC plays a positive mediating role between manufacturer digitalization, distributor

participation and firm performance; manufacturer digitalization has a greater impact on MSC than distributor participation.

Statement of Key Contributions

The theoretical contributions of this study are as follows: first, we complement previous research by discussing the decisive factor of firms' MSC from the digital transformation and value co-creation perspective. Second, this study shows how manufacturer digitalization interacts with customer participation in affecting MSC, which helps to combine the views of firms' internal digitization and external customer participation, and to have a better understanding of the interconnectedness between the two spheres from an MSC perspective. Third, the ex-post tests of this study have some interesting new findings: (1) compared with customer participation, manufacturer digitalization has a stronger role in improving MSC. This conclusion distinguishes the different importance of manufacturer digitalization and customer participation in improving MSC. (2) Manufacturer digitalization and customer participation promotes firm performance by improving manufacturers' MSC. While previous studies have explored the direct impact of manufacturer digitalization and customer participation on firm performance, its impact mechanism is not clear. This conclusion, to some extent, makes up for the shortcomings in this research field.

Omnichannel marketing and outside-in marketing capability

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Key words: outside-in marketing capability, omnichannel marketing, marketing competitive advantage

Description: This study explores how a manufacturer acquires outside-in marketing capability in omnichannel marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Outside-in marketing capability (OIMC) reflects a firm's ability to sense and leverage external market resources for competitive advantage. While prior studies emphasize its outcomes, limited attention has been paid to its antecedents. This study addresses this gap by examining marketing channel structures—specifically, channel diversity and cross-channel integration—as potential drivers of OIMC. Channel diversity reflects the breadth of a manufacturer's channel portfolio, while cross-channel integration captures the consistency and coordination across channels. We propose that both dimensions can enhance OIMC by improving access to market knowledge. Accordingly, we pose three research questions:

RQ1: What is the individual role of channel diversity and cross-channel integration in developing a manufacturer's OIMC?

RQ2: Do these two channel strategies complement or substitute each other in enhancing OIMC?

RQ3: How does cross-channel conflict influence the effects of channel diversity and cross-channel

integration on OIMC?

Method And Data

To test the proposed hypotheses, we selected manufacturers that adopted an omnichannel strategy as our research subjects. We commissioned a professional market research company to conduct the questionnaire-based survey to a random sample of 450 manufacturers drawn from a list of Chinese manufacturing firms. We ended up with 263 valid questionnaires after excluding 187 incomplete questionnaires. In this research, we relied on well-established scales from the existing literature to measure channel diversity, cross-channel integration, cross-channel conflict, outside-in marketing capability, and marketing competitive advantage. We use multiple linear regressions for hypothesis testing. Note that the F values are all statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ and that the R-square values range from 0.527 to 0.600, indicating that all regression models have satisfactory explanatory power.

Summary of Findings

Drawing on resource-advantage theory, our research investigates the effects of channel diversity, cross-channel integration, and cross-channel conflict on the manufacturer's outside-in marketing capability. We found that, first, a manufacturer's channel diversity and cross-channel integration improve its outside-in marketing capability. Second, the interaction between channel diversity and cross-channel integration negatively affects outside-in marketing capability. Third, cross-channel conflict strengthens the positive effect of channel diversity on outside-in marketing capability, while weakening the positive effect of cross-channel integration on outside-in marketing capability.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes three key theoretical contributions. First, it enriches the literature on outside-in marketing capability by identifying its antecedents in the context of omnichannel marketing,

addressing the previously overlooked role of channel structures. Second, it advances omnichannel marketing research by revealing a substitution effect between channel diversity and cross-channel integration, offering insights into how firms can strategically balance these elements. Third, it introduces cross-channel conflict as a contextual moderator, extending existing frameworks by highlighting its influence on the effectiveness of omnichannel strategies.

Practically, the findings suggest that managers should jointly consider channel diversity and integration to build marketing capability, recognize their trade-offs rather than prioritize only one, and carefully manage cross-channel conflict when implementing both strategies.

Perspectives from the Front Line

ALMOST GOT THERE: HOW SCALAR OUTCOME FEEDBACK ENHANCES SALESPERSON PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: Outcome feedback; sales performance, salesforce management system, business-to-business marketing

Description: This paper investigate the impact of scalar outcome feedback on salespersons’ performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Our research questions are: How does the type of outcome feedback (binary outcome feedback and scalar outcome feedback) influence salesperson performance? What roles do success experience and task difficulty play?

Method and Data

We employ difference-in-differences (DiD) and propensity score matching (PSM) methods to analyze data from a leading B2B firm. On August 15, 2023, the firm replaced

binary outcome feedback (BOF) with scalar outcome feedback (SOF) in two pilot cities, without BDs knowing it in advance. In the final matched sample, the treatment group consists of 19 BDs from the 2 pilot cities, comprising 1,581 BD-day observations, while the control group includes 98 BDs from 12 comparison cities, totaling 4,362 BD-day observations.

The characteristics between SOF cities and BOF cities are different. Thus, to construct BDs in BOF cities that are similar to those in SOF cities and make the treatment group comparable to the control group, we apply PSM based on observable characteristics (Goldfarb, Tucker & Wang, 2022).

To address the potential non-randomness of pilot city selection, we apply Heckman two-step correction after matching (Heckman, 1979; Wu, Chen, & Naik, 2024).

We examine the common trend assumption. We constructed DID model to investigate whether the SOF affects BD performance.

Summary of Findings

There is no significant difference in BD performance between the treatment group and the control group before treatment.

SOF has a significant positive impact on BD performance.

SOF has a significant positive impact on BD with less successful experience. SOF also has a significant positive impact on BD with more successful experience. SOF has a greater performance-improving effect on BDs with less successful experience.

When the customer is a VIP customer, the impact of SOF on BD performance is not significant. When the customer is a non-VIP customer, the impact of SOF on BD

performance is significantly positive. Therefore, SOF can only improve BD performance when the customer is a non-VIP customer (i.e., tasks with a high failure rate).

Key Contributions

This research advances the salesforce management and feedback literature by distinguishing between binary (success/failure) and scalar (progress-based) outcome feedback and examining their distinct motivational and performance effects. By integrating insights from the outcome feedback literature (e.g., Houser-Marko & Sheldon, 2008; Tolli & Schmidt, 2008), we highlight the motivational mechanisms underlying feedback's performance impact, revealing that scalar feedback fosters a stronger sense of accomplishment and perceived self-efficacy.

Our findings also identify boundary conditions for feedback effectiveness. Sales managers should accommodate salespeople's individual success experience and task difficulties when designing feedback systems to maximize motivational impact and performance gains.

Managerially, our insights are directly applicable to for-profit business-to-business (B2B) firms seeking to optimize their salesforce's performance by implementing outcome feedback. Non-profit and governmental sectors, engaged in fundraising or community engagement initiatives, may use scalar feedback to motivate staff or volunteers who vary in experience and face tasks of differing difficulty. Moreover, policy makers and organizational leaders could leverage these findings to shape training programs and performance evaluation tools that emphasize progress-based feedback for less experienced individuals or challenging tasks.

AN ESSAY ON ASPECTS OF COMPETITIVE DYNAMICS

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Keywords: Competitive dynamics, Competitive edge, Action-response dyad, Competitive interactions.

Description

The study extends strategic thinking in building competitive edge, the effects on the economy in terms of competition understanding, being pro efficient market operations, consumer, and public welfare; the stakeholder coverage being the business and the government; and the study useful to academicians and industry managers as well as competition policy makers.

ABSTRACT

Firms are required to be resilient to competition; it is questioned if this resilience, include and go beyond competitive static dimensions to competitive dynamic issues. The paper in making the above judgment, details aspects of competitive dynamics, that includes action-response dyad, competitive interactions, price competition, innovation and R&D competition.

INTRODUCTION

Competition is the process by which the makers and marketers of a particular product vie with each other, as they seek to obtain consumer choice in their favour in a bid to win and retain market demand for their offering. Competition is interdependence among players with conflict of interest among themselves, and the players not able to collude explicitly or enter into binding agreements (Moorthy 1985). As part of this process, marketing strategists will gain by paying explicit attention to a systematic and formal method of addressing competition and this is an effort to build competitiveness; also, the consideration of the sequence of moves and countermoves by competitors is complex (Baumol 1972; Lilien et al. 1999).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To aid strategic action and tactical marketing action by marketing strategists and marketers, it is useful to examine the a-priori considerations in managing with competition and thus make marketer's actions resilient to competitors. Competitors need to be identified, understood, and then anticipated / conjectured and the study is a step in this direction which is the realm of competitive dynamics.

MARKET-SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Competition is almost invariably governed by regulations of the government and practices of institutional bodies, that moderate the industry, the marketplace, and the consumer.

DYNAMIC VIEW OF COMPETITION

In the ultimate analysis, competitive dynamics erode competitive advantages (Schumpeter 1950; Chen 2009), and renewal investments need to be made, to build new competitive advantages. Competitive dynamics arise because firms are motivated and competitors are aware to act / respond, act / react, or move /countermove; and they are indeed capable of doing so. Further, competitive relationships are asymmetrical (Chen and Miller 2012).

Strategic Aspects of Competitive Dynamics

Decisions and actions of firms / players are at the root of inter-firm or competitive dynamics. Strategic decisions emerging (i) as objectives-based actions, as well as (ii) a decision of the strategic marketing process of the firm called planned strategic decision making, are typically actions moving the industry (group of firms competing for the same product category or need-want area), towards competitive equilibrium. Extant literature (Day and Reibstein 2004) has categorized competitive relationships resulting into one of broad three equilibriums – (i) Nash equilibrium; (ii) Stackelberg equilibrium; and (iii) Collusive equilibrium.

The loose condition of n player gaming is collusion. A tighter condition towards fairness to the market over collusion is cooperation, over cooperation is co-opetition, over co-opetition is

competition. The world has witnessed the move of the oil rich middle east countries, from a collusive situation in the 20th century to Gulf cooperation in the 21st century.

Strategic actions that can also be just called ‘actions.’ The most significant element of competitive dynamics in the strategic sense is the action-response one-time game that extant literature (Chen 2009) also calls the action-response dyad. Issues in competitor response include the kind of competitive stance to take, in the sense of responding or not to respond, and if respond whether to accommodate competitor or retaliate.

The other most significant element of competitive dynamics in the strategic sense is the aspect of strategic control which is corrective action taken when the performance outcomes of the competitive market do not match with strategic plans or objectives. Strategic control in this sense includes results control, objectives control, decision alternative control, as well as the all-encompassing performance-strategy control.

Tactical Aspects of Competitive dynamics

The fundamental weapon of tactical marketing is the ‘maneuver’ that seeks to disrupt equilibrium; in other words, these are tactical decisions to move the competitive situation away from equilibrium to gain advantage. As expected of rational players, competing firms offset these maneuvers and thus arises the maneuver-offset competitive dynamics. Tactical marketing is firefighting within the realm of the annual plan; this results in a repetitive situation that can be called as the competitive-offsetting game. Brand market share dynamics is motivated by competitive offsetting using trade-promotions and consumer-promotions as the marketing mix element.

The other aspect of competitive dynamics is countering strategic action by tactical reactions and thus arises the action-reaction conundrum, given that tactical reactions can be reacted to by the strategic action firm. The dynamic view of competition proposes in this paper, that the action-reaction conundrum are competitive interactions, are relative to competition, and there

is a need to separate out trends in emerging markets and examine stochastic equilibrium in steady state or mature markets of firm/ competitors before deciding on competitor actions as well as reactions.

The third aspect of tactical competitive dynamics is tactical control, which are tactical decisions taken when market-based outcomes or performance outcomes do not match with annual plan targets and control-action becomes necessary.

ISSUES OF ACTION-RESPONSE DYAD

For gauging the type of competitive actions firms need to play out, firms need to understand the dimensions of competition, and more closely and carefully act when the market is important to the firm. Strategic actions are complex (Day and Reibstein 2004) when resource requirements are high, resources are relocated, there is resistance from stakeholders, redeployment of resources committed is difficult, and disruption occurs in staff/systems. Complex actions need high commitment from the firm. Strategic actions are also sometimes associated with entry barriers to make it difficult for competitors to respond. Further pre-emption is another strategic action to take in the market before the competitor can respond. Strategic action firms can block the entry of competing firms through price reductions or signaling to indicate to the competing firm that it is not profitable to respond.

Competitor action-responses by firms and their competitors are intended to build or defend competitive advantages and bring forth firm performances better than competitors (Smith et al. 2001). Responses can vary from counter-offensive defense of the attacked firm if it is a leader to flanking defense if it indeed has been flanked by the challenger. In extreme situations, responding firms can strategically withdraw from the product market. It is to be noted, that action-response dyads assume the applications of the rational expectations between firms making the actions and giving the responses. The rational expectations hypothesis can be

simply stated as – ‘I know you; I know you know me.’ Issues in competitor response are detailed in extant literature (Grimm and Smith 1997; Day and Reibstein 2004; Chen 2009).

Competitive rivalry refers to action responses by competing firms, on competitive dimensions open to rational expectations. Competitive rivalry can at times be healthy and lead to active development of the market space. Competitive rivalry can sometimes be used by either of the rival firms in disturbing equilibrium and gaining long-term advantage.

When competitive rivalries escalate there is hyper-competition. Limits of Hyper competition (D’Aveni 1994) is perfect competition when no one player has an advantage and high profits are eliminated.

GAMES OF ACTION-REACTION / COMPETITIVE INTERACTIONS

Table 1: Information Specification

Category	Decision Basis	Games Basis	Information Basis
Liquidity Games			
	Theory Prone Decision Making	Pure Equilibrium Games and Models	CI, P, S Data sets or equilibrium data sets
Liquid Risk Games			
	Limited Action Strategies	Games of Disjunction and Models	CI, P, AS Data sets or divided data sets
	D-Limited Information decision making	Games of D-Limited Information	IC, P, S IC, P, AS CI, IP, S CI, IP, AS Limited Information Data Sets
	Constrained Decision Making	Games of Irreverence	IC, IP, S IC, IP, AS Information Gap Data sets

Legend

CI – Complete Information; IC – Incomplete Information; P - Perfect or fine information; IP – Imperfect or Coarse Information; S – Symmetric Information and / or Common Knowledge Information; AS – Asymmetric Information or Private Information; L – Limited Information; D-Limited Information – Definitely Limited Information.

Games of action-reaction can be posited as one-time games (such as the price action countered by reaction) or being considered repetitive, manifest as competitive interaction games or the action-reaction conundrum (the repetitive price action-reaction is the price war or war of attrition); such games fall broadly into tactical dynamics, meaning thereby that the action and the subsequent reaction (or the reaction – reaction couplet) take place within the annual time planning period. The specification of information for competitor action-reaction decision making as well as competitive interaction gaming is laid out in Table 1, above.

PRICE COMPETITION

Equilibrium strategies for Zero-sum games includes Nash, minimax, or maximin and they all lead to the same solution. Zero-sum games are strictly competitive, but do not lead to Pareto improvement among the players. Two player Zero-sum games (in continuity) of market share variable is always a non-price game. This happens as the effects of price on market share is offsetting, price being a ratio variable and a non-differentiation value variable. Differentiation values to consumers of different brands manifest as price differences of these brands and as such price is a differentiator manifest variable than a differentiation value causation variable. The typical way of showing price differences of similar brands by firms and accepting price differences by consumers is through cues such as quality cues with the cue value of price all by itself being negligible (also called the price indifference band) and the only logical acceptance of a price cue being a high priced or expensive brand. The resulting implication of a brand's net change in differentiation values / brand's utilities manifest as price changes being a change in demand as given by the demand curve.

The same logic can be extended to N player market share zero-sum games, and zero-sum games of market share are most relevant for understanding in steady-state or mature markets.

Because of the unique nature of the market share game among brands being a non-price game, it is postulated that the marketing stimuli (parameter) sensitivities and price response coefficient and price sensitivity be computed separately as below:

$$Mkt\ Share\ (A_t) = Intercept + B\ Advertising\ (A_t) + C\ Brand\ (A_t) + \epsilon_t \quad (1)$$

$$Mkt\ Share\ (A_t) = D + E\ Price\ (A_t) + \epsilon_t \quad (2)$$

$$Sales\ (A_t) = F + G\ Price\ (A_t) + \epsilon_t \quad (3)$$

(A) is considered brand, t -time period during which the variable values are captured; ϵ_t is error at time t

The market share to marketing stimuli (brand, and advertising) regression equation (1) outputs the brand specific, advertising (B) and brand (C) sensitivities or response coefficients for managerial action. The market share to price regression outputs of equation (2) may be called the resultant price sensitivity (E) of market share of brand A (t) to price A (t).

Equation (1) and equation (2) cannot be estimated jointly as the price coefficients are resultant price sensitivities. As managers would also want to proactively use price as a stimulus, the sales to price relation (not a zero-sum game) given by equation (3) needs to be used as the price response coefficient (G) for managerial action. The resultant price sensitivities of equation (2) provide an understanding of the impact of price or symbolic analysis coefficients of price in the market share to marketing stimuli zero sum game.

Given the above and Sales (A(t)) being Quantity Q of brand A sold, the brand price elasticity of sales / demand is given by:

$$\epsilon_{Q(A)} = \frac{\frac{\partial Q}{Q}}{\frac{\partial P}{P}} \quad (4)$$

The above-mentioned single variable regression equation (2) and equation (3) is just specified. We may want to include competitive price variables, to get the cross-brand resultant price sensitivities and the cross-brand price response coefficients respectively. Pooling of data of the different brands for the sales to price relation may result in a good category price sensitivity as price is a non-differentiation value variable but pooling is not a-priori recommended for the first equation (1) above as advertising and brand as elements are differentiation value variables. The above analysis assumes that the market share – stimuli relation given by equation (1) and the market share – price relation given by equation (2), as well as the sales to price response relation of equation (3) are linear in relationship and linear in parameters (Hanssens et. al, 2001).

War of attrition, usually manifest in the action-reaction and competitive interaction framework as price wars. The game being the firm having the ability (such as deep pockets, or cross-subsidization from profitable brands / products) to hold on a negative payoff till as such time that the other player weaker in such a withstanding capability goes out of the market. Price wars are also likely to occur in contestable markets wherein the entry barriers and exit barriers are both low.

QUANTITY COMPETITION

Neo-classical theory or the theory of perfect competition posits that competition occurs in industry-markets based on quantity adjustment (Hunt and Morgan 1995) by adjusting the quantity produced in the short run as a reaction to change in the product-markets, and by adjusting the scale of the plant in the long run. Further, aspects of quantity competition include game structuring of competitive interaction on quantity / capacity (entry into or expanding a market); such game structures are called the entry games and pre-emption games.

PRODUCT MARKET COMPETITION

The basis of product competition is differentiation. The three different competitive stances possible for a firm are ‘differentiated position’, ‘head-on position’ and ‘me-too’ which is to follow the leader in competitive position. Product-market competition also manifests as firm concentration, with firm concentration being the manifestation of firm market power (for example said as four firm concentration). The greater the market power, more oligopolistic is the product-market. Typically, product-market concentration, is supported by product patents by the firms in the oligopoly, with brand loyalty being the second measure of support for firm concentration (Ballance et al. 1992).

INNOVATION AND R&D COMPETITION

This is an investment sensitive dimension of moves – countermoves in n player games. This is a sequential game, guided by the strategic intent of the firm’s top management as well as the capture of competing firms’ intents; a major tool or technique guiding managers in this aspect of competitive dynamics is beach-head mapping.

If competitive product entry is a competitive rivalry aspect, then innovation and R&D competition is closely guarded by the company on rational expectations basis and is hence not obvious on rational expectations; this makes innovation and R&D competition a strength building dimension in the marketplace, though the manifestation of innovation and R&D in the marketplace is through future product entries which is obvious on rational expectations.

Given huge investments that may be required for both R&D as well as innovations, innovation (state-of-art) and R&D (cutting-edge) competition is impacted by size (Glader 2006) for which investment is made called size logic. Innovation markets are around two and half percent of the total market potential given by the Roger’s curve. The product must move from being an innovation to being a mainstream product before capturing the rest of the market.

War-gaming is an aspect of competitive dynamics useful in moves-countermoves gaming, in which firms are typically leaders, challengers, followers, or nichers. An important sequence of

moves of a market leader is to continually make moves to stay ahead in technology or state-of-art product called the mobile defence move. An important sequence of moves of a challenger is to make a sequence of moves to weaken the competitor called the encirclement attack. Extant literature deals with various aspects of war strategies (Ries and Trout 1986; Greene 2007; Vasconcellos E Sa 2005; Gagliardi 2005).

MULTIMARKET / MULTIPOINT COMPETITION

It is quite possible that two firms may be competing with one another in more than one market. In such a case it can be considered that markets find equilibrium through spheres of influence and mutual forbearance can be a path to resolve such competition. In this process, changing resource allocations can also be usefully applied between different markets by firms to resolve competition (Ketchen et al, 2004; Chen 2009).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING STRATEGISTS

Firms as of recent times are required to be resilient to competition and this makes the difference between a successful firm and not so successful firm. An illustration is of the comparison of the opening up to competition of the erstwhile monopoly business of the Government of India namely the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India in the insurance sector and the monopoly business in the telecom sector namely the Department of Telecom Services (DTS) of the Department of Telecommunications, with the establishment of Insurance Regulatory Development Authority of India (IRDA established in 1999) and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI established in 1997) respectively. LIC continues to be a leader as of financial year 2023 in the insurance market space despite the presence of 24 life insurance players, with a first-year premium share of 64.02% and the private sector holding 35.98% (the closest rivals being SBI Life, HDFC Life, ICICI Prudential Life) (IBEF). It can be thus construed that LIC is indeed resilient to competition. On the other hand, the firm BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) of the telecommunication department formed in 2000 to confront

competition is overcome by leaders in cellular communication space. In the telecom space as of May 2024, the top 3 players are Reliance Jio, Airtel and Vodafone-Idea holding 86.32% of the market share as against a significant but not so substantial 7.38% held by BSNL (IBEF). As such, can it be construed that the Government of India telecom operator is not so resilient to competition; does this resilience include and go beyond competitive dynamics issues to competitive statics dimensions such as technology choice, infrastructure investments, and operational excellence. Given technology standardization, availability of investment funds with the Government of India and the Government's deep interests and strengths in low-cost operations, does the resilience aspect flip back to competitive dynamics and underscore its importance in business success.

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CONSTRUING SALESPEOPLE’S PERFORMANCE AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING FROM QUIET EGO: THE ROLE OF ADAPTIVE SELLING AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Keywords: Quiet ego; Sales performance; Subjective well-being; Adaptive selling; Emotional intelligence

Description: This study examines how quiet ego influences salesperson performance through adaptive selling and subjective well-being, with emotional intelligence moderating the quiet ego–adaptive selling relationship.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Researchers praised the notion that sellers with noisy egos achieve sales success (Weinberg, 2019). Limited study has been conducted on the effects of the quiet ego, defined by four components: growth-mindedness, detached awareness, perspective-taking, and inclusive identification (Wayment & Bauer, 2017), in the business context. In modern sales, adaptive selling, defined as the understanding of and making adjustments to selling circumstances, is essential for improving salespeople's capacity to address buyer issues (Weitz et al., 1986). Researchers proposed that psychological elements may play a role in the practice of adaptive selling of salespeople (Wayment

et al., 2015). Moreover, transcending egoism is posited as a means to cultivate a more compassionate existence and attain enduring satisfaction and well-being (Wayment & Bauer, 2017). Moreover, a salesperson's emotional intelligence can facilitate the comprehension of both their own emotions and those of clients, enabling them to respond and act appropriately. This study investigates how the quiet ego influences sales performance through the mediating role of adaptive selling, with emotional intelligence moderating the quiet ego–sales performance relationship. It also examines how the quiet ego enhances subjective well-being, which in turn contributes to improved sales performance.

Method and Data

This research employed a primarily quantitative methodology. The study was carried out in Vietnam, a setting often referenced in emerging market literature (Sheth, 2011). The scale items for the constructs were derived from existing literature: quiet ego from Wayment et al. (2015); adaptive selling from Robinson et al. (2002); emotional intelligence from Wong and Law (2002); sales performance from Peasley et al. (2020); subjective well-being from Liu et al. (2021). This study employed convenience sampling to gather 255 responses from salespeople employed in major urban centers in Vietnam. Following the quality assessment, 221 responses were deemed suitable for data analysis with SmartPLS 4.1 software. Descriptive data indicate that the survey sample comprised 60.6% male and 39.4% female participants. The survey sample's age group with the biggest percentage is individuals aged 26 to 34 years, comprising 47.1%, while the lowest percentage is represented by those over 45 years old, at 7.2%. The percentages for the age categories 18-25 and 35-44 are 19% and 26.7%, respectively. Regarding marital status, 57% are

single, while other statuses comprise 43%. 24.9% own up to 3 years of sales experience, 33.5% have 3-6 years, 21.3% have 7-10 years, and 20.3% exceed ten years.

Summary of Findings

The scales' reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed before hypothesis testing. The results demonstrated that all hypotheses were supported. The quiet ego significantly affected adaptive selling ($\beta=0.509$, $p<0.001$), which in turn strongly impacted sales performance ($\beta=0.432$, $p<0.001$). The significance of the quiet ego's influence on adaptive selling aligns with Gilbert et al. (2022). The findings further corroborated the direct relationship between adaptive selling and sales performance (Charoensukmongkol & Suthatorn, 2021; Franke & Park, 2006). The quiet ego significantly impacted subject well-being ($\beta=0.423$, $p<0.001$), which in turn had a significant effect on sales performance ($\beta=0.435$, $p<0.001$). This result aligns with previous studies regarding the influence of a quiet ego on subjective well-being (Liu et al., 2021). The impact of subjective well-being on sales performance is notable, as researchers are divided on the causal direction between the two concepts (Brady et al., 2019), indicating that life satisfaction and positive affect may influence performance (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Emotional intelligence strengthened the impact of a quiet ego on adaptive selling ($\beta=0.227$, $p<0.001$). The finding regarding emotional intelligence substantiates the idea that it may regulate people's behaviors (Khalili, 2017; Prahan et al., 2017).

Key Contributions

The research contributes to relevant literatures on egoism, emotional intelligence, subjective well-being, and sales management regarding the mechanisms of quiet ego to salespeople's performance

and subjective well-being, with the roles of adaptive selling and emotional intelligence. Specifically, rather than just searching for noisy ego people, sales managers may employ salespeople with quiet ego traits who could exhibit positive adaptive selling behavior during customer interactions or can likely possess subjective well-being, which increase their sales performance. But managers must train them to change their approach to customers flexibly, recognize and develop new business opportunities using their own quiet ego by listening to customers with compassion. Furthermore, emotional intelligence could also be a criterion in job specification as this has been shown to elevate the impact of quiet ego on adaptive selling.

References are available upon request.

**DIFFERENT, DIFFERENT, BUT SAME:
A GENDER PERSPECTIVE ON JOB AD EFFECTS ON STUDENT APPLICATIONS
FOR B2B SALES JOBS**

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Keywords: Sales management, Recruiting, Gender, Belongingness, Diversity

This paper examines how linguistic features in job advertisements influence students' intention to apply for B2B sales positions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

B2B sales positions are difficult to fill, especially with university graduates and even more so with female candidates. Despite this challenge, the marketing literature offers little empirical insight into gender-specific job ad effects in the sales context. While prior research suggests that job ad design influences application intentions via gendered wording or value alignment, it remains unclear how these effects manifest in the context of B2B sales recruitment. This study addresses this gap by investigating how linguistic elements in job ads influence application intentions. Specifically, this study asks: *How do explicit belongingness cues, gendered wording, and company type in job ads influence students' application intentions for B2B sales positions—and does gender moderate these effects?* Grounded in the Need-to-Belong Theory, we develop and test a conceptual model exploring whether linguistic and contextual elements in job advertisements affect male and female students' intentions to apply for sales roles. This research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how inclusive communication can support diversity in B2B sales recruitment, and whether perceived company identity further influences these effects.

Method and Data

To examine the effects, we conducted a 2 (belongingness explicitness: present vs. absent) x 2 (gendered wording: masculine vs. feminine) between-subject experiment (N = 381) with business students nearing graduation in Germany. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four job ads scenarios for a B2B sales trainee position at either SAP (more masculine-perceived) or Zalando (more feminine-perceived). Belongingness cues were operationalized via a sentence emphasizing inclusivity. For the gendered wording manipulation, we followed Gaucher et al. (2011). Application intention was measured before and after the manipulation using validated scales. Control variables

included job experience, perceived job skills, and exposure to sales-related content. All scales met psychometric quality standards (e.g., Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$).

Summary of Findings

Our analysis revealed three key effects. First, explicit belongingness cues significantly increased application intentions ($\beta = .16, p < .01$), supporting the relevance of an inclusive wording. Second, feminine wording in job ads had a positive impact across genders ($\beta = .17, p < .01$), suggesting that inclusive language benefits a broad applicant pools—not just women. Third, company type mattered: students preferred the masculine-perceived company (SAP) over the feminine-perceived one (Zalando) ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$), regardless of their own gender. Contrary to our hypotheses, gender did not moderate any of these effects—none of the interaction terms were significant. These results suggest that while males and females may be different in many respects, their reactions to job ad design in the B2B sales context are more similar than previously assumed.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to three research domains. First, it introduces belongingness explicitness as a novel, cost-effective feature in job ad design that enhances application intentions, extending literature on inclusion in recruitment marketing. Second, our findings challenge prior assumptions that only women respond to gendered wording. Both male and female students responded more positively to feminine wording, indicating a broader preference for inclusive and supportive language across genders. Third, contrary to expectations, both men and women preferred the masculine-perceived company. This suggests that employer attractiveness in sales may be tied to perceived prestige or performance orientation rather than alignment with gender identity.

Together, these findings offer actionable insights for sales managers and HR professionals. Feminine gendered wording and belongingness cues are low-cost interventions that can broaden the applicant pool for hard-to-fill roles like B2B-sales. The lack of gender moderation further

suggests a shift in generational attitudes toward inclusive communication and organizational identity, making this research relevant for recruiting Gen Z talent. However, recruiters should be cautious with employer branding strategies. While inclusiveness is key, perceptions of organizational strength and prestige also matter.

EXPLORING THE OUTCOMES OF EMPLOYER BRANDING: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Key words: Employer Branding, Employee Commitment, Employee Retention, Job Satisfaction, Competitive Advantage.

Description: This paper examines how employer branding influences organizational outcomes, such as employee commitment, satisfaction, involvement, and retention, by proposing a theoretical framework and conceptual model that highlight its role in creating competitive advantage and positioning organizations as employers of choice.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The central research question guiding this study is: How does employer branding, defined as the strategic promotion of an organization's values, culture, and reputation, influence key

organizational outcomes such as employee commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, employee retention, and the development of competitive advantage?

This question emerges from the growing recognition that organizations face increasingly complex challenges in attracting and retaining talent, particularly in industries that require specialized knowledge and skills. With U.S. companies experiencing high turnover rates, the need to establish effective retention systems has never been greater. Employer branding offers a potential solution by creating a compelling organizational identity that appeals to both current and prospective employees. The research question therefore seeks to explore whether a strong and attractive employer brand can reduce turnover, enhance employee loyalty, and ultimately position organizations as employers of choice. It also addresses whether both external branding, aimed at attracting talent, and internal branding, designed to nurture and retain employees, play distinct but complementary roles in shaping organizational success. By investigating these dynamics, the study contributes to the theoretical foundations of employer branding while offering practical insights for managers seeking to strengthen workforce stability and long-term competitiveness.

Summary of Findings

This paper highlights the theoretical outcomes of employer branding and its vital role in achieving positive organizational results. Employer branding, defined as the strategic promotion of an organization's values, culture, and reputation, is shown to directly impact employee commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, intent to stay, and overall retention. The proposed conceptual model, supported by six hypotheses, suggests that organizations with strong employer brand attractiveness are more likely to develop a committed and satisfied workforce

that identifies with organizational goals and remains engaged over the long term. Findings from prior studies indicate that employer branding not only reduces turnover but also positions companies as employers of choice, enhancing their ability to attract high-quality talent in competitive labor markets.

The study emphasizes that both external and internal branding efforts are necessary: external branding creates a favorable image to attract new employees, while internal branding fosters loyalty and engagement among current staff. Together, these strategies strengthen organizational identity and create a sustainable competitive advantage. For academics, the paper advances theoretical foundations of employer branding by filling gaps in the literature. For practitioners, it provides actionable insights on leveraging branding to attract, engage, and retain talent, thereby ensuring long-term organizational success.

Key Contributions

This paper makes significant contributions to both academic research and managerial practice by advancing the understanding of employer branding and its organizational outcomes. For academics, the study offers a comprehensive theoretical framework that addresses gaps in the existing literature, where the conceptual foundations of employer branding remain underdeveloped. By synthesizing prior studies and proposing a model supported by six hypotheses, the paper clarifies how employer brand attractiveness influences employee commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, intent to stay, and retention. It also highlights the dual role of external and internal branding efforts, offering new perspectives on how these strategies interact to shape organizational success. Furthermore, the proposed conceptual model

provides a foundation for future research, particularly in exploring industry-specific applications and the influence of cultural and demographic contexts on employer branding effectiveness.

For practitioners, the study provides actionable insights into how organizations can strengthen their employer brand to attract and retain top talent in increasingly competitive labor markets. It underscores the importance of aligning branding strategies with employee expectations and organizational values, enabling firms to position themselves as employers of choice. By demonstrating how strong employer branding enhances retention and creates competitive advantage, the paper equips managers with a practical tool to improve workforce stability and long-term organizational performance.

References are available upon request.

FACIAL, VERBAL, AND VOCAL EMOTION DYNAMICS IN AI- AND HUMAN-MEDIATED SERVICE INTERACTIONS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Keywords: Facial, verbal and vocal emotional expressions; AI-mediated and human-mediated service interactions; Neuroscience; AI-based approach

Description: The findings of a systematic literature review show how facial, verbal and vocal emotional expressions in AI- and human-mediated service interactions influence service success.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Have you ever felt instantly understood and valued by an employee's voice, words, or facial expressions in a service interaction, or have you experienced frustration when their lack of emotion or mismatched responses left you feeling ignored? These experiences highlight how deeply emotions shape service interactions, for both customers and service companies. While prior research has predominantly focused on individual emotion modalities, such as facial expressions in human-to-human service interactions (Pugh 2001) or verbal expressions in AI-mediated service interactions (Chen et al. 2024), vocal emotional expressions and the combined effects of these modalities remain underexplored. Based on emotional contagion theory (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1993) and affect-as-information theory (Schwarz 1990), this systematic literature review investigates the role of facial, verbal, and vocal emotional expressions in service interactions, focusing on both AI-mediated and human-mediated contexts. The central research question explores how these emotional expressions influence service success, how their authenticity and intensity can enhance service outcomes, and how their dynamics differ between human-to-human and AI-to-human interactions. By synthesizing findings from 45 articles published between 2001 and 2024, the study develops a conceptual framework to guide the effective use of emotional expressions in service interactions and identifies critical gaps for future research.

Method and Data

The study applies a systematic literature review methodology, following the CAD framework (Collection, Analysis, and Discussion of data; Bichler et al. 2022). A comprehensive search across two academic databases, Web of Science (WoS) and EBSCO Business Source Premier, was conducted using four keyword families – emotions, emotional expression modalities, service parties, and the service context – and limited the results based on language,

publication type, ranking, research area, and time frame. The initial keyword search, without applying additional filters, identified 9,992 papers in WoS and 2,381 in EBSCO. Applying all pre-selection criteria reduced these numbers to 746 articles in WoS and 342 in EBSCO. A review of titles and abstracts, focusing on studies examining facial, verbal, or vocal emotional expressions in service interactions, further narrowed the selection to 152 articles in WoS and 37 in EBSCO. After removing duplicates, 172 articles remained for full-text screening, where articles were included that investigated the influence of AIs' and employees' emotional expressions on customers' perceptions of service success in B2C interactions, resulting in a final number of 45 relevant articles published from 2001 to 2024. Studies centered on customers' emotional expressions, marketing communications, B2B interactions, emotional labor, or emotion regulation strategies were excluded.

Summary of Findings

The findings emphasize the critical role of emotional expressions in shaping service success. Most studies examine facial emotions (n=39), six of which also consider verbal or vocal cues; fewer address verbal emotions (n=9), three of which also include facial or vocal expressions, and none focuses solely on vocal emotions. Findings show that facial expressions are particularly influential in human-to-human interactions, enhancing service outcomes (Marinova, Singh, and Singh 2018). In contrast, verbal expressions are more prominent in AI-mediated interactions (Zhang et al. 2024), while vocal expressions are often used to complement facial or verbal cues (Huang and Sénécal 2023). Authenticity emerges as a pivotal factor, with authentic emotional expressions fostering trust and satisfaction, whereas inauthenticity can lead to adverse outcomes (Lechner and Mathmann 2021). Similarly, the intensity of emotional expressions plays a significant role (Wang et al. 2017). However, prior studies offer mixed evidence regarding whether intense emotions enhance service outcomes or, conversely, lead to adverse effects. The review identifies gaps in the literature, including

the limited focus on vocal expressions, negative emotions, emotional intensity, the interplay of multiple modalities, and new methodological approaches. These findings are synthesized into a conceptual framework to guide future research and practice.

Statement of Key Contributions

Firms must adapt to evolving interaction dynamics, as emotions remain central to service interactions; however, the integration of AI-based service tools introduces uncertainty regarding their future role in service interactions. This systematic literature review presents a holistic overview of the impact of employees' and AIs' facial, verbal, and vocal emotional expressions on service success. It identifies factors that help in effectively using emotional expressions in service interactions. Facial expressions, for example, are key in human-to-human interactions (Pugh 2001). At the same time, AI lacks physical facial expressions, and verbal emotional expressions become the primary mode (Chen et al. 2024). While specific emotional expression modalities may stand out depending on the context, combining emotional modalities along with authentic and positive emotional expressions can enhance the impact of employees' and AIs' emotional expressions on service success. The literature review suggests that managers should prioritize diverse emotional expressions in both AI-mediated and human-mediated service interactions, focusing on designing AI tools that align with specific service contexts and customer preferences. Research should further investigate the interplay of facial, verbal, and vocal emotional expressions, explore service interactions between employees and AI, and apply neuroscientific and AI-driven research approaches to capture emotions immediately when they appear.

References available upon request.

FASHION CLOTHING STORES: THE INFLUENCE OF PHYSICAL STORE FORMATS ON CONSUMER RESPONSES

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Keywords: consumer behavior, fashion consumption, omnichannel, physical store formats

Description: This study explores the influence of different physical store formats on consumer behavior toward a clothing brand, specifically regarding engagement, purchase, recommendation, and visitation intention.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Although e-commerce continues to grow rapidly, physical retail remains in high demand, particularly for the experiential elements it offers – such as product trial, social interaction, and emotional gratification. In response, retailers are increasingly aware of the evolving consumer preference for more socially enriched shopping environments. To remain competitive and foster

lasting customer relationships, they must deepen their understanding of consumer behavior across different purchasing contexts. This study emphasizes the importance of further examining the Brazilian consumer experience within physical retail environments, particularly concerning understanding the reasons behind their intentions toward physical stores. Through the experimental methodology, our research explores five reasons consumers visit physical retail: Discovery, Convenience, Customization, Community, and Shoppertainment (Breugelmans et al. 2023). Analyzing how face-to-face interactions, environmental stimuli, and entertainment activations influence consumers' perceptions is essential. The Farm store was selected as the object of study, allowing a detailed analysis of how different store formats influence consumers' engagement, purchase intention, recommendation intention, and intention to visit.

Method and Data

This study employed a between-subjects to investigate the impact of different store formats on consumer behavior toward the Farm brand. Six pictures, including a neutral one, were created using AI-generated features to represent an actual Farm store. These scenarios highlighted the five dimensions established by Breugelmans et al. (2023) – Reference is available upon request. The research participants were randomly presented with various scenarios, leading to the following distribution: Discovery (n = 28), Convenience (n = 19), Customization (n = 28 subjects), Community (n = 25), Shoppertainment (n = 22), and the Neutral condition (n = 24). The questionnaires assessed how each stimulus influenced consumers' intention to recommend, visit the store, purchase, and level of engagement with Farm products (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Multiple linear regressions were performed to analyze the impact of the stimuli (independent variables) on engagement, purchase intention, recommendation intention, and

visitation intention (dependent variables). Dummy variables were created to represent each scenario.

Summary of Findings

This study explored how five in-store stimuli – Discovery, Convenience, Customization, Community, and Shoppertainment – impact consumer engagement, purchase intention, recommendation, and visitation intention. Results revealed no significant effects on engagement or purchase intention across all scenarios compared to the neutral baseline. However, the stimuli notably influenced recommendation intentions. Discovery ($p = .03$), Convenience ($p = .02$), Community ($p < .01$), and Shoppertainment ($p = .01$) significantly increased recommendation likelihood, with average score improvements ranging from 0.61 to 0.86. Customization did not yield a significant impact ($p = .21$). Regarding visitation intention, Discovery ($p = .02$), Community ($p = .02$), and Shoppertainment ($p = .05$) conditions led to significantly higher intentions to visit the store, highlighting their potential to enhance store traffic. Despite these findings, the model's overall explanatory power was limited: the adjusted R-squared value was only 0.02, indicating that just 2% of the variance in visitation intention could be explained by the stimuli. These results suggest that while some stimuli can enhance consumers' intent to recommend or visit, they may not sufficiently drive engagement or purchase intention on their own, and their influence on actual store traffic remains relatively weak from a statistical modeling perspective.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study offers valuable insights into consumer behavior in physical retail stores. Our findings demonstrate that the Convenience, Community, Discovery, and Shoppertainment formats positively impact consumers' intention to recommend clothing stores. This information can support retailers – such as Farm – in prioritizing store design elements that can enhance word-of-mouth marketing. Surprisingly, none of the studied store formats significantly influenced consumer engagement or purchase intention. While some formats (Discovery, Community, and Shoppertainment) showed statistical significance on store visiting intention, the overall explanatory power was limited. This indicates that store format alone may not predict visitation behavior, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach. The findings suggest that Farm and similar retailers should create convenient, community-oriented spaces that facilitate product discovery and provide entertainment value to enhance recommendation rates. This study builds upon Breugelmans et al.'s (2023) ideas of physical retail motivators, providing empirical evidence of their relative importance in a specific brand context. The results also emphasize the need for further investigation into factors beyond store format influencing consumer engagement and purchase intention in physical retail. These contributions offer valuable insights for academics studying retail consumer behavior and practitioners seeking to optimize their physical store strategies in an increasingly omnichannel landscape.

Extended Abstract

FOSTERING CUSTOMER KINDNESS: POSITIVE EXCHANGE SPIRALS IN FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE-CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERACTIONS

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Keywords: Customer Kindness, Scale development, Frontline Employees, Nudges

Description: This study introduces the concept of customer kindness through qualitative interviews and scale development followed by demonstrating managerially relevant antecedents through scenario and field experiments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted." – Aesop

This timeless adage underscores the power of kindness in human interactions, including those within service environments. In a landscape where frontline employees (FLEs) are often the first and most frequent point of contact between organizations and customers, the quality of

these interpersonal exchanges significantly shapes service outcomes. While research has extensively examined the negative aspects of customer behavior—incivility and mistreatment towards FLEs and other customers (Danatzis and Möller-Herm 2023; Kamran-Disfani et al. 2023; Subramony et al. 2021; Yang et al. 2024; Yue et al. 2021)—customer kindness remains comparatively underexplored. Our research is centered around the following research questions:

1. What is customer kindness?
2. What are the outcomes of customer kindness?
3. How can organizations and managers promote customer kindness?

Method And Data

To understand customer kindness and answer our research questions, we conducted three studies and a pretest utilizing a multi-method approach. Relying on qualitative insights (Study 1), we deductively explore the notion of customer kindness from the perspective of various FLEs. We then develop a scale (Study 2) to best capture customer kindness and its nomological network based on the qualitative findings. Finally, we test two interventions to nudge customers toward kindness (Studies 3a and 3b).

Summary of Findings

The present study introduces and explores the concept of customer kindness—a form of interpersonal prosocial behavior that fosters positive interactions between FLEs and customers. We identify four key components of customer kindness: appreciation, consideration, empathy, and patience. Our findings demonstrate that customer kindness is not only a key motivator for FLEs but also plays a crucial role in improving their job satisfaction, customer orientation, and even reducing turnover intentions. Based on the literature on nudges, this study identifies

humanization and kindness nudges as two organizational interventions that may encourage customer to make kinder choices when interacting with FLEs, especially in contexts where service quality may be compromised. Additionally, our findings underscore the role of reciprocity in fostering positive interactions, with FLEs noting that when customers exhibited kind behaviors, they felt motivated to reciprocate with higher levels of service and greater customer orientation.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research expands our understanding of frontline employee-customer interactions by introducing and operationalizing the concept of customer kindness. Unlike prior studies that focus on mitigating customer mistreatment, this research emphasizes the positive and reciprocal effects of customer kindness. It contributes to the field by identifying its dimensions (appreciation, consideration, empathy, and patience), developing a validated measurement scale, and providing evidence of its impact on FLE outcomes, including job satisfaction, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced customer orientation.

Additionally, this research provides actionable strategies for managers to foster prosocial customer behavior, ultimately improving both employee and customer experiences in service settings. Service-intensive organizations can use the findings to implement low-cost interventions like kindness and humanization prompts to improve employee well-being, customer satisfaction, and service quality. The introduction of the customer kindness scale also allows managers to not only focus on customer mistreatment but also to measure customer kindness among their frontline employees.

References are available upon request.

Heuristic Cues: Friend or Foe? A Closer Look at Font Size and Color

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Keywords: Price Discounts, Font Size and Color, Consumer Behavior, Purchase Intentions, Perceptual Salience

Description: This article examines how the combined effects of font size and font color influence consumers' perceptions of price discounts and their subsequent purchase intentions.

Extended Abstract

Research Question

This study investigates how the combined effects of font size and font color influence consumers' evaluations of price discounts and their subsequent purchase intentions. Specifically, it explores whether presenting sale prices in a larger font size and in red color can lead to different consumer responses based on the discount size (small, plausible, and exaggerated). The study aims to determine whether these visual cues enhance or diminish the attractiveness of the discount, ultimately affecting purchase decisions. Furthermore, it seeks to understand if the perceptual salience created by font variations can influence consumers' cognitive processing of

price information, leading to potential overestimation or skepticism depending on the discount magnitude.

Method and Data

A 2 (Sale Price Font: same size and black vs. larger size and red) $\times$ 3 (Discount Size: small, plausible, exaggerated) between-subjects experimental design was employed. A total of four hundred and seventy participants (78% Male; $M_{age} = 32.87$) recruited via mTurk were shown a product (a toaster) with varying sale price presentations. The sale price was displayed either in black and the same font size as the regular price or in red and a larger font size. Participants' purchase intentions and discount size perceptions were measured through validated survey instruments. Additionally, demographic questions were also asked.

Summary of Findings

The results reveal that when the sale price is displayed in red and in a larger font size, consumers tend to overestimate the discount size. For small discounts, purchase intentions were significantly higher when the sale price was presented in red and larger font compared to black and same font size ($M_{Black} = 5.18$ S.D. = .13; $M_{RedLarge} = 5.55$ S.D. = .12; $F(1,440) = 4.60$; $p < .05$), suggesting that consumers perceive the discount as more plausible. However, for plausible discounts, purchase intentions were significantly lower when the sale price was presented in red and larger font compared to black and same font size ($M_{Black} = 5.64$ S.D. = .12; $M_{RedLarge} = 5.24$ S.D. = .12; $F(1,440) = 5.24$; $p < .05$), indicating negative perceptions due to overestimation. In the case of exaggerated discounts, no significant difference was found between red and larger

font and black and same font size ($M_{Black} = 5.52$ S.D. = .13; $M_{RedLarge} = 5.58$ S.D. = .12; $F(1,440) = .1$; $p = .76$), suggesting that the already large discount size limits the impact of font variations.

Key Contributions

This research makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it expands the understanding of heuristic cues in pricing by exploring the interaction between font size and color—an area previously underexplored. The findings challenge the conventional use of plausible discounts as a control, revealing how heuristic cues can reverse their intended effects. From a managerial perspective, the study offers practical guidance for retailers, emphasizing that while font manipulation can enhance the appeal of small discounts, it may backfire for plausible discounts, leading to unintended consequences. The study also identifies avenues for future research, such as exploring the role of individual differences and further theoretical validation of perceptual salience effects.

SALESPERSON LONE WOLF TENDENCIES AND CUSTOMER VALUE CO-CREATION

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Keywords: Salesperson; Lone wolf tendencies; Value co-creation; Trust; Conflict

Description: This study addresses the potential link between salesperson LWT and customer reactions by analyzing data from B2B salespeople, customers, and firm objective sales figures, using a social exchange framework that emphasizes trust and conflict levels.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As business-to-business (B2B) sales organizations increasingly adopt collaborative and solution-oriented selling approaches, the lone wolf tendencies (LWT) trait in salespeople requires further scrutiny due to its potential to impact salesperson-customer relationships. With shifts toward cooperative paradigms favoring value co-creation between salespeople and their customers, LWT may act as a deterrent to building successful and mutually collaborative salesperson-customer relationships. Although the potential link between salesperson personality traits and customer reactions in B2B sales has been suggested, there is a lack of research examining the specific impact of salesperson LWT on customer value co-creation. The results indicate that salesperson LWT reduce customer value co-creation, which can, in turn, enhance sales performance while reducing customer propensity to leave. Furthermore, the results suggest that salespeople with

LWT are more likely to undermine customer trust and heighten conflict in salesperson-customer relationships. The study provides a better understanding of the process in which LWT affect sales and behavioral performance.

Research Question

Despite its increasing importance in the modern selling environment, the literature lacks consensus on how LWT affect salespeople's performance (Locander *et al.*, 2015; Lussier *et al.*, 2022), highlighting the need for a more comprehensive understanding of potential effects on customer outcomes and, subsequently, on salesperson's performance (Briggs *et al.*, 2012). On one hand, lone wolves may be motivated to invest more effort in individual tasks, making them more involved in the job and more dedicated to sales (Blau and Boal, 1987; Griffeth *et al.*, 1999). Research has suggested that LWT may be associated with certain positive outcomes, such as improvements in task performance, innovativeness, and job dedication. By examining LWT using a mixed salesperson-customer-organizational model, our research offers three unique contributions to the literature. To our knowledge, this is the only study to examine LWT in relation to customer value co-creation. With the shift toward service-dominant logic and the increasing focus on the buyer's needs, value co-creation has become an important subject of study in the sales domain (Friend *et al.*, 2020; Hartmann *et al.*, 2018; Plouffe *et al.*, 2024). Simultaneously, there have been numerous calls for additional research on LWT as they relate to a salesperson's personality (Briggs *et al.*, 2012; Locander *et al.*, 2015).

Method and Data

Data were collected from a mid-sized, privately held U.S.-based company operating in the B2B logistics industry. Survey data were collected from both salespeople and customers at the

focal company. A matching procedure was used to build salesperson-customer dyads, which included customers' responses linked to their respective salespeople's responses. The salesperson sample included twenty-one salespeople, while the customer sample was 206.

From the salesperson side, we captured LWT and adapted the measure from (Mulki *et al.*, 2007). From the buyer side, customer trust was captured using a three-item measure (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Customers were also asked to report on the level of conflict they have with the salesperson by answering a four-item measure adapted from (Jap and Ganesan, 2000). Customer value co-creation was measured using a six-item measure (O'Cass and Ngo, 2012). A three-item measure was adapted from (Friend *et al.*, 2011) to capture customer propensity to defect. Customers were required to report on the possibility of ending their business with the selling company, represented by the salesperson. We also captured the seller's reputation (Doney and Cannon, 1997) and the salesperson's extra-role behavior (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2005) to have them as covariates in the model. Finally, the salesperson's sales performance was measured using firm-provided objective sales data. Specifically, the net sales revenue of the year for every salesperson was provided by the seller.

We utilized partial least squares structural equation modeling for analysis.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that salesperson LWT reduce customer value co-creation, which can, in turn, enhance sales performance while reducing customer propensity to leave. Furthermore, the results suggest that salespeople with LWT are more likely to undermine customer trust and heighten conflict in salesperson-customer relationships. The study provides a better understanding of the process in which LWT affect sales and behavioral performance.

Key Contributions

The study's insights offer a theoretical contribution to the sales literature by revealing the mechanisms through which salesperson LWT influence customer relationships and ultimately impact sales performance. By advancing the understanding of these complex dynamics, this research provides valuable insights for both academicians and practitioners.

Note: References are available upon request.

SERVICE SABOTAGE INTRICACIES: EXPLORING THE UNDERLYING TRIGGERS AND ETHICAL COMPLEXITIES OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE MISCONDUCT

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Keywords: service sabotage, ethicality, role ambiguity, role conflict, abusive supervision, conservation of resources theory

Description: This paper studies role ambiguity, role conflict, and abusive supervision as the antecedents of service sabotage, with ethicality as the moderator

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this paper attempts to study role ambiguity, role conflict, and abusive supervision as the antecedents of service sabotage, with ethicality as the moderator. Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS – SEM) was employed to analyze the relationships. The results indicated that the relationship between role ambiguity and service sabotage is mediated by role conflict, while ethicality moderated the relationship between abusive supervision and service sabotage. This study enhances our understanding of service sabotage by providing insights into the perspective of the saboteur, investigating their motives for engaging in vengeful actions against the firm and its customers. Additionally, existing research has largely overlooked the measures firms can adopt to prevent such harmful behavior. Practitioners should minimize role conflict, provide adequate support and training, and empower employees to resolve customer issues. Implementing the management-by-

wandering-around (MBWA) strategy can help detect abusive behaviors. Finally, hiring individuals with high ethical standards and emotional intelligence can lower the risk of sabotage, promoting a healthier work environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to expand our knowledge of service sabotage by offering a window into the world of the saboteur, through an inquiry into their rationale for committing acts of vengeance against the firm and its customers. Drawing from the organizational behavior literature, our study considers the effects of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007) along with role conflict (Park and Hur, 2023) on the likelihood that an employee will engage in sabotaging behaviors. To this end, we develop and test a conceptual model that considers these antecedents. In addition, our model evaluates the moderating effects of the service employee's intrinsic ethicality. In this regard, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) which emphasizes safeguarding valuable resources at the workplace because losing these valuable resources can result in conflicts, stress, and burnout, explicates these relationships. We address the research gap through two studies involving actual customer interacting service employees

METHOD AND DATA

Survey respondents were recruited by trained student interviewers from two medium-sized university towns. The final sample consisted of 336 respondents. To test the hypotheses, two research models were analyzed using SmartPLS PLS-SEM software version 3.0. It should be noted here that the vast majority of the questionnaire items had factor loadings greater than .70. Those that were less than .70, however, were retained in the models to ensure that the entire domain of each construct was adequately measured. Furthermore, since the PLS-SEM algorithm is not based on examining the differences between a sample and estimated covariance matrix,

traditional χ^2 based model fit measures were not used. Instead, model quality is demonstrated by Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) values less than .10 and the exact fit criterion d_ULS, where its estimated value must lie within a confidence interval. The results suggested good fit (SRMR = .091; d_ULS = 1.877, which is < 2.228 at the 99% confidence interval), whereas the results from the moderated research model suggested good fit as well (SRMR = .093; d_ULS = .478, which is < 1.383 at the 99% confidence interval) (Henseler *et al.*, 2014).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most of each of the research models' structural paths were significant, supporting the majority of research hypotheses (See Table V). The mediated structural model indicates that role ambiguity significantly affects perceptions of role conflict ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), thus supporting H_{2a}. The results also indicate that role conflict significantly increases the probability of service sabotage behaviors ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), providing support for H_{2b}. Further, role ambiguity did not have a significant effect on service sabotage, and thus did not provide support for H₁. In addition, role conflict serves as a mediator between role ambiguity and service sabotage. Finally, the results from the mediated model indicate that it explains 8% of the variance in role conflict and 29% in service sabotage. For the moderated model, the majority of its structural paths were significant, supporting the majority of research hypotheses. Additionally, the findings offer support for H₃ by suggesting that abusive supervision positively affects service sabotage ($\beta = .22, p < .01$). Lastly, the results from the moderated model indicate that it explains 35% of the variance in service sabotage.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Our results have several useful implications for service managers dealing with frontline service employees. Specifically, managers should be cognizant of the frontline employee's level of role

stress; that is, their level of role conflict. Here, efforts should be made to ensure that employees do not feel that they have been given simultaneous, incompatible requests from more than one supervisor (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2017). In circumstances where this role conflict occurs, instead of reaping the benefits of improved customer service, the firm can alienate the employee and ultimately the customer. Also in this vein, it is critical that management provides its frontline workers with all of the tools, including soft tools such as adequate training that they need to effectively execute their tasks and enhance well-being (Rahman, 2021). Finally, managers should be flexible regarding their interpretation and enforcement of organizational policies. This does not imply that anarchy should rein within the firm, but instead it suggests that managers should be willing to empower employees to make decisions that remedy problems and, thus, affect the immediate satisfaction of the customer

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