

2026 AMA SUMMER ACADEMIC CONFERENCE

Increasing YOUR Impact: Amplifying Scholarship,
Teaching, and Organizational Leadership

> July 20 • Virtual
July 24-26 • Denver, CO

PROCEEDINGS

Volume 37

Co-Chairs:

Kay Peters, UC Davis and University of Hamburg

Kelly Hewett, Colorado State University

Kim Whitler, University of Virginia



AMERICAN MARKETING
ASSOCIATION

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Best Overall Paper

“When Does Mobile Money Empower? A Global Marketing Strategy Perspective on Adoption and Retail Use in Developing Markets”

Nandini Nim, Colorado State University
Youngjin Kim, University of Texas at San Antonio
Deepa Chandrasekaran, University of Texas at San Antonio
Richard Gretz, University of Texas at San Antonio

Best in Track Papers

Advertising and Marketing Communication

“Low-Pitched Music Used in Marketing Communications Can Enhance Perceived Brand Luxuriousness”

Zhenyu Jin, Towson University
Lei Jia, Kent State University
Xiaojing Yang, University of South Carolina
Xiaoyan Deng, Ohio State University

B2B Marketing and Interorganizational Issues

“Beyond the Polanyi Paradox in B2B Marketing: Leveraging AI to Extract Tacit User Knowledge in Product-Led Growth”

Subroto Roy, University of New Haven

Big Data and Artificial Intelligence

“Lowering Barriers, Unequal Gains: How Generative AI Reshaped Participation and Recognition in Knowledge Production on Kaggle”

Qiuli Su, Creighton University
Bahar Khasraghi, Central Michigan University
Hanieh Khasraghi, University of Delaware

Branding

“Dynamic Shifts in Brand Architecture and Firm Performance”

Madhur Mohan, University of Georgia
Sundar Bharadwaj, University of Georgia
Sakshi Sanjay Babar, University of Georgia

Consumer Behavior

“The Customer-funded Effect”

Zoe Y. Lu, Tulane University
Robin Tanner
Kurt Carlson, William & Mary

CRM and Customer Experience

“From Dyadic to Triadic: Characterizing Customer Experience Management in B2B2C Ecosystems Through Service-Dominant Logic”

Souhaib El Haouzi, Africa Business School, University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (UM6P)

Kofi Osei-Frimpong, Africa Business School, University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (UM6P)

Nouha Berrada, Africa Business School, University Mohammed VI Polytechnic (UM6P)

Digital Marketing and Social Media

“From Engagement to Disengagement: Dynamic Effects of Streak Goals”

Yue Liang, University of Washington

Robert Palmatier, University of Washington

Oliver Rutz, University of Washington

Distribution Channels and Supply Chain Management

“From Investments to Impact: How Channel Equity and Artificial Intelligence Shape Market Performance”

Manisha Mathur, Augusta University

Global and Cross-Cultural Marketing

“When Does Mobile Money Empower? A Global Marketing Strategy Perspective on Adoption and Retail Use in Developing Markets”

Nandini Nim, Colorado State University

Youngjin Kim, University of Texas at San Antonio

Deepa Chandrasekaran, University of Texas at San Antonio

Richard Gretz, University of Texas at San Antonio

Marketing Education

“Teaching Customer Segmentation with RFM Analysis: An Excel-Based Marketing Analytics Case for Principles of Marketing”

Lina Xu, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Sally Baalbaki-Yassine, Metropolitan State University of Denver

Marketing Research and Marketing Analytics

“Optimal Decisions for Repeated A/B Testing Programs”

Elea Feit, Ohio State University

Ron Berman, The Wharton School

Marketing Strategy and Management

“Transforming the C-Suite: Fractional Leaders, Intermediary Firms, and Strategic Flexibility”

Chris Palmisano, Sano Ventures

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Yashar Atefi, University of Denver

Sebastian Hohenberg, University of Münster

New Product Development, Innovation, and Technology

“Bridging Markets and Technology: Sales-R&D Collaboration for New Product Success”

Nicola Weber, University of Mannheim
Christian Homburg, University of Mannheim
Aline Lanzrath, University of Mannheim

Retailing and Pricing

“The Impact of Inflated Reference Price on E-commerce Store Preference: The Roles of Sugrophobia and Perceived Deception”

Byung Wook Chung, Wayne State University
Abhijit Biswas, Wayne State University

Sales Force Management and Personal Selling

“The Effect of Personal Selling on Customer Conversion under Partial Compliance”

Seong kyoung Shin, Bowling Green State University
Tat Chan, Washington University in St. Louis

Service Marketing

“Digital Coaches: When Robot Feedback Is Impactful”

Jana Holthöwer, University of Groningen
Jenny van Doorn, University of Groningen
Stephanie Noble, University of Tennessee

Society, Public Policy, Social Responsibility, and Ethics

“Epistemic Injustice and Consumer Dignity: How Service Systems Silence, Exclude, and Undermine Voice”

Lynn Sudbury-Riley, University of Liverpool
Pippa Hunter-Jones, University of Liverpool
Michael Haenlein, University of Liverpool
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**FROM CLASSROOM TO CLIENT: INTEGRATING NEUROMARKETING TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNITY PART-
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Consumer Behavior & Psychology

A PERFECT MATCH: HOW PRODUCT PRICE AFFECTS CREDIT CARD CHOICE

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Keywords: consumer behavior, experiments, inferences, financial decision-making

Description: Consumers systematically route high-priced purchases to their metal card and low-priced purchases to their plastic card, and spend more overall when holding a metal card, even when the metal card offers no superior rewards or carries higher borrowing costs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

On average, American consumers own three credit cards. While past research documents how different factors influence consumer spending, we show that a credit card's material—metal vs. plastic—can influence spending.

While plastic is the most common credit card material, use of metal is on the rise. Recent shifts in credit card offerings—such as the expansion of metal card options by firms like Chase and Amazon—have allowed 50% of US citizens to access cards made from non-plastic materials (e.g., platinum, steel) that have historically been associated with “premium” status or high net worth individuals (Experian 2023).

We propose a matching effect, wherein consumers intuitively match expensive purchases with metal cards and cheaper ones with plastic. Across eight studies, we find that this effect holds regardless of purchase category, rewards, and costs. Just as consumers rely on labeling cues to guide which purchases they make with certain types of funds (Heath and Soll 1996; Kooreman 2000; Reinholtz, Bartels, and Parker 2015), perceived match between product price and card material mediates the effect, and introducing low-quality product or material cues reduces the preference for metal cards.

Method And Data

Across nine studies, participants chose to pay for low- or high-priced products with metal or plastic credit cards, using images, physical cards, or semantic activation, across online and offline scenarios. Studies 1A–D (N = 1,540) showed the payment material effect held across products, price points, rewards/costs, and participants with/out metal card experience. In Study 1C, experienced cardholders preferred metal cards more for high- than low-priced coffeemakers (67% vs. 46%), as did inexperienced participants (40% vs. 19%). Study 2 (within-subjects, N = 515) found participants allocated 72% of total dollars but only 46% of items to metal cards, with allocation rising with price; price was the sole driver. Study 3 (N = 302) confirmed the

mechanism: perceived match between price and card material mediated metal card preference, with plastic matching low prices and metal matching high prices. Studies 4A and 4B ($N = 881$) showed the effect attenuated when card material or price signaled lower quality: cheap-looking metal cards and negative reviews on high-priced products both reduced metal card preference. Study 5 ($N = 399$) showed that when a metal card option was available, participants chose pricier products more often, and allocation of expensive purchases to that card increased significantly when it was metal rather than plastic.

Summary of Findings

Consumers associate price with card material in their credit card portfolios, which cannot be explained by prior payment mode literature. We extend price-quality theory to financial instruments by introducing the cue-matching payment material effect and clarifying how it operates. Metal is not merely aesthetic; it is a potent, low-cost cue that reallocates high-value transactions toward the issuing bank while elevating consumers' preferences toward more expensive products.

Statement of Key Contributions

Prior work on payment behavior assumes consumers choose cards based on functional factors (e.g., credit limits, rewards, budgeting habits, convenience). In contrast, we document a material–price matching effect: consumers prefer metal cards for higher-priced purchases and plastic cards for lower-priced ones, even though material is rarely a conscious decision criterion.

Across eight studies, the effect generalizes across categories and persists when material is only semantically activated, ruling out visual novelty and purchase context. Perceived match between purchase price and card material quality mediates the effect, extending the price–quality heuristic to financial instruments. Consistent with a cue-based account, the effect weakens when metal is framed as low quality or when negative reviews disrupt price–quality inferences. Overall, this work introduces a cue-matching framework for payment choice. Collectively, this work introduces a cue-matching framework for payments and expands theorizing on how product attributes and decision artifacts jointly shape consumer choice.

References are available upon request.

ALGORITHM OR ARTISAN? CONSUMER MORALITY IN AI-DRIVEN LUXURY DESIGN

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Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Luxury branding; Moral anxiety; Consumer behavior; Luxury design

Description: This research examines how AI versus human designers influence consumer evaluations of luxury products through moral lens.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Luxury brands are increasingly incorporating AI into creative processes traditionally associated with human craftsmanship. While prior research shows that AI-designed luxury products are often evaluated less favorably, little is known about the psychological mechanism underlying these reactions. We propose that AI-generated luxury designs evoke moral anxiety because consumers perceive AI as challenging values of authenticity, craftsmanship, and human creativity that define luxury. We examine whether moral anxiety explains consumers' negative responses toward AI-designed luxury products and whether this effect depends on consumers' cognitive reappraisal ability and brand identity (heritage versus futuristic).

Method and Data

The research combines qualitative and experimental evidence. First, more than 2,200 Reddit comments discussing AI- and human-designed luxury products were analyzed using a custom LIWC dictionary to identify expressions of moral anxiety. Two online experiments with CloudResearch participants then manipulated whether a luxury product was designed by AI or a human designer. Participants evaluated brand attitude, moral anxiety, purchase intention and related outcomes. Mediation analyses tested the role of moral anxiety while controlling for relevant covariates.

Summary of Findings

Reddit discussions revealed significantly greater moral anxiety toward AI-designed luxury products than human-designed products. Across both experiments, AI-designed

products generated less favorable brand attitudes and higher moral anxiety. Moral anxiety significantly mediated the relationship between design agent and consumer evaluations. AI-designed products also reduced purchase intention, willingness to pay, perceived creativity, and word-of-mouth intentions. The broader research further identifies cognitive reappraisal and futuristic brand identity as important boundary conditions that weaken consumers' moral anxiety toward AI-designed luxury products.

Key Contributions

This research extends AI and luxury branding literature by identifying moral anxiety as a novel mechanism explaining resistance to AI-generated luxury products. It contributes to moral psychology by demonstrating how symbolic consumption activates moral evaluations of machine creativity. The findings further explain when resistance can be reduced by consumer emotion regulation and innovation-oriented brand identities. Managerially, the results suggest that luxury brands should position AI as a collaborative creative tool rather than a replacement for artisans, communicate the continuing role of human craftsmanship, and strategically leverage innovation-oriented branding when introducing AI-enabled design.

References are available upon request.

ANGULAR OR CIRCULAR? EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF LOGO SHAPE ON PERCEIVED BRAND INNOVATIVENESS

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Keywords: Innovative brand, Logo design, Logo shape, Angular and circular, Perceived innovativeness

Description: This research finds a positive association between angular logos and perceived brand innovativeness, with consumers favoring angular over circular logos for innovative brands, and such congruence enhances positive consumer responses.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand innovativeness has become a core driving force behind corporate growth and profitability (Aaker 2007), and is an important factor that consumers value when purchasing products. However, how to effectively convey a brand's innovativeness to consumers remains relatively unexplored. This research will examine a key element companies use to communicate innovativeness: their brand logo, which serves as an important channel of communication with consumers (Bettels and Wiedmann 2019), particularly through its shape.

Drawing on shape symbolism and visual metaphor, angular shapes may be associated with innovativeness. For example, an idiom such as “think outside of the box” suggests that people equate innovation with actions that cross straight lines and edges, and “cutting-edge” means creative and breakthrough. Furthermore, research indicates that sharp and straight-edged shapes are associated with technology and analytical thinking (Aronoff et al. 1992; Fang and Mowen 2005).

Based on the above arguments, an angular (vs. circular) shape is expected to be more closely associated with innovativeness. In the context of brand logo design, we hypothesize that consumers might perceive brands with angular (vs. circular) logos as more innovative, and consider an angular logo to be more suitable for an innovative brand or product than a circular one.

Method and Data

Seven studies were conducted to test our hypotheses. Using the Boston Consulting Group's 2023 top 50 most innovative brands, Study 1a analyzed the correlation between brands'

innovation ranking and logo shape, with GPT-4o and human ($n=179$) rating brand logo shapes ($r = 0.84, p < .001$). Study 1b examined the relationship between logo shapes and perceived brand innovativeness by using a dataset of 628 brands' brand characteristics. Study 2 conducted an Implicit Association Test and used participants' ($n=100$) response times to assess the relative strength of associations between shape type (angular vs. circular) and "innovativeness" concepts. Study 3 (preregistered) employed a between-subjects design to test whether angular logos elicit higher perceived innovativeness than circular logos among 400 participants.

Study 4 adopted a single-factor (logo shape: angular vs. circular) within-subjects choice task in which participants ($n=201$) were asked to choose a new logo for a technology brand. Study 5 (preregistered) was a real choice behavior task in which participants ($n=38$) selected three appropriate sub-brand logos for a technology company in a laboratory setting. Study 6 (preregistered) was a between-subjects design with 400 participants to investigate whether pairing an innovative brand with different-shaped (angular vs. circular) logos influences consumers' behavioral responses.

Summary of Findings

Study 1a showed a positive correlation between angular logo shapes and innovative brand rankings. Study 1b, using another dataset provided by Lovett et al. (2014), provided additional in-market evidence for the relationship between logo shape and perceived brand innovativeness. Using the well-established IAT procedure (Greenwald et al. 1998; Greenwald et al. 2003), study 2 found that participants responded faster when pairing angular (vs. circular) images with innovativeness-related words, supporting the proposed "angular = innovativeness" association. The first three studies proved that angular (vs. circular) logos are positively associated with

perceived innovativeness. Study 3 confirmed that when a brand's logo is angular, consumers perceive the brand as more innovative.

Studies 4 and 5 further examined the effect of logo shape for innovative brands using logo-choice tasks. Study 4 indicated that more participants selected an angular (vs. circular) logo and considered it more suitable for an innovative brand. By measuring actual logo-choice behavior repeatedly, Study 5 replicated this finding in a controlled behavioral experiment. Study 6 further tested how matching logo shape with an innovative brand influences consumer response. The result showed that pairing an innovative brand with an angular (vs. circular) logo led to higher product usage intention.

Key Contributions

This research extends logo shape literature by identifying its impact on brand innovativeness. While prior work demonstrates that circular logos convey friendliness (Jiang et al. 2016) and angular logos elicit confrontational associations (Zhang et al. 2006), we find angular logos better suit innovative brands and improve consumer responses. This work complements research on perceived brand innovativeness by identifying logo shape as a new factor, alongside logos' color gradients (Wei et al. 2025), incompleteness (Hagtvedt 2011), and complexity (Mahmood et al. 2019). Additionally, it deepens shape-related associations (e.g., Jiang et al. 2016). The sharp edges of angular shapes evoke a sense of transcending boundaries, which is associated with breakthrough innovativeness. Angular shapes also symbolically convey the concept of technological innovation, as they are cognitively linked to technology and rationality (Fang and Mowen 2005).

This research has practical implications for marketing practitioners: For innovation-positioned brands, adopting angular-dominant logos may enhance brand image congruence and improve consumer responses such as purchase intention. Conversely, brands that avoid overemphasizing innovative associations may benefit from non-angular (e.g., circular) designs. And managers should not only prioritize brand symbol design but also align specific visual elements with the brand image (e.g., pairing an innovative positioning with angular logos).

**AUTOMATED CONVENIENCE, AUTOMATED WASTE? HOW SELF-SERVICE
KIOSKS PROMOTE UNSUSTAINABLE CONSUMER CHOICES**

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Keywords: self-service kiosks; unsustainable behavior; convenience association; eco-labels; consumer rights

Description: This research examines how self-service kiosks influence consumers' unsustainable behavior through convenience association and investigates the moderating roles of eco-labels and consumer rights.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Self-service kiosks have rapidly become a dominant service interface because they improve operational efficiency, reduce labor costs, and enhance perceived convenience. Although prior

research has primarily focused on technology adoption, service quality, and customer satisfaction, little is known about whether interacting with automated service technologies influences consumers' subsequent environmentally relevant decisions. The present research examines whether ordering through a self-service kiosk, rather than interacting with counter personnel, increases consumers' tendency to request environmentally harmful add-on items, such as disposable utensils, plastic bags, and paper receipts. We propose that this effect occurs because self-service kiosks activate a convenience association—a learned mental association linking automated interfaces with ease and effort reduction—which subsequently generalizes to downstream consumption decisions. Furthermore, we investigate two theoretically meaningful boundary conditions. Specifically, we examine whether eco-labels on disposable add-on items attenuate the influence of service mode by providing moral reassurance and whether emphasizing consumer rights strengthens convenience-driven consumption by legitimizing self-focused decision making. Together, this research demonstrates how technology-enabled service encounters unintentionally shape consumer sustainability through psychologically meaningful mechanisms.

Method and Data

Three between-subjects experiments were conducted using U.S. participants recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk to examine the proposed framework. Study 1 ($N = 315$) manipulated service mode (self-service kiosk vs. counter personnel) and tested the mediating role of convenience association while ruling out alternative explanations, including public self-awareness and technology anxiety. Study 2 ($N = 370$) employed a 2 (service mode) $\times$ 2 (eco-label: absent vs. present) design to investigate whether eco-labels moderate the effect of service

mode on consumers' unsustainable behavior through convenience association. Study 3 (N = 366) adopted a 2 (service mode) $\times$ 2 (consumer rights: not emphasized vs. emphasized) design to examine whether consumer-rights framing strengthens the proposed mechanism. Across all studies, participants completed realistic restaurant-ordering scenarios in which they indicated their willingness to request disposable utensils, plastic bags, and paper receipts. Unsustainable behavior was operationalized as the combined tendency to request these environmentally harmful add-on items, with higher scores indicating greater unsustainable consumption.

Summary of Findings

Across three experiments, the findings consistently support the proposed conceptual framework. Study 1 demonstrates that consumers using self-service kiosks exhibit a significantly greater tendency to request environmentally harmful add-on items than consumers interacting with counter personnel. Mediation analyses further reveal that this effect is driven by convenience association, whereas alternative explanations, including public self-awareness and technology anxiety, are not supported. Study 2 shows that eco-labels significantly moderate the effect of service mode. Specifically, the behavioral difference between self-service kiosks and counter personnel is reduced when eco-labels are present because eco-labels provide moral reassurance that legitimizes requesting disposable items across both service modes. Study 3 further demonstrates that emphasizing consumer rights strengthens the positive effect of self-service kiosks on unsustainable behavior by increasing the influence of convenience association. Collectively, these findings indicate that automated service interfaces shape environmentally relevant decisions beyond the focal service encounter and that contextual cues can either attenuate or amplify this downstream spillover effect.

Key Contributions

This research makes four important contributions to the consumer behavior literature. First, it extends self-service technology research by shifting attention from technology adoption and service efficiency to the downstream behavioral consequences of interacting with automated service interfaces. Second, it identifies convenience association as a novel psychological mechanism explaining why self-service kiosks increase environmentally harmful consumption, thereby enriching the literature on technology-enabled decision making and sustainable consumption. Third, the findings demonstrate that eco-labels do not always encourage environmentally responsible behavior. Instead, eco-labels may serve as a form of moral reassurance that unintentionally legitimizes requests for disposable add-on items, offering a new perspective on the boundary conditions of eco-label effectiveness. Finally, this research shows that emphasizing consumer rights can strengthen convenience-driven consumption by legitimizing self-focused decision making, thereby extending consumer-rights research into the sustainability domain. From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that firms should carefully design self-service interfaces, environmental cues, and service communications to achieve operational efficiency without unintentionally encouraging wasteful consumption.

BEYOND RATIONALITY: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE ADOPTION OF IMMERSIVE TECHNOLOGIES

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Keywords: intuitive fit, VR adoption, technology acceptance, experiential technology

Description:

This research challenges the assumption that technology adoption of new technologies, here: Virtual Reality headsets, is primarily driven by rational evaluations, as suggested by the technology acceptance literature.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite substantial technological advances and increasing affordability, consumer adoption of virtual reality (VR) remains far below market expectations. Existing technology acceptance research has predominantly explained adoption through rational evaluations of perceived usefulness, ease of use, enjoyment, and other cognitive beliefs. However, these models struggle to explain why consumers frequently acknowledge the benefits of VR while still refraining from adoption. This limitation is particularly pronounced for immersive technologies, where users often lack prior experience and stable evaluation criteria.

This research proposes that adoption decisions are not solely driven by reflective cost-benefit assessments but are also shaped by intuitive, affective judgments. We introduce intuitive fit, defined as the immediate feeling that a technology subjectively "feels right," and argue that this pre-reflective evaluation represents a key determinant of adoption decisions for experiential technologies. Drawing on dual-process theory, we investigate whether intuitive fit provides a stronger explanation of adoption intentions than established technology acceptance constructs. Specifically, we address the following research question: To what extent does intuitive fit outperform traditional cognitive acceptance beliefs in explaining consumers' adoption intentions for immersive technologies following direct product experience?

Method and Data

The research employs a multi-stage empirical design consisting of qualitative and quantitative studies. In the quantitative studies, respondents used actual VR headsets. We measured our key target variables before and after the use to assess changes.

Summary of Findings

The qualitative findings show that many consumers struggle to articulate explicit reasons for adopting or rejecting VR, instead relying on diffuse affective impressions such as whether the technology "feels right." This suggests that evaluations of VR are often not grounded in explicit cost-benefit reasoning but instead reflect diffuse, affective impressions.

Across the quantitative studies, intuitive fit consistently emerged as the strongest predictor of consumers' adoption intentions, outperforming established technology acceptance constructs.

Overall, the results indicate that adoption decisions for immersive technologies are driven less by deliberate cognitive evaluations than by holistic, experience-based judgments that emerge during direct interaction with the technology.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to theory by advancing a new perspective on adoption of consumer technology that extends beyond the prevailing assumption of deliberate, cognitive-driven decision making. While established technology acceptance models conceptualize adoption as the outcome of cognitive evaluations, our findings demonstrate that intuitive fit is a more proximal

driver of adoption intentions following direct product experience. By integrating intuitive fit into technology adoption frameworks, this research broadens current understanding of how consumers evaluate unfamiliar, experiential technologies.

BREAKING VIRTUAL BARRIERS: ASSESSING READINESS FOR VR INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Keywords: Virtual reality; Technology readiness; TRAM; Technology adoption; Higher education

Description: This study evaluates the technology readiness of students and teachers in Finnish higher education and extends the Technology Readiness and Acceptance Model (TRAM) by incorporating attitude to better explain the factors influencing their intentions to adopt virtual reality (VR) in education.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research question

VR is considered as a promising complementary tool of university teaching practice. Indeed, virtual reality allows students to engage and be immersed through interactive learning environments (Coelho and Martins 2022; Dirksen et al. 2019). Despite increased investments in VR laboratories and pilot projects, its adoption in actual university courses remains limited

(Kosmas et al. 2021; Llanos-Ruiz et al. 2025). The majority of existing research has focused on the educational benefits or technical characteristics of VR, without considering human and psychological factors shaping students' and teachers' intentions to use VR (Conrad et al. 2024; Lin et al. 2024; Llanos-Ruiz et al. 2025; Marougkas et al. 2023). The Technology Readiness and Acceptance Model (TRAM) (Lin et al. 2007) integrates technology readiness and technology acceptance constructs to explain technology adoption of consumers. To our knowledge, no prior research has examined the TRAM to VR adoption from both students' and teachers' perspectives. Based on these considerations, we formulated the following research question: What are the technology readiness levels of students and teachers, and how does this readiness influence their intention to use VR in education? To address this question, we extend TRAM by incorporating attitude and examining parallel serial mediation through perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitude.

Method and Data

Study participants were students and teachers from 12 universities in Finland. The data were collected from February 1 to May 30, 2025, using an online questionnaire, which was created with the Qualtrics XM survey tool. From 706 responses, 432 were students' and 274 were teachers' responses. We used a 7-point Likert scale (Guyatt et al. 1987) and a 7-point bipolar scale for questionnaire items. The following variables were measured: optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, insecurity (Illuminas & Parasuraman 2024; Parasuraman & Colby 2015), perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness (Davis 1989), attitude, and intention (Ajzen 1991). Optimism, innovativeness, discomfort, and insecurity were measured at a general attitudinal level using original questionnaire items, but perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, intention, and behavior were measured in a context-specific to VR. As the study involved both students and teachers, the wording of these items was adapted accordingly for each group. IBM SPSS Statistics 29 and IBM SPSS Amos 29 were utilized for

data analysis. To check model fit, variables' reliability, and validity, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis and discriminant validity analysis. By performing structural equation analysis, we tested and evaluated the proposed hypothesis.

Summary of Findings

Students ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.78$) and teachers ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.80$) demonstrated moderate readiness for technology use. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated acceptable model fit for both groups and provided evidence of the reliability and validity of all constructs. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5, and composite reliability values were above 0.7. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker 1981). Structural equation modeling revealed that technology readiness significantly and positively influenced perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness in both groups, but its effect on intention was negative and non-significant. In addition, perceived ease of use positively and significantly affected attitude, and perceived usefulness did likewise. Finally, attitude exhibited a strong positive and significant effect on intention. Mediation tests of the model confirmed that the technology readiness of both students and teachers influenced intention indirectly through two parallel serial mediation pathways: (1) perceived ease of use and attitude, (2) perceived usefulness and attitude. Comparing the extended TRAM with the original model indicated that incorporating attitude increased explained variance in intention by 6.1 percentage points among students and 7.4 percentage points among teachers.

Key Contributions

This research advances the field of consumer behavior by applying TRAM to the higher education context in Finland. We extend the model by adding attitude and test parallel serial mediation, which has not been explored in TRAM before. Comparison of the extended TRAM to the original TRAM demonstrates that inclusion of attitude increases the explanatory

power of the model. The results suggest that technology readiness influences the intention of VR use through cognitive (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use) beliefs and affective (attitude) evaluations, instead of directly affecting it. Additionally, this is one of the first studies that incorporates both students' and teachers' perspectives. Findings have practical relevance. To increase awareness of, interest in, and adoption of VR technology, universities should plan better ways to introduce VR to students and teachers, clearly communicate its value, and offer adequate support. Governmental institutions and policymakers responsible for digital education initiatives can also benefit from the insights for developing their digitalisation strategies. Although the context of this study is education, its contributions should not be limited to this field. The findings provide broad perspectives into technology implementation and consumer decision-making processes. Therefore, they are relevant for any organization aiming to introduce new technologies or increase user acceptance.

References are available upon request

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE CARBON LABELS: THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL REFERENCES

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Keywords: Carbon labels, reference values, message valence, pro-environmental behavior, sustainable consumption

Description: Our findings suggest that carbon labels are more effective in strengthening product perceptions and in turn increasing purchase intentions when combined with external reference values that are higher (vs. lower) in magnitude OR with positively (vs. negatively) framed evaluative messages.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Several leading manufacturers are adopting carbon labels to increase transparency of their products’ environmental impact. However, researchers warn that carbon labels in their current form (i.e., displaying only the product’s carbon emissions value) are ineffective at promoting climate-conscious choices due to their lack of contextualization (Winterich, Reczek, and Makov 2023). Relatedly, this paper proposes two interventions using numeric and evaluative cues to make carbon labels more effective. External reference values as a numeric cue (e.g., in equivalents of burning 952 grams of coal), and message-framing as an evaluative cue (e.g., in equivalents of emissions avoided by planting one tree) are recommended. Importantly, current research raises two questions: (1) will the magnitude of the external reference value (i.e., high

vs. low) and (2) valence of the evaluative message (i.e., positive vs. negative framing) impact the label's effectiveness in shaping positive product perceptions? Consistent with the literature on unit effects (Pandelaere, Briers, and Lembregts 2011), we propose that external reference values that are higher (vs. lower) in magnitude strengthen product perceptions. Furthermore, anchored in findings that positive messages activate a problem-focused coping mechanism (Duhachek, Agrawal, and Han 2012), we propose that positively (vs. negatively) framed evaluative messages strengthen product perceptions.

Method And Data

In study 1, online panel participants located in the U.S. ($N = 103$) were shown two plant-based yogurt cups: (1) Silk and (2) Kitehill. The Silk cup displayed the label, "carbon footprint 4 lbs. CO₂e" with a descriptive statement explaining the label; the Kitehill cup did not display any additional information, acting as the control (presentation order of the cups were randomized). Participants were randomly assigned between two conditions: 2 (high vs. low reference value). In the high (low) condition, the Silk cup also displayed a statement "consuming the Silk yogurt cup emits 4 lbs. CO₂e = burning 952 grams (2.1 lbs.) of coal." After viewing the products, purchase intentions and product perceptions were measured. In study 2, student participants ($N = 388$) were shown the ad for unisex jeans. The ad displayed the carbon label, "the carbon footprint of this denim jeans is 33 lbs. CO₂e" with the descriptive statement, similar to study 1. A between-subjects design was used with three conditions: 3 (control versus positive versus negative message framing). In the positive (negative) condition, the ad also displayed the statement "equivalent to emissions avoided (caused) by planting (uprooting) one tree." After viewing the ad, focal measures were obtained.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 results revealed that product perceptions were stronger for Silk in the high versus low reference condition ($M_{\text{high}} = 5.80$, $M_{\text{low}} = 5.09$; $t(101) = 2.82$, $p = .01$). A mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes 2018) with the reference conditions as the predictor, product perception as the mediator, and purchase intention as the dependent variable (DV) affirmed that product perceptions mediated the effect of the high reference condition on purchase intentions (95% CI = [.13,.75]). In study 2, message conditions had a main effect on product perceptions ($F(2,392) = 8.90$, $p < .001$). There was no difference between the control versus positive condition ($p = .45$), and product perceptions were stronger in the control versus negative condition ($M_{\text{control}} = 4.06$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 3.43$; $t(261) = 3.20$, $p < .01$). Importantly, as predicted, product perceptions were stronger in the positive versus negative condition ($M_{\text{positive}} = 4.20$, $M_{\text{negative}} = 3.43$; $t(261) = 4.04$, $p < .001$). A mediation analysis, similar to study 1 was conducted, but the control condition was dropped for ease of interpretation. Results showed that product perceptions mediated the effect of the positively valenced message on purchase intentions (95% CI = [.19,.59]).

Statement of Key Contributions

Our findings extend the literature on number heuristics by showing that when attribute and reference values are expressed in different units, consumers anchor on familiar units and evaluate products more favorably when reference values are higher in magnitude. We also demonstrate that positively framed messages can enhance the effectiveness of carbon labels by possibly alleviating potential negative self-image concerns, thereby promoting more favorable product evaluations and sustainable choices. These findings offer actionable guidance for marketers and policymakers seeking to design more effective carbon labels. Our findings suggest that simply disclosing carbon footprint information is insufficient to influence

consumer behavior. Instead, firms should incorporate external reference values that facilitate interpretation and comparison, even in the absence of category-wide standardization. Presenting reference values using higher magnitude units or pairing carbon labels with positively framed messages can enhance product perceptions, and in turn increase purchase intentions. More broadly, this research informs regulatory and industry efforts aimed at improving the clarity, comparability, and utility of environmental labels, thereby supporting more informed and climate-conscious consumer decision making.

EPISODE-LEVEL CALIBRATION IN AI-ASSISTED COMPOSITIONAL WORK: AUTHORSHIP GAPS ACROSS CO-CREATOR, EDITOR, AND AI-DOMINANT MODES

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Keywords: generative AI, authorship, creative agency, disclosure, practice-as-research

Description: This paper introduces the authorship gap in AI-assisted compositional work and demonstrates it through a staged theatre case in which the same scene was written in three modes of AI assistance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Generative AI is changing compositional work. When AI can quickly produce fluent material, the human role shifts toward directing, selecting, verifying, integrating, and defending what enters the final work. The creative act does not disappear; it is redistributed. The central problem is that AI involvement can be real while remaining difficult to see. A final text or scene may appear coherent and human-made even when AI shaped its structure, language, rhythm, or framing, which creates a provenance problem for evaluators and an authorship problem for creators. The issue is therefore wider than AI detection: how is AI-shaped work made, claimed, judged, and held accountable when the process behind it is partly hidden?

This paper asks how generative AI reshapes creative agency, authorship, and responsibility as work moves from private creation to external judgment. Its central object is the authorship gap, formally the involvement-claim-judgment gap: the distance among the actual AI involvement in a work, the authorship the creator claims, and the authorship an evaluator grants. The guiding question is when that gap widens, and what widens it.

Method and Data

The study uses a Practice-as-Research showing at the aesthetic end of an evaluability spectrum, meaning how readily a result can be judged. Performance practice is the critical case, because it places the greatest pressure on authorship where there is no simple factual ground truth: quality is settled through voice, performability, and reception rather than against verifiable sources.

The same short two-hander, *Too Late, Sir*, was developed in three drafting modes and staged. In co-creator mode a human-authored outline and scene logic set the direction before AI generated variants. In editor mode AI generated a full draft that was then edited and rearranged. In AI-dominant mode there was little or no human input. Evidence includes drafts and prompt logs, rehearsal notes, performer responses, staging documentation, and post-performance feedback on perceived artistic value, authorship, and the impact of disclosure. Two lenses organize the analysis: actants, or non-human agency within performance networks, and digital liveness, or mediation's effect on presence and spectatorship. Quality was assessed on two criteria: playability, whether dialogue lets actors act intentions rather than recite information, and voice presence, whether the scene holds a coherent dramatic voice.

Summary of Findings

The authorship gap opened and closed as a function of who set the structure first. In co-creator mode the text remained recoverable: because the structure was set before AI was introduced, a line that failed to land could be revised back while maintaining the logic of the scene, and AI acted as a supporting actant while the human retained control of the dramatic structure. In editor

mode AI produced longer drafts with symmetrical turns and motivations stated directly in the characters' mouths; human labour then went into curating the text so performers could resist literal interpretation, and pauses were harder to create because the text had already filled the silences. In AI-dominant mode explanatory density increased and the rhythm of turns became smoother and more symmetrical. The smoother the text sounded on the page, the more effort was required to stage it as conflict with stakes, and that repair labour is itself a form of liveness. Disclosure functioned as dramaturgy. The label “AI-generated” operated as an actant of spectatorship, redistributing attention before judgment began.

Key Contributions

The authorship gap moves the study of AI-shaped work beyond detection toward how work becomes someone's work when the process is partly hidden and evaluation matters. The evaluability spectrum is a second contribution, showing how failure shifts from checkable error toward inauthenticity and voice drift, and how the basis of authorship judgment shifts from intellectual ownership toward voice and authenticity. Episode-level calibration names the mechanism: alignment between a creator's confidence and validated quality is updated across repeated episodes rather than set once at adoption.

The findings carry a design implication. The mainstream paradigm, type a prompt, receive a full draft, edit, bakes editor mode into the default workflow, precisely the mode where agency drifts to stylistic defaults. Because audiences penalise openly AI-authored work but accept AI-as-editor, creators face concealment pressure to under-disclose exactly when AI involvement is heaviest, which raises real questions for credit and disclosure norms.

The artistic contribution is central rather than incidental: the comparative staging let an audience experience authorship as an aesthetic property, a visible quality, rather than a hidden claim.

References are available upon request.

ERASURE IN THE MARKETPLACE: TRANSHUMANIST WORLDVIEWS AND DEHUMANIZATION OF HUMAN WORKERS IN THE AI-DRIVEN ECONOMY

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Keywords: worldview; transhumanism; dehumanization; artificial intelligence; consumer beliefs

Description: This research introduces the transhumanist worldview as a driver of how consumers evaluate human workers in an AI-driven marketplace, with downstream consequences for the firm.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As artificial intelligence (AI) encroaches on domains once considered uniquely human, it has sparked widespread concern about the future of human labor, identity, and interpersonal relations. As firms increasingly deploy AI in consumer-facing roles—automating, restructuring, and replacing work once performed by people—the relevance of human agents in the marketplace grows uncertain, raising a central question: How do consumers respond to the human workers who remain in an AI-driven marketplace, and which consumers are more likely to resist or embrace their replacement? Technological shifts that threaten human dominance tend to evoke deep anxieties about what it means to matter and to be uniquely human, and in response individuals fall back on their worldviews—deep-seated belief structures that organize cognition

and behavior during social disruption. Drawing on worldviews theory and the dehumanization literature, this research proposes that consumers rely on one worldview in particular—transhumanism, the belief that human capacities can be enhanced, modified, or reproduced through technology—to interpret this disruption. We ask whether a stronger transhumanist worldview leads consumers to dehumanize human workers, thereby reducing the perceived value of human involvement and shaping downstream consequences for their attitudes toward the firm.

Method And Data

Study 1A (N = 303) and 1B (N = 254) developed and validated the Transhumanism Worldview Scale (TWS), establishing reliability and testing discriminant validity against adjacent constructs (e.g., technology optimism, attitudes toward AI, social dominance orientation). In Study 2 (N = 233), participants completed the TWS measure and read a scenario involving a fictional national retail chain that announces an AI-based customer-service system that will progressively reduce human customer representatives. Participants reported dehumanization via mechanistic dehumanization and moral exclusion of the human worker, along with attitudes toward the firm and the human worker. All studies included controls such as age, gender, political orientation, religiosity, and social desirability, with attention and manipulation checks validating the scenario.

Summary of Findings

Studies 1A and 1B establish the transhumanist worldview as a psychometrically sound construct that is reliable across different samples, and empirically distinct from adjacent constructs. Together, they confirm that transhumanism is a distinct belief system about human nature rather than a proxy for general pro-technology sentiment. Study 2 findings demonstrate that consumers holding a stronger transhumanist worldview more readily dehumanized the affected human

worker—both mechanistically, construing the worker as an interchangeable, function-like part of the service system, and through moral exclusion, extending less fairness and moral concern to a worker whose role AI could absorb. In addition, a higher transhumanist worldview was associated with reduced support for the human worker and more favorable attitudes toward the AI-adopting firm. Together, the studies offer insight into how the transhumanist worldview shapes the way consumers evaluate human workers, with downstream consequences for their attitudes toward the firm in an increasingly AI-driven marketplace.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, to the dehumanization literature in consumer behavior, we show that consumers' dehumanization of workers can occur via a stable worldview commitment about the nature of human capacities. Second, we introduce the transhumanist worldview as a novel antecedent of how consumers evaluate human workers in the marketplace, extending consumer research on worldviews and belief systems to the question of how technological conceptions of human nature can shape everyday market interaction. Third, our findings speak to a downstream consequence of AI in the marketplace. In sum, this research provides insight into how an AI-driven marketplace reshapes the way consumers respond to the human workers who remain, and to the firms that employ them.

Title: From Belief to Identity: The Fissile–Fuzzle Cycle of Misinformation in Consumer Markets

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Keywords

Misinformation; Consumer Identity; Belief Persistence; Phase Transitions; Marketing Communication

Description

This paper develops the Fissile–Fuzzle Cycle, a phase-based theoretical framework explaining how consumer misinformation evolves from individually held, correctable misbeliefs into socially entrenched, identity-protective belief systems that resist corrective interventions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer misinformation often persists despite credible corrections, creating significant challenges for firms, consumers, and policymakers. Existing research attributes misinformation persistence to motivated reasoning, cognitive bias, and information diffusion, yet these perspectives do not adequately explain why some false beliefs remain correctable whereas others become socially defended and resistant to change (Ecker et al., 2020; Wood & Porter, 2019). This paper addresses this theoretical puzzle by asking when and how misinformation transitions from an individually held cognitive misbelief into a collectively reinforced identity commitment.

We propose the Fissile–Fuzzle Cycle, a process-oriented framework that conceptualizes misinformation as a phase-dependent system rather than a linear process of reinforcement. During the fissile phase, misinformation functions primarily as an individual cognitive belief that remains susceptible to evidence-based correction through motivated reasoning and belief revision processes (Kunda, 1990; Ecker et al., 2011). As repeated social validation accumulates, however, misinformation undergoes a qualitative transition into the fuzzle phase, where beliefs become identity-relevant signals of group membership, loyalty, and moral commitment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Swann & Buhrmester, 2015). Once this transition occurs, the psychological mechanisms sustaining belief fundamentally change, explaining why corrective interventions that are effective early frequently lose effectiveness or even provoke resistance after misinformation becomes socially embedded (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The proposed framework conceptualizes misinformation as a phase-dependent system in which the dominant psychological mechanisms sustaining belief shift from cognitive evaluation

to identity protection. Drawing on consumer behavior, cognitive psychology, social identity theory, and network science, the Fissile–Fuzzle Cycle integrates individual-level motivated reasoning and belief persistence (Kunda, 1990; Ecker et al., 2013), group-level identity formation and social validation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Swann & Buhrmester, 2015), and structural dynamics associated with algorithmic curation and online communities (Pariser, 2011; Gillespie, 2014).

Building on these complementary perspectives, the paper develops a phase-transition model in which the dominant mechanism sustaining misinformation shifts from cognitive evaluation to identity protection. The framework specifies the psychological conditions under which this transition occurs and develops six propositions concerning misinformation adoption, belief persistence, phase transition, correction effectiveness, intervention timing, and boundary conditions. The resulting theory provides a coherent conceptual foundation for future empirical research on misinformation in consumer markets.

Theoretical Insights

The proposed framework suggests that consumer misinformation evolves through two qualitatively distinct phases separated by a critical psychological transition. In the fissile phase, misinformation is accepted through motivated reasoning, emotional resonance, and perceived narrative coherence (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Because beliefs remain primarily cognitive, timely and non-threatening corrective information can successfully revise or eliminate false beliefs (Ecker et al., 2011).

As repeated social validation strengthens group consensus, misinformation undergoes a phase transition in which the basis for belief shifts from external evidence to internal social

affirmation (Moscovici, 1980). In the resulting fuzzle phase, misinformation functions less as a factual claim than as a marker of identity, belonging, and group loyalty. Identity fusion, epistemic closure, and affective polarization reinforce belief through mutually reinforcing feedback loops (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Nichols, 2017), making corrective information increasingly ineffective and, in some cases, counterproductive (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010; Wood & Porter, 2019). Accordingly, the framework predicts that intervention effectiveness is inherently phase dependent: evidence-based corrections are most effective during the fissile phase, whereas identity-sensitive interventions become necessary once misinformation enters the fuzzle phase.

Key Contribution

This paper makes four important contributions to marketing and consumer research. First, it introduces a novel phase-transition perspective that reconceptualizes misinformation persistence as a qualitative shift in the psychological mechanisms sustaining belief rather than as a continuous process of reinforcement. This perspective provides a theoretical explanation for the inconsistent effectiveness of debiasing and corrective interventions reported in prior research (Ecker et al., 2020). Second, the framework extends consumer identity theory by conceptualizing misinformation as a distinct identity object whose value derives from signaling group membership, loyalty, and moral alignment rather than factual accuracy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Kozinets, 2001). Third, it integrates cognitive, social, and structural explanations into a unified theoretical framework linking motivated reasoning, identity processes, and digital network dynamics to explain how misinformation emerges, persists, and becomes resistant to correction within consumer markets. Finally, the framework offers actionable implications for firms, advocacy organizations, regulators, and digital platforms by demonstrating that effective misinformation management requires phase-contingent interventions. Rather than relying on

universal correction strategies, organizations should match interventions to the psychological state of misinformation, emphasizing evidence-based correction during the fissile phase and identity-sensitive engagement once beliefs become socially entrenched (Pariser, 2011; Gillespie, 2014).

References

References are available upon request.

FROM UNFAIR WORDS TO NEGATIVE BUZZ: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON REVIEW UNFAIRNESS AND EWOM

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Keywords: Unfair negative online reviews, Fairness theory, Cognitive appraisal theory, Experimental research, Empathy

Description: This paper demonstrates that perceived unfairness in negative online reviews can elicit empathy toward the brand, which reduces third party consumers' intentions to spread negative eWOM

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Unfair negative online reviews create a paradox for brands. Although negative reviews usually harm brand evaluations and stimulate negative electronic word of mouth (eWOM), an exaggerated or disproportionate negative review may instead lead third party observers to consider the brand as a victim. This research asks: when consumers perceive a negative online review as unfair, does that perception reduce their intention to spread negative eWOM, and does empathy toward the brand explain this effect? We further ask whether the brand's public response strategy, either accommodative or defensive, strengthens or weakens the relationship between empathy and negative eWOM intention. Integrating fairness theory with cognitive appraisal theory, we conceptualize unfair negative reviews as moral appraisal events in which observers assign accountability, form empathic concern for the brand, and then decide whether

to amplify or withhold communication that damages the marketplace. The focal research question is therefore: How does perceived negative review unfairness shape third party observers' intentions to spread negative eWOM through empathy toward the brand, and is this process contingent on brand response strategy?

Method and Data

We test the model across three randomized online experiments in a hospitality review context with English speaking adult participants recruited from Prolific. Study 1 (N=200) used a single factor between subjects design manipulating review fairness: fair versus unfair negative review. The fair review balanced criticism and praise, whereas the unfair review used more extreme language. Study 2 (N=300) replicated the fairness manipulation and added empathy toward the brand as the mediator, using validated item measures of empathic concern and negative eWOM intention. Study 3 (N=392) used a 2x2 between subjects design crossing review fairness, fair vs unfair, with brand response strategy, accommodative versus defensive. Across studies, participants read the assigned scenario and review materials, completed manipulation checks, empathy and negative eWOM measures, attention checks, and demographic items. Analyses included ANOVA, and bootstrapped conditional indirect effect using 5000 resamples.

Summary of Findings

Across the studies, the manipulations successfully shifted perceived review fairness. Study 1 showed that participants exposed to the unfair review perceived it as significantly less fair than participants exposed to the fair review, but the direct effect of review fairness on negative eWOM intention was not significant. Study 2 revealed the psychological mechanism. Exposure to an unfair negative review increased empathy toward the brand, and empathy significantly reduced negative eWOM intention. Bootstrap mediation results showed a significant indirect effect, which indicates that unfair reviews reduce negative eWOM through empathy toward the brand. Study 3 replicated the central role of empathy. Empathy again significantly reduced

negative eWOM intention. However, brand response strategy did not significantly moderate the relationship between empathy and negative eWOM, and the conditional effects were not significant under either accommodative or defensive responses. Overall, the findings suggest that perceived review unfairness changes third party observers' interpretation of the review, activates empathy toward the brand, and reduces the likelihood that observers will spread negative eWOM.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it extends the online review literature by shifting attention from review valence alone to perceived review fairness, showing that a negative review can backfire when consumers perceived it as unfair. Second, it integrates fairness theory and cognitive appraisal theory to explain how accountability judgments become discrete moral emotions and, ultimately, marketplace communication intentions. Rather than treating empathy as a general positive affect, the study identifies empathy toward the brand as the mechanism through which unfair review reduce negative eWOM. Third, it contributes to webcare research by showing that brand response strategy did not moderate this empathic pathway, and suggesting that once third-party observers feel empathy for a wronged brand, their willingness to spread negative eWOM may be relatively robust across accommodative and defensive strategies. Managerially, the findings suggest that brands should monitor not only negative review volume and valence, but also perceived fairness.

References are available upon request.

GREEN OR SAVE? VALUE-FRAMED RECOMMENDATION NUDGES ACROSS THE PURCHASE JOURNEY

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Keywords: Digital nudging; e-commerce recommendation pop-ups; purchase funnel stage; sustainability framing; financial framing.

Description: This paper examines when sustainability- and financial-framed recommendation pop-ups increase purchase intention across the online purchase journey.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Digital recommendation pop-ups are common in e-commerce, yet it remains unclear whether the value frame attached to an otherwise identical recommendation changes purchase intention and whether this effect depends on when the pop-up appears in the purchase journey. This paper asks whether sustainability-framed and financial-framed recommendation nudges outperform a generic/unframed recommendation nudge, and whether these effects vary across website, cart, and checkout stages. It also contrasts two recommendation logics: add-on recommendations that suggest an additional product and substitute recommendations that suggest an alternative product. The central research question is therefore: when should online retailers use green versus savings-based recommendation frames to increase purchase intention without changing the basic interface structure or restricting consumer choice? A secondary, exploratory question examines

whether involvement and perceived cognitive resource demand help explain why framed recommendation nudges work in some contexts but not others.

Method And Data

We conducted two between-subjects online experiments in an e-commerce scenario setting. Study 1 examined add-on recommendations and included 328 participants; Study 2 examined substitute recommendations and included 299 participants. Each study used a 3 (nudge framing: generic/unframed vs. sustainability-framed vs. financial-framed) $\times$ 3 (funnel stage: website vs. cart vs. checkout) factorial design with random assignment. Participants encountered a standardized recommendation pop-up at the assigned funnel stage; layout and call-to-action were held constant, while only the framing cue varied. Measures were collected after scenario exposure using established multi-item scales adapted to the e-commerce context, including purchase intention, involvement, perceived cognitive resource demand, and perceived ownership as a stage-validation measure. Both datasets were cleaned before hypothesis testing, excluding speeders and patterned responses. Analyses used two-way ANOVAs with effect sizes and adjusted post-hoc comparisons. Exploratory mechanisms were assessed through nonparametric bootstrap mediation, with multiplicity addressed using Holm and Benjamini-Hochberg procedures where appropriate.

Summary of Findings

Perceived ownership increased across funnel stages in both studies, supporting the intended psychological progression from browsing to checkout. In the substitute-recommendation study, nudge framing had a strong effect on purchase intention: sustainability-framed and financial-

framed recommendations both outperformed the generic recommendation, and sustainability framing also exceeded financial framing. Funnel stage and the framing $\times$ stage interaction were not significant, indicating that substitute recommendations were primarily driven by framing rather than placement. In the add-on study, framing also increased purchase intention, but the effect depended on funnel stage. Both sustainability and financial frames outperformed the generic recommendation overall. However, the significant framing $\times$ stage interaction showed that financial framing was most effective earlier in the journey, particularly on the website and cart, whereas sustainability framing showed its clearest advantage at checkout. Exploratory mediation results suggested that, in the add-on context, the financial frame operated partly through higher involvement and higher perceived cognitive resource demand. These indirect effects were not robust for sustainability framing or in the substitute context.

Statement of Key Contributions

The paper contributes to marketing research by isolating value framing as a causal lever within an otherwise identical digital recommendation pop-up. By comparing generic, sustainability-framed, and financial-framed recommendations across two scenario logics and three funnel stages, it identifies when framed nudges improve purchase intention and when placement matters. The results show that framing effects are not uniform: add-on recommendations require stage-sensitive design, whereas substitute recommendations are less dependent on funnel placement. This advances digital nudging theory by linking interface-level choice architecture to purchase-journey dynamics and by showing that sustainability and financial appeals can operate as distinct motivational frames. The exploratory mediation evidence adds a mechanism-oriented perspective, suggesting that financial framing in add-on contexts can work through greater involvement

and effortful cognitive engagement. Managerially, the findings caution against treating recommendation pop-ups as interchangeable. E-commerce teams, UX designers, and sustainability managers should match message framing to both recommendation logic and journey stage, using savings frames earlier for add-ons and sustainability frames more strategically near checkout.

References are available upon request.

HOW IMPLICIT THEORIES SHAPE RELIANCE ON CHATGPT

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Keywords: ChatGPT; Generative Artificial Intelligence; Implicit Theories; Help-Seeking; Moral Conflict

Description: This research examines how consumers' implicit theories influence reliance on ChatGPT by showing that anticipated moral conflict reduces fixed-mindset individuals' willingness to delegate tasks to generative AI.

Extended Abstract

Research Question

Generative artificial intelligence has transformed the way consumers perform everyday tasks (Boussiou et al. 2024). Unlike earlier AI systems that primarily automated routine activities, ChatGPT is capable of generating text, solving problems, and completing tasks that traditionally required human effort (Huang 2025). Although these capabilities offer substantial productivity benefits, consumers vary considerably in the extent to which they rely on ChatGPT. Many users readily delegate writing, brainstorming, and analytical tasks to the system, whereas others remain reluctant to rely on it extensively despite recognizing its usefulness. This variation suggests that productivity benefits alone are insufficient to explain reliance on ChatGPT.

Drawing on implicit theories and help-seeking research, we propose that consumers' beliefs about whether personal qualities are fixed or malleable shape their willingness to delegate tasks to ChatGPT. As interactions with ChatGPT increasingly resemble interactions with a social actor,

relying on the system may be psychologically construed as receiving help. Because individuals with fixed mindsets tend to view receiving help as signaling insufficient ability, relying on ChatGPT is expected to evoke anticipated moral conflict and reduce willingness to delegate tasks. In contrast, individuals with growth mindsets should perceive reliance on ChatGPT as a learning opportunity rather than a threat to competence. This research therefore examines whether implicit theories influence reliance on ChatGPT and whether anticipated moral conflict explains this relationship.

Method and Data

The proposed framework was tested across three complementary studies employing both measured and experimentally manipulated implicit theories. Collectively, the studies examine whether fixed versus growth mindsets influence consumers' willingness to rely on ChatGPT and identify the psychological process underlying this relationship.

Study 1 provides an initial test of the proposed relationship by examining whether naturally occurring differences in consumers' mindsets predict willingness to rely on ChatGPT for task completion. Study 2 conceptually replicates the findings using an experimental manipulation of implicit theories, establishing the causal effect of mindset on reliance. Study 3 extends the investigation by examining anticipated moral conflict as the underlying psychological mechanism linking mindset to ChatGPT reliance. Across the studies, participants evaluated common task scenarios involving ChatGPT and reported their willingness to delegate task completion to the system. Together, these studies provide converging evidence for the proposed theoretical framework while demonstrating the robustness of the findings across multiple research designs.

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, the findings consistently demonstrate that individuals with stronger fixed mindsets are less willing to rely on ChatGPT than individuals with stronger growth mindsets. Specifically, fixed-mindset individuals are more reluctant to delegate task completion to ChatGPT because doing so is psychologically interpreted as receiving help. This interpretation evokes anticipated moral conflict by increasing concerns that relying on ChatGPT violates norms of autonomy, competence, and self-reliance. In contrast, individuals with growth mindsets perceive reliance on ChatGPT as more compatible with learning and self-improvement, resulting in greater willingness to delegate tasks. The studies consistently support anticipated moral conflict as the psychological mechanism underlying these effects. Together, the findings demonstrate that consumers' willingness to rely on generative AI depends not only on the technology's capabilities but also on the psychological meaning individuals attach to receiving assistance from AI.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions to the emerging literature on generative AI and consumer behavior. First, it identifies implicit theories as an important psychological antecedent of reliance on ChatGPT, extending research on AI adoption beyond functional considerations to demonstrate the role of fundamental beliefs about human ability. Second, it reconceptualizes reliance on ChatGPT as a form of help-seeking behavior. By integrating help-seeking theory with research on human–AI interaction, the findings demonstrate that norms surrounding autonomy and self-reliance continue to influence behavior even when assistance comes from an AI system rather than another person. Third, this research identifies anticipated moral conflict as the psychological mechanism underlying resistance to extensive reliance on ChatGPT. These

findings provide a richer understanding of why consumers differ in their willingness to delegate tasks to generative AI and offer practical guidance for organizations, educators, and policymakers seeking to encourage effective and responsible AI use while minimizing psychological resistance.

References are available upon request.

Matching Immersion with Newness: How Experiential Fit Enhances Consumer Evaluation of New Products

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Keywords: Immersion level; product newness; mental simulation; product benefit understanding; temporal distance.

Description: This paper shows that consumer evaluations of new products improve when immersion level fits the learning demands created by radical versus incremental product newness.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms increasingly use VR, 360-degree video, and related immersive media to introduce new products, but high immersion may not be uniformly beneficial. This research asks when immersive product presentation improves consumer evaluations and when it creates unnecessary cognitive burden. We distinguish radically new products (RNPs), which require consumers to learn unfamiliar usage processes, from incrementally new products (INPs), which can be understood by mapping improvements onto existing knowledge. We argue that these two forms of newness impose different simulation demands. RNPs require process simulation: consumers need to mentally rehearse usage steps, interaction rules, and procedural logic to reduce uncertainty. INPs require outcome simulation: consumers mainly need to envision upgraded

benefits without being distracted by redundant operational details. We therefore propose an experiential fit framework in which high immersion fits RNPs by supporting embodied process simulation, whereas low immersion fits INPs by focusing attention on outcome value. We further examine product benefit understanding as the psychological mechanism and launch temporal distance as a boundary condition.

Method And Data

The hypotheses were tested with one secondary data analysis and three online experiments. Study 1 used a two-cell between-subjects design manipulating immersion level for an incremental tile product ($N = 112$) and measured process simulation, outcome simulation, product evaluation, perceived immersion, and perceived innovation. Study 2 analyzed secondary marketplace data from Taobao's Good Products List. We scraped innovative product entries using newness-related keywords and retained 216 products with immersive presentation features. Four trained coders classified product newness (RNPs vs. INPs) and immersion level (high vs. low), and product evaluation was operationalized as the ratio of positive reviews to total reviews, with price controlled. Study 3 employed a 2 (product newness: RNPs vs. INPs) $\times$ 2 (immersion level: high vs. low) between-subjects design using fictional automobile launch stimuli ($N = 310$). It measured product evaluation, product benefit understanding, flow experience, cognitive load, product familiarity, personal newness, and VR usage. Study 4 focused on an RNP, a smart photography watch, and used a 2 (temporal distance: distant vs. proximate) $\times$ 2 (immersion level: high vs. low) design ($N = 398$).

Summary of Findings

Across studies, the results support the proposed experiential fit framework. Study 1 showed that high immersion significantly increased process simulation, whereas low immersion significantly

increased outcome simulation; for the incremental tile product, low immersion produced higher product evaluations than high immersion. Study 2 provided field evidence from Taobao reviews. The interaction between product newness and immersion level was significant: for RNPs, high-immersion presentations generated higher positive review ratios than low-immersion presentations, whereas for INPs, low-immersion presentations outperformed high-immersion presentations. Study 3 replicated this matching effect in a controlled 2 x 2 experiment. High immersion improved evaluations for RNPs, while low immersion improved evaluations for INPs. Mediation analysis showed that product benefit understanding carried the interaction effect, while flow experience did not serve as an alternative mediator. Study 4 identified temporal distance as a boundary condition for RNPs. When launch was proximate, high immersion led to stronger evaluations than low immersion because it supported concrete understanding of usage processes. When launch was distant, the advantage of high immersion disappeared, indicating that consumers focused more on abstract desirability than immediate procedural learning.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it qualifies the common assumption that immersion is inherently beneficial for new product communication. By integrating cognitive load theory with immersive learning perspectives, we show that immersion creates value only when its cognitive affordances fit the learning demands of the product. High immersion helps consumers understand radical newness, but it can become redundant for incremental newness. Second, the research advances new product adoption theory by distinguishing process-oriented and outcome-oriented simulation as separate routes through which consumers learn about innovation. This distinction clarifies why different types of newness require different communication media. Third, the research identifies product benefit understanding as the key

mechanism and temporal distance as a meaningful boundary condition, showing that the value of high immersion is strongest when radical innovations are close to launch and consumers need concrete procedural knowledge. Managerially, the findings provide a practical allocation rule for immersive technology investment: use high-immersion, interactive formats for radically new products near launch, but use simpler low-immersion formats for incremental upgrades or distant announcements. This prevents costly over-engineering while improving consumers' ability to understand and evaluate new products.

MENTAL WELLNESS PRODUCTS ARE PERCEIVED AS LUXURIOUS

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Keywords: mental wellness, consumer health, luxury perceptions, lay belief, inference-making

Description: This research shows that consumers perceive mental wellness offerings as more luxurious than comparable physical wellness offerings, driven by the lay belief that mental wellness is desirable but comparatively non-essential, with downstream consequences for purchase intentions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Mental wellness has become a prominent theme in consumer marketing. While mental health offerings have historically centered on illness treatment, such as medications and therapy, many brands now position products and services as supporting consumers' efforts to maintain or enhance cognitive and emotional well-being in everyday life, from meditation apps and calming teas to mood-enhancing product features and fitness programs emphasizing mental transformation. As mental wellness positioning becomes increasingly common across industries, this research examines whether, and why, consumers perceive offerings positioned as supporting mental wellness differently from comparable offerings positioned as supporting physical wellness. We propose that mental wellness offerings are perceived as more luxurious, prestigious, and status-enhancing than their physical wellness counterparts. We further propose that these luxury perceptions are driven by a lay belief that the pursuit of mental wellness is more of a luxury and less of a necessity than the pursuit of physical wellness—that is, mental wellness is viewed as desirable but comparatively non-essential. We further examine a boundary condition of this effect and its downstream consequences for purchase intentions.

Method and Data

Across eight studies, including five pre-registered studies, we test the proposed lay belief, its effect on luxury perceptions of mental versus physical wellness offerings, and downstream purchase intentions. Study 1 establishes that consumers hold a lay belief that the pursuit of mental wellness is more of a luxury and less of a necessity than the pursuit of physical wellness.

Studies 2-5 examine how this lay belief translates into perceptions of marketplace offerings. Study 2 shows that consumers perceive mental wellness offerings as more luxurious than physical wellness offerings across a variety of products. Study 3 demonstrates that consumers view an identical product as more luxurious when it is framed as supporting mental (vs. physical) wellness. Studies 4A and 4B provide process evidence through moderation: heightened luxury perceptions of mental wellness offerings attenuate when their use is framed as restoring (vs. enhancing) wellness, rendering the underlying lay belief less applicable. Finally, Study 5 demonstrates a downstream consequence: mental wellness framing increases purchase intentions, especially when consumers have a luxury consumption goal. Across studies, we draw from multiple participant pools and test alternative explanations, including halo effects, perceived product efficacy, added benefits, and inherent differences in mental versus physical wellness practices.

Summary of Findings

Together, the studies show that consumers perceive mental wellness offerings as more luxurious than physical wellness offerings, reflected in higher perceived product and brand luxuriousness, greater inferred user status, and higher price estimates. These luxury perceptions emerge across diverse product categories, when the product itself is held constant, and even when the offering is free but requires investments of time and energy. The studies further show that these elevated luxury perceptions are driven by a consumer lay belief that the pursuit of mental wellness is more of a luxury and less of a necessity—that is, more desirable but less essential—than the pursuit of physical wellness. Further supporting this lay belief account, luxury perceptions of mental wellness offerings dissipate when the lay belief is less applicable—

for example, when the offerings are viewed as a means to restore baseline well-being rather than as opportunities to enhance it beyond the baseline. Finally, mental wellness framing has behavioral consequences: it increases purchase intentions, especially when consumers have a luxury consumption goal, such as a splurging goal.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, this research advances consumer health research by offering a more integrated perspective on health-related behavior, examining mental and physical wellness in tandem within the important yet underexplored domain of wellness pursuit. Prior marketing research has largely focused on physical health, while emerging work on mental health has often examined it in isolation and primarily in illness-treatment contexts. Moving beyond illness treatment to the broader pursuit of mental wellness, we identify a distinct consumer lay belief about mental (vs. physical) wellness pursuits and show how this belief shapes perceptions of everyday products (e.g., tea, body wash) positioned as enhancing well-being, rather than treating illness. Second, this research contributes to the consumer lay belief literature by identifying a novel health-related belief tied to the wellness domain, thereby extending prior work beyond the traditional healthy–unhealthy dichotomy. Third, it contributes to the luxury perceptions literature by showing that wellness positioning—mental versus physical—can serve as a novel driver of perceived luxuriousness, status, and prestige, beyond previously studied visual and design elements. Finally, the findings offer managerial insights by showing that mental wellness positioning can enhance luxury appeal, support premium pricing, and inform product development, line extensions, and purchase-focused messaging.

Negotiating Power, Privacy, and Value: Female Consumers' Perceptions of FemTech

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Key words: FemTech; Value-Centred Marketing; Surveillance Capitalism; Consumer Empowerment; Privacy

Description: This study examines how women negotiate empowerment, privacy, and value within FemTech ecosystems characterised by intimate data collection and commercial data practices.

Research question: FemTech has emerged as a rapidly growing sector encompassing menstrual tracking applications, fertility platforms and other digital technologies designed to support women's health. Positioned as a corrective to the historical neglect of women's healthcare, these technologies promise personalised insights, reproductive autonomy, and improved health outcomes. Such claims align closely with Value-Centred Marketing (VCM), which emphasises consumer empowerment, co-creation, and long-term stakeholder wellbeing. However, FemTech's reliance on intimate reproductive data raises important ethical questions concerning privacy, consent, surveillance, and commercial exploitation. While existing research has predominantly focused on technological innovation, legal regulation, and organisational perspectives, comparatively little attention has been given to women's own experiences and perceptions of these technologies. This absence is significant because consumer interpretations of empowerment, trust, and value fundamentally shape engagement with digital health platforms. This study therefore explores how do female consumers perceive FemTech and the marketing use of their personal reproductive data? More specifically, it explores how women negotiate the tensions between empowerment and surveillance, and how these perceptions influence their willingness to engage with FemTech

platforms. Integrating VCM Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism, the research critically evaluates whether FemTech enhances autonomy or whether it reframes data extraction as empowerment within contemporary digital markets.

Method and Data: The study adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore women's lived experiences and perceptions of FemTech. This methodology was selected because it enables rich exploration of subjective meanings, personal experiences, and socially constructed understandings of health technologies and data practices. Twenty menstruating women aged between 18 and 55 residing in the United Kingdom participated in the study. Participants were recruited through a combination of online and offline channels, including women's health forums, social media platforms, community groups, and local noticeboards. Importantly, prior use of FemTech was not a prerequisite, enabling the inclusion of both users and non-users. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Coding was conducted inductively using NVivo, allowing themes to emerge directly from participant narratives rather than being imposed through predetermined categories. This approach generated nuanced insights into how women understand empowerment, privacy, trust, commercialisation, and convenience within data-driven reproductive health ecosystems.

Summary of findings: The analysis identified four interconnected themes: female empowerment and autonomy, privacy and trust, commercialisation of FemTech, and convenience. Participants frequently described FemTech as empowering because it increased awareness of reproductive health, facilitated self-monitoring, and enhanced confidence in managing menstrual cycles and related health concerns. Access to personalised health

information contributed to a sense of control and self-knowledge. However, empowerment was often experienced as conditional and contradictory. Participants reported growing reliance on applications to validate bodily experiences, creating forms of algorithmic dependency. Privacy concerns were widespread, yet many women continued using FemTech despite distrust regarding data handling practices. This reflects the personalisation–privacy paradox, whereby consumers exchange personal information for perceived benefits and convenience. Commercialisation emerged as another significant concern. Participants expressed discomfort with firms profiting from intimate reproductive data and questioned whether current value exchanges were fair. While some accepted data sharing when framed as advancing women’s health or scientific research, they strongly distinguished between socially beneficial uses and profit-driven commercial exploitation. Finally, convenience played a central role in sustaining engagement. Participants routinely prioritised efficiency and functionality over privacy considerations, often accepting terms and conditions without scrutiny. The findings suggest that FemTech simultaneously empowers and constrains women, embedding them within data ecosystems characterised by unequal power relations and opaque value exchanges.

Key contributions: This research makes several important theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. First, it extends Value-Centred Marketing by demonstrating that consumer empowerment is not inherently beneficial when value creation depends upon the extraction and commercialisation of intimate reproductive data. By integrating surveillance capitalism with VCM, the study reveals how discourses of co-creation and empowerment can obscure unequal relationships between consumers and firms, where personal data functions as a source of commercial value. Second, the research contributes rare consumer-centred qualitative evidence within the FemTech literature, which has largely been dominated by

technological, legal, and organisational perspectives. The findings highlight self-perception, trust, and contextual sensitivity as critical but underdeveloped mechanisms influencing how consumers assess value and empowerment. Women evaluated data practices differently depending on whether information was used for healthcare purposes or commercial gain. Third, the study offers practical implications for marketers, FemTech developers, healthcare organisations, and policymakers. The findings demonstrate that opaque data practices undermine trust and threaten long-term consumer engagement. Sustainable innovation within FemTech therefore requires greater transparency, meaningful consent, ethical governance, and consumer-centred design. Rather than treating empowerment as a marketing claim, organisations must ensure that women retain genuine control over their reproductive data. Ultimately, the research argues that successful value creation should be evaluated not only through personalisation and efficiency, but also through trust, legitimacy, and justice.

References available on request.

PRESTIGE ABOVE ALL OR VALUE FOR MONEY? STATUS CONSUMPTION, SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION, AND PREFERENCES FOR TRADING-DOWN LUXURY VERSUS DUPES

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Keywords: Status consumption; Social dominance orientation; Trading-down luxury; Dupes; Product conspicuousness

Description: This research examines how status consumption and social dominance orientation shape consumers' preferences for trading-down luxury products versus dupes under budget constraints.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As economic uncertainty reshapes luxury consumption, consumers increasingly face a strategic decision regarding which aspects of luxury they wish to preserve—brand symbolism or functional utility. Rather than abandoning discretionary purchases altogether, many consumers engage in downgrade consumption by choosing either trading-down luxury products (i.e., authentic entry-level or downsized luxury offerings) or dupes that provide similar aesthetics and functionality without the prestige brand. Unlike dupes,

trading-down luxury products retain institutionalized brand legitimacy and therefore continue to function as symbolic markers of social status. Although prior research has examined counterfeit consumption, luxury purchasing, and status signaling, little is known about the psychological mechanisms underlying consumers' preferences between these two distinct downgrade strategies. We argue that downgrade decisions are driven not only by economic constraints but also by consumers' desire to preserve symbolic status and social hierarchy. Specifically, this research investigates how status consumption and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) jointly shape preferences for trading-down luxury products versus dupes. Furthermore, we examine whether product conspicuousness serves as a boundary condition by strengthening or weakening the symbolic value conveyed through luxury branding.

Method and Data

Two scenario-based experiments were conducted to examine the proposed framework. Study 1 recruited 162 participants who evaluated a purchase scenario involving a choice between a trading-down luxury handbag and a comparable dupe under budget constraints. Participants completed established multi-item measures of status consumption and Social Dominance Orientation, and their purchase preference served as the primary dependent variable. Building upon these findings, Study 2 recruited 260 participants and employed a 2 (SDO: High vs. Low) $\times$ 2 (Product Conspicuousness: High vs. Low) between-subjects experimental design using business briefcases to examine the proposed boundary condition. Product conspicuousness was manipulated through the visibility of brand-identifying cues. Hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA while controlling for relevant covariates. Together, the two studies provide complementary evidence regarding both the

psychological mechanisms and boundary conditions underlying consumers' downgrade preferences.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, consumers with stronger status consumption tendencies exhibited significantly greater preferences for trading-down luxury products over dupes ($F(1, 159) = 67.65, p < .001$), supporting the proposition that status motives remain influential even under financial constraints. Consistent with our hypotheses, Social Dominance Orientation further strengthened consumers' preference for trading-down luxury products ($p = .019$), suggesting that individuals who endorse social hierarchy are more motivated to preserve symbolic status despite financial constraints. More importantly, Study 2 demonstrated that product conspicuousness represents a critical boundary condition, yielding a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 255) = 5.43, p = .02$). When luxury products displayed highly visible brand cues, high-SDO consumers showed a substantially stronger preference for trading-down luxury products ($M_{\text{high-SDO}} = 4.93$ vs. $M_{\text{low-SDO}} = 3.25$). However, this difference largely disappeared when conspicuous brand cues were minimized ($M_{\text{high-SDO}} = 4.09$ vs. $M_{\text{low-SDO}} = 3.81, p = .55$). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that downgrade consumption serves as a symbolic strategy for preserving social hierarchy rather than merely maximizing economic value.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research advances the marketing literature by reconceptualizing luxury downgrade consumption as a symbolic and ideological decision rather than a purely economic response to budget constraints. By distinguishing trading-down luxury products from dupes, we demonstrate that consumers evaluate these alternatives according to their

ability to preserve legitimate brand symbolism and social hierarchy rather than treating them as functionally equivalent budget options. Furthermore, this research extends status consumption theory by identifying Social Dominance Orientation as an important ideological mechanism underlying downgrade preferences and establishes product conspicuousness as a critical boundary condition that determines when symbolic status preservation becomes influential. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how consumers negotiate identity, hierarchy, and status under financial constraints. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that luxury brands should preserve visible symbolic cues in entry-level products to maintain their appeal among hierarchy-oriented consumers. In contrast, masstige and dupe brands may benefit from emphasizing functional value and accessibility when targeting consumers who place less importance on hierarchical distinction. Together, these findings provide actionable insights for brand managers seeking to compete effectively in an increasingly polarized luxury marketplace.

PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP AND BRAND LOYALTY IN ENVIRONMENTAL CSR: EVIDENCE FROM MESSAGE FRAMING AND BRAND USAGE CONTEXTS

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Keywords: Environmental CSR; Psychological Ownership; Brand Loyalty; Message Framing; Sustainability Orientation

Description: This paper shows that psychological ownership—rather than emotional message framing or brand usage—drives brand loyalty in environmental CSR communication, with consumers' sustainability orientations as the key underlying mechanism.

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research advances marketing theory by examining how environmental CSR communication translates into brand loyalty through psychological ownership. Across two experimental studies, neither emotionally framed CSR messages nor brand usage cues directly enhance psychological ownership or brand loyalty; instead, psychological ownership toward sustainability initiatives consistently emerges as the key mechanism linking CSR efforts to loyalty outcomes, challenging the assumption that emotionally evocative CSR communication alone builds durable consumer–brand relationships. The study further extends psychological ownership theory into the environmental CSR domain by conceptualizing ownership at the initiative level rather than the brand level, clarifying why CSR communication may generate loyalty.

Beyond academic contributions, the findings offer insights for marketing managers, sustainability professionals, and policymakers: they caution against overreliance on emotional

CSR messaging or brand usage cues to foster loyalty, indicating instead that CSR initiatives are most effective when they resonate with consumers' underlying sustainability beliefs and consumption orientations, and that durable support emerges from internalized value alignment rather than persuasive framing alone.

ABSTRACT

Drawing on psychological ownership theory, two experiments examine how CSR message framing and brand usage relate to brand loyalty. Psychological ownership consistently predicts loyalty, whereas emotional framing and usage cues show no direct effects, highlighting consumers' internalized sustainability connections over surface-level communication tactics.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental CSR has become a significant component of contemporary brand communication strategies, as firms increasingly invest in visible sustainability initiatives to strengthen consumer–brand relationships. An important question remains insufficiently understood: how and under what conditions do CSR communications translate into enduring consumer loyalty? CSR effectiveness depends not only on what firms do, but also on how these actions are communicated. Message framing and emotional appeals influence perceptions of CSR sincerity (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010), and emotionally framed messages are often assumed to foster positive responses; however, emerging evidence questions such surface-level strategies, suggesting emotional framing may increase attention without generating deeper psychological bonds (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2014). The present research therefore adopts a psychological ownership perspective — a state in which individuals feel a sense of ownership toward a target, shown to shape attachment and loyalty (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001) — to

examine how consumers internalize brands' sustainability initiatives, a role that remains underexplored in environmental CSR communication.

Across two experimental studies, this research examines whether CSR communication fosters brand loyalty through psychological ownership. Study 1 investigates the effect of CSR message framing, while Study 2 examines brand usage, also considering individual sustainability orientations. The findings demonstrate that psychological ownership toward sustainability initiatives is a stronger predictor of brand loyalty than message framing or usage cues, highlighting individual-level sustainability orientations over tactical communication elements.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Environmental CSR Communication and Message Framing

Environmental CSR communication is a central mechanism through which firms translate sustainability initiatives into favorable consumer responses, shaping how consumers interpret firms' motives and sincerity (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Nyilasy et al., 2014), and consumers actively evaluate whether initiatives reflect genuine concern or strategic impression management (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Message framing theory suggests emotionally framed messages are more vivid and engaging than neutral, informational messages, increasing affective processing and involvement (Escalas, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000), strengthening attitudes and consumer–brand connections (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Recent CSR research shows that emotionally framed environmental messages can enhance perceived sincerity and engagement relative to neutral, outcome-focused messages (Peloza, White, & Shang, 2013). However, emotional framing alone may not generate durable outcomes unless consumers internalize the underlying values (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016), suggesting framing influences responses through deeper psychological mechanisms rather than direct persuasion.

Psychological Ownership as a Mechanism in Environmental CSR

Psychological ownership is a cognitive–affective state in which individuals feel a target is “theirs,” even absent legal possession, developing through perceived control, intimate knowledge, and self-investment (Pierce et al., 2001). Marketing research extends this construct to brands and brand-related activities (Peck & Shu, 2009), and ownership is especially likely when stimuli are symbolically meaningful and aligned with consumers' values. Environmental CSR initiatives are a fertile context for ownership formation because they emphasize collective responsibility and shared impact (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004); when consumers find sustainability initiatives personally relevant, they may internalize them as part of their extended self. Here, psychological ownership refers specifically to ownership of the sustainability initiative rather than of the brand as a whole. Emotionally framed CSR messages are expected to heighten symbolic engagement and personal connection, facilitating ownership perceptions.

H1: Emotionally framed environmental CSR messages lead to higher psychological ownership of a brand's sustainability initiatives than neutral CSR messages.

Psychological Ownership and Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty reflects a consumer's enduring commitment to a brand, manifested through preference, repeated choice, and resistance to switching (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Contemporary perspectives increasingly highlight emotional attachment and identity-based connections as antecedents of loyalty (Fournier, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), and psychological ownership strengthens these connections by integrating the brand into consumers' extended self-concept (Belk, 1988; Kirk, Peck, & Swain, 2018); consumers who feel ownership are more likely to protect and remain committed to a brand over time. This may be particularly

pronounced in CSR contexts, where sustainability initiatives often resonate with consumers' moral identities (Rather, Tehseen, & Parrey, 2018).

H2: Psychological ownership of a brand's sustainability initiatives positively influences brand loyalty.

Environmental Sustainability Beliefs and Psychological Ownership

Consumers vary in their environmental sustainability beliefs — convictions about ecological balance and human responsibility toward nature (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000) — which shape how they interpret sustainability-related information (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Individuals with strong beliefs are more likely to perceive CSR initiatives as personally relevant and morally meaningful, increasing internalization and ownership, whereas those with weaker beliefs may view initiatives as peripheral regardless of message execution.

H3: Environmental sustainability beliefs positively influence psychological ownership of a brand's sustainability initiatives.

Brand Usage and Psychological Ownership

Consumers' prior relationship with a brand is an important factor in CSR communication effectiveness. Existing users possess greater familiarity, which may facilitate ownership by increasing perceived closeness (Fournier, 1998), and CSR initiatives may resonate more with existing customers than non-users. However, brand usage alone may not generate deeper psychological connections: without meaningful engagement or value congruence, usage cues may remain superficial (Torelli, Monga, & Kaikati, 2012). Whether brand usage fosters ownership in environmental CSR contexts thus remains an open question.

H4: Brand usage positively influences psychological ownership of a brand's sustainability initiatives.

3. METHOD

This research employs a multi-study experimental design to examine how environmental CSR communication influences psychological ownership and brand loyalty, using two between-subjects online experiments conducted in Turkey; experimental methods are appropriate for isolating causal effects of communication cues in consumer research (Kline, 2023). Study 1 examined the effect of CSR message framing (neutral vs. emotionally positive). Participants ($N = 143$) were randomly assigned to a framing condition and exposed to a visual CSR communication describing a brand's reforestation initiative, with the underlying activity held constant across conditions; a manipulation check confirmed correct perception of the framing, and all observations were retained.

Study 2 employed a similar procedure with a separate sample, all exposed to a positively framed CSR message describing the same initiative. Brand usage was manipulated by describing the brand as one the participant currently uses or does not use, and a manipulation check confirmed successful perception of the usage scenario.

Psychological ownership and brand loyalty were each measured with three-item scales (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001); environmental sustainability beliefs used five items from the revised New Ecological Paradigm scale (Dunlap et al., 2000), and Study 2 also included a four-item sustainable consumption orientation scale. All items used seven-point Likert scales and demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency; items are available from the authors upon request. Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling with bootstrap standard errors (5,000 resamples) (Hayes, 2017), with CSR framing and brand usage coded as binary variables. Model fit was evaluated using the chi-square statistic, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR (Hu & Bentler,

1999); in Study 2, additional models with sustainability beliefs and consumption orientation as covariates assessed robustness.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

All multi-item constructs demonstrate satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .70. Across both studies, psychological ownership (BO) is positively correlated with brand loyalty (BL), providing preliminary support for the theorized association. Environmental sustainability beliefs (SB) are also positively related to psychological ownership in both studies, and in Study 2 sustainable consumption orientation (SC) is positively associated with both psychological ownership and brand loyalty (see Table 1).

4.2 Study 1

Manipulation Check and Model Fit. The majority of respondents correctly identified the message as neutral or emotionally positive as intended; all observations were retained, and the check was reported descriptively. The hypothesized structural model, estimated with bootstrap standard errors (5,000 resamples), demonstrated excellent fit, $\chi^2(3) = 2.59$, $p = .459$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.01, RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .027 (Table 2, Study 1 column).

Structural Model Results. CSR message framing did not significantly affect psychological ownership (BO ~ CSR framing), whereas environmental sustainability beliefs were positively related to it (BO ~ SB); the framing $\times$ SB interaction was not significant. Psychological ownership was positively associated with brand loyalty (BL ~ BO), and the direct effect of framing on loyalty (BL ~ CSR framing) was not significant; conclusions were unchanged when the interaction term was dropped or SB modeled solely as a control.

Indirect Effects and Summary. Consistent with the nonsignificant effect of framing on psychological ownership, the indirect effect of CSR framing on brand loyalty via psychological ownership was also nonsignificant, so ownership did not mediate this relationship in Study 1. Overall, Study 1 highlights the central role of psychological ownership in shaping brand loyalty and the importance of individual-level sustainability beliefs, while neither a direct nor indirect effect of CSR message framing emerged.

4.3 Study 2

Manipulation Check and Model Results. Participants assigned to the brand usage condition were more likely to indicate they had used the brand than those in the non-usage condition, confirming successful manipulation. A mediation model examined whether brand usage influences brand loyalty through psychological ownership; because the model was just-identified, interpretation focuses on the Study 2 column of Table 2. Brand usage did not significantly affect psychological ownership (BO ~ Brand usage); consistent with Study 1, psychological ownership was positively associated with brand loyalty (BL ~ BO), while the direct effect of brand usage on loyalty (BL ~ Brand usage) was not significant.

Indirect Effects and Robustness. The indirect effect of brand usage on brand loyalty via psychological ownership was not significant, so ownership did not mediate this relationship. Controlling for environmental sustainability beliefs and sustainable consumption orientation (Table 2, robustness column) left brand usage unrelated to psychological ownership, while ownership remained strongly associated with loyalty; sustainable consumption orientation was positively associated with both, and sustainability beliefs were positively related to ownership. The substantive pattern of results was unchanged.

Summary of Study 2 Findings. Study 2 reinforces the central role of psychological ownership in shaping brand loyalty and indicates that brand usage cues do not directly translate into ownership or loyalty. Together with Study 1, these findings emphasize consumers' internalized psychological connections over surface-level message or usage cues.

5. DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions. This research contributes in several ways. It refines CSR communication theory by showing that emotionally framed CSR messages and brand usage cues alone are insufficient to foster psychological ownership or brand loyalty, nuancing prevailing assumptions about the persuasive power of CSR tactics (Du et al., 2010; Nyilasy et al., 2014). It also extends psychological ownership theory into the environmental CSR domain, an area with limited empirical attention; across two studies, ownership consistently emerged as a strong predictor of loyalty, underscoring its role as the key mechanism through which consumers internalize sustainability efforts (Pierce et al., 2001; Peck & Shu, 2009; Kirk et al., 2018). Finally, sustainability orientations explained psychological ownership more strongly than message framing or usage cues, shifting attention from communication tactics to value alignment and advancing a more consumer-centered view of CSR effectiveness.

Managerial Implications. Psychological ownership emerged as a robust predictor of brand loyalty, whereas emotionally framed CSR messages and brand usage cues did not reliably enhance ownership, suggesting CSR effectiveness depends less on how initiatives are communicated and more on whether they resonate with consumers' values (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006). Managers should be cautious about relying solely on emotional CSR messaging — such messages may raise awareness but appear insufficient for fostering ownership — and should instead design engagement-oriented programs and target consumers with strong sustainability beliefs and

consumption orientations. Brand usage alone does not deepen CSR engagement; loyalty emerges when initiatives become personally meaningful rather than merely communicated.

Limitations and Future Research. The studies focused on a single environmental initiative (reforestation); future work could examine other domains, such as circular economy practices or carbon neutrality, and explore additional mechanisms such as moral identity or perceived sincerity. Future research could also incorporate behavioral or longitudinal data rather than self-reported loyalty measures, experimentally activate sustainability orientations, or examine cultural contexts that shape their influence. The sample size, while sufficient for medium-sized effects, may have limited power for smaller interaction effects; larger samples could further examine boundary conditions under which CSR framing or usage cues exert stronger effects.

TABLES

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (Study 1 and Study 2)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Panel A: Study 1						
(1) BO	3.79	0.92	1.000	0.626	0.428	–
(2) BL	3.58	0.87	0.626	1.000	0.337	–
(3) SB	4.33	0.71	0.428	0.337	1.000	–
Panel B: Study 2						
(1) BO	3.64	1.06	1.000	0.677	0.485	0.616
(2) BL	3.61	0.92	0.677	1.000	0.476	0.617
(3) SB	4.28	0.82	0.485	0.476	1.000	0.481
(4) SC	3.94	0.89	0.616	0.617	0.481	1.000

Notes. BO = Psychological ownership; BL = Brand loyalty; SB = Environmental sustainability beliefs; SC = Sustainable consumption orientation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceed .70 for all constructs.

Table 2 Structural Model Results Across Studies

Path	Study 1	Study 2	Study 2 (Robustness: +SB +SC)
BO ~ CSR framing	-0.04 (0.141)		
BO ~ SB	0.553 (0.107)***		
BO ~ CSR framing × SB	-0.047 (0.219)		
BL ~ BO	0.592 (0.066)***	0.59 (0.049)***	0.388 (0.062)***

BO ~ Brand usage		0.039 (0.15)	0.107 (0.116)
BL ~ Brand usage		-0.16 (0.098)	-0.12 (0.09)
BO ~ SB			0.319 (0.084)***
BO ~ SC			0.594 (0.077)***
BL ~ SB			0.14 (0.073)
BL ~ SC			0.288 (0.081)***

Notes. BO = Psychological ownership; BL = Brand loyalty; SB = Environmental sustainability beliefs; SC = Sustainable consumption orientation. Unstandardized coefficients are reported with standard errors in parentheses. ***, **, and * denote significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

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**SEEKING STABILITY OR EMBRACING CHANGE? THE IMPACT OF
RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY ON NEW PRODUCT ADOPTION**

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Keywords: Residential Mobility, New Product Adoption, Holistic Thinking, Product Innovativeness, Mobility Autonomy

Description: This research examines how residential mobility influences new product adoption through the cognitive mechanism of holistic thinking, and identifies critical boundary conditions related to product innovativeness and mobility autonomy.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Residential mobility—the frequency of changing one's primary residence—has become a defining characteristic of modern global society, yet its influence on consumer innovation adoption remains theoretically contested. While some perspectives suggest

that the anxiety accompanying relocation drives consumers toward familiarity-seeking, others propose that navigating geographic transitions fosters a change-seeking mindset. This research addresses the fundamental question: Does residential mobility increase or decrease new product adoption, and through what mechanisms? We propose that the social restructuring inherent in residential mobility cultivates holistic thinking—an orientation toward context and relationships—which facilitates analogical reasoning that enables consumers to comprehend and embrace new products. However, we contend this effect is not uniform across all innovations or circumstances. Specifically, we investigate whether the mobility-adoption link is bounded by two critical factors: product innovativeness (incremental versus radical) and mobility autonomy (active versus passive). By integrating socio-ecological psychology with innovation diffusion theory, this research aims to resolve the theoretical tension in the literature and provide a nuanced understanding of when and why geographic flux shapes consumer receptivity to novelty.

Method And Data

This research employs a multi-method approach comprising one archival data analysis and three experimental studies. Study 1 utilizes secondary data from Sina Weibo during the launch of Xiaomi SU7, a radical electric vehicle innovation, collecting 14,731 original posts. After rigorous filtering (excluding reposts, duplicates, and verified corporate accounts), the final sample comprised 1,246 users (143 mobile, 1,103 stable), with residential mobility operationalized through IP location changes over 365 days. New product attitude was measured using SnowNLP sentiment analysis. Study 2

(N=120) employs an experimental design examining the mediating role of holistic thinking using the Analysis-Holism Scale (AHS) and purchase intention measures for a smart thermos innovation. Study 3 (N=110) utilizes a mixed-design experiment with a within-subjects product type manipulation (incremental vs. radical washing machine innovations) to test moderation. Study 4 (N=240) employs a 2 (Mobility: Mobile vs. Stable) $\times$ 2 (Autonomy: Active vs. Passive) between-subjects scenario-based experimental design to establish causality and examine autonomy as a boundary condition. All experimental studies recruit participants through Credamo, a professional data platform.

Summary of Findings

Across four studies, we find convergent evidence that residential mobility positively influences new product adoption. Study 1 demonstrates that mobile consumers exhibited significantly more positive sentiment toward the Xiaomi SU7 electric vehicle ($M=.75$) compared to stable consumers ($M=.67$; $t(1244)=2.63$, $p<.01$), establishing ecological validity. Study 2 confirms that residential mobility predicts purchase intention ($\beta=.43$, $p<.001$), with holistic thinking partially mediating this relationship (Indirect Effect=.041, 95% CI:[.008,.091]). Study 3 reveals that this mediation is contingent upon product innovativeness: the indirect effect is significant for incremental innovations (Indirect Effect=.30, 95% CI:[.129,.506]) but nonsignificant for radical innovations (Indirect Effect=-.08, 95% CI:[-.347,.199]). Study 4 establishes that mobility autonomy critically moderates the pathway; the indirect effect is significant only for active mobility (Indirect Effect=.13, 95% CI:[.031,.287]) and

dissipates for passive mobility (Indirect Effect=-.04, 95% CI:[-.154,.062]). These findings collectively demonstrate that residential mobility fosters holistic thinking, which facilitates incremental innovation adoption, yet this advantage is circumscribed by product radicalness and depends fundamentally on relocation voluntariness.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research offers three primary contributions to marketing scholarship and practice. First, we reconcile conflicting literature on residential mobility and consumer preference by identifying holistic thinking as the cognitive mechanism that resolves the theoretical tension between stability-seeking and novelty-seeking perspectives. We demonstrate that social restructuring inherent in mobility fosters a holistic mindset that facilitates new product comprehension through analogical transfer—a mechanism previously unexplored in this context. Second, we contribute to innovation adoption literature by delineating critical boundary conditions: the mobility-adoption link holds for incremental innovations where continuity with existing categories enables relational processing, yet breaks down for radical innovations where analogical transfer is obstructed. This refinement enhances the predictive precision of socio-ecological models in innovation diffusion. Third, we integrate mobility autonomy into the socio-ecological framework, demonstrating that voluntariness fundamentally alters downstream cognitive effects, thereby incorporating control theory into consumer behavior research. For practitioners, residential mobility (detectable through address changes or IP geolocation) offers a scalable segmentation variable for identifying early adopters of incremental innovations in consumer electronics and automotive sectors.

For policymakers, understanding that forced mobility stifles cognitive flexibility underscores the importance of supporting autonomy during relocation to maintain economic dynamism.

SELLING WITHOUT A HUMAN? HOW AI HOSTS CAPTURE ATTENTION IN LIVESTREAM COMMERCE

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Livestream Commerce; AI Hosts; Consumer Engagement; Cognitive Absorption

Description: This study develops and tests an interactional competence perspective to explain consumer engagement with AI hosts across different livestream commerce configurations.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming livestream commerce (LSC), enabling AI-powered hosts to undertake many of the communication, recommendation, and persuasion functions traditionally performed by human streamers (Chang et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025). As organisations increasingly adopt AI hosts to improve scalability, operational efficiency, and customer engagement, understanding how consumers respond to different forms of AI-mediated interaction has become an increasingly important marketing research priority (Ki et al., 2024; Gong & Sun, 2026). Existing literature has primarily adopted two perspectives. The first compares AI and human streamers, producing inconsistent findings regarding their relative effectiveness in influencing consumer engagement and purchase behaviour (Gao et al., 2025;

Yuan et al., 2025). The second focuses on anthropomorphism, suggesting that human-like appearance and behaviour enhance trust, social presence, emotional connection, and purchase intentions (Kim & Park, 2024; Sun & Tang, 2024; Barari et al., 2025). However, emerging evidence indicates that anthropomorphic realism alone cannot consistently explain consumer responses, particularly when AI behaviour fails to satisfy the expectations created by highly human-like appearances, resulting in reduced trust and engagement (Hu & Ma, 2023; Xie & Desouza, 2025).

More recent research argues that consumers increasingly evaluate AI hosts according to the quality of interaction they provide, including responsiveness, adaptability, conversational consistency, and credibility rather than appearance alone (Khoi & Le, 2024; Liu et al., 2025; Qin & Liu, 2025; Moghddam et al., 2025). Despite these developments, two important theoretical gaps remain. First, existing studies generally conceptualise AI hosts as a homogeneous category despite substantial variation in their levels of human involvement and virtual representation. Second, limited theoretical attention has been devoted to explaining how multiple interactional attributes jointly shape consumer engagement across different AI-host configurations. Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (SOR) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this study advances interactional competence as a unifying theoretical perspective, conceptualising it as an AI host's ability to respond effectively, adapt dynamically, establish credibility, and sustain meaningful real-time interactions that foster consumer engagement. Accordingly, this research examines AI-augmented, AI-humanistic, and AI-animated hosts and addresses three research questions: (RQ1) How do interactivity, homogeneity, reputation, and anthropomorphism influence cognitive absorption and retention intention? (RQ2) Does cognitive absorption mediate these relationships? (RQ3) How do these relationships differ across AI-host configurations? By addressing these questions, the study extends research on AI-enabled marketing, livestream commerce, and technology-mediated

consumer behaviour beyond the dominant anthropomorphism perspective (Liu et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025; Moghddam & Mortimer, 2026).

Method and Data

This study employed a scenario-based comparative research design to investigate consumer engagement across three distinct AI-host configurations. Scenario-based methods are increasingly recommended in AI-enabled commerce research because they balance experimental control with ecological validity while allowing researchers to examine realistic consumer decision-making contexts (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Hughes & Huby, 2004). Participants were first classified according to the AI-host format with which they possessed the greatest prior livestream shopping experience, ensuring that respondents evaluated familiar interaction environments rather than hypothetical situations. Three carefully developed shopping scenarios represented AI-augmented hosts (human livestreamers supported by AI technologies), AI-humanistic hosts (highly human-like virtual presenters), and AI-animated hosts (stylised virtual characters).

Survey data were collected from Chinese consumers with previous livestream shopping experience, reflecting China's position as the world's largest and most mature livestream commerce market. After data cleaning and screening for completeness and response quality, 906 valid questionnaires were retained for analysis and allocated across the three AI-host configurations. All constructs were measured using previously validated multi-item scales, including interactivity (Joo & Yang, 2023), anthropomorphism (Kim & Park, 2024), homogeneity and reputation (Ladhari et al., 2020), cognitive absorption (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000), and retention intention (Moghddam & Mortimer, 2026). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to estimate the conceptual model because of its suitability for prediction-oriented research and complex theoretical

models involving multiple latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021; Sarstedt et al., 2022). Separate structural models were estimated for each AI-host configuration, followed by exploratory multi-group analyses to compare the relative importance of interactional competence dimensions across AI-host types and identify configuration-specific engagement mechanisms.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that interactional competence provides a substantially stronger explanation of consumer engagement than anthropomorphic appearance across all AI-host configurations. Interactivity consistently emerged as the strongest predictor of both cognitive absorption and retention intention, indicating that consumers place greater value on AI hosts capable of providing responsive, adaptive, and meaningful real-time interactions than on visually human-like designs. These findings reinforce recent research highlighting the central role of interactive experiences in creating engaging livestream commerce environments (Khoi & Le, 2024; Liu et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025). Reputation also exerted consistently positive effects on consumer engagement, particularly within AI-humanistic environments, where perceptions of credibility became increasingly important as AI hosts more closely resembled human presenters (Qin & Liu, 2025).

In contrast, anthropomorphism produced relatively weak and inconsistent effects across the three configurations and failed to significantly influence consumers' retention intentions. These results challenge the dominant assumption that increasing human likeness necessarily enhances AI effectiveness, suggesting instead that consumers evaluate AI hosts primarily according to the quality of their interactions rather than their visual realism (Barari et al., 2025; Sun & Tang, 2024). Homogeneity demonstrated configuration-specific effects, positively influencing engagement within AI-augmented and AI-animated environments while remaining insignificant among AI-humanistic hosts. Cognitive absorption consistently predicted retention

intention, supporting prior engagement research (Balakrishnan & Dwivedi, 2021; Moghddam et al., 2025), although its mediating effects varied across configurations. Overall, the findings support a configurational understanding of AI-host effectiveness, demonstrating that different AI-host types operate through distinct engagement mechanisms rather than representing a single homogeneous technological category.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several important theoretical and practical contributions to the growing literature on AI-enabled commerce and livestream marketing. First, it challenges the prevailing emphasis on anthropomorphism by demonstrating that interactional competence provides a more comprehensive and robust explanation of consumer engagement than human-like appearance alone. Rather than evaluating AI hosts primarily according to visual realism, consumers appear to prioritise responsiveness, adaptability, credibility, and meaningful interaction quality, thereby extending emerging research on AI-enabled engagement and virtual streamers (Xu et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2025).

Second, the study introduces interactional competence as an overarching theoretical perspective that integrates previously fragmented constructs—including interactivity, anthropomorphism, reputation, and homogeneity—within the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This integrated perspective provides a stronger theoretical explanation of consumer engagement and extends recent developments in livestream commerce and AI marketing research (Ki et al., 2024; Moghddam & Mortimer, 2026). Third, the research develops and empirically validates a novel typology comprising AI-augmented, AI-humanistic, and AI-animated hosts. By moving beyond the dominant binary comparison between AI and human streamers, this configurational perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of how different AI-host designs influence consumer responses (Gao et

al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2025). Finally, the findings provide actionable managerial implications by demonstrating that organisations should prioritise investments in interaction quality, responsiveness, and credibility rather than increasingly sophisticated anthropomorphic design. As AI becomes more deeply embedded within customer-facing environments, these findings offer evidence-based guidance for designing AI hosts capable of maximising consumer engagement, fostering long-term retention, and creating sustainable competitive advantage (Moghddam & Mortimer, 2026).

References are available upon request.

SERVICE ROBOTS WILL MAKE YOU WAIT: HOW SERVICE ROBOTS INFLUENCE INTERTEMPORAL CHOICE

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Key Words: Social Jetlag; Preference for AI; Social Anxiety; Lay Belief; Social Evaluation

This research demonstrates that service robot can increase consumers' intertemporal choice
by future temporal focus.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Previous studies have investigated the consumers' acceptance of service robots and their
interaction experiences, but interactions with service robots influence subsequent decisions that
are unrelated to the robots (i.e., spillover effects), such as intertemporal choice, remains largely

unknown. To address this gap, we conducted one pilot study and five studies to examine the relationship between service robot and intertemporal choice. Our findings indicate that service robot can increase consumers' intertemporal choice, with future temporal focus mediating this effect. Furthermore, this effect emerges only under a gain-framed condition, but not a loss-framed condition. These findings enrich the service robot literature and advance understanding of how different AI automated agents shape intertemporal choice while providing valuable insights for marketers.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Service robots are increasingly being adopted across a wide range of service settings, including restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and healthcare environments. Existing research has primarily focused on consumers' acceptance of service robots, the factors influencing human-robot interactions, and the consequences of these interactions for customer experiences and service outcomes. While prior studies have demonstrated that service robots can influence consumers' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors during service encounters, relatively little is known about whether interactions with service robots generate spillover effects on subsequent decisions that are unrelated to the service encounter itself. This research examines whether service robots influence intertemporal choice, defined as decisions involving trade-offs between immediate and delayed outcomes. Specifically, we investigate whether interacting with a service robot, compared with a human service provider, increases consumers' preference for larger delayed rewards. Furthermore, we propose that future temporal focus serves as the underlying

psychological mechanism and examine whether decision framing (gain versus loss) moderates this effect. By addressing these questions, this research seeks to advance understanding of how service robots shape consumer decision making beyond the immediate service context.

METHOD AND DATA

A pretest examined the cognitive association between service robots and the future. Study 1 comprised four sub-studies. Study 1a demonstrated that, compared with a human server, a service robot increased individuals' preference for larger but delayed rewards. Study 1b replicated this effect using a product-based rather than monetary intertemporal choice task. Study 1c employed the titration procedure as an alternative measure of intertemporal choice. Study 1d used video-based stimuli and an incentive-compatible behavioral experiment involving real rewards. Study 2 tested the mediating role of future temporal focus. Finally, Study 3 employed a different robot image and examined the moderating role of decision framing.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Across one pretest and six studies, we demonstrate that service robots increase consumers' patience in intertemporal choice. This effect is driven by enhanced future temporal focus. We further ruled out risk perception, trust, and perceived rationality as alternative explanations. Furthermore, decision framing moderates this process, such that the effect occurs under gain-framing conditions but not under loss-framing conditions.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

First, by examining consumers' downstream spillover behaviors following exposure to service robots, this research further advances the service robot literature. In doing so, we extend spillover effects from specific post-interaction behaviors to more fundamental, time-related decision orientations, offering a new perspective on how service robots shape consumer decision making. Second, this research contributes to the literature on AI automated agents. Whereas prior work shows that AI agents such as chatbots can increase consumers' preference for immediacy, we identify an embodied AI agent—service robots—that reduces preferences for immediate outcomes. Building on the distinction that AI agents differ in their mode of presence and operating environments (Gelbrich et al., 2025), we argue that embodiment makes social categorization cues more diagnostic, leading consumers to classify service robots as outgroup members, thereby increasing psychological distance, heightening future temporal focus, and ultimately enhancing patience for delayed options. In contrast, chatbots rely on disembodied, symbolic online interactions, which weakens social categorization and promotes tool-like, efficiency-oriented construals that favor rapid processing (Li et al., 2025). Together, these findings discuss seemingly divergent effects and clarify when and why different AI automated agents shape intertemporal choice in opposite directions. Finally, this research also contributes to understanding how decision framing influences intertemporal choice.

SUSTAINABLE PARADOX: NAVIGATING BELIEFS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING IN PURSUIT OF NEW DESIRES IN THE LUXURY MARKET

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Keywords: Global warming, New luxury, Intrinsic values

Description: This study investigates how fashion consumers reconcile desires for sustainable luxury with intrinsic luxury values.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The United Nations 2030 resolution states that global warming and climate action should be top priorities since Arctic Sea ice is receding, and extreme weather events are intensifying due to human activities (General Assembly, 2015). As global warming interferes with ecosystems, societies, and economies worldwide, luxury retailers face mounting pressure from shoppers to embrace sustainability and accept greater social responsibilities beyond profit-seeking (e.g., Chandy *et al.*, 2021; Hennigs *et al.*, 2013). In this sense, sustainability focuses on three pillars: environmental integrity, social equity, and economic prosperity (Elliott, 2005). However, some aspects of luxury selling and distribution are still incompatible with these pillars.

Therefore, we investigate the following research questions:

1. How do beliefs about the effects of global warming and organic fashion motivations shape hedonic and functional luxury values?
2. In what ways do hedonic and functional luxury values influence consumer adoption of new luxury practices on digital platforms such as shopping from flash sales, online luxury rentals, and secondhand websites?

By addressing these issues, we aim to contribute to the broader field of luxury retailing, which is concerned with the pursuit of exclusive apparel—clothing, leather goods, jewelry, and accessories—from esteemed fashion designers and stores.

Method and Data

An online survey was developed by adapting items from fashion and retail management literature. The independent variables were measured along a seven-point Likert scale (strong-disagree–strongly agree). *New Luxury Practices*, however, were measured with single-item indicators on

five-point scales (never–always). Respondents reported how often they shopped for luxury fashion products from rental websites (e.g., BagBorrowSteal), consignment or secondhand websites (e.g., FashionPhile), and online flash sales (e.g., Gilt.com).

Fashion consumers ($n = 410$) were recruited through an online panel from SurveyMonkey audience in the US. We sent respondents an email invitation, and they answered pre-screening questions about their fashion purchases, income, and perceptions of luxury. The screening criteria stipulated that they must have purchased at least one fashion product per month and earned more than USD 75,000 annually. The researchers included a reverse-coded statement to perform an additional layer of screening and improve the validity of the dataset: “I am not interested in luxury goods” (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). This statement allowed us to recruit higher-income fashion consumers with a stronger appreciation for luxury. If respondents answered “3” or greater on a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree–strongly agree), they were screened out and not allowed to complete the online survey.

Summary of Findings

An SEM path analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses. The regression results supported H1, meaning that beliefs about the effects of global warming were positively related to hedonic luxury values ($\beta = .16^{**}$). Moreover, the results supported H2, showing that beliefs about the effects of global warming were positively related to functional luxury values ($\beta = .16^{**}$). H3 was also supported, as organic fashion motivations were positively associated with hedonic luxury values ($\beta = .15^{**}$), while H4 was supported in the negative direction, indicating a significant inverse relationship between organic fashion motivations and functional values ($\beta = -.14^{**}$). Regarding the influence of intrinsic luxury values on new luxury practices, hedonic values were positively related to shopping via flash sales (H5a: $\beta = .27^{***}$), rental websites (H5b: $\beta = .18^{***}$), and

secondhand websites (H5c: $\beta = .23^{***}$), supporting H5 in full. On the other hand, functional values showed mixed effects. While there was no significant relationship with shopping from online flash sales (H6a: $\beta = -.07$, n.s.), functional values were negatively related to the frequency of shopping through rental websites (H6b: $\beta = -.27^{***}$) and secondhand websites (H6c: $\beta = -.26^{***}$), supporting H6b and H6c.

Key Contributions

While social scientists have analyzed relationships between the effects of global warming, capitalism, and consumer aspirations (e.g., Dietz *et al.*, 2020; Thøgersen, 2021), there is a lack of substantiative evidence for the impacts of global warming (GW) beliefs on luxury consumption. This study addressed this gap by examining how GW beliefs underscore intrinsic luxury values and new luxury practices. We found a significant association between global warming beliefs and functional luxury values which reinforce the notion that environmental issues can create an attractive state for product excellence. Functional luxury values are significantly and negatively associated with most new luxury practices except for online flash sales, which may reflect consumer skepticism towards preloved luxury goods. This finding suggests that global warming beliefs seem to increase hedonic luxury values. The results for organic fashion motivations tell a slightly different story, indicating a positive relationship with hedonic luxury values and negative relationship with functional luxury values.

The managerial implication is that luxury brands can cultivate emotional experiences that signal a deep appreciation for sustainable materials and escapism from throwaway culture. For example, Prada produced a relevant streaming film for its Re-Nylon campaign that triggers hedonic values through the sights and sounds of upcycling.

“References are available upon request.”

SWEAT OUT OF RHYTHM, SPEND WITHOUT RESTRAINT: HOW IRREGULAR EXERCISE FUELS INDULGENT CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Irregular Exercise; Indulgent Consumption; Perceived Deservedness; Moral Licensing; Goal Specificity

Description: This research demonstrates that irregular exercise increases consumers' post-exercise indulgent consumption by heightening perceived deservedness, an effect that is attenuated when consumers have specific exercise goals.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers often struggle to maintain regular exercise routines because of work demands, fragmented schedules, and competing responsibilities. As a result, exercise frequently occurs in irregular and episodic patterns. Although exercise is generally viewed as a health-promoting behavior, prior research has shown that it does not always lead to healthier subsequent consumption and may, under certain conditions, increase indulgent eating. However, existing research has largely focused on whether, how much, or how intensely consumers exercise, while paying limited attention to the temporal structure of exercise.

This research examines whether irregular exercise, compared with regular exercise, increases consumers' post-exercise indulgent consumption. It further investigates the psychological mechanism underlying this effect by asking whether irregular exercise is more likely to be perceived as an extra and completed positive investment, thereby increasing consumers' perceived deservedness and licensing subsequent indulgence. Finally, this research examines goal specificity as a boundary condition, proposing that clear and specific exercise goals embed individual exercise episodes within an ongoing goal-pursuit process and therefore weaken the indulgent consequences of irregular exercise.

Method and Data

We conducted one pretest and five studies to examine the effect of exercise regularity on post-exercise indulgent consumption. The pretest ($N = 70$) identified food items that were perceived as indulgent. Study 1 ($N = 198$) employed a correlational design and measured participants' actual exercise schedule regularity and subsequent indulgent consumption intentions. Studies 2a and 2b ($N = 300$ each) used preregistered between-subjects experiments to manipulate exercise regularity through external situational constraints and personal exercise preferences, respectively, thereby establishing the robustness and causal validity of the effect.

Study 3 ($N = 300$) tested perceived deservedness as the underlying psychological mechanism and examined perceived effort as an alternative explanation using parallel mediation analysis. Study 4 ($N = 340$) employed a 2 (exercise regularity: regular vs. irregular) $\times 2$ (goal specificity: high vs. low) between-subjects design to test the proposed boundary condition and moderated mediation process. Across the five studies ($N = 1438$), participants were recruited through Credamo, and the data were analyzed using regression, analysis of variance, and PROCESS mediation and moderated mediation models.

Summary of Findings

Across five studies, the results consistently demonstrate that irregular exercise increases consumers' post-exercise indulgent consumption compared with regular exercise. This effect emerged both when exercise patterns reflected consumers' actual schedules and when exercise

regularity was experimentally manipulated through external constraints or personal preferences.

Thus, the effect is not limited to a particular source of exercise irregularity.

The findings further reveal that perceived deservedness explains this effect. Consumers are more likely to construe irregular exercise as an extra, discrete, and completed positive investment rather than as part of an ongoing routine. This interpretation heightens the belief that they deserve a reward, which subsequently increases their willingness to engage in indulgent consumption. In contrast, perceived effort did not account for the effect, suggesting that indulgence is driven by psychological entitlement rather than physical exertion.

Finally, goal specificity moderates the effect. When exercise goals are vague, irregular exercise significantly increases perceived deservedness and indulgent consumption. However, when consumers have clear and specific exercise goals, the difference between irregular and regular exercise is attenuated because each exercise episode is viewed as part of an ongoing goal-pursuit process.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions. First, it extends the literature on exercise and consumption by shifting attention from conventional dimensions such as exercise frequency, duration, and intensity to the temporal structure of exercise. By identifying irregular exercise as a

prevalent but overlooked behavioral pattern, the research shows that even health-promoting behavior can generate unintended indulgent consumption consequences when it occurs episodically.

Second, this research advances moral licensing theory by demonstrating that the licensing effect of exercise depends on how the behavior is psychologically construed. Irregular exercise is more likely to be perceived as an extra, discrete, and completed positive investment, which heightens perceived deservedness and relaxes subsequent self-restraint. This mechanism differs from explanations based on physical effort or resource depletion.

Third, the research identifies goal specificity as an important boundary condition. Specific goals embed individual exercise episodes within an ongoing goal-pursuit process, thereby reducing perceived completion and weakening deservedness-based licensing. Practically, these findings suggest that fitness platforms, policymakers, and consumers can reduce post-exercise indulgence by using concrete short-term goals, progress tracking, and process-oriented feedback to frame irregular workouts as part of a continuous journey.

**TALKING TO STREAMERS: HOW STREAMERS' COMMUNICATION
STYLES INFLUENCE CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS IN
LIVESTREAMING E-COMMERCE**

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Keywords: livestreaming e-commerce, communication styles, perceived value,
purchase intention

Description: This research aims to investigate whether the effects of streamer communication styles (task-oriented vs. social-oriented) on consumer purchase intention vary depending on streamer gender and product type, and identify the underlying mechanisms from a perceived value perspective.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In the livestreaming e-commerce, streamers serve as a critical bridge connecting consumers and products, playing a pivotal role in facilitating product sales and shaping consumer purchase decisions. Given that streamers primarily rely on verbal communication to present products and persuade consumers, the communication style they adopt becomes a crucial factor influencing sales outcomes. This work addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Do communication styles, streamer gender, and product type jointly produce matching effects that shape consumer purchase intention?

RQ2: What are the value-based psychological mechanisms through which streamers' communication styles influence consumer purchase intention?

Method and Data

This paper relied on three experiments to empirically validate the research framework. Study 1 (N=310) focused on streamer gender as a boundary condition, exploring its interactive effect with communication styles on purchase intention. Study 2 (N=316) shifted the focus to product characteristics, investigating how product type shapes the effectiveness of different communication styles. Study 3 (N=450) unpacked the underlying mechanisms by testing utilitarian and hedonic value as mediators, while also examining whether streamer gender and product type moderate these indirect pathways.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that task-oriented communication exerts a stronger influence on consumer purchase intention when delivered by male streamers and when promoting search products, whereas social-oriented communication is more effective when delivered by female streamers and when promoting experience products. Furthermore, the results reveal distinct mediating pathways: task-oriented communication primarily influences consumer purchase intention through utilitarian value, while social-oriented communication mainly operates through hedonic value. These findings contribute to the livestreaming e-commerce literature by revealing the matching effects between communication styles, streamer gender, and product type, and by identifying the value-based mechanisms underlying the persuasion process.

Key Contributions

First, it develops a gender-contingent perspective to explain when streamers' communication styles are most effective in stimulating consumers' purchase intention. By theorizing streamer gender as a pivotal boundary condition, this study clarifies the conditions under which task-oriented versus social-oriented communication can better activate consumers' motivational responses, thereby enriching the conceptualization of communication effectiveness in livestreaming e-commerce. Second, this study explicates the underlying psychological mechanism through which streamers' communication styles shape consumers' purchase intention. By identifying distinct mediating pathways, it demonstrates that different communication styles exert their

effects through differentiated motivational processes rather than a single uniform route.

This mechanism-based explanation deepens theoretical understanding of how livestreaming communication translates into consumers' purchase intention.

THE COST OF CONSCIENCE: HOW LOW PRICES LICENSE THE CONSUMPTION OF UNETHICAL AI

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Keywords: Ethical Consumption, Pricing, Moral Licensing, Regulatory Focus, Artificial Intelligence

Description: This paper examines how price framing shapes consumers' responses to ethical disclosures about AI products by activating different psychological mechanisms that influence purchase intentions.

ABSTRACT

We propose that low prices license consumption of unethical AI products, whereas high prices increase ethical scrutiny. A 2×2 experiment showed that ethical concerns had little effect on purchase intent at low prices but substantially reduced intent at high prices. These findings extend theories of moral licensing and regulatory focus.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a popular add-on feature for consumer products, offering superior efficiency, personalization, and convenience compared to non-AI alternatives (Huang and Rust 2021). However, these technological improvements are accompanied by hidden

costs. Beneath the surface, AI development often involves exploitative labor practices for data labeling, significant energy and water use for model training, and extensive surveillance of personal data for algorithmic refinement (Morley et al. 2021).

Existing marketing literature indicates that such violations of corporate social responsibility can negatively impact consumers' purchase intent (Kitzmueeller and Shimshack 2012; Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher 2016). However, a clear attitude-behavior gap persists in this domain: consumers often report high levels of ethical concern yet continue to patronize firms with questionable records (Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell 2010; White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). Prior research has primarily attributed this gap to individual-level traits such as green consumption values (Haws, Winterich, and Naylor 2014), as well as product-level considerations such as category relevance (Luchs et al. 2010). What this literature has largely overlooked, however, is the role of pricing strategy as a contextual cue that shapes how consumers evaluate ethical implications.

We argue that a product's price tag serves not merely as an economic indicator but as a "moral switch" that can activate or suppress ethical scrutiny. Integrating Regulatory Focus Theory, Motivated Reasoning, and Moral Licensing, we propose that low prices dampen the negative influence of ethical concerns on purchase intent, while high prices amplify their impact.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Regulatory Focus Theory

Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins 1997) posits that consumers approach decisions in one of two motivational states: the "Promotion Focus" or the "Prevention Focus." When consumers encounter a product priced below the market reference point, they adopt a

promotion-focused mindset (Crowe and Higgins 1997) oriented toward the maximization of “hits” (positive outcomes). In this state, consumers become eager to secure the deal and therefore emphasize benefits over risks, which can lead them to overlook stated ethical concerns.

In contrast, when consumers see a product priced above the market reference point, they adopt a prevention-focused mindset (Crowe and Higgins 1997) oriented toward the minimization of “misses” (negative outcomes). In this state, individuals become more vigilant of risks and therefore highly sensitive to ethical violations.

The domain of AI provides a particularly compelling context for this investigation. AI tools are often framed as categorically superior to non-AI alternatives, creating a strong baseline cue for promotion-focus priming. Additionally, unlike physical goods where defects are visible (e.g., poor stitching on clothing), the ethical externalities of AI are largely abstract, remote, and opaque (Martin and Murphy 2017). We propose that this combination of high perceived utility and concealed costs makes consumers more likely to overlook ethical concerns.

Motivated Reasoning

Motivated Reasoning (Kunda 1990) suggests that consumers selectively process information to justify desired conclusions. When a consumer sees a low-priced product but then encounters information indicating it is unethical, they do not simply abandon their values. Instead, they engage in a specific form of motivated reasoning known as Strategic Ignorance to secure the deal while minimizing cognitive dissonance. They may skim over ethical risk disclosures, tell themselves that “all companies do this,” or reason that “it’s not my responsibility to police corporate supply chains.”

On the other hand, when a consumer sees a high-priced product and then learns it is unethical, they follow a different pathway. Without the pull of a bargain, they are no longer

motivated to suppress negative information. Instead, they may become motivated to find reasons to reject the expensive item. We propose that this results in the “Scrutiny Effect,” which makes consumers highly sensitive to ethical violations.

Moral Licensing

Moral Licensing (Merritt, Effron, and Monin 2010) explains how consumers reconcile ethical compromise with a positive moral self-image. Traditionally, this theory presents a temporal sequence: consumers complete a good deed and subsequently feel licensed to perform a bad deed. The initial act fills a “moral bank account,” providing credits that can be spent later. We propose an extension of this theory to “Thrift-Driven Moral Licensing”: when the purchase decision itself is framed as an act of thrift, it produces the moral credit concurrently with the transgression. The consumer does not need a prior good deed, as the “good deed” is the prudent financial decision happening right now.

This idea relies on a deeper insight: thrift is not merely a utilitarian preference but a deeply encoded moral virtue. Prior research has found that thrift is a distinct virtue associated with traits like gratitude, generosity, and prudence (Ratchford, Schnitker, and Reppas 2021). In consumer behavior, this virtue manifests as “Smart Shopper Feelings.” Consumers perceive themselves as expert navigators of the marketplace, capable of extracting value where others fail.

When purchasing low-priced AI products with ethical concerns, this experience of virtue (I am smart/prudent) competes with the experience of vice (this product is unethical). Because the “Smart Shopper Feelings” are immediate, personal, and concrete while the ethical concerns remain distant, impersonal, and abstract, the virtue often overrides the vice. The consumer can then balance their moral equation and justify the transaction: “I am being responsible with my money, so I can be slightly irresponsible with the product’s ethics.”

In contrast, when purchasing high-priced AI products that have ethical concerns, this moral licensing mechanism breaks down. Paying a premium generates no virtue signal and may even feel wasteful or irresponsible. Without the moral credit from thrift, ethical violations stand alone as pure vice with no redemptive element, resulting in maximum moral scrutiny.

HYPOTHESES

These three theoretical perspectives converge to explain the central phenomenon we investigate, leading us to three hypotheses that test how price framing shapes consumers' responses to ethical risk disclosures in AI products.

H1 (The Moral Licensing Effect): In the presence of disclosed ethical risks, a low price will license consumption, resulting in higher purchase intent compared to a high price. This will represent a reversal of the standard price-quality signal.

H2 (Strategic Ignorance): In the Low Price condition, participants will engage in motivated suppression of ethical concerns. This will be evidenced by (a) purchase intent failing to decrease significantly from baseline despite ethical risk disclosures and (b) self-reported ethical concern failing to increase significantly despite explicit risk warnings.

H3 (The Scrutiny Effect): In the High Price condition, participants will subject the product to strict moral scrutiny. This will be evidenced by purchase intent decreasing significantly from baseline upon the introduction of ethical risks.

METHODS

Participants and Design

We recruited 189 adults via Prolific ($N = 189$; 122 male, 62 female, 5 other). The study employed a 2 (Price: Low vs. High) $\times$ 4 (Ethical Concern: Baseline, Labor, Environmental, Data Security) between-subjects experimental design. Preliminary analysis indicated that the three ethical concern conditions produced very similar effects. Therefore, we collapsed the design into a 2 (Price) $\times$ 2 (Concern: Baseline vs. Concern) factorial for the final analysis.

Procedure

Participants completed an anonymous online survey. After providing informed consent and demographic information, participants evaluated a marketing flyer for “Lumen Assistant,” a hypothetical AI productivity tool designed to appear commercially realistic.

Price Manipulation: We manipulated the product price relative to a stated market price of \$19.99/month. In the Low Price condition, the product was offered at \$9.99/month. In the High Price condition, the product was offered at \$29.99/month.

Concern Manipulation: The product description varied by condition. In the Baseline condition, participants saw a standard description highlighting productivity features. In the Concern conditions, we added text disclosing one of three ethical risks: labor exploitation (overseas contractors paid below living wages), environmental harm (energy-intensive data centers), or data privacy risks (continuous collection of user data).

Measures

Purchase Intent: We measured purchase intent using two items on a 7-point Likert scale (Spears and Singh 2004): “How likely would you be to choose this product over similar alternatives?” and “How likely would you be to recommend this product to friends and/or family?”

Overall Attitude: We assessed overall product attitude using a four-item, 7-point semantic differential scale (Spears and Singh 2004) with anchors: very unappealing/appealing, very bad/good, very unpleasant/pleasant, and very unfavorable/favorable.

Explicit Ethical Concern: To test for strategic ignorance (H3), we asked all participants to rate their concern regarding ethical issues with the product on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., “I am concerned about how workers involved in creating this product may have been treated”).

Analytic Approach

To account for potential demographic influences on technology adoption and ethical sensitivity, we conducted 2 (Price) $\times$ 2 (Concern) Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA) on the primary outcomes, including Age and Gender as covariates. We examined simple main effects to decompose significant interactions.

RESULTS

Purchase Intent

An ANCOVA on Purchase Intent revealed a significant crossover interaction between Price and Ethical Concern ($F(1, 179) = 7.55, p = .007, \eta^2 = .040$). Among the covariates, Gender was a significant predictor ($F(1, 179) = 11.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .059$), while Age was not ($p = .14$). We decomposed the interaction to test the specific hypotheses.

H1 (The Moral Licensing Effect): Consistent with H1, ethical disclosures reversed the standard price effect. Participants in the Low Price/Concern condition reported marginally higher purchase intent ($M = 5.51$) than those in the High Price/Concern condition ($M = 5.08$), $t(142) = -1.77, p = .080, d = -0.29$.

H2 (Strategic Ignorance): Consistent with H2, ethical disclosures failed to reduce purchase intent in the Low Price condition. In fact, purchase intent was marginally higher in the Low Price/Concern condition ($M = 5.51$) than in the Low Price/Baseline condition ($M = 4.82$), $t(28.4) = -1.81, p = .081, d = 0.50$. Likewise, ethical disclosures did not significantly influence reported ethical concern between conditions ($ps = .118-.394$).

H3 (The Scrutiny Effect): Consistent with H3, ethical disclosures significantly reduced purchase intent in the High Price Condition. Participants in the High Price/Concern condition reported lower purchase intent ($M = 5.08$) than those in the High Price/Baseline condition ($M = 6.15$), $t(43) = 3.26, p = .002, d = 0.97$.

Overall Attitude

The ANCOVA on Overall Attitude similarly revealed a significant Price $\times$ Concern interaction ($F(1, 179) = 11.69, p < .001, \eta^2 = .061$). Neither Age nor Gender were significant covariates ($p > .15$). In the Baseline condition, High Price led to more positive attitudes ($M = 5.65$) than Low Price ($M = 4.62$), $t(43) = 2.40, p = .021$, reflecting the standard price-quality heuristic. However, this pattern reversed in the Concern condition: High Price led to significantly less positive attitudes ($M = 4.89$) than Low Price ($M = 5.37$), $t(142) = -2.01, p = .046$.

DISCUSSION

Integrating the Theoretical Framework

The findings support our proposed framework by demonstrating that the same ethical disclosure produces different responses depending on price.

In the Low Price condition, ethical disclosures not only failed to decrease purchase intent but marginally increased it. Moreover, consumers did not report increased ethical concern despite

explicit risk warnings. These results suggest that consumers remained focused on securing the bargain rather than evaluating its ethical implications. We propose that this pattern reflects the combined influence of Promotion Focus, Strategic Ignorance, and Thrift-Driven Moral Licensing. Promotion Focus motivates consumers to prioritize gains, Strategic Ignorance enables them to discount conflicting ethical information, and the Thrift-Driven Moral Licensing provides a perceived justification for the purchase.

In contrast, the High Price condition produced the opposite pattern, with ethical disclosures significantly reducing purchase intent. We propose that this reflects the combined influence of Prevention Focus, which heightens sensitivity to risks, and the Scrutiny Effect, which leads consumers to evaluate ethical shortcomings more critically.

Together, these findings suggest that price functions as a moral switch, shaping whether ethical information is discounted or scrutinized and ultimately determining its influence on purchase decisions.

Market Dynamics

These findings have crucial implications for market dynamics. If low prices systematically disable moral vigilance, a harmful equilibrium emerges. Unethical firms cut corners to lower costs, lower costs allow for lower prices, and lower prices trigger thrift-driven licensing, motivating consumers to overlook the unethical practices that enabled those prices.

Conversely, if high prices result in heightened vigilance, ethical firms charging higher prices face *more* consumer scrutiny than their unethical, low-cost competitors. We call this the “Premium Ethics Paradox”: the more you charge to be ethical, the more your ethics are questioned.

Practical Implications

Since the market cannot self-correct these feedback loops, the responsibility falls to stakeholders. For policymakers, transparent disclosure is insufficient in low-price contexts because consumers selectively process ethical information. We suggest that policymakers move beyond disclosure to establish minimum standards for data labor and privacy that prevent firms from competing through unethical cost reductions.

For firms selling ethical AI products, marketing “Responsible AI” at a premium price presents a daunting challenge due to the Premium Ethics Paradox. To overcome this challenge, we suggest that these firms sell performance, security, or accuracy as the primary value proposition instead of ethics alone. If consumers believe that the premium price is justified by these functional gains, the ethical attribute becomes a “bonus” rather than a target for suspicion.

CONCLUSION

This research examines a central paradox: consumers express concern about AI ethics yet continue to purchase the cheapest options. Our findings offer an integrated framework that helps explain this disconnect within consumer behavior. Future research can further examine the mechanisms underlying these effects using moderated mediation and behavioral measures of ethical concern. As AI development accelerates, a deeper understanding of these psychological processes will be essential for designing interventions that encourage more ethical consumer decision-making.

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THE CUSTOMER-FUNDED EFFECT

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Keywords: customer-funded, incentive effectiveness, marketing communication

Description: Communicating an incentive as originating from customers' past behavior (e.g., store patronage, tax payments) makes customers more likely to engage with it, compared to presenting the incentive without explicit source attribution or as a firm's offering.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms distribute billions of incentives each year, yet most go unredeemed. In the United States alone, 176 billion coupons were distributed in 2021, roughly 1.5 per person per day, but fewer than one percent were redeemed. The gap between what firms invest in incentives and what customers do with them is one of the most persistent puzzles in marketing practice, and it has generated a substantial research literature. What remains unexamined is something firms decide every time they communicate an incentive: *how to describe where it comes from*.

Consider the range of choices a firm actually faces. A firm offering \$10 off a future visit can present that offer without any explanation of its origin, attribute it to the firm's generosity, or describe it as something originating from customers' past behavior. These three approaches are not equivalent in what they imply about the customer's relationship to the incentive, yet firms rarely treat the choice as consequential. The vast majority of incentives are presented without explicit source attribution or as a firm's offering. The question we raise is whether that default choice leaves value on the table.

We propose that it does. Specifically, we propose a *customer-funded effect*: communicating an incentive as originating from customers' past behavior (e.g., store patronage, tax payments) makes customers more likely to engage with it, compared to presenting the incentive without explicit source attribution or as a firm's offering. We refer to this communication approach as *customer-funded framing*.

Method and Data

Eight preregistered studies ($N > 150,000$), including two field experiments, tested the robustness, external validity, mechanism, and boundary conditions of the *customer-funded effect*.

Study 1 tested the customer-funded effect in a controlled laboratory setting. The study employed a one-factor (funding source of the incentive: customers vs. restaurant owners vs. not specified) between-subjects design. Study 2 (field experiment) replicated the customer-funded effect on flu shot uptake among college students. The study employed a 2 (funding source of the incentive: customers vs. not specified) $\times$ 2 (incentivized behavior: initiation vs. completion) mixed design. Stage 1 incentivized scheduling flu shot appointments; Stage 2 incentivized receiving flu shots. Study 3 (field experiment) further replicated the customer-funded effect by

comparing click-through rates of three versions of a Facebook advertisement that promoted *Well Wisconsin*, a real wellness incentive program. The study employed a one-factor (funding source of the incentive: customers vs. state government vs. not specified) between-subjects design. Study 4 measured feelings of being appreciated and psychological ownership of the incentive and tested the underlying mechanism of the customer-funded effect via mediation analyses. Studies 5-8 provided further evidence of the underlying mechanism of the effect by showing boundary conditions of the effect in controlled laboratory settings.

Summary of Findings

Across eight preregistered studies, including two field experiments, we find consistent evidence that communicating an incentive as originating from customers' past behavior (e.g., store patronage, or tax payments) increases customer engagement relative to presenting the same incentive without explicit source attribution or as a firm's offering. This effect holds regardless of whether the incentive is attributed to customers' collective behavior (e.g., contributions to the state tax revenue in Study 3) or to customers' personal behavior (e.g., individual purchases made at a home improvement store in Study 4).

Mediation analyses show that the customer-funded effect operates through two complementary mechanisms: feelings of being appreciated as well as enhanced psychological ownership of the incentive; the mediation through psychological ownership remains significant after controlling for feelings of being appreciated (Study 4).

The customer-funded effect arises when target customers have meaningful prior contributions to acknowledge (Study 5), customers' psychological ownership of the incentive has not been elevated by other means before the customer-funded framing is applied (Study 6), the

incentive requires customers to take the promoted action to obtain value (Study 7), and customers are satisfied with past exchanges with the incentive provider (Study 8).

Key Contributions

Firms distribute billions of incentives each year, yet a very consequential decision in this process — how to describe where the incentive comes from — has been largely overlooked. Communicating an incentive as customer-funded is not novel: it is the logic underlying cashback rewards, credit union dividends, and government benefit communications. What the present research establishes is that this logic can be extended to a broad range of incentives, at no cost, without deception, and with meaningful effects on customer engagement. While the effect is likely multiply determined, the present research identifies psychological ownership as a focal mechanism that parsimoniously accounts for when the effect emerges (targeting customers who have contributed to the firm's revenue) and when it attenuates (when baseline psychological ownership is already elevated). While early-stage startups may draw on debt or investor capital, the connection between customers' contributions and the firm's ability to offer incentives is almost always economically grounded for established businesses. For practitioners, the implication is immediate: how firms describe the source of an incentive is not merely a packaging decision, but a substantive driver of customer engagement.

References available upon request.

THE GIFT OF GIVING – NO ONE ELSE CAN MAKE IT FOR YOU?

HOW CONSUMERS DEVALUE AI-GENERATED GIFTS

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Keywords: Gift-giving, Artificial intelligence, Emotional value, Consumer behavior

Description: This paper investigates how consumers evaluate AI-generated gifts and demonstrates a consistent AI-devaluation across eight studies, tracing it to lower perceived effort and quality associated with AI-generated gifts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

Gift-giving is a central mechanism through which people build and maintain interpersonal relationships (Givi et al. 2022). The emotional value of a gift, its ability to convey affection, care, and relational closeness, depends heavily on the symbolic effort a giver invests (Weinberger, Baskin, and Gunasti 2025). With the rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI), givers can now create personalized gifts such as custom images, songs, or texts with minimal time investment. While this facilitates personalization, it may simultaneously undermine the perceived effort and authenticity that make gifts emotionally meaningful. Prior research has established consumer skepticism toward AI in functional and service contexts (Rai 2020), but AI-generated products as gifts remain unexplored. This paper addresses this gap by asking: How do consumers evaluate AI-generated gifts compared to self-made or store-bought gifts? What psychological mechanisms drive these evaluations? And under what conditions does the AI-devaluation bias persist or attenuate? Understanding these questions has direct implications for both gifting behavior theory and for marketers promoting AI-powered personalization tools in emotionally significant consumer contexts.

METHOD AND DATA

This research employs one exploratory study, six online experiments, and one field study. Study 1 ($N = 535$) explored participants' experiences with and openness to AI-generated gifts. Study 2 ($N = 250$) used a 2×2 between-subjects design (role: giver vs. receiver $\times$ gift type: self-made vs. AI-generated) to test a giver-receiver asymmetry using a recipe book scenario. Studies 3a ($N = 196$) and 3b ($N = 303$) extended findings to multiple product categories (photo book, birthday

card, artwork, socks, song) using within- and between-subjects designs. Studies 4a ($N = 199$) and 4b ($N = 215$) varied the degree of AI involvement (self-made, partially AI-generated, fully AI-generated, no information) using a photo book scenario. Study 5 ($N = 214$) experimentally held quality and time investment constant to isolate the pure effect of AI-generated gifts. Study 6 ($N = 39$) used a real-world field setting at a German university Christmas market where participants created AI-generated snow globes using Mistral's leChat system. All key dependent variables are the thoughtfulness, appreciation, offensiveness, and emotional value that the gift conveys, with perceived gift effort and quality as well as AI attitudes and AI Knowledge as controls.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Across all studies, a consistent AI-devaluation emerges: consumers rate AI-generated gifts as less emotionally valuable, less appreciative, less thoughtful, and more offensive than both self-made and store-bought gifts. This bias is traced to lower perceived effort and quality attributions for AI-generated gifts (Study 3a), even when objective quality and time investment are held constant (Study 5). The devaluation generalizes across gift types, gifting occasions, and both giver and receiver perspectives, though receivers judge AI-generated gifts slightly more favorably than givers do, indicating a weak giver-receiver asymmetry (Study 2). Partial AI involvement attenuates but does not eliminate the bias for some dimensions (Study 4a). Study 4b identifies symbolic value, visible effort, and personalization as the strongest predictors of emotional gift value. The field study (Study 6) reveals that AI gift creation occurs naturally in real-world settings, with the majority of participants (76.9%) intending to give their AI-generated snow globe as a gift, primarily to close family members and those who incorporated explicit personalization cues showing even higher gifting intention (88.9% vs. 73.3%).

STATEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper makes two key contributions. First, we contribute to the growing literature on consumer responses to AI by introducing the AI-devaluation bias to explain why consumers are skeptical toward AI-generated gifts. We connect established concepts like perceived effort and emotional value in the context of AI gift-giving. Second, we contribute to the gift-giving literature by being one of the first projects to examine AI gifts across multiple contexts, identifying both the general devaluation of AI gifts and boundary conditions, such as the different levels of AI usage in gift creation.

References are available upon request.

THE IMPACT OF TEMPORAL LOCATION ON PERSUASIVENESS

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Keywords: Word-of-mouth, Temporal location, Consumer expertise, Persuasiveness

Description: Based on controlled experiments and real-world data, we found that consumers are more likely to be persuaded by past-focused (vs. future-focused) reviews, and this effect is explained by perceived expertise.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the popularity of digital platforms, users have more chances to share their product experiences. Previous research figured out a number of motivators of sharing word of mouth (WOM), such as acquiring information, regulating emotions, managing impressions, etc. (Packard and Berger, 2017). Following this trend, consumers increasingly rely on reviews from

other users to inform their decisions (Forbes, 2024; Marketing Dive, 2023). Extensive research has examined factors that influence review persuasiveness, such as valence (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) and source trustworthiness (Hovland and Weiss, 1951).

However, there is one largely overlooked antecedent of review persuasiveness: temporal location. For example, to convey product quality, a consumer might say, “The product is great—I have been using it in the past” (past-focused) or “The product is great—I will continue to use it in the future” (future-focused). It remains unclear which of these temporal framings is more persuasive to consumers. This research aims to explore the following question: How does temporal location impact persuasiveness? To the best of our knowledge, few studies have directly investigated the role of temporal location in persuasiveness. This research aims to contribute to the literature on word-of-mouth (WOM), expertise, and temporal location.

Method And Data

We conducted six controlled experiments and provided real-world data to examine the proposed research question. Study 1 was designed to test the main hypotheses. Study 1 adopted a one-factor (temporal location: past-focused vs. future-focused) between-subject design. Participants in the past-focused (vs. future-focused) condition were instructed to read a few paragraphs of past-focused (vs. future-focused) product reviews of a Bluetooth speaker. Then, participants answered the dependent variable questions. In Study 2, we examined the main effects in another product category. In Studies 3A, 3B, and 3C, we replicated the findings across multiple product categories using different dependent variable measurements. In Study 4, we tested the main

effects in another setting and examined the proposed process. Specifically, the participants rated the perceived helpfulness and usefulness of a social media post. Next, as mediator measurement, participants indicated the perceived expertise of the reviewer (Rocklage et al., 2021).

In Studies 5A and 5B, we provided evidence from the real business world. We retrieved a publicly available data set that covers a series of features of Amazon reviews, including textual reviews and “helpful” votes. The dependent variable was measured by the number of “helpful” votes the reviews received.

Summary of Findings

The studies and the real-world data provided convergent supporting evidence for the hypotheses. In study 1, we found that participants were more likely to try and purchase the products if the reviews were past-focused. In Study 2, we found that the effects can be generalized to another product category. Across Studies 3A, 3B, and 3C, we tested the hypotheses across multiple product categories. Apart from replicating the patterns from the first 2 studies, we found that the past-focused (vs. future-focused) reviews were rated as more helpful and useful. In Study 4, we tested the proposed process, and the results revealed that the effects are mediated by perceived expertise. In Studies 5A and 5B, we conducted an analysis of textual reviews from Amazon. The results showed that past-focused reviews received more “helpful” votes than the future-focused reviews.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study will make several theoretical contributions. First, this research will contribute to word-of-mouth research by adding a new antecedent --- temporal location. Previous research identified several antecedents of persuasiveness, such as source credibility (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). But the role of temporal location is relatively understudied.

Second, this work contributes to research on past and future asymmetry. Prior literature examined how temporal location influences whether people share WOM (Weingarten and Berger, 2017), but the research on how consumers make inferences of temporal location is relatively scant.

Third, this work also contributes to consumer expertise research. Expertise is intensively studied in marketing literature (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Existing research explored how consumers make inferences about expertise (McGinnies and Ward, 1980), the impact of expertise on persuasiveness (McGinnies and Ward, 1980), information search behavior (Brucks, 1985), and hedonic experience (Rocklage et al., 2021). This research examined how consumers make inferences about expertise based on temporal location.

This research also has practical implications. For example, business managers may encourage consumers to focus on past experiences when sharing WOM, rather than on long-term commitments. Moreover, this research also has implications for individual consumers in decision-making.

References are available upon request.

THE PARADOX OF NOSTALGIA: WHY FOND MEMORIES CAN UNDERMINE DEMAND FOR EXTENDED SERVICE CONTRACT

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Keywords: nostalgia; extended service contracts; gratitude; optimism; post-purchase decision making

Description: This research examines how nostalgia influences consumers' intention to purchase extended service contracts by uncovering the serial mediating roles of gratitude and optimism and identifying sustainable product framing and shared-use context as key boundary conditions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Extended service contracts (ESCs), including extended warranties and service plans, constitute a major source of retailer profitability and play an important role in consumers' post-purchase

decisions. Existing research has primarily explained ESC purchase from economic and cognitive perspectives, emphasizing perceived risk, product characteristics, and pricing. In contrast, relatively little attention has been devoted to the role of emotions in shaping consumers' willingness to purchase post-purchase protection. This research addresses this gap by examining whether nostalgia influences consumers' intention to purchase ESCs. We propose that nostalgia evokes gratitude, which subsequently fosters optimism, reducing consumers' perceived vulnerability to future product failure and, consequently, lowering their intention to purchase ESCs. Furthermore, we investigate two boundary conditions that may attenuate this effect. Specifically, sustainable product framing may increase concerns about product durability, whereas shared-use contexts may enhance feelings of stewardship and responsibility toward others. Together, these factors help explain when nostalgia decreases, weakens, or no longer reduces consumers' willingness to purchase post-purchase protection.

Method and Data

Three empirical studies were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. Study 1 employed a two-condition between-subjects experiment (nostalgia vs. non-nostalgia; $N = 140$) to examine the effect of nostalgia on ESC purchase intention and willingness to pay, while testing the serial mediating roles of gratitude and optimism. Study 2 adopted a 2 (nostalgia: present vs. absent) $\times$ 2 (product framing: sustainable vs. non-sustainable) between-subjects design ($N = 280$) to investigate whether sustainable product framing moderates the effect of nostalgia on ESC purchase intention. Study 3 employed a 2 (nostalgia: present vs. absent) $\times$ 2 (shared-use context: present vs. absent) between-subjects design ($N = 280$) to examine whether shared-use context attenuates nostalgia's influence on ESC purchase intention. Across all studies, validated

manipulation checks and established multi-item measures were employed, and the proposed hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA and PROCESS mediation analyses.

Summary of Findings

The findings consistently supported the proposed framework across the three studies. Study 1 demonstrated that participants experiencing nostalgia reported lower ESC purchase intention and lower willingness to pay than those in the non-nostalgic condition. Serial mediation analyses further revealed that nostalgia reduced ESC demand through sequential increases in gratitude and optimism. Study 2 showed that sustainable product framing significantly attenuated nostalgia's negative effect on ESC purchase intention, suggesting that sustainability cues increase consumers' concern for product durability and long-term maintenance. Study 3 further demonstrated that shared-use context weakened the negative influence of nostalgia. When products were framed for shared use, the difference in ESC purchase intention between nostalgic and non-nostalgic consumers disappeared. Overall, the findings indicate that nostalgia reduces consumers' motivation to purchase post-purchase protection through positive emotional processes, while sustainable product framing and shared-use context qualify this effect by redirecting attention toward responsibility and long-term product care.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating a previously overlooked consequence of nostalgia in post-purchase decision making. While prior research has primarily documented nostalgia's positive influence on brand evaluations and consumption, the present findings show that nostalgia can paradoxically reduce consumers' willingness to purchase extended service

contracts. The research further identifies a serial emotional mechanism through which nostalgia increases gratitude and optimism, thereby lowering perceived vulnerability and reducing demand for post-purchase protection. In addition, the findings identify sustainable product framing and shared-use context as important boundary conditions that attenuate nostalgia's suppressive effect on ESC purchase intention by increasing consumers' concern for product maintenance and collective responsibility. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that marketers should carefully consider when nostalgic appeals are appropriate and how product framing strategies can mitigate nostalgia's unintended influence on consumers' willingness to purchase service contracts.

THE POLARIZATION PARADOX: HOW SOCIAL NORMS SPLIT IDENTITY MARKETS

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Keywords: identity markets; platform exclusivity; social norms; polarization; congestion externality

Description: A platform's exclusivity ceiling shapes the equilibrium distribution of consumer identity choices, and a norm–congestion complementarity can make stronger norms increase rather than reduce polarization.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Recent identity markets raise a puzzle about access, scarcity, and social norms. Fortnite's re-release of rare cosmetics renewed attention to rare skins and new rarity tiers; Supreme's retail expansion coincided with weaker mid-tier resale values but stronger limited collaborations; and relaxed professional dress codes coincided with demand for ultra-premium bespoke tailoring. These cases are difficult to reconcile with existing theory. Conformity models predict that stronger social norms should produce more conformity, while snob-and-follower models explain upward-sloping demand for status goods but not why the middle erodes. Fashion-cycle models address temporal dynamics rather than the platform's product-line decision. This paper asks three questions. Q1: When do

stronger norms hollow out the middle rather than induce uniform conformity? Q2: What is the platform's optimal exclusivity breadth? Q3: How does the answer depend on the link between norms and congestion? We address these questions by modeling consumers who choose identity positions under both social-norm pressure and symbolic congestion.

Method and Data

This is a nonempirical theoretical paper. We develop a tractable model of consumer sorting in an identity market. Consumers are distributed along an identity space, where x indexes the intrinsic preference for differentiation. A monopolist platform offers three positions: the mainstream position, an interior position, and the exclusive fringe. The platform chooses an exclusivity ceiling $\bar{d}$, which determines the maximum degree of differentiation available to consumers.

A consumer choosing position d trades off identity fit against the norm cost of differentiation, price terms, and symbolic congestion from the equilibrium mass N_d at that position. Norm strength and congestion sensitivity are not independent: when norms make a symbol more publicly salient, the loss of distinctiveness from sharing it with others is amplified. The platform first chooses $\bar{d}$, then sets prices, and consumers subsequently sort across the three positions. We solve the model by backward induction and characterize the equilibrium through indifferent-consumer cutoffs. The analysis derives comparative statics for polarization and for the platform's optimal exclusivity breadth.

Summary of Findings

The model shows that stronger social norms operate through two opposing channels. The first is a norm channel: stronger norms raise the norm cost of differentiation and therefore push consumers toward less differentiated positions. The second is a congestion channel: when norms make identity symbols more publicly salient, consumers become more sensitive to sharing the same symbol with others, making the densely populated interior more costly relative to the sparse extremes. When the norm–congestion complementarity is weak, the standard conformity prediction holds and polarization falls. When it is strong, the congestion channel dominates: consumers exit the

interior toward both the mainstream and the fringe, hollowing the middle. This produces the polarization paradox, in which stronger norms increase rather than reduce polarization. The model also shows that the platform's optimal exclusivity breadth can widen with norm strength. Although stronger norms might seem to call for a narrower rarity space, high complementarity makes the exclusive fringe more valuable to serve. The managerial implication is that identity platforms may benefit from combining broad access with ultra-exclusive offerings rather than targeting the middle.

Key Contributions

This paper contributes to research on identity markets, conspicuous consumption, and platform strategy in three ways. First, it introduces an operationally meaningful platform decision: the exclusivity breadth, or the maximum degree of differentiation the platform makes available to consumers. This links identity-market polarization to a concrete product-line decision. Second, it models consumers as responding jointly to two forces that are usually treated separately: social-norm pressure against differentiation and symbolic congestion from others occupying the same position. Third, it shows that these two forces can move together. When norms make a symbol more publicly salient, the loss of distinctiveness from sharing that symbol with others is amplified. This norm–congestion complementarity generates the paper's central result: stronger norms can increase rather than reduce polarization, hollowing out the middle of the identity market. The framework helps explain why platforms and brands may combine broad access with ultra-exclusive offerings rather than concentrating on the middle.

**TOO TIRED TO BE JUDGED BY HUMANS: SOCIAL JETLAG INCREASES
PREFERENCE FOR AI THROUGH SOCIAL ANXIETY**

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Key Words: Social Jetlag; Preference for AI; Social Anxiety; Lay Belief; Social Evaluation

This research demonstrates that social jetlag increases consumers' preference for AI evaluations by heightening social anxiety.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

With the growing prevalence of AI, understanding how consumers choose between AI and human evaluations has become increasingly important. Drawing on social evaluation, this research examines how social jetlag shapes preferences for AI. Across four interrelated studies, we show that greater social jetlag—reflecting circadian misalignment—heightens social anxiety, which in turn increases individuals' preference for AI in social evaluation, as a way to reduce the

psychological pressure of potentially biased human judgments. This effect is moderated by lay beliefs about AI: when AI is perceived as objective, social jetlag significantly amplifies preference for AI; however, when AI is viewed as subjective, the effect weakens. These findings highlight the psychological mechanisms linking circadian differences to AI preference and offer practical implications for designing AI-based service experiences that alleviate social anxiety in social evaluation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have enabled AI systems to increasingly participate in social evaluation contexts. As AI becomes a viable alternative to human evaluators, understanding the factors that shape consumers' preferences for AI versus human evaluation has become an important research question. Prior research has primarily focused on technological characteristics, perceived fairness, and algorithmic attributes that influence AI acceptance. However, relatively little attention has been paid to how consumers' temporary psychological states and circadian-related experiences may affect these preferences. This research examines whether social jetlag—the misalignment between biological and social clocks—influences individuals' preferences for AI versus human evaluation. We propose that social jetlag increases social anxiety, thereby motivating individuals to avoid potentially judgmental human evaluators and favor AI-based evaluations instead. Furthermore, we investigate whether this effect depends on lay beliefs regarding the objectivity of AI. By examining the intersection of circadian rhythms,

social anxiety, and AI preference, this research seeks to advance understanding of when and why consumers prefer AI over humans in social evaluation.

METHOD AND DATA

This research adopts a multi-study design in which four interrelated studies provide cumulative and convergent evidence for the proposed hypotheses, thereby strengthening the generalizability of the findings. Study 1 aims to test H1, which proposes that social jetlag leads to a greater preference for AI. In this study, social jetlag is manipulated using a two-stage survey design. Study 2 examines H2, focusing on the mediating role of social anxiety. In addition, to enhance the internal validity of the research, Study 2 employs a different operationalization of social jetlag by measuring participants' mid-sleep time to calculate temporal misalignment. Although operationalized differently, both approaches capture the same underlying construct of circadian misalignment (e.g., Lau et al., 2013; Roenneberg et al., 2012). Moreover, whereas previous studies provided descriptive information about AI and human evaluations based on their respective characteristics in social evaluation, Study 3 removes such descriptions and directly asks participants to choose between AI and human evaluators, which serves as the dependent variable. Study 4 further examines the moderating role of lay beliefs about AI.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Across four interrelated studies, we demonstrate that social jetlag—a common form of circadian misalignment—increases consumers' preference for AI in social evaluation. Rather

than reflecting a general avoidance of interpersonal interaction, this effect is driven by heightened social anxiety. Moreover, this effect is moderated by lay beliefs about AI: the preference emerges primarily when AI is perceived as objective and consistent, but disappears when AI is perceived as subjective.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This research contributes to work on circadian rhythms in marketing. Prior research on social jetlag has primarily focused on sleep science and medical domains (Tamura & Okamura, 2024), with limited attention on consumer behavior. Consumer research has offered only initial evidence of its behavioral consequences and has not addressed emerging-technology preferences or underlying mechanisms (Yin & Huang, 2022; Janakiraman et al., 2024). We also extend the AI-preference literature by identifying a circadian antecedent of AI adoption. Previous research on AI preference has largely focused on task characteristics, AI identity and attributes, ethical and moral considerations, human–AI relationships, consumer cognition, and consumer emotions. However, few studies consider circadian factors. Finally, this work contributes to social-anxiety research by linking it to circadian misalignment through social evaluation. Existing accounts largely focus on interpersonal situations (e.g., anticipated mishaps, interactions, embarrassment) (Fay & Maner, 2014; Savitsky et al., 2001; Tei et al., 2020), and although sleep research suggests anxiety-related consequences of poor sleep, circadian misalignment has rarely been examined as a trigger of social anxiety.

**TRUST AT FIRST SIGHT: HOW PROCESSING FLUENCY SHAPES CONSUMERS'
JUDGMENT OF BRAND LOGOS?**

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Paper description: This paper demonstrates that the effectiveness of brand logo colour depends on typographic congruence and explains this relationship through processing fluency.

Keywords: Brand logo color, font type, attention, perceived brand trustworthiness and brand attitude, processing fluency

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Wordmark logos (logos comprising only text) are among the most widely used forms of brand identity, relying heavily on logo colour to communicate symbolic meanings and shape consumer perceptions. Among different colours, blue has become one of the most frequently used choices for brands seeking to communicate trust, competence, and reliability. Consequently, prior research has consistently examined the positive influence of blue on consumer trust and brand evaluations. However, this stream of research implicitly assumes that the symbolic meaning of blue remains stable across different visual contexts. In practice, consumers perceive logo colour together with other visual elements, particularly typography, suggesting that the effectiveness of blue may depend on its accompanying typographic context rather than on colour alone. Although typography has been shown to convey symbolic meanings through characteristics such as structure, precision, and naturalness, its role in shaping the effectiveness of logo colour remains underexplored. Furthermore, while congruent visual designs are generally associated with more favourable evaluations, the cognitive mechanism through which such congruence influences consumer judgments remains unclear. Drawing on Processing Fluency Theory, Congruity Theory, and Gestalt principles, this research examines whether the trust-enhancing effect of brand logo colour depends on font type in wordmark logos and whether processing fluency explains how congruent logo colour-typography combinations translate into favourable consumer evaluations.

Method and Data

To examine the proposed relationships, a 2×2 between-subjects experiment was conducted in a banking service context, manipulating brand logo colour (red versus blue) and font type (organic versus geometric). A fictitious bank was used to minimize the influence of prior brand knowledge and familiarity, thereby isolating the effects of the experimental manipulations. A total of 156 participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Participants viewed the wordmark logo while their visual attention was recorded using a Tobii Pro Fusion eye tracker (250 Hz). Following stimulus exposure, participants completed validated measures of processing fluency, perceived brand trustworthiness, and brand attitude. Visual attention, operationalized as average fixation duration, was examined as a dependent variable and included as a covariate, together with gender, in subsequent analyses to account for potential differences in attentional allocation during evaluative processing. Hayes' PROCESS Model 85 was employed to examine whether the effect of brand logo colour on consumer responses depended on font type and whether processing fluency and perceived brand trustworthiness sequentially mediated these effects.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that the influence of brand logo colour on consumer evaluations is contingent upon its accompanying typographic context rather than operating independently. Specifically, blue logos paired with geometric typefaces generated significantly higher levels of perceived brand trustworthiness and brand attitude than other colour-typography combinations, whereas red combined with organic typography attracted greater visual attention but did not produce equally favourable evaluations. These results suggest that the symbolic meanings conveyed by colour are strengthened when reinforced by congruent typographic cues. The analyses

further reveal that processing fluency serves as the underlying cognitive mechanism through which colour-typography congruence influences consumer responses. Congruent visual combinations were processed more fluently, resulting in higher perceived brand trustworthiness, which subsequently translated into more favourable brand attitudes. Importantly, the eye-tracking findings indicate that greater visual attention did not consistently correspond with more positive evaluations, highlighting a dissociation between attentional allocation and evaluative judgment. Collectively, the results suggest that perceptual coherence and ease of processing, rather than visual salience alone, drive favourable consumer responses to wordmark logos, providing empirical support for the role of processing fluency in visual branding.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to the branding and visual communication literature in several important ways.

First, it challenges the prevailing assumption that the effects of brand logo colour are stable and independent by demonstrating that the effectiveness of logo colour depends on its congruence with accompanying typography. In doing so, the study shifts the focus from isolated visual cues to a holistic perspective in which colour and typography operate as an integrated visual system within wordmark logos.

Second, the research advances understanding of visual branding by identifying processing fluency as the cognitive mechanism through which congruent colour-typography combinations translate into favourable consumer evaluations. By demonstrating a sequential process linking processing fluency, perceived brand trustworthiness, and brand attitude, the findings provide a process-based explanation for how visual design influences consumer judgment. Astra

Third, integrating eye-tracking with self-reported evaluations demonstrates that greater

visual attention does not necessarily result in more favourable brand evaluations. Instead, perceptual coherence and ease of processing are more influential than visual salience in shaping consumer responses.

Collectively, these contributions extend theories of visual branding, processing fluency, Gestalt perception, and congruity while offering practical guidance for designing effective wordmark logos in trust-sensitive contexts.

WHEN BEING IRRELEVANT IS RELEVANT: HOW THE RELATIVE RELEVANCE OF BRANDS' SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS IMPACTS BRAND PERCEPTION

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Keywords: social media, product relevance of posts, consumer-brand relationship, relationship strength, brand warmth

Description: Including product-irrelevant posts on brand social media enhances perceived relationship strength, which increases perceived brand warmth and ultimately drives purchase intentions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brands increasingly use social media to communicate with consumers, yet the content strategies that best drive consumers' positive reactions remain underexplored. Drawing on consumer-brand relationship literature (Fournier 1998; Khamitov, Wang, and Thomson 2019), this research examines how the product relevance of a brand's social media posts influences brand perceptions and behavioral intentions. Specifically, we examine how including product-irrelevant posts alongside product-relevant posts lead to more favorable brand outcomes than posting only

product-relevant content. We theorize that product-irrelevant posts signal relational intent—mimicking the breadth of conversations in human relationships and conveying authenticity as a social partner—thereby strengthening consumers’ perceived relationship with the brand. Drawing on the stereotype content model (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007), we further propose that increased perceived relationship strength elevates brand warmth perceptions, which in turn drives engagement and purchase intentions. This effect is particularly pronounced when consumers do not have a strong pre-existing relationship with the brand, suggesting a powerful strategy for strengthening consumer-brand relationships and improving brand outcomes. This research underscores the importance of balancing product-relevant and product-irrelevant posts to humanize brands and encourage a consumer-brand connection.

Method and Data

Study 1 employed web scraping of 11,119 tweets from 96 coffee brands on X/Twitter (April 2020–March 2021), using ANCOVAs to examine the effect of post product relevance on likes, comments, and retweets. Studies 2–5 used online experiments. Study 2 ($N = 257$ students) manipulated a local bakery’s Instagram posts (product-irrelevant-including vs. relevant-only) and measured perceived relationship strength and warmth. Study 3 ($N = 204$ MTurk participants) used a smartwatch brand and measured intention to follow the brand’s account. Study 4 ($N = 107$ students) tested serial mediation (PROCESS Model 6; 5,000 bootstraps, Hayes 2018) of perceived relationship strength and warmth on purchase intentions. Study 5 ($N = 279$ students) used a 3 (relationship strength: high vs. low vs. control) $\times$ 2 (post product relevance: irrelevant-including vs. relevant-only) between-subjects design with a sunglasses brand. We tested a

moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 7; 5,000 bootstraps, Hayes 2018) examining whether the indirect effect of post product relevance on brand interest through perceived brand warmth was moderated by relationship strength. Product categories, post ratios, and dependent variables were varied across studies to assess robustness and generalizability of the findings.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed that product-irrelevant tweets received significantly more likes, comments, and retweets than product-relevant tweets across 96 real brands, providing initial real-world evidence. Study 2 confirmed that participants perceived stronger relationship strength and greater brand warmth when exposed to a mix of product-irrelevant and relevant posts versus relevant-only posts. Participants also rated the brand which included product-irrelevant posts as more customer-focused and less sales-oriented. Study 3 found marginally greater intention to follow the brand's social media account when some posts were product-irrelevant compared to when all posts were strictly product-relevant. Study 4 demonstrated that product-irrelevant posts increased purchase intentions, and that this effect was serially mediated by perceived relationship strength and brand warmth. Study 5 revealed a moderated mediation: the warmth-enhancing effect of product-irrelevant posts and its downstream impact on brand interest emerged only when consumers perceived a neutral (neither strong nor weak) prior relationship with the brand, and disappeared under high or low prior relationship strength. Together, these findings support a serial mediation framework wherein product-irrelevant posts enhance relationship strength, elevate warmth, and ultimately drive engagement and purchase intentions.

Key Contributions

First, this research extends the stereotype content model (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2007) by identifying perceived relationship strength as a novel antecedent to warmth perceptions in a brand communication context, revealing a relational pathway activated through social media content. Second, this research contributes to consumer-brand relationship literature by showing that social media content can play a formative role in early brand relationship development, particularly for new or less familiar brands, by conveying relational intent and warmth through product-irrelevant posts. Third, we advance the social media engagement literature (Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014; Kumar and Mirchandani 2012; Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair 2018) by identifying a specific, actionable message feature (the inclusion of product-irrelevant content within a post series) that reliably enhances consumer engagement. Finally, the present work offers important managerial implications. Our findings challenge the prevailing industry norm of over-emphasizing product-centric content and recommend that marketers strategically balance promotional messaging with non-product posts to humanize the brand and encourage stronger consumer-brand connections—especially early in the relationship lifecycle.

References are available upon request.

WHEN MEDICATION GETS A FACE: HOW DISEASE TYPE SHAPES CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR COOL AND CUTE ANTHROPOMORPHISM

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Keywords: medical decision-making, anthropomorphism, cuteness and coolness, need for potency and safety, symptom visibility

Description: This research examines how disease type (acute vs. chronic) shapes consumers' preference for anthropomorphic medication styles (cool vs. cute), and explores the underlying mechanism of consumers' differential need for potency and safety in acute (vs. chronic) treatments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

With the development of e-pharmacy and the increasing prevalence of direct over-the-counter (OTC) purchases, consumers are gaining greater autonomy over their medication choices. In response, pharmaceutical companies have begun shifting their primary marketing focus from medical professionals to lay consumers. However, unlike experts, most consumers lack medical expertise, making their perceptions and choices of medications more susceptible to contextual factors. Consequently, pharmaceutical companies are relying ever more heavily on product design to communicate key attributes and attract consumers. One popular strategy is medication anthropomorphism, often in cool or cute styles. However, little research has

examined how such anthropomorphism can be effectively implemented. This research classifies anthropomorphism based on anthropomorphic styles (cute vs. cool), and explore how and why consumers' preference for medications with different anthropomorphic styles vary across disease types (chronic vs. acute) in the OTC context. Building on Goal Shielding Theory, we propose that consumers prefer medications with cool (vs. cute) styles more when treating acute (vs. chronic) diseases. This is because consumers hold a greater need for potency but a lower need for safety in acute (vs. chronic) treatments, and they perceive cool medications as more potent but less safe than their cute counterparts.

Method and Data

A series of six studies (two preregistered), including a large-scale survey and a field experiment, were conducted to test the hypotheses. Study 1 was a large-scale nationwide survey aiming to validate the premise that people have a higher need for potency but lower need for safety when treating acute (vs. chronic) diseases. Studies 2-3 examined the main effect of disease type on anthropomorphic style preference. Study 2 first tested this effect in a controlled setting, examining whether consumers prefer cool (vs. cute) medications more strongly when treating acute (vs. chronic) diseases. Study 3 further measured consumers' real-life product choices and replicated the main effect in a field setting. Study 4 delved into the underlying mechanism and validated that this effect is mediated by consumers' heightened need for potency over safety in acute (vs. chronic) treatments. Study 5 investigated the consumers' safety and potency perceptions of cool and cute anthropomorphic medications, and examined the proposed matching effect between disease type and anthropomorphic style. Finally, Study 6 explored the moderating role of symptom visibility, demonstrating that the effect is attenuated when symptom visibility is high (vs. low).

Summary of Findings

In this research, we propose and establish that consumer preference for medications with cool versus cute anthropomorphic styles is influenced by the disease type they intend to treat. Specifically, consumers hold a stronger preference for, and are more likely to choose cool (vs. cute) anthropomorphic medications when they intend to treat acute (vs. chronic) diseases. This effect is robust across oral medications (e.g., capsule, oral solution) and topical medications (e.g., ointment, nasal patch). We further show that this effect is driven by differences in consumers' underlying treatment needs: acute (vs. chronic) diseases elicit a higher need for medication potency but a lower need for medication safety. Moreover, consumers perceive cool (vs. cute) anthropomorphic medications as more potent but less safe, leading to a matching effect between anthropomorphic style and disease type. In line with the proposed mechanism, we identify symptom visibility as a disease-related boundary condition, such that the effect of disease type on consumer preference for cool (vs. cute) anthropomorphic style is attenuated when the disease is associated with high (vs. low) symptom visibility.

Key contributions

This research contributes to the literature on medical decision-making and anthropomorphism. First, prior research on medical decision-making has largely explored consumer behavior from either a disease-centered perspective, focusing on how disease characteristics shape consumers' behavior, or a marketing design perspective, investigating how different design cues influence consumers' evaluations. Our research extends the literature by integrating these two perspectives, and shows that condition type (chronic vs. acute) systematically shapes consumers' preferences for medication with cool (vs. cute) anthropomorphic styles.

Second, despite the rich knowledge on anthropomorphism, relatively little research has examined its role in the medical context, or investigated the differential effects of distinct forms of anthropomorphism on consumer behavior. This research is among the first to classify anthropomorphism based on anthropomorphic style, and examine its effects in the medical domain.

This research also provides meaningful implications. We suggest that pharmaceutical companies tailor anthropomorphic styles to medications' target diseases: cool styles are more effective for medications target acute diseases, whereas cute styles are better suited for those cope with chronic diseases. More broadly, cute styles may be preferred when medications try to emphasize gentleness and safety, while cool styles are more effective when the intention is to highlight potency.

WHEN PRODUCTIVITY IS AN ILLUSION: THE EFFECT OF GOAL- VERSUS LEISURE-ORIENTED USER-GENERATED CONTENT ON VIEWERS

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Keywords: user-generated content, vicarious goal fulfillment, goal progress, procrastination

Description: This research examines how observing goal-oriented versus leisure-oriented user-generated content shapes viewers' psychological experiences related to their own goal pursuit.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers increasingly spend time watching others perform everyday activities through user-generated content on digital platforms such as YouTube. Although prior research has examined how characteristics of user-generated content (e.g., valence, emotionality, and objectivity) influence consumer responses, little is known about how the nature of the observed activity itself shapes viewers' psychological experiences. We introduce a novel distinction between goal-oriented content, which depicts visible progress toward a desired outcome (e.g., studying, cooking, exercising, and cleaning), and leisure-oriented content, which primarily emphasizes entertainment and enjoyment (e.g., mukbang, gaming, and lifestyle vlogs). Building on research on observational learning and goal progress, we propose that watching goal-oriented content

increases vicarious goal fulfillment, a psychological state in which viewers experience a sense of goal accomplishment despite not performing the activity themselves. We further propose that this effect occurs because observing another person's goal pursuit creates a subjective sense of perceived goal progress, and that procrastination weakens this process by reducing the extent to which viewers internalize observed goal progress.

Method and Data

We conducted two pilot studies and four empirical studies. Pilot Study A (N = 999) examined consumers' naturally occurring YouTube viewing habits and identified commonly consumed categories of user-generated content. Pilot Study B (N = 105) validated the proposed classification of video categories as goal-oriented or leisure-oriented through independent human coding. Study 1 (N = 246) experimentally manipulated exposure to goal-oriented versus leisure-oriented videos to establish the causal effect on vicarious goal fulfillment. Study 2 (N = 1,011) replicated this effect while refining the measurement of the key constructs. Study 3 (N = 1,008) expanded the stimuli to nine categories of user-generated content and tested the proposed mediation through perceived goal progress while examining procrastination as a boundary condition. Finally, Study 4 (N = 504) provided a more controlled replication by comparing food preparation and mukbang videos created by the same content creator, thereby isolating the effect of goal orientation while minimizing stimulus differences.

Summary of Findings

Across studies, goal-oriented content consistently generated greater vicarious goal fulfillment than leisure-oriented content. The results further demonstrated that observing goal-oriented

activities increased viewers' perceived goal progress, which subsequently mediated the effect of content type on vicarious goal fulfillment. This pattern remained robust after accounting for confounds, including emotional responses and psychological detachment. In addition, procrastination moderated viewers' responses to content. Specifically, when procrastination was low, goal-oriented content generated significantly greater vicarious goal fulfillment than leisure-oriented content. When procrastination was high, this difference became significantly weaker. Study 4 further replicated the proposed process using highly controlled stimuli within the same content domain, providing additional evidence that the observed effects are attributable to goal orientation rather than differences in content creators or video characteristics. Together, the findings demonstrate that consumers can experience vicarious goal fulfillment simply by observing others' goal pursuit, even without directly engaging in the activity themselves.

Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it introduces goal-oriented versus leisure-oriented content as a new conceptual framework for understanding user-generated content, extending existing classifications that primarily focus on message characteristics such as valence or emotionality. Second, it identifies perceived goal progress as the psychological mechanism through which observing others' goal pursuit produces vicarious goal fulfillment, extending theories of observational learning and goal pursuit to digital content consumption. Third, it identifies procrastination as an important boundary condition by demonstrating that the psychological benefits of observing goal-oriented content diminish when viewers perceive that consuming the content delays their own goal-directed activities. These findings contribute to the growing literature on digital consumption by showing that user-generated content influences not

only consumers' judgments and behaviors but also their subjective experiences of goal pursuit. They also offer practical implications for digital platforms and content creators seeking to design content that promotes greater psychological engagement while minimizing perceptions of procrastination.

WHY DOES WORD OF MOUTH REDUCE STATUS INFERENCES? THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CULTURAL CAPITAL

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Keywords: word of mouth, cultural capital, status inferences, social perception

Description: In this work, we examine the mediating role of cultural capital in the relationship between word of mouth (WOM) about status products and status inferences about consumers who share such WOM.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

WOM serves many social functions, including impression management. In the context of status consumption, consumers often share WOM about their status products in the hope of elevating their social standing (Berger 2014; Dichter 1966). However, it is not clear whether talking about their status products indeed increases consumers' perceived status in the eyes of others or whether it might, paradoxically, *decrease* it. Our work aims to address this research gap and uncover the underlying mechanism behind the effect of WOM on status inferences about consumers who share it.

Method and Data

We conducted nine experimental studies to disentangle the psychological mechanism underlying the effect of WOM on inferences about one's status.

Summary of Findings

Our experimental studies revealed a fundamental prediction error. Study participants erroneously believed that sharing WOM about status products would increase their status, but doing so produced the opposite effect of reducing their status in the eyes of others. We demonstrated the mediating role of the WOM sharer's perceived cultural capital, defined as a collection of a person's social assets, including intellectual ability, taste, connoisseurship, and knowledge of high culture (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1979). We also ruled out competing mechanisms and explored additional social and marketing consequences of our effect.

Key Contributions

While consumers are often eager to spread WOM about their status products (Berger 2014; Dichter 1966; Lovett et al. 2013), our findings suggest that doing so might backfire. Results of nine experimental studies reveal that WOM about one's status products lowers perceived status, suggesting that consumers' actions are often counterproductive and may, paradoxically, lead to outcomes opposite to those they anticipate. We show that WOM about status products backfires because such WOM reduces the sharer's perceived cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1979), revealing an underlying mechanism that has been largely overlooked in the WOM literature.

References are available upon request.

WILL AI ENHANCE SAVVY PURCHASE? USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS ON SUBSEQUENT DUPE PURCHASE

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Tech-savviness; Materialistic Mindset; Dupe Purchase; Spillover Effect

Description: This research examines how AI tool use spills over to influence subsequent dupe purchase through perceived tech-savviness and a materialistic mindset.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become deeply embedded in consumers' daily lives through generative AI, voice assistants, and algorithmic services. Although prior research has primarily examined consumers' evaluations of AI systems and their responses to algorithmic

recommendations within specific usage contexts, relatively little is known about whether AI use influences subsequent consumer behavior in unrelated domains. Addressing this gap, the present research investigates whether interacting with AI-based tools, compared with conventional computer tools, shapes consumers' subsequent preference for purchasing dupes (i.e., legal imitations of branded products). Drawing on spillover theory, we propose that AI use enhances consumers' perceived tech-savviness, which subsequently activates a materialistic mindset rooted in modern instrumental rationality and efficiency-oriented valuation. This psychological process increases consumers' preference for dupes as rational and value-maximizing consumption choices. Furthermore, we examine goal framing as an important boundary condition, proposing that productivity goals strengthen this spillover effect, whereas creativity goals attenuate or reverse it. Together, this research explains how AI use reshapes consumers' self-perceptions and downstream consumption decisions beyond the original technology-use context.

Method and Data

Three studies were conducted to test the proposed framework. Study 1 analyzed secondary state-level data from the United States ($N = 51$) by combining Google Trends search indices for AI-related and dupe-related keywords with Zillow smart-home listings. Multiple regression analyses examined whether AI-related interest predicted dupe-related search behavior after controlling for state-level economic indicators. Study 2 employed a two-condition between-subjects experiment (AI-based tool: ChatGPT vs. conventional computer tool: Microsoft Office; $N = 335$) to test the causal effect of AI tool use on dupe purchase intention and the serial mediating roles of perceived tech-savviness and materialistic mindset. Study 3 adopted a 2 (tool type: AI image

generator vs. painting software) $\times$ 2 (goal type: productivity vs. creativity) between-subjects design ($N = 836$) to examine goal framing as a moderator of the proposed serial mediation process. Across studies, hypotheses were tested using regression analyses, ANCOVA, and PROCESS mediation and moderated mediation analyses.

Summary of Findings

The findings consistently supported the proposed conceptual framework. Study 1 demonstrated that U.S. states with greater AI-related interest and higher levels of AI-related technology adoption exhibited significantly stronger interest in dupes. Study 2 established a causal relationship, showing that participants using AI-based tools reported higher purchase intentions for dupes than those using conventional computer tools. Serial mediation analyses further revealed that AI tool use increased perceived tech-savviness, which activated a materialistic mindset and subsequently increased dupe purchase intention. Study 3 identified goal framing as a significant boundary condition. Under productivity goals, AI tool use strengthened consumers' preference for dupes, whereas under creativity goals the effect was attenuated or reversed for most product categories. Moderated mediation analyses further confirmed that the indirect effect of AI tool use through perceived tech-savviness and materialistic mindset differed significantly across goal conditions. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that AI use produces meaningful psychological spillover effects that influence downstream consumption decisions beyond the immediate technology-use context.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the consumer behavior literature by demonstrating that AI use has systematic downstream consequences beyond consumers' immediate interactions with AI systems. First, it extends AI research by shifting attention from contextual evaluations of AI to the spillover effects of AI use on subsequent consumer judgment and behavior. Second, it identifies perceived tech-savviness as a novel self-perception mechanism through which AI use shapes later consumption decisions and demonstrates that this self-perception activates a materialistic mindset emphasizing instrumental rationality and efficiency-oriented valuation. Third, the research extends theories of spillover and liquid modernity by showing that materialistic orientations can be situationally activated through everyday interactions with AI technologies, thereby increasing consumers' preference for dupes as rational consumption choices. Finally, by identifying goal framing as a boundary condition, the findings demonstrate that the psychological consequences of AI use depend on whether consumers pursue productivity or creativity goals. These findings offer important theoretical insights into AI-enabled consumer behavior and practical implications for the design of AI-assisted consumer experiences.

**Society, Public Policy,
Social Responsibility,
Sustainability, and Ethics**

DESIGNING SUSTAINABILITY ARCHITECTURE IN GLOBAL MOBILITY: A TYPOLOGY AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: Sustainability Architecture, Global Mobility, Eco-efficiency, System Design

Description: This study conceptualizes sustainability as an emergent property of system design and offers a structural perspective for international marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sustainability has been pursued as a firm-level optimization exercise through energy efficiency operations, waste minimization, supply chain optimization, and eco-design (Porter and van der

Linde 1995). These efforts are incremental but siloed within organizations and can be easily reversed, making outcomes elusive (Montabon, Pagell and Wu 2016). The outcomes remain particularly challenging in markets where firms, consumers, and resources move across national and cultural boundaries.

Prior research has largely examined the field of sustainability in optimizing operations, product innovations, ESG initiatives, and consumer attitudes towards sustainable consumption (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). While these approaches make significant contributions, they largely treat sustainability as a discretionary organizational attribute. Hence, sustainability outcomes remain focused on managerial intent, local compliance, or consumer willingness, making them fragile (Thomas and Lamm 2012).

This paper focuses on the insufficiently theorized phenomenon of market architecture in sustainability.

In this study, we answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do different sustainability architectures in cross-cultural market systems shape sustainability outcomes in global mobility?

RQ 2: What forms of global mobility are affected under different sustainability architectures, and how does this affect the market systems?

Summary of Findings

We distinguish sustainability interventions along two dimensions: the level of action (process vs system) and the mode of engagement (thinking vs design). This yields a 2×2 typology that explains the structural limitations of existing approaches and identifies the conditions under which sustainability becomes durable and scalable in international markets. The typology lists each quadrant as a different type of global mobility factor and explains the sustainability outcome for each quadrant. The study shows that durable sustainability arises not from optimizing individual firms but from redesigning market architectures through shared standards, interoperability, accountability mechanisms, and resource infrastructures. By reframing sustainability as an emergent property of system design, the study offers a structural perspective for international marketing and identifies research avenues for scaling sustainability across diverse institutional contexts.

Key Contributions

The research advances the field of sustainable marketing by reconceptualizing sustainability as a property of market architecture. Prior research on sustainability marketing has generated valuable insights on sustainable processes, behavior, products, and consumption practices. However, it has offered a limited explanation of divergent outcomes across cross-cultural and global mobile markets. In this paper, we develop a typology of sustainable architectures that compares process and system dimensions. This research offers direct value to policymakers and regulatory bodies seeking to design sustainability initiatives that remain effective in globally

mobile and culturally diverse markets. By identifying architectural sustainability as a distinct approach, the study highlights the importance of embedding sustainability into market rules, standards, and infrastructures rather than relying solely on persuasion or incentives. This insight can inform the design of cross-border sustainability regulations, international standards, and public-private initiatives that reduce dependence on local enforcement and individual adaptation.

References are available on request

EFFECT OF A FIRM'S COMMERCIAL MISCONDUCT ON ITS BUSINESS-TO- GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: B2G Marketing, Business-to-Government, Legitimacy, Corporate Misconduct

This paper investigates whether a firm's misconduct in the commercial market spill over to harm its ability to acquire and retain federal government customers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Unlike customers in commercial markets (e.g., B2C, B2B), the federal government must focus on both economic efficiency and societal impact (Grewal and Dharwadkar 2002). This makes evaluating potential suppliers more complex and raises the standards in business-to-government (B2G) markets (Chase and Murtha 2019). In this context, governments rely not only on pricing and technical capabilities but also on indicators as a trusted long-term partner. One useful piece of information they can consider is a history of commercial misconduct, which refers to *violations of regulations and laws in non-B2G markets* and, more broadly, to publicly disclosed ethical failures (Chen et al. 2025; Karpoff et al. 1999). For instance, when Enron's fraudulent activities were exposed, the General Services Administration suspended the company from engaging in federal contracts (Lunney 2002; Meeks 2003). Although WorldCom's fraud was even more substantial, it remained the government's primary telecommunications provider and continued to secure contracts (GAO 2004). This contrast suggests that the B2G consequences of commercial misconduct are neither purely automatic nor proportional to the severity of the violation. Therefore, this raises the question: *how does commercial misconduct affect B2G relationship performance, and does this differ across the acquisition and retention stages?*

Method and Data

We collected data from COMPUSTAT, USA Spending, Violation Tracker, and the Center of Responsive Politics. Our analysis began by identifying more than 2,000 publicly traded firms that received at least one federal prime contract, using Violation Tracker data (2000-2024). We identified approximately 95,000 cases of commercial misconduct. By reclassifying these

cases by parent company, we narrowed the analysis to more than 33,000 cases linked to more than 1,000 firms. When we limited our focus to federal cases, we identified over 32,000 instances of corporate misconduct. We defined variables using publicly available datasets to examine how commercial misconduct affects a firm's performance in the B2G market. We divided a firm's relationship performance in the B2G market into two variables: acquisition performance, *a firm's performance with a government procurement office that has not engaged in prior*, and retention performance, *a firm's performance with a government procurement office that has engaged in prior*. To examine how commercial misconduct affects a firm's B2G relationship performance, we estimated firm-level panel regression models that distinguish between acquisition and retention performance.

Summary of Findings

The model shows a negative effect of commercial misconduct on acquisition performance ($b = -0.045$, $p < .01$; Model 1), which remains significant with moderators ($b = -0.050$, $p < .01$). This suggests that commercial misconduct reduces success in acquiring new government contracts. Conversely, misconduct's effect on retention performance is statistically insignificant ($b = 0.005$, $p > .10$; $b = 0.001$, $p > .10$), indicating it doesn't consistently affect existing contract retention. The interaction between federal agencies' fixed-pricing preference and commercial misconduct in acquisition is insignificant ($b = 0.077$, $p > .10$). Still, it shows a marginally positive effect on retention ($b = 0.131$, $p < .01$). This implies that agencies try to reduce uncertainty from misconduct by imposing stricter contract requirements. Market competition negatively moderates misconduct's impact on acquisitions ($b = -0.081$, $p < .05$), but this effect is not significant for retentions ($b = 0.028$, $p > .10$). In retentions, procurement competition negatively moderates misconduct and is significant ($b = -0.015$, $p < .01$).

Key Contributions

This study advances the relationship lifecycle and stage literature by demonstrating that the effect of commercial misconduct on B2G relationship performance is asymmetric across relationship phases. Prior research has examined the consequences of misconduct within the same market domain, focusing on consumer and investor reactions, with little attention to how public-sector clients respond to such behavior. By distinguishing between acquisition and retention performance, we show that commercial misconduct erects a significant barrier to new relationship formation while leaving existing relationships largely intact. It also proposes a framework showing how misconduct influences B2G acquisition and retention, based on procurement characteristics. Agencies favor fixed-price contracts and tend to cut ties with firms involved in misconduct due to costs and the need for continuity. Market competition worsens the impact of misconduct on acquisition, but procurement discipline exists within established relationships. Agencies prefer vendors with clean records when selecting among incumbents. The paper recommends addressing misconduct during the contract phase, as competition allows better screening. Existing relationships often rely on fixed prices, which mitigate the effects of misconduct. Still, agencies should reassess screening processes to support long-term growth, as misconduct hampers future expansion more than current revenues.

FIRM CULPABILITY OR SYMBOLIC PROTEST: A TWO-PATHWAY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BRAND BOYCOTT PROPENSITY

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Keywords: consumer boycotts, moral attribution, symbolic association, moral outrage, identity-based solidarity

Description: This conceptual paper explains how boycott participation may vary depending on whether consumers interpret wrongdoing as firm-specific culpability or as symbolic association with a broader societal conflict.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer boycotts are a recurring form of marketplace activism in politically polarized and digitally mediated environments (Neureiter and Bhattacharya 2021; Mady et al. 2025; Mulyono and Rolando 2025). Prior marketing research has mainly explained boycotts as punishment-oriented responses to firm-specific wrongdoing, emphasizing moral judgment and responsibility attribution toward a culpable firm (Friedman 1999; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001; John and Klein 2003; Klein, Smith, and John 2004). Yet many contemporary campaigns target brands

through symbolic associations with broader political, national, or ideological conflicts (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Russell and Russell 2010). Existing theory offers limited explanation for how these interpretations shape participation intensity across contexts. This paper asks how the perceived locus of moral transgression shapes boycott participation and how moral outrage, identity-based solidarity, and cultural orientation influence that relationship. It develops a framework distinguishing direct firm responsibility from contextual attribution to broader conflicts for which the firm becomes a symbolic proxy (Folkes 1984; Weiner 1985). In symbolic-association cases, the firm may not be viewed as directly culpable; rather, it becomes a proxy for expressing opposition to a broader conflict. This distinction explains why similar boycott triggers generate different forms of participation and collective response.

Method and Data

Not applicable. This paper is conceptual and theory-building in nature.

Summary of Findings

The paper proposes two distinct but potentially interacting pathways of boycott participation. These pathways are not mutually exclusive; moral outrage and identity-based solidarity may operate simultaneously. When consumers attribute moral transgressions directly to firm actions, they are more likely to experience moral outrage—anger and condemnation directed toward the perceived wrongdoer (Folkes 1984; Weiner 1985; Haidt 2003; Batson, Chao, and Givens 2007). In this pathway, boycotts function mainly as punishment-oriented responses that signal accountability and public moral disapproval (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001), consistent

with the first and third propositions. When transgressions are interpreted as contextual or symbolic, consumers are more likely to boycott as an expression of identity-based solidarity. Here, participation expresses group loyalty, collective identity, and resistance to perceived out-group threats rather than only firm culpability (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998; Russell and Russell 2010), consistent with the second and fourth propositions. Finally, individualism–collectivism serves as a boundary condition shaping pathway salience (Hofstede 1980; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1995). Individualist orientations may make outrage-based interpretations more salient, whereas collectivist orientations may make solidarity-based interpretations more salient (Triandis and Gelfand 1998), as stated in the fifth proposition.

Key Contributions

This paper makes three contributions to research on consumer boycotts and marketplace activism. First, it introduces the locus of moral transgression as an organizing construct, distinguishing direct firm culpability from symbolic association as alternative bases for perceived wrongdoing (Folkes 1984; Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998). This shifts attention from boycott outcomes and motivations (John and Klein 2003; Klein, Smith, and John 2004) to moral attribution processes that initiate participation and structure mobilization. Second, it integrates moral outrage and identity-based solidarity into a unified explanation of boycott participation. Although these mechanisms are established in moral psychology and collective action research (Haidt 2003; Batson, Chao, and Givens 2007; Leach et al. 2008; Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008), they have rarely been combined within marketing theory. Third, it advances cross-cultural research by proposing individualism–collectivism as a boundary condition shaping how consumers interpret moral responsibility and translate those

interpretations into collective action (Hofstede 1980; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1995). It also notes that richer cultural explanations may require attention to nationalism, religion, ideology, and historical memory. Together, these contributions provide a framework for future conceptual and empirical research across boycott contexts.

References are available upon request.

FROM GREENWASHING TO BRAND HYPOCRISY: A COGNITION-REPAIR OF TRUST BREAKDOWN AND RECOVERY

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Keywords: Greenwashing; Corporate Remedial Strategy; Trust Recovery; Attribution Theory; Social Exchange Theory

Description: This study examines how different corporate remedial strategies influence consumer trust recovery following suspected greenwashing by reducing various forms of negative consumer reactions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Greenwashing allegations frequently undermine consumer trust, yet firms often respond with

various remedial strategies whose effectiveness remains unclear. Existing research has primarily examined the consequences of greenwashing rather than the process through which trust can be restored. Moreover, little is known about whether different remedial strategies reduce distinct forms of consumer negative reactions that ultimately influence trust recovery. Accordingly, this study asks: Which remedial strategy is most effective in restoring consumer trust after suspected greenwashing, and through what psychological mechanisms does trust recovery occur?

Method and Data

This study employs a between-subjects scenario-based experiment. Participants are randomly assigned to one of three remedial strategy conditions following a suspected greenwashing incident: economic compensation, apology, or transparency. After reading the scenario, respondents complete manipulation checks, attribution measures, consumer negative reaction scales, and trust recovery measures using validated multi-item instruments. Analysis of variance (ANOVA/ANCOVA) is conducted to compare the effectiveness of the three remedial strategies, while mediation analyses examine whether distinct negative consumer reactions mediate the relationship between remedial strategies and trust recovery.

Summary of Findings

We expect transparency to be the most effective strategy for restoring consumer trust because it directly addresses consumers' information needs and reduces uncertainty regarding corporate responsibility. An apology is expected to generate moderate improvements by expressing sincerity and accountability, whereas economic compensation is anticipated to yield comparatively weaker trust recovery because it primarily offsets losses without resolving concerns about organizational integrity. Furthermore, reductions in consumer negative reactions are expected to mediate the relationship between remedial strategies and trust recovery, demonstrating that trust is restored through alleviating consumers' adverse psychological and behavioral responses.

Key Contributions

This study makes four contributions. First, it extends the greenwashing literature by shifting the focus from the consequences of greenwashing to mechanisms of trust recovery. Second, it integrates Attribution Theory and Social Exchange Theory to explain how responsibility attribution and reciprocity jointly shape post-crisis consumer responses. Third, it differentiates multiple dimensions of consumer negative reactions rather than treating them as a single construct, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of trust restoration. Finally,

the findings offer practical guidance for managers by identifying the most effective remedial strategies for rebuilding consumer trust after suspected greenwashing incidents.

HOW SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE EMERGES: DISCURSIVE LEGITIMATION IN PALM OIL MARKETS

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Keywords: Sustainability governance; discursive legitimation; palm oil; institutional change; transnational governance

Description: This study examines how sustainability governance in global palm oil markets emerges, stabilizes, and consolidates through multi-actor discursive legitimation.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Sustainability governance in global supply chains increasingly relies on non-state and mixed governance arrangements, yet it remains unclear how such systems become accepted in contested industries. Palm oil provides an important context because it is economically significant but strongly contested due to concerns over deforestation, biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, land conflicts, and labor rights. This study examines how NGOs, producer corporations, and consumer-facing corporations construct, contest, and stabilize legitimacy in global palm oil governance. Specifically, we ask: How do discursive struggles over legitimacy among NGOs, producer corporations, and consumer-facing corporations shape the evolution of sustainability governance in the global palm oil sector over time? By addressing this question, the study explains how competing claims about sustainability move from moral critique toward shared standards, organizational routines, and rule-based governance arrangements.

Method and Data

We use a longitudinal grounded critical discourse analysis to examine how legitimacy is constructed and institutionalized in global palm oil governance. The dataset includes 526 documents from 13 major actors between 2004 and 2025. These documents include NGO reports and campaign materials, corporate sustainability reports and policy statements, certification and governance documents, press releases, and public statements. Documents were included if they explicitly referenced palm oil and sustainability, governance, certification, or regulation; were publicly accessible; were attributable to one of the targeted organizations; and contained substantive discursive content. The analysis proceeded through open, axial, and selective coding. We coded discursive strategies, actor interactions, legitimacy forms, and institutional outcomes.

Selective coding then integrated these patterns into a process model explaining how sustainability governance evolved over time.

Summary of Findings

The analysis identifies four sequential stages in the emergence of palm oil sustainability governance. First, in the moral disruption stage, NGOs challenged palm oil production by using moral evaluation and cautionary narratives to frame existing practices as ethically and environmentally unacceptable. Second, in the governance emergence stage, moral contestation shifted toward scientific rationalization, expert authorization, and shared definitions, enabling partial coordination around sustainability standards. Third, in the institutional stabilization stage, producer and consumer-facing corporations routinized sustainability through reporting, sourcing commitments, certification language, and managerial procedures. Finally, in the regulatory consolidation stage, sustainability governance became embedded in formal rules, compliance systems, and certification frameworks. Across these stages, legitimacy shifted from moral to cognitive, pragmatic, and regulatory forms, showing how contested sustainability claims became institutionalized over time.

Key Contributions

This study makes three contributions. First, it conceptualizes legitimacy as a dynamic, multi-actor process rather than a static organizational attribute. Legitimacy in palm oil governance emerges through interaction among NGOs, producer corporations, and consumer-facing corporations. Second, the study explains how different forms of legitimacy—moral, cognitive,

pragmatic, and regulatory—evolve across stages of governance development and produce different institutional outcomes, including disruption, creation, maintenance, and consolidation. Third, the study shows how discursive struggles over meaning and justification help move sustainability governance from advocacy-driven critique toward rule-based regulatory consolidation. By tracing these dynamics in the global palm oil sector, the study provides insight into how transnational sustainability governance systems become stabilized in highly contested global industries.

References are available upon request.

MARKETING AS A MORAL INTERFACE: ETHICAL DUALISM IN DIGITAL NECESSITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP DURING CRISIS

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Keywords: Digital Necessity Entrepreneurship, Ethical Marketing, Ethical Dualism Loop, Crisis Contexts

Description: This paper theorizes marketing as a moral interface by introducing the Ethical Dualism Loop, explaining how Digital Necessity Entrepreneurs in Lebanon enact, monitor, and adapt ethical practices through digital platforms to build trust and sustain legitimacy in crisis contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Within Lebanon's post-2019 crisis, Digital Necessity Entrepreneurs (DNEs) emerged as survival-driven actors leveraging social platforms and basic web tools to secure livelihoods amid pervasive scarcity (Campos, 2024). While entrepreneurial marketing research has examined adaptation under uncertainty through effectuation, bricolage, and agility (Read et al., 2009), less attention has been paid to marketing as an ethical practice that actively confronts trust deficits and social fragility in crisis. To advance this agenda, this paper theorizes marketing as a moral interface wherein entrepreneurs articulate ethical commitments and respond to real-time consequences through digital channels. Building on marketing ethics frameworks (Hunt & Vitell, 1986) and macromarketing's societal orientation (Bartels & Jenkins, 1977), we conceptualize the Ethical Dualism Loop, defined as the continuous cycle of framing moral intent, observing consequences, and ethically adapting. This loop integrates prospective responsibility (ethical anticipation) and retrospective responsibility (ethical accountability), operationalized through transparent storytelling, positioning statements, pricing rationales, and feedback-based adjustments (Leitch, 2017). Three research questions guide this paper:

1. How do DNEs enact marketing as a moral interface in crisis contexts?
2. How does the Ethical Dualism Loop shape trust and legitimacy under institutional fragility?
3. How do digital feedback mechanisms function as ethical audit systems guiding adaptation?

Method And Data

An abductive theory development was applied, iterating between surprising observations and theoretical constructs to generate refined explanations (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). Our design integrated Participatory Action Research (PAR), collaborative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, with Narrative Inquiry accessing lived ethical sensemaking (Lewin, 1947; Pasmore et al., 2008; Toledano & Anderson, 2020).

A purposive sample of 13 DNEs was selected based on: (1) primary digital platform dependence; (2) necessity-driven resource constraints; (3) active ethical tension navigation. Sectoral diversity spanned food to wellness, enabling cross-case pattern identification while preventing sector-specific distortions.

Data sources included social media content (posts, stories, captions capturing ethical intent signaling), semi-structured narrative interviews (exploring dilemmas and decision processes), platform analytics (engagement metrics, sentiment indicators evidencing feedback responses), and reflexive memos (supporting researcher reflexivity and audit trails) (Brannick & Coghlan, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis followed abductive thematic procedures, iteratively comparing narrative categories with theoretical constructs. Open coding identified recurring practices; focused coding grouped them temporally around prospective responsibility, consequence observation, and retrospective responsibility. PAR cycles enabled iterative validation through member checking. Cross-case comparison revealed the Ethical Dualism Loop as trans-sectoral dynamic capability (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021).

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that Digital Necessity Entrepreneurs (DNEs) operationalize marketing as a dynamic ethical practice through the iterative enactment of the Ethical Dualism Loop, encompassing the stages of framing moral intent, observing consequences, and ethically adapting. First, DNEs proactively signal prospective responsibility by embedding transparency, fairness, and societal value into their digital communications, particularly through pricing rationales, sourcing disclosures, and culturally grounded storytelling. These practices position ethical clarity as a strategic resource for trust-building in contexts of institutional erosion. Second, digital platforms function as real-time ethical audit systems, where engagement metrics, comment patterns, and direct messages are interpreted as indicators of moral alignment or misalignment. Entrepreneurs develop nuanced feedback literacy, treating both explicit and subtle signals as guidance for evaluating fairness perceptions and societal resonance. Third, retrospective responsibility is enacted through visible and responsive adaptations, including pricing adjustments, product reframing, enhanced transparency, and community-oriented initiatives. These adaptations are explicitly communicated as ethical corrections, reinforcing accountability and strengthening legitimacy. Collectively, the loop operates as a continuous and self-reinforcing process in which each adaptation informs future intent, transforming marketing from a unidirectional transactional activity into a bidirectional moral interface that fosters trust, community cohesion, and micro-level social stability under crisis conditions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research reframes marketing from a transactional instrument to a moral interface in crisis entrepreneurship, offering three key theoretical contributions. First, it introduces the Ethical Dualism Loop, a framework integrating prospective responsibility (moral intent) with retrospective responsibility (real-time accountability), extending marketing ethics theory into dynamic digital contexts. Second, it positions ethics as a dynamic capability embedded in entrepreneurial marketing, where sensing, interpreting, and adapting are enabled through digital feedback systems, advancing work on marketing under uncertainty. Third, it identifies transparency, fairness, and societal value as a triadic ethical framework for digital environments, contributing to debates on responsible marketing and platform governance.

Practically, the findings provide actionable guidance for entrepreneurs in crisis contexts: clearly communicate ethical intent through transparent storytelling and pricing, interpret digital interactions as ethical audit signals, and adapt visibly to restore alignment when misalignment occurs. Non-profit organizations and social enterprises can apply the Ethical Dualism Loop to strengthen trust and legitimacy within vulnerable communities. Policymakers gain insights into supporting ethical entrepreneurial ecosystems through digital trust infrastructures and fairness auditing tools, while platform providers can design governance mechanisms and analytics features that enable ethical agility and responsible marketing practices.

References are available upon request.

MORAL GRANDSTANDING IN CONSUMER ACTIVISM: PRESTIGE AND DOMINANCE PATHWAYS TO BUYCOTTING, BOYCOTTING, AND CANCELING

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Keywords: moral grandstanding, consumer activism, boycotting, buycotting, canceling

Description: This research introduces moral grandstanding as a status-seeking motivational framework that explains why consumers engage in distinct forms of activism in response to brand moral transgressions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brands today operate in a morally visible environment. Corporate actions related to social justice, labor practices, environmental responsibility, and political engagement are routinely scrutinized by consumers who increasingly view marketplace behavior as a moral domain (Morhart et al. 2015; Webb and Mohr 1998). Consumers respond to perceived moral transgressions by engaging in a variety of moralized marketplace actions, such as boycotting, buycotting, and canceling. Prior research has offered important insights into why consumers care about corporate morality, showing that moral conviction, ethical concern, political identity, and perceived efficacy motivate consumers to reward or punish firms (Friedman 1996; Hoffmann et

al. 2018; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Neilson 2010). However, most of this literature focuses on whether consumers act rather than how they act, treating consumer activism as a unified response to moral transgressions, and provides limited insight into why consumers choose among distinct forms of moralized marketplace behavior that differ meaningfully in tone, intent, and social meaning. We argue that moral grandstanding, defined as the use of moral expression to seek social status, offers a unifying framework for understanding these divergent responses, and we ask how prestige-based and dominance-based grandstanding predict boycotting, buycotting, and canceling.

Method and Data

Across three experimental studies, we examine how prestige-based and dominance-based moral grandstanding shape distinct forms of consumer activism in response to brand moral transgressions. Study 1 (N = 300; Prolific, USA; Mage = 40.53) establishes the basic relationship between moral grandstanding orientations and attitudes toward boycotting and buycotting, with participants completing established scales for prestige and dominance grandstanding (Grubbs et al. 2019) and then rating their attitudes toward boycotting and buycotting behaviors. Study 2 (N = 300; Mage = 40.12) extends these findings by incorporating canceling behavior and testing self-image motives as a mediating mechanism, with participants completing self-image motives items for each behavior after being presented with a description of boycotting, buycotting, or canceling. Study 3 (N = 300; Mage = 43.46) examines a key boundary condition using a between-subjects design, in which participants were randomly assigned to read a description of boycotting framed as either improvement-oriented or punitive, testing whether this framing alters when dominance grandstanding becomes relevant.

Summary of Findings

Prestige grandstanding consistently predicts favorable attitudes toward both boycotting and buycotting while dominance grandstanding predicted canceling and, in some cases, lower buycotting (Study 1: $\beta = .33$ and $\beta = .47$, $p < .001$; Study 2: $\beta = .21$ and $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$).

Dominance grandstanding negatively predicted buycotting ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .009$; $\beta = -.12$, $p = .024$) and, in Study 2, positively predicted canceling ($\beta = .19$, $p = .001$). We further demonstrate that these effects are mediated by self-image motives, with the effect of prestige grandstanding on buycotting (indirect effect = .22, 95% CI [.14, .32]) and the effect of dominance grandstanding on canceling (indirect effect = .24, 95% CI [.15, .35]) both operating through this mechanism.

Finally, we show that punitive (vs. improvement-oriented) boycott framing increases the relevance of dominance grandstanding for boycotting: the framing X dominance grandstanding interaction was significant ($b = .19$, $p = .01$), such that dominance grandstanding was significant and positive in the punishment condition ($b = .12$, $p = .03$) but not in the improvement condition ($b = -.07$, $p = .22$), while prestige grandstanding positively predicted boycotting favorability regardless of condition ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$).

Statement of Key Contributions

This research advances marketing literature by introducing moral grandstanding as a theoretically grounded psychological driver of consumer activism. Prior work on boycotting and buycotting has primarily focused on moral conviction, perceived efficacy, political identity, and ethical concern (Friedman 1996; Hoffmann et al. 2018; Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Neilson 2010), offering limited insight into how consumers choose among distinct forms of public moral action. Drawing on moral grandstanding theory (Grubbs et al. 2019; Tosi and Warmke 2016),

this research demonstrates that consumer activism can serve as a status-seeking behavior, driven by either prestige or dominance, explaining why buycotting, boycotting, and canceling represent different psychological processes. This research demonstrates that these effects are mediated by self-image motives and that framing alters when dominance motivations become relevant for boycotting. Together, these contributions integrate status-seeking and moral psychology into consumer activism research and extend work on brand moral transgressions by identifying heterogeneity in consumer moral responses. This work provides non-academic stakeholders with practical insights: brand managers can use these findings to predict whether ethical controversies will result in punitive backlash or supportive engagement, and policymakers and platform regulators can better evaluate the social impacts of online moralization and public shaming in the marketplace.

References are available upon request.

PHILANTHROPY OR FUNCTIONALITY? HOW PRODUCT DESCRIPTION ORIENTATION INFLUENCES PURCHASING IN SOCIAL VENTURES

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Keywords: Social ventures; product descriptions; marketing communications; consumer identity

Description: For social venture product descriptions, we demonstrate that a cause-focused orientation, compared to a product-focused orientation, is most effective in driving sales due to increased perceived purchase efficacy and moral identity expression potential.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In the current research, we explore how a social venture's choice of product description orientation – cause-focused or product-focused – impacts consumer purchasing. Existing marketing literature and our partnership with real social enterprises have emphasized the confusion that many managers face when choosing the wording of their product descriptions. On one hand, a strong focus on the cause supported by the organization might crowd out product information, increasing uncertainty about product or service quality. However, a cause-focused orientation might also signal moral meaning to potential consumers through its ability to promote a purchase's benefit to others, increasing purchase likelihood. With these competing theories in mind, managers of social ventures must decide how to balance their own product descriptions and whether to more heavily employ a cause-focused orientation (communication focused on the cause the organization is supporting and how a purchase would benefit this cause) or a product-focused orientation (communication focused on the functional benefits of the product or

service being sold and how a purchase would benefit the end user). We predict that a cause-focused orientation will be most effective at driving purchasing for social ventures, specifically due to the increase in perceived purchase efficacy and moral identity expression potential it generates.

Method and Data

We use both secondary and primary data to explore product description orientation choices for social ventures. Our first study utilizes a Shopify dataset provided by Her Future Coalition, a real social venture, which contains the number of purchases of each of their products over a period of time. In total, the dataset included the number of purchases made for 173 products including jewelry, accessories, and paper products (e.g., photographs, books). The unique value of this dataset comes in its inclusion of the language used in each online product description. The language varies heavily from product to product, giving us the opportunity to evaluate how the content of the descriptions, and specifically the degree to which the description is cause-focused, impacts purchases. Studies 2 and 3 take an experimental approach, using Cloud Research and student samples (combined $n = 995$) to directly compare a cause-focused to a product-focused orientation for fictional social ventures and determine which is most effective at driving purchase intention. Additionally, both studies examine perceived purchase efficacy and moral identity expression potential as mediators of the positive effect of a cause-focused orientation hypothesized. Study 2 does this directly, while Study 3 uses a process-through moderation approach.

Summary of Findings

Across our three studies, we consistently find evidence that a cause-focused orientation in product descriptions positively impacts purchases for social ventures. In Study 1, a regression model indicated that, when controlling for price and product type, an increase in cause-focused language within a product description led to an increase in the number of products sold for a real social venture ($\beta = 1.143, p = .004$). This finding provides initial support for our prediction that a cause-focused orientation is more effective than a product-focused orientation. Study 2 replicates this finding experimentally, showing that consumers who viewed a cause-focused product description from a social venture were more likely to purchase a product ($M_{\text{cause}} = 5.29$) than those who viewed either a product-focused ($M_{\text{product}} = 4.84; t(600) = 3.82, p = .005$) or neutral (control) description ($M_{\text{control}} = 4.35, t(600) = 5.84, p < .001$). Additionally, a significant indirect effect through perceived purchase efficacy and moral identity expression was found ($\beta = .05, SE = .02, 95\% CI = [.02, .09]$). Using a process-through-moderation approach, Study 3 shows that this effect only occurs when existing purchase efficacy is uninflated, highlighting that the positive effect of a cause-focused orientation is truly due to an increase in the perceived impact of the purchase.

Statement of Key Contributions

The current research makes several important contributions. First, it reconceptualizes marketing communication in the context of social ventures as a mechanism for constructing the moral meaning of market exchange. In other words, rather than viewing marketing information solely as a vehicle for conveying functional information or persuasion, we show that a social venture's framing of its offering can determine whether consumers interpret a purchase primarily as a

commercial transaction or as a moral action. This is something that can't be easily done by for-profit firms, which traditionally rely on creating and communicating functional value to consumers. We also show that this moral value does not need large-scale marketing campaigns but can be created even through simple language choices within product descriptions. Our findings demonstrate that in hybrid market contexts, moral meaning can substitute for functional information in shaping consumer demand, challenging the assumption that persuasive effectiveness depends primarily on the communication of product attributes. Additionally, we show that marketing messages can activate perceived purchase efficacy and moral identity expression at the point of sale. In doing so, we extend these constructs from stable consumer characteristics often considered in charitable giving literature to malleable, message-driven drivers of demand in commercial exchange.

REGULATING RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION: THE IMPACT OF UTAH'S H.B. 155

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Keywords: Regulation, Safety, Consumption, Public Policy

Description: Utah's reduction of the legal blood alcohol concentration limit for drivers from .08% to .05% reduced alcohol-related driving fatalities by 23 deaths annually, had a stronger effect on white drivers and young adult drivers, and contributed to total annual safety benefits that exceeded \$233 million.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study examines Utah's attempt to increase safety on the road through its H.B. 155: the first law by a U.S. state limiting the legal BAC for drivers from the national standard of .08 grams per deciliter (i.e., .08%) to .05 grams per deciliter (i.e., .05%) (Utah State Legislature 2017). The implementation of Utah's BAC law provides an exogenous shock in which we can examine whether a system-wide tightening of an operational compliance threshold for consumer consumption before driving can serve as an effective mechanism to improve safety.

Method and Data

To examine the main effect of Utah's BAC law, we employ a difference-in-differences (DiD) approach that compares the weekly change in the number of alcohol-related driving fatalities (ARDF) in Utah before and after the implementation of the law with the weekly change in ARDF in the control group. We include fixed effects for states and weeks. We identify control states by using propensity score matching to determine the probability of a state adopting a stricter BAC law and nearest neighbor matching to match units in the treatment group with units in the control group based on propensity scores.

We gather data on each fatal automobile accident in the U.S. from January 1, 2018 through January 31, 2020 that involved a driver with a positive blood alcohol concentration level. To examine the main effect of the law, we aggregate daily accident data using the NHTSA's FARS database to the U.S. state-week level for 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia over 108 weeks: 52 weeks before and 56 weeks after the BAC law's implementation, yielding 5,508 state-week-year observations. The analyses used to examine heterogeneous effects of the law utilize 12,426 observations of disaggregated accident-level data.

Summary of Findings

The coefficient for “Utah x Post-Treatment” is $-.45$ ($p = .000$), showing that the law reduced the number of ARDF by $.45$ per week, or 23.4 annually. To examine the plausibility that the law increased drivers’ perceived vulnerability to arrest, we examine whether the effect was stronger during nighttime hours when there is a greater perceived vulnerability to arrest. The coefficient “Utah x Post-Treatment x Night” is negative ($-.13$, $p = .000$), indicating that Utah’s BAC law had an even stronger impact on reducing ARDF during nights.

We also examine boundary conditions for the BAC law’s effect on individuals who demonstrated low compliance with the previous law. The coefficients for “Utah x Post-Treatment x Young Adult Driver” ($-.21$, $p = .000$) and “Utah x Post-Treatment x White Drivers” ($-.06$, $p = .000$) are both negative, indicating that the law’s reduction of ARDF was stronger on alcohol-related fatal crashes involving young adult and White drivers.

Using “Tourism Volume” as the dependent variable, we find that the law led to 4% reduction in weekly visitors to Utah. While statistically significant, when compared to the prevention of over 23 deaths annually, the law’s annual safety benefits ranged from $\$233.3$ million to $\$268.9$ million.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, this study provides the first rigorous evidence that further tightening a BAC consumption threshold without increases in monitoring or enforcement positively impacts safety. *Second*, the study offers theoretical insights into how a more stringent consumption standard can exert its effects. Using protection motivation theory as a lens, we find evidence that the reduction in ARDF is attributable to the law increasing drivers’ perceived vulnerability to arrest. We test this possibility by examining heterogeneity in the law’s effects at night, a period associated with

a greater perceived vulnerability (Goodwin et al. 2015). *Third*, we find that Utah's law had a greater effect on lowering ARDF among young adult and White drivers, both of whom are among the least compliant with consumption-regulating laws on the road (Barry, Schumacher, and Sauber-Schatz 2022; Romano, Voas, and Lacey 2010). *Fourth*, we assess concerns that the law deterred visitors, finding a 4% decline in local tourism post-implementation that is far outweighed by its estimated \$233.3 million to \$268.9 million annual safety benefit. Our findings suggest that fears of economic consequences from stricter consumption standards may have been overstated compared to their societal benefits.

SEEING ETHICS ON THE SHELF: MORAL EMOTIONS AND CONSUMER RESPONSES TO ETHICAL PACKAGING

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Keywords: Ethical packaging; corporate social responsibility; purchase intention; moral emotions; consumer behavior

Description: This paper shows that ethical packaging operates as a CSR signal that increases consumer responses by activating self-accountability, anticipated guilt, and pride, with pride becoming especially influential in public contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms increasingly communicate corporate social responsibility (CSR) through product-level design, yet most CSR research emphasizes advertising, corporate statements, or brand campaigns rather than packaging at the point of choice. This research asks how moral cues embedded in packaging influence consumer responses and why they do so. Specifically, we examine whether ethical packaging increases purchase intention, perceived CSR, brand loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium. We also investigate whether these effects operate through moral self-regulation. Drawing on moral emotion theory, we propose that ethical packaging activates self-accountability, which can elicit anticipated guilt, and that it also evokes pride as a positive moral emotion. Finally, we examine whether the social visibility of consumption strengthens these

mechanisms by comparing public and private decision contexts. This research therefore clarifies when consumers see ethics on the shelf and how such visibility translates CSR communication into market-relevant responses.

Method And Data

We conducted five online experiments across multiple product categories and ethical-cue types. Studies 1 and 2 used one-factor between-subjects designs to test direct effects. Study 1 compared facial cleanser packages with versus without Braille design, and Study 2 compared an environmentally friendly PETG bank card with a conventional PVC card. Study 3 used yogurt packaging with versus without a climate-footprint label to test the sequential mediation of self-accountability and anticipated guilt. Study 4 used cat-food packaging with versus without a coral-restoration cue to test pride as a mediator. Study 5 used a 2 x 2 design crossing packaging type with public versus private consumption context, using cause-related potato-chip packaging. Participants completed seven-point scale measures of manipulation checks, purchase intention, perceived CSR, brand loyalty, willingness to pay, self-accountability, anticipated guilt, and pride. Analyses included t-tests, ANOVA, and PROCESS mediation and moderated-mediation models.

Summary of Findings

Across Studies 1 and 2, ethical packaging significantly increased purchase intention, perceived CSR, brand loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium, demonstrating both attitudinal and economic value. Study 3 showed that ethical packaging increased self-accountability, which positively predicted anticipated guilt. The sequential indirect pathway from packaging to self-accountability to anticipated guilt to purchase intention was significant. Study 4 showed that ethical packaging increased pride, and pride significantly mediated the effect of ethical packaging on purchase intention. In Studies 3 and 4, suppression patterns emerged: although the

direct effect of ethical packaging became negative after accounting for mediators, the positive indirect effects through moral emotions increased purchase intention. Study 5 showed that ethical packaging increased purchase intention overall. Self-accountability and anticipated guilt pathways operated consistently in both public and private contexts. However, the pride-based pathway was stronger in public contexts, indicating that social visibility amplifies the motivational effect of positive moral emotion.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes four contributions. First, it positions packaging as a direct CSR communication channel at the moment of consumer choice, extending CSR research beyond advertising and corporate-level messaging. Second, it provides convergent experimental evidence across inclusive design, sustainable materials, carbon-transparency labels, and cause-related packaging, showing that ethical cues can shape consumer behavior across product categories. Third, it integrates self-accountability, anticipated guilt, and pride into a unified moral-emotion framework. Rather than treating guilt and pride separately, the findings show that ethical packaging activates both avoidance-based and approach-based pathways. The observed suppression effects also reveal that ethical cues may initially create skepticism or burden, yet moral emotions can convert these reactions into stronger purchase motivation. Fourth, the study identifies social visibility as a boundary condition: public contexts especially strengthen the pride-to-purchase pathway. Practically, the findings suggest that firms should design ethical packaging cues that are clear, credible, and socially meaningful.

References are available upon request.

SHIFTING TO A MINIMALIST CONSUMER LIFESTYLE: LESS AS A PROCESS THEORY OF REDUCED CONSUMPTION

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Keywords: Consumer Minimalism; Sustainable Consumption; Consumer Culture Theory; Practice Theory; Process Theory

Description:

This conceptual paper develops the LESS framework to explain how consumers gradually transition toward and sustain minimalist lifestyles through evolving meanings, practices, social relations, and structural conditions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Contemporary consumer societies remain organised around material acquisition, economic growth, and continual consumption, positioning purchasing as central to identity, social belonging, and personal well-being. Although research on voluntary simplicity, anti-consumption, and consumer minimalism has expanded considerably, existing scholarship largely conceptualises minimalism as a psychological orientation, personality trait, or lifestyle category. Consequently, little theoretical attention has been devoted to understanding how consumers gradually transition toward and sustain reduced-consumption lifestyles over time. This conceptual limitation restricts marketing theory's ability to explain long-term behavioural change and alternative forms of value creation beyond market expansion. This paper addresses: how do consumers transition toward and sustain minimalist lifestyles through dynamic interactions among meanings, practices, social relationships, and structural conditions?

Rather than treating minimalism as a stable consumer identity, this paper conceptualises reduced consumption as an evolving lifestyle transformation embedded within everyday life. Drawing on Consumer Culture Theory, practice theory, and sustainable consumption literature, the paper develops the LESS framework, comprising four interrelated dimensions; Lived Meanings, Everyday Practices, Social Relations, and Structural Conditions. Together, these dimensions explain how consumers progressively redefine consumption, reorganise daily routines, negotiate social expectations, and respond to institutional environments, ultimately stabilising minimalist lifestyles as an ongoing process rather than a fixed end state.

Summary of Findings

The paper argues that minimalist consumption is better understood as a continuous process of lifestyle transformation than as a fixed consumer identity or psychological disposition. The proposed LESS framework demonstrates that transitions toward reduced consumption occur through the dynamic interaction of four interdependent dimensions.

First, Lived Meanings explain how consumers reinterpret material possessions, redefining "having enough" as a desirable source of autonomy, well-being, and authenticity rather than deprivation. Second, these revised meanings become embedded through Everyday Practices, including intentional purchasing, repairing, sharing, maintaining, and decluttering, which gradually become normalised routines. Third, Social Relations shape the legitimacy of minimalist lifestyles by either supporting or challenging alternative consumption choices through family, friends, and broader social expectations. Finally, Structural Conditions, including market infrastructures, repair services, second-hand markets, policy environments, and institutional arrangements, determine whether reduced-consumption lifestyles remain practically achievable and socially legitimate.

The framework proposes that these four dimensions continuously reinforce one another through recursive feedback mechanisms. As meanings reshape practices, practices alter relationships, relationships influence institutional legitimacy, and supportive structures further reinforce minimalist behaviours. Consequently, minimalist lifestyles emerge not through isolated behavioural decisions but through ongoing social and material reconfiguration, producing durable changes in consumption practices that challenge dominant assumptions linking consumer value exclusively to acquisition and market growth.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes four principal contributions to marketing and consumer research.

First, it reconceptualises consumer minimalism as a dynamic process theory rather than a stable psychological trait, consumer identity, or lifestyle category. By shifting analytical attention from who minimalist consumers are to how minimalist lifestyles develop and endure, the paper advances theoretical understanding of long-term consumption change.

Second, the LESS framework integrates previously fragmented perspectives from Consumer Culture Theory, practice theory, and sustainable consumption into a unified explanatory model. This integration demonstrates that reduced consumption cannot be adequately understood through individual motivations alone but must be explained through the interaction of meanings, practices, social relationships, and institutional structures.

Third, the paper extends marketing theory by reframing reduced consumption as a legitimate process of value creation rather than deprivation or sacrifice. It challenges dominant growth-oriented assumptions by demonstrating that consumer value may emerge through sufficiency, longevity, care, and meaningful use rather than continual acquisition.

Finally, the paper contributes to broader debates surrounding sustainable consumption and post-growth marketing by offering a theoretically grounded framework capable of informing future empirical research, marketing practice, and public policy. The LESS framework provides scholars with a foundation for examining consumption transitions longitudinally while offering practitioners and policymakers actionable insights for designing interventions that normalise and support sustainable lifestyles centred on "having enough" rather than perpetual consumption.

References are available upon request.

THE EFFECT OF RECIPIENT'S GENDER ON DONATION BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: gender, warmth, donation behavior, gender discrepancies.

Description: This study examines how the gender of the beneficiary impacts donation behaviors.

Research Question:

Some authors (e.g., Chapman et al. 2022; Erlandsson et al. 2024) have proposed, but not empirically tested, that women should receive more donations relative to men due to normative associations with women needing help more often than men. However, work on perceived warmth and competence demonstrates that these judgements are context dependent and perceptions of gender in specific contexts highly influence stereotype beliefs. For example, while women are generally perceived as warmer than men, they are also more likely to lose perceived warmth when engaging in activities more highly associated with men. In contrast, as men are traditionally perceived as more agentic, asking for help may boost their communal traits, leading to higher perceptions of warmth for the recipient. We test this against multiple studies and secondary data from GoFundMe.

Method and Data

Using secondary data from GoFundMe, we provide initial evidence that when the beneficiary is female, there is a significant negative effect on number of donors either with the full sample ($b = -.075, p < .05$) or with the subsample ($b = -.093, p < .01$). In addition, the beneficiary being female has a significant negative effect on contributed amount either with the full sample ($b = -.035, p < .05$) or with the subsample ($b = -.056, p < .01$). We further test this finding across give laboratory-controlled experiments and replicate the main effect, demonstrating that consumers are more willing, and give higher donation amounts, when the recipient of the fundraiser is male compared to female. We replicate this across an incentivized setting, multiple donation requests, with images of the recipients and even without images. We also differentiate from other request contexts (i.e., Kickstarter) to show that the effect is specific to an altruistic request for help as opposed to one that more closely mimics an investment or includes a reward. Finally, we establish conditions to mitigate biased donation behavior by increasing the warmth of the fundraiser description, therefore leveling the perceived warmth applied to the recipients and increasing donations for both men and women.

Summary of Findings

Prior work has established that gender stereotypes influence giving behaviors. However, much past research examines the influence of the gender of the donor and not the gender of the recipient. This research advances understanding of gender bias in charitable giving by showing that male recipients are given more donations (both higher willingness to donate and higher amounts) compared to female recipients. This occurs because the donation context represents an asymmetrical warmth environment in which men are perceived as warmer than women,

deviating from the traditional stereotype judgement that women are warmer than men. We propose asking for help increase vulnerability of the recipient, increasing warmth by default irrespective of recipient gender. However, as men are perceived as more agentic and therefore not expected to ask for help, this increases their perceived warmth. On the other hand, asking for help aligns with communal expectations for women, thus not incrementally increasing the perceived warmth as shown for men. This suggests that rather than reflecting a fixed stereotype in which women are always perceived as warmer than men, warmth perceptions are context dependent and the donation environment is such a context in where male recipients are perceived as warmer than women.

Statement of Key Contributions

Our work makes three key contributions. First, to the crowdfunding and prosocial behavior literature, we shift the focus from the characteristics of fundraisers and campaigns to those of beneficiaries, a perspective that has received scant attention despite its centrality to donor decision-making. Using a combination of large-scale field data and controlled laboratory experiments, we document a robust gender disparity in donation outcomes, establishing beneficiary gender as a consequential determinant of prosocial support. Second, to the stereotype literature, we reveal that stereotype judgements are context dependent and demonstrate an environment in which a warmth asymmetry exists—asking for help. This challenges the prevailing assumption that warmth uniformly benefits women in communal domains. Thus, we offer a more nuanced account of how stereotypes influence consumer judgments. Finally, for practice, our findings highlight a hidden form of bias embedded in digital platforms. By demonstrating when and how women are disadvantaged, we suggest interventions such as

anonymizing beneficiary information, adjusting message framing, or designing platform nudges that mitigate stereotype penalties. In doing so, this research contributes to the broader goal of fostering equity and inclusivity in digital marketplaces for prosocial giving.

Global and Cross-Cultural Marketing

WHEN FOREIGN BRANDING BACKFIRES: THE ROLE OF BRAND ORIGIN IN CONSUMER RESPONSES TO FOREIGN BRANDING STRATEGIES

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Keywords: Foreign branding; Brand origin; Country-of-origin; Emerging-market firms; Shifting standards theory

Description: This research examines how discrepancies between a brand's implied and actual origin influence consumer responses to foreign-branding strategies.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand names are often consumers' first point of contact with a brand, shaping initial impressions and expectations (Aaker and Keller 1990). To cultivate favorable brand perceptions, firms sometimes adopt a foreign-branding strategy by creating a brand name that implies an origin different from its actual origin (Leclerc et al. 1994). Although this strategy has long been used by firms from developed markets, it has become increasingly attractive to emerging-market firms seeking to overcome unfavorable country-of-origin associations and enhance perceptions of quality and prestige. Because consumers frequently infer brand origin from the linguistic properties of brand names (Samiee et al. 2005), foreign branding offers firms a relatively inexpensive means of influencing these perceptions. However, growing access to brand-origin

information has made discrepancies between implied and actual origin increasingly transparent, raising questions about how consumers respond when such inconsistencies become apparent. While prior research has primarily examined the benefits of foreign branding, little is known about its potential downside, particularly for emerging-market firms. Drawing on country stereotypes, confirmation bias, and brand origin literature, this research examines how incongruence between implied and actual brand origin influences consumer responses. Specifically, we investigate perceived deception as the underlying mechanism and examine whether offering type (product versus service) and logo design (full-form versus abbreviated) serve as important boundary conditions.

Method and Data

The proposed framework was tested across five complementary experiments involving multiple product categories, research designs, and consumer markets. Collectively, the studies examine how consumers respond to discrepancies between implied and actual brand origin while identifying the underlying psychological mechanism and relevant boundary conditions. Study 1 tests the main effect of foreign branding by comparing emerging- and developed-market firms using foreign and local branding strategies. Study 2 replicates these findings across consumers from the United States, Mexico, and China. Study 3 examines perceived deception as the underlying mechanism while accounting for alternative explanations, including country image and country-related affect. Study 4 investigates whether the nature of the offering (product versus service) moderates the proposed effect, whereas Study 5 examines whether abbreviated versus full-form brand logos reduce the salience of implied origin cues and improve consumer responses. Across the five studies, data were collected using controlled experimental designs,

providing a comprehensive test of the proposed framework across multiple consumer markets, product categories, and branding contexts.

Summary of Findings

Across five studies, the findings consistently demonstrate that foreign-branding strategies are most likely to backfire when employed by emerging-market firms to imply a developed-market origin. Compared with identical strategies used by developed-market firms, foreign branding by emerging-market firms evokes stronger perceptions of deception, resulting in less favorable brand attitudes, lower perceived quality, and reduced consumer engagement. The studies further establish perceived deception as the primary mechanism underlying these effects. Consumers are more likely to interpret foreign branding by emerging-market firms as an attempt to mislead them regarding the brand's true origin, which subsequently undermines brand evaluations. The research also identifies important boundary conditions. Specifically, the negative effects are attenuated for service offerings, where consumers rely less on origin cues, and when abbreviated brand logos reduce the salience of implied foreign origin. Together, these findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of foreign-branding strategies depends not only on discrepancies between implied and actual brand origin but also on the context in which those strategies are implemented.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions to the international marketing and branding literature. First, it advances research on foreign branding by shifting attention from country of manufacture to brand origin, a more appropriate lens for understanding how consumers form country associations in an increasingly globalized marketplace. By distinguishing between implied and

actual brand origin, this research demonstrates that discrepancies between the two have important consequences for consumer evaluations.

Second, this research identifies perceived deception as the primary psychological mechanism through which foreign-branding strategies backfire. Specifically, it shows that foreign branding employed by emerging-market firms is more likely to evoke perceptions of deception than identical strategies employed by developed-market firms, thereby reducing perceived quality, brand attitudes, and consumer engagement. In doing so, the findings provide a deeper understanding of how consumers interpret brand-origin incongruence.

Finally, this research identifies important boundary conditions that influence the effectiveness of foreign-branding strategies. The findings demonstrate that service offerings and abbreviated brand logos reduce the salience of implied origin cues, thereby weakening perceptions of deception and improving consumer responses. Together, these findings offer a more nuanced understanding of when foreign-branding strategies are likely to succeed or fail and provide actionable guidance for firms competing in increasingly transparent international markets.

References are available upon request.

Modernize the Craft, Discount the Brand: How AI Design Shapes

Perceived Brand Globalness in Emerging Markets

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Keyword: Perceived Brand Globalness; AI Design Disclosure; Emerging-Market Brands; Perceived Cultural Capital; Cultural Congruence.

Description: This research examines how AI design disclosure shapes consumers' perceptions of emerging-market brands' globalness by altering perceived cultural capital.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence is increasingly incorporated into product design, allowing brands to update creative processes, improve design efficiency, and signal technological sophistication. For emerging-market brands seeking greater global recognition, AI design may appear particularly appealing because it offers a way to compensate for resource constraints and project an image of innovation. Yet the value of culturally expressive products is not derived solely from novelty, efficiency, or technological advancement. Such products also embody symbolic meanings, aesthetic judgment, cultural heritage, and accumulated cultural resources. This creates a critical tension for emerging-market brands: although AI design may modernize the craft, it may also discount the brand by weakening consumers' perceptions that the brand possesses meaningful cultural capital.

This research examines how AI design disclosure influences perceived brand globalness for emerging-market brands. We propose that, compared with human-designed products, AI-designed products reduce perceived brand globalness because consumers infer lower levels of perceived cultural capital. We further argue that this

effect depends on brand–design cultural origin congruence. When the cultural origin of the design elements is congruent with the brand’s country of origin, AI design is more likely to be interpreted as lacking human cultural understanding and aesthetic judgment, thereby reducing perceived brand globalness. By contrast, when the cultural origin of the design elements is incongruent with the brand’s country of origin, this negative effect should be attenuated because the design is less likely to be viewed as a direct expression of the brand’s own cultural heritage.

Method And Data

We test the proposed framework across five experiments using multiple emerging-market brand contexts and product categories. A pilot experiment first examines whether the negative effect of AI design is specific to emerging-market brands. Participants evaluated a lamp attributed either to an emerging-market brand from India or to a developed-market brand from the United States. The pilot provides initial evidence that the AI design effect is more pronounced for emerging-market brands.

Two main-effect experiments then test whether human-designed products generate higher perceived brand globalness than AI-designed products. These studies use different product categories and country contexts, including an Vietnam handbag and a Philippine perfume. A subsequent mediation experiment uses a Bangladeshi T-shirt to examine whether perceived cultural capital explains the effect of design source on perceived brand globalness. Finally, a moderation experiment uses an Indian tote bag to test the role of brand–design cultural origin congruence. In this experiment, design source is manipulated as AI design versus human design, and cultural congruence is manipulated by presenting design elements that are either congruent or incongruent with the brand’s country of origin. Across studies, perceived brand globalness serves as the primary dependent variable.

Summary of Findings

Across five experiments, we find consistent evidence that AI design disclosure can undermine perceived brand globalness for emerging-market brands. Products described

as human-designed are perceived as higher in brand globalness than otherwise comparable products described as AI-designed. This effect emerges across multiple emerging-market country contexts and product categories, indicating that consumers do not merely evaluate AI design as a technological cue, but also use it to infer whether an emerging-market brand possesses the symbolic and cultural resources needed to be recognized globally.

The findings further reveal the psychological process underlying this effect. AI design reduces perceived brand cultural capital: consumers infer that AI-designed products reflect less cultural accumulation, weaker aesthetic refinement, and a lower capacity to express cultural meaning through design. This diminished perception of cultural capital subsequently lowers perceived brand globalness. In addition, the negative effect of AI design depends on brand–design cultural origin congruence. When design elements are culturally congruent with the brand’s country of origin, AI design is especially detrimental because consumers expect the design to embody the brand’s own cultural heritage and aesthetic knowledge. However, when the design elements are culturally incongruent with the brand’s country of origin, the negative effect of AI design is attenuated, as the design is less likely to be interpreted as a direct expression of the brand’s own cultural capital.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it contributes to the perceived brand globalness literature by identifying AI design disclosure as a novel antecedent of perceived brand globalness for emerging-market brands. Prior research has primarily examined globalness cues such as brand names, advertising appeals, spokespersons, country-of-origin cues, and global/local cultural positioning. This research extends this literature by showing that the perceived source of product design can also shape consumers’ judgments of whether an emerging-market brand appears globally competitive and internationally recognized.

Second, this research contributes to the literature on AI in marketing and product design by revealing a tension between the technological and cultural meanings of AI design. Although AI design may signal modernity, novelty, and technological advancement, it can also weaken the symbolic and cultural meanings that consumers expect from culturally expressive products. In doing so, this research clarifies why AI design disclosure may not always benefit brands, especially when consumers evaluate products whose value depends on cultural understanding, aesthetic judgment, and human creative interpretation.

Third, this research introduces perceived cultural capital as a mechanism linking AI design disclosure to perceived brand globalness. By showing that AI design lowers perceived cultural capital, which in turn reduces perceived brand globalness, this research explains why design source is especially consequential for cultural products from emerging markets. Finally, the moderating role of brand–design cultural origin congruence further specifies when this process is most pronounced: AI design is particularly damaging when the product’s design elements are culturally congruent with the brand’s country of origin and are therefore expected to represent the brand’s own cultural heritage and aesthetic resources.

Advertising and Marketing Communications

EMPATHY BEYOND HUMANITY: UNBLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS IN BRAND EVANGELISM

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Keywords: Virtual influencers, Human-AI collaboration, Prior knowledge of AI, Artificial empathy, Brand evangelism.

Description: This study investigates the nonlinear and outcome-specific effects of different types of virtual influencers (human-like, anime-like, cartoon-like) and prior AI knowledge on artificial empathy and brand evangelism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

While virtual influencers (VIs) increasingly compete with human influencers (HIs) for consumer attention, extant literature presents inconsistent findings regarding their persuasive effectiveness. This inconsistency largely stems from prior studies employing binary human-versus-AI comparisons or limited typologies, which fail to capture the full design spectrum of VIs. Furthermore, although artificial empathy is critical for human-computer interaction, existing research treats it as a uniform construct, neglecting the theoretical distinction between

cognitive and affective empathy pathways within digital environments. Consequently, this study addresses three primary research questions:

- (1) Do VIs evoke artificial empathy through mechanisms distinct from interpersonal empathy experienced with HIs?
- (2) Under what conditions do cognitive versus affective empathy pathways differentially predict brand evangelism?
- (3) To what extent does prior knowledge of AI affect these relationships?

Method and Data

This study utilized a 4 (human-AI collaboration paradigm: human vs. human-like vs. anime-like vs. cartoon-like) $\times$ 2 (prior knowledge of AI: high vs. low) between-subjects online experimental design. Following the exclusion of invalid responses, the final sample comprised 601 participants. The experimental stimuli consisted of promotional Instagram posts for UNIQLO's Autumn/Winter 2025 collection, endorsed by four systematically selected influencers corresponding to the manipulated conditions (H'Hen Nie, LilMiquela, Kizuna AI, and Apoki). Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4 to test the structural model, while SPSS was utilized for ANOVA to assess mean differences across experimental groups.

Summary of Findings

The empirical results demonstrate that the degree of human-likeness in VIs exerts a nonlinear effect on artificial empathy. Contrary to expectations, cartoon-like VIs elicited the highest overall artificial empathy, significantly outperforming human-like VIs, which produced the weakest empathic responses. Despite their lower empathy scores, human-like VIs generated strong brand evangelism, comparable to HIs and cartoon-like VIs, whereas anime-like VIs exhibited significantly weaker effects on brand advocacy. Mediation analysis revealed that perspective-taking (cognitive empathy), empathic concern, and emotional contagion (affective empathy) operate as independent, complementary pathways driving brand evangelism. Notably, cognitive empathy demonstrated a constant and robust impact across all VI types. Finally, moderation analysis indicated that a high level of AI knowledge enhanced consumers'

overall receptivity to VIs, while a lack of AI literacy led to more critical evaluations, particularly hindering the effectiveness of anime-like VIs.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research provides twofold contributions to digital marketing and human-computer interaction by challenging conventional binary assumptions about artificial agents. Theoretically, it extends the Computers-Are-Social-Actors theory by evaluating a comprehensive spectrum of anthropomorphism. The study unveils a nonlinear relationship between visual realism and consumer responses to resolve prevailing contradictions in extant literature. Paradoxically, human-like virtual influencers (VIs) elicit the least artificial empathy yet remain highly formidable in driving brand evangelism.

Furthermore, this study introduces theoretical novelty by isolating the underlying mechanisms of artificial empathy. It provides pioneering empirical evidence that cognitive and affective empathy operate through independent pathways in human-AI collaborations. Notably, the cognitive route demonstrates greater persuasive strength across all VI typologies. The research also uncovers a fascinating paradox regarding consumers' AI literacy. While a high level of prior AI knowledge enhances overall receptivity to VIs, it simultaneously reverses aesthetic preferences, prompting technologically savvy consumers to favor human-like VIs over cartoon-like alternatives.

Managerially, this study translates these empirical insights into an actionable strategic framework for VI selection. Marketers should align VI design characteristics with specific campaign objectives. For instance, brands can deploy cartoon-like VIs to cultivate empathy-driven engagement and utilize human-like VIs for conversion-focused initiatives. By identifying AI literacy as a critical segmentation variable, the research equips practitioners to tailor their communication strategies. This targeted approach ensures that brands can effectively mitigate consumer skepticism and maximize campaign efficacy among audiences exhibiting lower technological familiarity.

References are available on request.

HOW ADVERTISING WORKS IN HIGH-INTENT DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS: TIMING, FORMAT AND REPETITION IN RETAIL MEDIA NETWORKS

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Keywords: Retail Media, advertising effectiveness, Motivation–Opportunity–Ability (MOA), temporal dynamics, ad format, exposure intensity.

Description: Drawing on Motivation–Opportunity–Ability (MOA) theory and proprietary hourly campaign data from a major retail media platform, this study examines how advertising timing, format, and repetition jointly drive sales effectiveness in high-intent digital purchase environments.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retail Media (RM) has emerged as a dominant force in digital advertising, surpassing \$140 billion globally in 2024 by embedding brand messages directly within consumers' purchase journeys. Unlike traditional media, RM platforms simultaneously control ad delivery and the point of sale, creating a high-intent purchase context in which consumers are structurally primed to respond to advertising stimuli. Yet, despite this commercial relevance, the drivers of RM effectiveness remain

theoretically underdeveloped. This study addresses that gap by asking: How do advertising timing, format, and repetition influence sales effectiveness in high-intent digital retail environments? Drawing on the Motivation–Opportunity–Ability (MOA) theory, we map three classical advertising levers onto the RM context: ad timing captures temporal fluctuations in consumer *Motivation* across hours and days; ad format—encompassing funnel stage and ad product type—reflects the degree of situational *Opportunity* at the moment of exposure; and ad repetition—measured through exposure frequency and campaign duration—shapes consumer *Ability* by building decision fluency. We develop six hypotheses predicting that evening and early-week exposures outperform other time windows (H1–H2), lower-funnel and brand-oriented formats generate higher sales than attention and display formats (H3–H4), exposure intensity follows an inverted-U pattern (H5), and campaign duration produces monotonic sales decay (H6).

Method and Data

We analyze a proprietary dataset from a major RM platform covering three leading consumer goods brands across four product categories—oral care, personal care, electric toothbrushes, and home care—over a 12-month period (April 2024–March 2025). The dataset comprises 412 distinct product-level campaigns and 217,815 campaign–time observations, collectively generating approximately \$73 million in attributed revenue from 15 million units sold. Each observation records hourly campaign metrics including attributed sales revenue, ad impressions, and unique users reached. To estimate the effects of timing, format, and repetition on log-transformed sales revenue while controlling for persistent, unobserved campaign heterogeneity, we employ a Correlated Random Effects (CRE) panel model with Mundlak corrections. Cluster-robust standard errors are computed at the campaign level. We estimate two complementary models: Model 1 identifies funnel stage effects; Model 2 substitutes ad product type. Robustness checks include

fixed effects benchmarking, lagged dependent variable specifications, Oster coefficient stability tests, and placebo tests with lead indicators. Post hoc analyses examine daypart $\times$ day-of-week and ad format $\times$ daypart interactions.

Summary of Findings

All six hypotheses were supported. For ad timing (H1–H2), evening exposure increases sales by +12% and early morning reduces them by –44% relative to the morning baseline; Tuesday is the strongest weekday (+15%) while Saturday is the weakest (–6%). For ad format (H3–H4), consideration and purchase funnel stages outperform the attention baseline by +143% and +161%, respectively; brand ads and product ads exceed display ads by +102% and +66%. Notably, brand ads outperform product ads even at the point of purchase, contradicting traditional item-level conversion assumptions. For ad repetition (H5–H6), exposure frequency follows an inverted-U pattern peaking at approximately 90 impressions per buyer—far above classical benchmarks of 3–10—while the observed campaign mean of approximately 11 suggests widespread underinvestment. Campaign duration produces a compounding decay of approximately –20% in sales over 30 days, substantially slower than the hours-long dissipation documented in television. Post hoc analyses reveal non-additive temporal effects: the evening–early-week window (peaking Monday–Wednesday evenings) delivers the strongest joint lift, and ad format effectiveness varies systematically across dayparts.

Key Contributions

This study advances advertising theory and practice along three dimensions. First, it establishes motivational synchronization as a platform-specific lever of RM effectiveness, showing that circadian and weekly rhythms shape advertising responsiveness differently in transaction-integrated environments than in television or in-store digital signage—with evening and early-

week exposures outperforming patterns documented in prior media research. Second, it reconceptualizes Opportunity in RM as a continuous alignment construct rather than a binary condition: the closer the funnel stage and ad format are to the transaction moment, the more directly consumer purchase intent converts to sales. Third, it extends classical wear-in/wear-out theory by demonstrating that high-intent environments substantially elevate the optimal exposure threshold and slow temporal decay—evidence that technology determines how exposures are delivered, but psychology determines when and why they work. Managerially, findings translate into four actionable principles: concentrate delivery in evening and early-week windows; align format to funnel stage; raise exposure toward the impression optimum; and implement scheduled creative refreshes to counteract the monthly decay. References are available upon request.

I SEE, I STRIVE, AND I'M SPENT: HOW VISUAL PERSPECTIVE AND GOAL STAGES INFLUENCE RESPONSES TO RESTRAINT AND REWARD PRODUCTS

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Keywords: Goal Contagion; Vicarious Goal Satiation; Visual Perspective; Self-Control; Resource Depletion

Description: This study examines how visual perspective and goal stage jointly shape consumers' responses to restraint and reward product advertisements in online video contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Online video platforms increasingly integrate advertising into video-viewing experiences, yet less is known about how the goal-related content of a video shapes responses to subsequent advertisements. Drawing on goal contagion, vicarious goal satiation, and vicarious depletion, this research asks how viewers respond to advertisements inserted during different stages of a character's goal process. Specifically, we examine whether advertisements for restraint products, which require self-control and facilitate goal pursuit, are more effective during goal pursuit, whereas advertisements for reward products, which are hedonic and goal-irrelevant, are more effective after goal achievement. We further ask whether these effects depend on the visual perspective of the video. First-person perspective may intensify mental simulation and transfer the character's self-control effort to the viewer, thereby producing greater resource depletion than third-person perspective. As a result, the typical effects of goal contagion and vicarious goal satiation may be weakened or altered in first-person video contexts.

Method and Data

Two laboratory experiments were conducted using a YouTube-like online video context. Study 1 examined whether first-person perspective induces greater self-control resource depletion than third-person perspective during goal-pursuit videos. A 2 x 3 between-subjects design manipulated visual perspective and video duration, with 180 participants randomly assigned to one of six conditions. The character's goal was achieving a good physique, and self-control depletion was measured using a 10-point Brief Mood Introspection Scale. Study 2 tested the advertising effects of visual perspective, goal stage, and product type. A 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design manipulated visual perspective, goal stage, and product type, with 242 participants randomly assigned to eight conditions. The restraint product was unsweetened cereal, and the reward product was chocolate cookies. A fictitious brand was used to avoid prior brand bias. Advertising effectiveness was assessed using eye-tracking measures of visual attention, a brand memory recognition task, and ad attitude ratings.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed that first-person perspective produced significantly greater self-control resource depletion than third-person perspective when viewers watched goal-pursuit videos, particularly at the 6-minute and 9-minute durations. Study 2 revealed a significant three-way interaction among visual perspective, goal stage, and product type. In third-person videos, restraint product advertisements were more effective when inserted during goal pursuit than after goal achievement, producing higher visual attention, better brand memory, and more favorable ad attitudes. In contrast, reward product advertisements were more effective after goal achievement, particularly for brand memory and ad attitudes. However, these patterns changed in first-person videos. Because first-person perspective induced stronger vicarious depletion, restraint product advertisements showed consistently limited effectiveness across both goal stages. Reward product advertisements, meanwhile, attracted relatively strong responses regardless of whether they appeared during goal pursuit or after goal achievement.

These findings suggest that the influence of goal contagion and vicarious goal satiation depends critically on visual perspective.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to marketing and consumer behavior literature in three ways. First, it extends goal contagion and vicarious goal satiation research to an online video advertising context, showing how the goal stage of media content can influence responses to embedded advertisements. Second, it identifies visual perspective as an important boundary condition. Whereas third-person videos allow goal pursuit and goal achievement to guide responses to restraint and reward products, first-person videos intensify mental simulation and produce vicarious depletion, thereby weakening the typical goal-stage effects. Third, this research advances understanding of product-ad placement strategy by distinguishing between restraint and reward products. Practically, the findings suggest that restraint products are best inserted during goal-pursuit scenes in third-person videos, while reward products are more effective after goal achievement. In first-person videos, however, reward products may outperform restraint products across goal stages. These insights can help advertisers, platforms, and content creators optimize ad timing and improve advertising effectiveness.

References are available upon request.

MERGING MINDS: MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IMPACT ON PERCEIVED MARKETPLACE SHARED REALITY AND CONSUMER RESPONSE

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Keywords: marketplace shared reality, self-brand connection, brand motivation, consumer identity.

Description: We demonstrate that brands can create perceived shared reality with their target consumers by using socially validating marketing messages.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question:

Consumers possess an innate drive to share experiences with others. Shared reality posits that individuals are motivated to seek alignment of their inner states (i.e., beliefs, feelings, concerns) with others to fulfill these epistemic and relational needs. When one's worldview is shared it can produce meaningful outcomes including the feeling that the "right" decision was made. However, marketing research on shared reality has largely focused on consumer-to-

consumer interactions, lacking consideration for if and how firms can create a perception of shared reality. This research demonstrates one such type of marketing strategy: using brand messaging to elicit what we term *marketplace shared reality*. We propose that using marketplace shared reality allows brands to strengthen their connections with consumers by helping them feel understood, included, and confident in their worldview, driven by a united inner state with a marketer, service provider, or brand.

Method and Data:

Across four experiments and a field study, we aimed to test our theory of marketplace shared reality messaging. Study 1 tests this phenomenon in the field by partnering with a local, small business. The findings of the field study increase external validity and provide evidence that a marketplace shared reality message is more effective at increasing consumer engagement compared to a neutral advertising message. We replicate this effect in multiple laboratory-controlled settings, including varying message copy or keeping copy the same and varying target audience. We further increase internal validity by replicating the main effect using advertisements that closely mimics real advertisements in multiple studies. We provide strong causal evidence of self-brand connection as the driver by manipulating self-brand connection directly and show that marketplace shared reality messaging can increase feelings of connections with brands that have low baseline connection with their consumers, similar to those that have higher baseline connections with their consumers. Finally, we show that brand motivation is a boundary in which marketplace shared reality messaging will not be as effective if the brand motivation appears opportunistic as opposed to sincere.

Summary of Findings:

Marketplace shared reality is unique in that it is rooted in a commercial exchange, shifting the dynamic from purely relational to transactional. Thus, this research offers several key contributions. First, we introduce and formally define marketplace shared reality. To this end, we conceptualize marketplace shared reality as consumers' perception that a brand genuinely understands and shares their inner states, including beliefs, concerns, and lived experiences. Second, we provide empirical evidence that marketplace shared reality emerges as a distinct outcome of thoughtfully designed brand communications and yields important positive consequences for brand-related responses. Across studies, we demonstrate that marketplace shared reality enhances consumer outcomes by increasing self-brand connection, thereby clarifying the psychological mechanism underlying its effects. Collectively, this research offers the first systematic examination of marketplace shared reality, establishing it as a theoretically distinct and practically relevant construct that advances understanding of how brands can foster deeper consumer relationships through communication.

Statement of Key Contributions

These findings offer several theoretical and managerial implications. First, this research extends shared reality theory beyond its traditional grounding in psychology literature to the domain of marketplace communication. In doing so, we identify a framework for how marketers can foster feelings of connection and understanding between brands and consumers. Importantly, this work broadens shared reality theory by demonstrating how shared reality processes operate within exchange-based consumer-brand relationships. Second, we demonstrate that the effects of

MSR emerge through self-brand connection. The findings here extend self-brand connection theory by identifying *MSR* as an antecedent of self-brand connection, suggesting that shared reality can serve as an epistemic and relational pathway through which brands connect with consumers. In studying the role of self-brand connection, we introduce a novel approach to manipulate, rather than measure, self-brand connection. Managerially, the findings suggest that brands can strengthen consumer relationships by strategically crafting marketing communications that signal the understanding and validation of consumers' inner states. When executed well, this strategy allows marketers to move beyond transactional persuasion and toward the cultivation of a consumer-brand relationship.

MORE RECENCY RULES: EXPERIMENTALLY INVESTIGATING EFFECTS OF SERIAL AD POSITION, AD TYPE, AND ENGAGEMENT ON PODCAST AD EFFECTIVENESS

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Keywords: podcast advertising, serial ad placement, media vehicle engagement, Social Cognitive Theory of Internet Uses and Gratifications, recency effect

Description: This 2×2 experiment tests how ad type (host-read vs. conventional) and serial placement (pre-roll vs. mid-roll) affect podcast advertising outcomes, moderated by media vehicle engagement, within a Social Cognitive Theory of Internet Uses-and-Gratifications framework.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question -- Podcast advertising revenue is growing rapidly, yet experimental research on managerially relevant outcomes remains limited compared to qualitative- and survey-based literature. Prior studies show mixed or equivocal results for host-read versus conventional ads and for serial ad placement (pre-roll/"primacy effect" vs. mid-roll/"recency effect"), with little experimental examination of longer-form conversational podcasts or hedonic products with regard to common advertising-related dependent variables. Engagement is frequently cited as both a feature of podcast audiences and positive driver of ad-related outcomes in other media, but it has not been tested experimentally as a moderator (or potential primary antecedent) in this

context. Drawing on the Social Cognitive Theory of Internet Uses and Gratifications (LaRose and Eastin 2004) and Calder and Malthouse's motivation-based engagement framework, this study asks: How do ad type and serial ad placement affect purchase intention, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and information seeking intention? Does podcast engagement moderate these relationships, and how does it function conceptually?

Method and Data -- A 2×2 between-subjects experiment manipulated ad type (host-read vs. conventional/non-host-read; AI-generated voice clone for the host-read condition using a popular long-form conversational podcast) and serial placement (pre-roll vs. mid-roll) within a 2.5-minute *Joe Rogan Experience* clip featuring a fictitious hedonic apparel brand. Participants (final $N = 193$ after attention/manipulation checks and cleaning per best practices) first completed established engagement measures (Calder et al.'s [2016] sub-factors summed into a second-order construct, $\alpha = .952$), listened to the stimulus, then completed validated multi-item scales for the dependent variables (purchase intention, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, information seeking intention; all $\alpha > .72$). Data were analyzed via ANCOVA (with relevant covariates) for main and interaction effects, and Hayes' PROCESS Model 3 for moderated moderation.

Summary of Findings -- Mid-roll placement produced significantly higher purchase intention, attitude toward the ad, and information seeking intention than pre-roll (small but meaningful effect sizes, $\eta^2 \approx .02-.03$), supporting a recency advantage in this longer-form context. A significant interaction emerged on attitude toward the brand: among pre-roll exposures, host-read ads outperformed conventional ads. Motivation-based engagement positively predicted all outcomes and significantly moderated effects on purchase intention, attitude toward the brand, and information seeking intention. Patterns indicated that host-read ads rely less on high

engagement levels to drive outcomes relative to conventional ads (i.e., engagement acts partly as an equalizer), while also functioning as a strong overall predictor—consistent with positioning it as a primary antecedent/driver rather than solely a moderator.

Statement of Key Contributions -- This study advances marketing knowledge by providing causal experimental evidence on podcast advertising in an underexplored longer-form conversational format combined with a hedonic product category, extending prior survey/qualitative work. Theoretically, it integrates and extends the Social Cognitive Theory of Internet Uses and Gratifications with motivation-based engagement frameworks to podcasts, offering refined understanding of engagement as both moderator and primary driver/antecedent that amplifies ad outcomes while reducing reliance on executional factors like host-read delivery at high engagement levels. It also nuances host-read advertising effects via interaction with placement and potential parasocial mechanisms. Managerially, findings recommend prioritizing mid-roll inventory, using host-read executions to mitigate pre-roll drawbacks (especially when engagement cannot be assured), and targeting or selecting podcast vehicles/hosts with high levels of engagement—potentially yielding 5–10% lifts in purchase intention based on adjusted means. These insights help practitioners optimize limited podcast ad budgets while guiding future research on engagement, parasocial relationships, and value co-creation in audio advertising.

References are available upon request.

UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCE IN DIGITAL ADVERTISING: A MULTIMODAL PROCESS MODEL OF PROBLEMATIC ADVERTISING

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Keywords: Problematic Advertising, Persuasion Knowledge, Multimodal Analysis, Dark Patterns, Consumer Perception

Description: This research develops and tests a multimodal process model explaining how textual and visual cues jointly shape the deployment, recognition, and evaluation of problematic advertising.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Problematic advertising often relies on subtle combinations of language and visual design that shape consumer responses without overt persuasion. Prior research has examined deception and persuasion but typically treats problematic advertising as a binary phenomenon or focuses on isolated tactics. This overlooks two critical gaps: (1) the distinction between how influence is deployed by advertisers and how it is recognized by consumers, and (2) the inherently multimodal nature of digital advertising, where textual and visual cues jointly shape interpretation.

Grounded in persuasion knowledge theory, this research conceptualizes problematic advertising as a multistage process linking textual influence cues to influence tactics (manipulation, coercion, and deception), their cognitive registration as perceived manipulation, and downstream ad evaluations. We further examine the role of visual design as a contextual moderator that conditions how influence tactics translate into evaluative outcomes.

The central research question is: How do textual and visual cues jointly shape the deployment, recognition, and evaluation of influence tactics in digital advertising?

Method and Data

We analyze a publicly available dataset of 500 online display advertisements collected from top U.S. websites, each evaluated by at least ten participants, yielding over 5000 consumer responses. Textual influence cues are extracted using optical character recognition (OCR) and operationalized as theory-driven linguistic features, including urgency, exaggeration, directive language, deceptive wording, and interface-mimicking text. Visual design cues are extracted using computer vision techniques and summarized via principal components capturing key dimensions such as contrast, saliency, and color structure. Influence tactics (manipulation, coercion, and deception) are measured using multimodal large language model–based classifiers, validated against independent human coding ($ICC = .90-.97$; $r > .95$).

We estimate a three-stage empirical model: (1) OLS models linking textual cues to influence tactic deployment, (2) fractional logit models examining whether tactics are recognized as perceived manipulation, and (3) moderated models testing how influence tactics and perceived manipulation affect ad evaluations, conditional on visual design.

Summary of Findings

Results reveal a structured and asymmetric influence process. First, textual cues map onto distinct influence tactics rather than a single persuasion dimension. Manipulation is driven by urgency and exaggeration, coercion by directive language, and deception by deceptive wording and interface mimicry. Second, consumers selectively recognize these tactics. Manipulation and deception significantly increase perceived manipulation, whereas coercion is not recognized, indicating a gap between influence deployment and recognition. Third, visual design conditions evaluation effects. Manipulation and deception reduce trust and design quality, while perceived manipulation strongly suppresses evaluations. Visual context moderates these effects: high contrast amplifies negative responses, whereas visually balanced designs attenuate them.

These findings support a multistage, multimodal account of problematic advertising.

Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, it extends persuasion knowledge theory by empirically distinguishing between influence deployment and influence recognition, demonstrating that influence can affect consumers even when it is not consciously identified as manipulative. Second, it advances persuasion research by disaggregating influence into manipulation, coercion, and deception, and showing that each is constructed through distinct linguistic strategies rather than reflecting a unitary persuasion dimension. Third, it contributes to multimodal advertising theory by repositioning visual design as a contextual moderator that shapes how influence tactics are interpreted and evaluated, rather than as a direct driver of influence.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the validity of combining large language model–based measurement with human benchmarking to analyze persuasion at scale. Managerially and from a

policy perspective, the findings show that textual choices deploy influence, while visual design determines its evaluative cost, highlighting the need for influence-aware advertising and multimodal regulation.

Digital Marketing and Social Media

AGENCY IN THE ALGORITHM: CAN EMOTIONAL MESSAGING RESTORE THE PERCEIVED BEHAVIORAL REALISM OF VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS?

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Keywords: Virtual Influencers, Perceived Agency, Perceived Behavioral Realism, Mind Perception Theory, Expectancy Violation Theory

Description: This research investigates the psychological mechanisms behind the agency deficit of virtual influencers and demonstrates how emotional messaging can effectively restore their perceived behavioral realism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

While there has been much focus on virtual influencers partnering with global brands, they are plagued by a key ontological problem related to their agency deficit. Many consumers view them as corporate algorithms or just puppets, thus reducing the effectiveness of their endorsements. Based on the theoretical foundations of Mind Perception Theory (MPT) and Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), this study seeks to explore the reasons behind this problem of agency deficit as well as how to counteract them through strategic communication. The following are the two central research questions this study attempts to

answer: (1) Does perceived behavioral realism mediate the relationship between the influencer's ontological type (virtual vs. human) and perceived agency? (2) How does the type of message (rational vs. emotional) moderate the relationship between perceived behavioral realism and perceived agency, and does this moderation differ for virtual versus human influencers? Our hypothesis is that labeling influencers as “virtual” creates a visual prime reducing behavioral realism, yet emotional messaging helps overcome this problem.

Method and Data

Data for three experimental studies were collected from Gen-Z social media users in India via a mixed-mode strategy, yielding a total sample of 1,015 participants. To ensure rigorous internal validity and rule out visual confounding variables, all studies strictly employed the principle of local control. For each study, the exact same visual stimulus (image or video) was shown across conditions, with only the ontological label (Virtual vs. Human) and message type manipulated. Study 1 (N = 328) utilized a single-factor between-subjects design to test the baseline agency deficit using identical static images. Study 2 (N = 382) replicated this design to test the mediating role of behavioral realism using bootstrapping procedures. Study 3 (N = 305) employed a 2 (Influencer Type: VI vs. HI) $\times$ 2 (Message Type: Rational vs. Emotional) factorial design using identical video posts. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA).

Summary of Findings

The results support the hypothesized theoretical model. In Study 1, a statistically significant baseline deficit is found. Just the virtual label, by itself, significantly lowers agency perception compared to the human label ($\beta = 0.642$, $p < .001$) regardless of visual fidelity. Study 2 shows that the relationship between virtuality and agency perception is partially

mediated by the perception of behavioral realism. The virtual ontological prime decreases the perception of behavioral realism ($\beta = 0.266$, $p = 0.01$), which in turn leads to less agency perception ($\beta = 0.190$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, Study 3 finds that emotional messaging serves as a powerful boundary condition. The PLS-MGA difference test reveals a statistically significant interaction effect for the VI group ($\beta = 0.972$, $p < .001$) compared to the HI group. Whereas rational messaging reinforces the machine stereotype and keeps the realism deficit for VIs intact, emotional messaging violates expectancies positively. Emotional messaging for VIs were rated as showing significantly higher behavioral realism and agency perception than the VIs using rational messaging, thereby restoring VIs' perception of agency to near-human levels.

Key Contributions

The current research makes substantial theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to Mind Perception Theory by defining perceived behavioral realism as a subjective state determined by the ontological category, rather than a technological characteristic alone. This research shows that even the highly realistic VIs experience the gap between the actual and perceived realism, which happens when the VI is categorized as nonhuman. In addition, it helps integrate Expectancy Violation Theory with MPT to address the competence vs. warmth dilemma for artificial agents. Contrary to literature, which claims that machines need to stay strictly rational in order to meet consumers' expectations, our study proves that emotive messages work effectively as a humanizing signal, making VIs more trustworthy and credible than ever before. Managerially, the research outlines steps for overcoming the “puppet syndrome.” It cautions practitioners that it is not enough to achieve visual hyper-realism if VI behavior is predictable. On the contrary, we find that an emotional solution is a must, as VIs should be programmed to feel vulnerable, joyful, and passionate.

References are available upon request.

BREAKING UP WITH INFLUENCERS: A MIXED-METHODS INVESTIGATION INTO WHY FOLLOWERS DISENGAGE

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Keywords: Disengagement, Influencer Marketing, Unfollowing Behavior, Push–Pull–Mooring (PPM).

Description: This empirical study investigates the underlying mechanisms of disengagement with social media influencers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Influencer research has identified antecedents of unfollowing, including declining content quality, excessive commercialization, unethical behavior, and value or identity incongruence (Ayari et al., 2025; Daud, 2025). However, these studies largely identify reasons for unfollowing without explaining the underlying mechanism through which followers disengage from influencers. To address this deficiency, this study aims to answer the following research question: “What are the underlying mechanisms of disengagement with social media influencers?”

Drawing on the Push–Pull–Mooring framework (Tang and Chen, 2020), we conceptualize trust as the central mooring anchor that constrains influencer disengagement. We posit that Parasocial Relationship and Perceived Credibility are the primary inputs that build this

mooring anchor, i.e., trust. Research suggests parasocial relationships create emotional closeness and reduce psychological distance, thereby fostering trust (Babu et al., 2024). When trust deteriorates through fatigue, ethical concerns, deception, or identity threats, followers become increasingly likely to disengage (Ayari et al., 2025). We hypothesize:

H1: Parasocial relationship has a positive effect on trust.

H2: Perceived credibility has a positive effect on trust.

H3: Trust has a negative effect on disengagement intention.

H4: Trust mediates the relationship between parasocial relationship and disengagement.

H5: Trust mediates the relationship between perceived credibility and disengagement.

Method and Data

This study adopted a concurrent mixed-methods design (Creswell and Clark 2018) that combined structural equation modeling with qualitative inquiry. Data was collected from 274 MTurk participants who had previously unfollowed at least one social media influencer. Participants first completed two open-ended questions describing how they gradually lost interest in an influencer and why they ultimately unfollowed, followed by validated seven-point measures of parasocial relationships, perceived credibility, trust, and disengagement adapted from previous research (Dutot and Mosconi 2016; Nguyen et al. 2020; Reinikainen et al. 2020). Structural equation modeling using maximum likelihood estimation tested the hypothesized relationships.

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 314.78$, $df = 130$, $CFI = .959$, $RMSEA = .070$, $SRMR = .061$), with acceptable reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The structural model also demonstrated satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 322.67$, $df = 131$, $CMIN/DF = 2.46$, $CFI = .958$, $RMSEA = .072$, $SRMR = .061$). Qualitative responses were

analyzed using a large language model-assisted coding procedure that generated lower-order and higher-order themes, which were subsequently synthesized into broader disengagement pathways.

Summary of Findings

The structural model strongly supported the proposed framework. Parasocial relationship positively influenced trust ($\beta = .152, p < .001$), supporting H1, while perceived credibility exerted an even stronger positive effect on trust ($\beta = .839, p < .001$), supporting H2. Trust significantly reduced disengagement intentions ($\beta = -.658, p < .001$), supporting H3 and confirming its role as the central mooring mechanism within the PPM framework.

Mediation analyses further revealed that trust fully mediated both proposed relationships. The indirect effect of perceived credibility on disengagement through trust was significant ($b = -.242, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.561, -.064]$), while the direct effect became nonsignificant ($b = .071, p = .274$), supporting H5. Likewise, trust fully mediated the relationship between parasocial relationship and disengagement (indirect $b = -.055, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.148, -.014]$; direct $b = .047, p = .183$), supporting H4. This suggests that PSR and Credibility must first be translated into trust to effectively reduce disengagement intentions.

Qualitative analyses complemented these findings by identifying three distinct pathways through which trust deteriorates: (1) gradual decay of parasocial relevance, (2) credibility erosion resulting from moral transgressions and value incongruence, and (3) content fatigue and over-commercialization. Across all pathways, trust consistently emerged as the mechanism linking follower experiences to disengagement.

Key Contributions

This research makes four contributions to the influencer marketing literature. First, it extends the Push–Pull–Mooring framework by positioning trust as the central mooring mechanism that converts parasocial relationships and perceived credibility into relationship persistence.

Second, it demonstrates that neither parasocial relationships nor credibility directly reduce disengagement; rather, both operate exclusively through trust. Notably, perceived credibility exhibits a substantially stronger influence on trust ($\beta = .839$) than parasocial relationships ($\beta = .152$), suggesting that follower retention depends more heavily on sustained credibility than emotional attachment alone.

Third, the concurrent mixed-methods design extends the quantitative findings by revealing three theoretically distinct pathways through which trust weakens prior to disengagement, thereby explaining how follower relationships gradually erode or abruptly collapse.

Finally, the findings provide actionable implications for influencers and brand managers. Long-term follower retention requires more than cultivating intimacy or expertise; influencers must continuously reinforce trust by maintaining authenticity, preserving credibility, remaining consistent with followers' values, and balancing commercial partnerships with meaningful and relevant content. Together, these findings advance a more comprehensive understanding of influencer disengagement by integrating structural relationships with the lived experiences through which trust is ultimately lost.

References are available upon request.

CONFIDING IN GENERATIVE AI: CONSUMER SELF-EXPRESSION IN SERVICE INTERACTIONS

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Keywords: Generative AI; human–AI communication; consumer self-expression; service interactions; psychological safety

Description: This research examines whether, when, and why consumers express themselves more openly to generative AI than to human advisors in service interactions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Consumer self-expression is central to many service interactions. Consumers need to describe their needs, routines, preferences, or concerns before service providers can recommend. As generative AI (GenAI) advisors are increasingly deployed in service interactions, it remains unclear whether consumers communicate differently with GenAI than with human advisors.

Prior research on human–AI interaction has largely focused on consumers’ evaluations of and responses to AI-generated content (Freitas et al., 2025; Hartmann et al., 2025; Kapoor & Kumar, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026), yet less is known about how advisor identity shapes consumers’

willingness to express themselves. This effect is theoretically ambiguous. Compared with GenAI advisors, human advisors are perceived as offering greater warmth, empathy, and relational understanding, but they may heighten consumers' concerns about being judged (Choi et al., 2021; Wenger et al., 2026). GenAI advisors may reduce these interpersonal concerns, but may lack the social presence of human support (Huang et al., 2024; Jin et al., 2025). These differences may shape consumer self-expression in service interactions.

This research examines whether GenAI advisors increase consumer self-expression relative to human advisors, how this effect varies across service contexts that elicit evaluation apprehension (Tsai et al., 2021), and whether psychological safety explains it.

Method and Data

The current research uses online experiments with simulated chat-based service interactions to compare consumer self-expression toward GenAI and human advisors. Across three studies, participants are randomly assigned to advisor type, while advisor prompts, follow-up messages, and interaction sequence are held constant. Study 1a uses a mental health consultation context to examine consumer self-expression in a service setting that elicits high evaluation apprehension. Study 1b uses a restaurant recommendation context as a low-evaluation-apprehension comparison to assess whether the effect is context-dependent. Study 2 uses a skincare consultation context to test a serial mediation process in which perceived social judgment concerns and psychological safety explain differences in self-expression across advisor types.

Consumer self-expression is assessed using self-report scales. Study 2 also includes a complementary behavioral measure based on participants' responses to an open-ended prompt inviting them to share any additional information during the service interaction. Psychological safety is measured with a four-item scale adapted from Liang et al. (2012) and Brown and Leigh (1996). Perceived social judgment concerns are measured with a three-item scale adapted and expanded from Kim et al. (2022). Analyses included ANOVA and bootstrapped mediation models.

Summary of Findings

Across three studies, GenAI advisors increased consumer self-expression in higher-evaluation-apprehension contexts, but not in a lower-evaluation-apprehension context. In Study 1a (mental health consultation context; $N = 270$), participants reported greater self-expression with a GenAI advisor than a human advisor ($M_{\text{GenAI}} = 5.17$, $M_{\text{Human}} = 4.81$, $p = .013$). Psychological safety mediated this effect ($b = .211$, 95% CI [.085, .365]). In Study 1b (restaurant recommendation context; $N = 363$), advisor type did not significantly affect consumer self-expression ($p = .283$), suggesting that the GenAI advantage attenuates in lower-evaluation-apprehension service settings.

Study 2 replicated and extended the Study 1a effect in a skincare consultation context ($N = 425$). Participants reported greater self-expression with a GenAI advisor than with a human advisor ($M_{\text{GenAI}} = 4.39$, $M_{\text{Human}} = 3.35$, $p < .001$). Mediation analyses supported a serial process in which GenAI reduced perceived social judgment concerns, increased psychological safety, and subsequently enhanced consumer self-expression (serial indirect effect = .041, 95% CI

[.015, .076]). These findings were further supported by the secondary behavioral composite measure. Alternative-mechanism analyses indicated complementary pathways through responsiveness, warmth, and social presence, while the proposed social judgment–psychological safety pathway remained significant.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to the emerging literature on GenAI in marketing and service contexts. First, it shifts attention from AI-generated content to consumer self-expression in AI-mediated interactions. Prior work has centered largely on AI-generated content (Hartmann et al., 2025; Kapoor & Kumar, 2025), yet consumer expression itself is integral to service interactions and consequential for service quality. By foregrounding consumers' willingness to express themselves to AI advisors, this research examines an important but underexplored facet of human–AI interaction: how advisor identity shapes consumers' willingness to articulate their needs, preferences, and concerns.

Second, this research offers novel substantive evidence on when and why self-expression differs across advisor types. Consumers are more willing to express themselves to GenAI advisors than to human advisors when evaluation apprehension is high, whereas this difference is not significant when evaluation apprehension is low. We identify psychological safety as a key mechanism underlying this effect and further show that perceived social judgment concerns operate as an antecedent to psychological safety in a serial mediation process. These findings inform the design

of AI-enabled service interfaces that elicit richer consumer input and support more effective service interactions.

References are available upon request.

CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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Keywords: Consumer engagement, Social media, Brand-generated content, Content type, Content format

Description: This research examines how content design influences consumer engagement with brand messages on social media by conducting a systematic review of empirical research.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

RQ1: What characteristics of brand-generated social media content have been examined in relation to consumer engagement?

RQ2: How do different brand-generated content characteristics affect behavioral engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares?

RQ3: What could be future directions for research to advance the study of brand-generated social media content and consumer engagement?

Method and Data

This review followed the PRISMA protocol. A systematic keyword search in Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) resulted in 2298 initial records (1138 from Scopus and 1160 from WoS). After removing duplicate studies, 1637 articles were screened. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2015 onwards and written in English were included. This review concentrated solely on brand-generated content and consumer engagement on social media. Therefore, studies on user-generated or influencer-generated content and highly specific contexts (e.g., B2B companies, sports clubs, universities, and hospitals) were excluded. After abstract screening, 168 articles remained for full text screening. Studies that operationalized engagement as attitudinal intentions rather than behavioral engagement metrics were removed. Consequently, 104 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, and 64 remained. Finally, backward and forward reference searches identified 11 additional relevant articles, resulting in a final sample of 75 articles.

Summary of Findings

By synthesizing 75 empirical studies from 2015 to 2025, this research consolidates fragmented evidence and categorizes content-related factors into three main groups: content type, format, and timing. Informational, emotional, and entertaining content are the most frequently examined content types. Informational content generally influences likes, comments, and shares, although its effectiveness varies depending on the type of information presented and its integration with other content characteristics. Emotional content emerges as another significant factor in driving engagement, but its impact differs across formats, platforms, and operationalizations.

Entertaining content increases likes and comments; however, its effect seems weaker in utilitarian industries.

Regarding content format, vividness, interactivity, and message length are frequently analyzed. Higher levels of vividness (e.g., videos) and interactivity (e.g., mentions, links) do not automatically generate greater engagement. Their effectiveness varies by platforms and engagement metrics. For instance, mentions may boost likes but reduce comments. Research on message length and timing reveals inconsistencies, suggesting that effective content strategies are greatly shaped by contextual factors such as platform characteristics, industry type, and cultural differences.

Statement of Key Contributions

This review contributes to the academic marketing discipline by synthesizing a decade of fragmented and often conflicting findings regarding brand-generated content on social media. It provides a clear overview of how content design affects engagement outcomes and clarifies why prior research has produced contradictory results by underscoring the role of contextual moderators such as platform features, industry type, and cultural setting. Further, it identifies key gaps in the literature and proposes future research directions that can enhance understanding of consumer engagement in digital environments.

This review provides valuable insights for practitioners to optimize their social media communication strategies, demonstrating that the effectiveness of content characteristics is highly context-dependent. Rather than promoting a universally optimal approach, it highlights the importance of tailoring content strategies based on platform features, industry characteristics, and audience profiles. Organizations can enhance consumer interactions and strengthen customer relationships by aligning social media content with specific contexts.

EMOTIONAL TRANSLATION IN THE METAVERSE: HOW POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS SHAPE COMMUNITY ENDORSEMENT THROUGH COGNITIVE APPRAISAL

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Keywords: *Metaverse; Community Endorsement; Cognitive Appraisal Theory; User-Generated Content; Large Language Models*

Description: This study explains how positive and negative emotions expressed in metaverse user-generated content are cognitively translated into community endorsement through distinct cognitive appraisal mechanisms.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Although emotions are central to user experiences in the metaverse, little is known about how emotional expressions become collective community evaluations. Existing metaverse research has primarily focused on technological characteristics, such as immersion, telepresence, and virtual presence, while paying comparatively less attention to the psychological mechanisms through which emotions shape community endorsement. Likewise, prior research on user-

generated content generally assumes that positive emotions lead to favorable evaluations and negative emotions to unfavorable evaluations, offering limited insight into the cognitive processes that translate emotional experiences into collective judgments.

Drawing on Cognitive Appraisal Theory and Flow Theory, this study proposes that emotions influence community endorsement indirectly through differentiated appraisal mechanisms rather than through direct affective effects. Specifically, positive emotions are expected to activate reward-oriented appraisals that enhance user engagement, whereas negative emotions trigger threat-oriented appraisals reflected in perceived risk and psychological reactance. Furthermore, because emotional interpretation depends on contextual cues, this study proposes that threat-related discussion topics strengthen the translation of negative emotions into threat-based appraisals. Using large-scale user-generated content collected from Roblox, this research develops and empirically tests a process-based framework explaining how emotional expressions are translated into community endorsement through distinct cognitive pathways.

Method and Data

This study analyzes 2,616 user-generated comments collected from the Roblox metaverse platform. Community endorsement was measured using the platform's vote-based rating system, representing aggregated community evaluations of users' shared experiences.

A hybrid AI-based text analytics framework was employed. Discrete emotions were extracted using a transformer transfer learning (TTL) model, while engagement, perceived risk, and psychological reactance were measured through theory-driven large language model (LLM)-based semantic coding. Threat-related discussion topics were additionally identified to examine

contextual differences in emotional appraisal. The proposed framework was tested using mediation and moderated mediation analyses.

Summary of Findings

The findings support an asymmetric emotional translation process in the metaverse. Rather than exerting direct effects on community endorsement, positive and negative emotions followed distinct cognitive appraisal pathways. Positive emotions primarily enhanced engagement, whereas negative emotions activated threat-oriented appraisals, including perceived risk and psychological reactance. In addition, threat-related discussion topics strengthened the influence of negative emotions on these appraisal mechanisms.

The results further indicate that perceived risk plays a central role in explaining how negative emotions influence community endorsement, whereas engagement and psychological reactance exhibited more nuanced effects than originally expected. Overall, the findings demonstrate that emotions are translated into community endorsement through differentiated cognitive appraisal processes rather than direct emotional responses.

Key Contributions

This research advances metaverse research by introducing an asymmetric emotional translation framework in which positive and negative emotions influence community endorsement through distinct cognitive appraisal pathways rather than direct emotional effects. By integrating Cognitive Appraisal Theory and Flow Theory, the framework explains how reward- and threat-oriented appraisals shape collective evaluations in immersive digital environments. It further extends appraisal theory by identifying threat-related discussion topics as a key contextual

boundary condition that amplifies threat-based emotional processing. Methodologically, the study introduces a hybrid AI-based framework combining transformer-based emotion detection with theory-driven LLM semantic coding to measure latent psychological constructs from large-scale user-generated content. Managerially, the findings suggest that platform managers should actively manage governance, monetization, and security-related communications, as reducing threat-related appraisals can strengthen community endorsement and support healthier metaverse communities.

References are available upon request.

FAKE OR REAL? WHEN USER-GENERATED CONTENT FEELS LESS AUTHENTIC

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Keywords: user-generated content, online consumer behavior, authenticity, content creator expertise, branding

Description: Using a multi-study approach, the paper investigates how content cues influence perceived authenticity of user-generated content through inferences of creator expertise.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The current research examines the impact of user-generated content cues on consumers’ perception of authenticity. Specifically, it analyzes how inferred creator expertise acts as the causal mechanism driving this relationship. Furthermore, it investigates whether the impact of these cues on product and service evaluations varies across different levels of consumer brand knowledge.

Method And Data

To address the research questions, I conducted multiple studies combining experimental designs with secondary data analysis. Study 1 utilized a scenario-based experiment to examine the relationship between content cues and consumers' perceptions of authenticity. Study 2 then investigated the mediating role of inferred creator expertise through a single-factor, between-subjects design. Study 3 employed a two-level between-subjects design to test how content cues impact perceived authenticity across varying levels of consumer brand knowledge. Finally, Study 4 validated the relationship between content cues and perceived authenticity using secondary field data, thereby enhancing the external validity of the research.

Summary of Findings

The current research investigates the effect of user-generated content cues on consumers' perceptions of authenticity. The results indicate that contextualized content fosters perceptions of authenticity by enhancing inferred content creator expertise. Moreover, the effect is stronger for relatively less established, newer brands, suggesting that brand knowledge can buffer or amplify the impact of content characteristics on consumer judgements. By linking content characteristics to perceived authenticity, these findings offer a roadmap for strategically leveraging user-generated content to shape online consumer perceptions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to the marketing literature on user-generated content, consumer judgment, and authenticity. Specifically, it identifies content cues as a key yet

underexplored factor driving perceptions of authenticity in user-generated content. The findings reveal that generalized content reduces perceived authenticity, as consumers infer that the contributor is less knowledgeable and competent about the product, service, or experience. In addition, by adopting a multimethod approach that incorporates both primary and field data, this research achieves strong internal validity while enhancing external validity. From a managerial perspective, the research provides actionable insights for reducing consumers' perceived deception in user-generated content. The findings suggest that platforms and marketers can foster authenticity and support informed decision-making by prioritizing or highlighting contextualized content cues. By identifying the scalable content cue that shapes perceptions of authenticity, this research offers practical guidance for platform design, content curation, and consumer engagement strategies. Collectively, these contributions advance marketing theory on authenticity in user-generated content and offer important implications for managerial practices in the digital environment.

“References are available upon request.”

FROM INSPIRATION TO SKEPTICISM: HOW AI-GENERATED INFLUENCER CONTENT SHAPES TRAVEL DESTINATION AVOIDANCE

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Keywords: AI-generated content, influencer marketing, persuasion knowledge, regulatory focus, destination avoidance

Description: This study experimentally examines how AI-generated versus human-generated influencer content shapes tourists' destination avoidance intentions through skepticism, and whether this process is conditional on regulatory focus.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Generative artificial intelligence now enables the creation of hyper-realistic influencer travel imagery that can match or exceed the visual quality of human-produced content. Yet because tourism decisions are intangible, irreversible, and high-risk, the indexical link between image and reality is critical to persuasion. Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model and Regulatory Focus Theory, this study asks: How does AI-generated influencer content influence tourists' destination avoidance intentions through skepticism, and how is this process shaped by individual differences in regulatory focus? Rather than assuming that greater visual perfection enhances persuasion, this research tests whether AI-generated imagery instead activates persuasion knowledge, producing skepticism that drives avoidance rather than approach behavior. The study further asks whether this indirect pathway is contingent upon tourists' promotion- versus prevention-oriented motivational tendencies, thereby identifying a boundary condition that may

explain heterogeneity in how skepticism translates into behavioral avoidance across different tourist segments.

Method and Data

A between-subjects experimental survey design was used, with participants randomly assigned to view an AI-generated or human-generated influencer travel post depicting the same destination, holding composition, caption, and context constant. Data were collected via an online survey from postgraduate management students who were active social media users with prior experience consuming travel content; after removing incomplete responses and failed attention checks, 134 usable responses were retained for analysis. Skepticism (8 items), destination avoidance intention (5 items), and regulatory focus (12 items) were measured on five-point Likert scales using established, adapted multi-item scales, all demonstrating excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Data were analyzed using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 14) in SPSS, with content type as the independent variable, skepticism as the mediator, destination avoidance as the dependent variable, and regulatory focus as the moderator. Indirect and conditional indirect effects were estimated using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

Summary of Findings

AI-generated influencer content significantly increased skepticism relative to human-generated content ($B = 0.66, p < .001$). Skepticism, in turn, significantly predicted destination avoidance ($B = 0.49, p < .001$), and fully mediated the effect of content type on avoidance, as the direct effect of content type was non-significant ($p = .52$) while the indirect effect through skepticism was significant (Effect = 0.31, 95% CI [0.14, 0.53]). Contrary to expectations, regulatory focus did not significantly moderate the skepticism–avoidance relationship ($p = .47$), and the index of moderated

mediation was non-significant (Index = -0.05 , 95% CI [-0.19 , 0.12]). The indirect effect of content type on avoidance through skepticism remained significant and of comparable magnitude across low, mean, and high levels of regulatory focus. These results indicate that skepticism operates as a dominant, indirect-only mechanism linking AI-generated influencer content to destination avoidance, and that this mechanism functions consistently across tourists' promotion- and prevention-oriented motivational orientations rather than being contingent on them.

Key Contributions

This research extends the Persuasion Knowledge Model into the domain of generative AI, showing that visual perfection in AI-generated influencer content activates skepticism rather than enhancing credibility, challenging Source Credibility Theory assumptions. It provides empirical evidence for the emerging concept of AI-thenticity, identifying skepticism as the specific psychological mechanism through which AI-generated visuals disrupt indexical authenticity and shape behavioral outcomes. By focusing on destination avoidance rather than visit intention, the study captures a more consequential outcome in high-risk, irreversible tourism decisions, and the indirect-only mediation pattern clarifies that AI-generated content discourages travel through cognitive evaluation rather than direct rejection. Finally, by testing regulatory focus as a boundary condition and finding no significant moderation, the study refines theoretical expectations, suggesting that once skepticism is activated, its influence on avoidance is broadly shared across motivational orientations rather than segment-specific. Practically, the findings caution destination marketers against unrestricted reliance on AI-generated influencer imagery and underscore the need for authenticity cues, transparency, and hybrid AI-human content strategies across, rather than within, specific audience segments.

References are available upon request.

HUMAN OR VIRTUAL? AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF INFLUENCER DISCLOSURE AND ITS IMPACT ON ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

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Keywords: influencer marketing, virtual influencer, disclosure, credibility

Description: This paper investigates the effects of influencer type and disclosure on consumers' attitude toward the influencer and intention to purchase the endorsed product and analyzes the mediating role of perceived credibility.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Despite the growing importance of social media marketing as a well-known marketing approach, it also carries risks, as it involves real people, including scandals that can negatively impact brands (Kim and Wang 2024). To address these challenges, brands and endorsers have introduced virtual influencers as a new phenomenon. Virtual influencers were established to complement or replace human influencers (Kim and Wang 2024). However, they also raise concerns about authenticity, trust and credibility (Diwanji 2026). Empirical findings on the effectiveness of virtual influencers remain inconsistent, with studies producing mixed results (Franke, Groeppel-Klein, and Müller 2023; Gerlich 2023; Hedhli et al. 2023; Lou et al. 2023; Sands et al. 2022). An additional difficulty arises from disclosure requirements, as revealing the artificial nature of

virtual influencers may fundamentally challenge consumers' perceptions (Diwanji 2026; Lim and Lee 2023; Muniz, Stewart, and Magalhães 2024). Based on these considerations, the current study addresses the following research questions: How does the disclosure of virtual influencers affect consumers' attitudinal and behavioral responses compared to human influencers? And how can this interplay between influence type and (non-)disclosure be explained?

Method and Data

The study used a 2×2 between-subjects-design with the independent variables of influencer type (human vs. virtual) and disclosure (no disclosure vs. disclosure). The final sample consisted of $n = 225$ participants (66.2 % female; mean age = 29.02 years). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The data were collected through an online experiment, which is particularly suitable for research on social media and influencer marketing. Regarding the choice of platform and context, Instagram was selected as the stimulus platform. The stimuli for the test subjects were designed as Instagram-like posts containing an image, a caption, a username, and engagement indicators to ensure ecological validity (Van Berlo, Campbell, and Voorveeld 2024). To test our hypotheses, a series of ANOVAs were conducted to examine the main and interaction effects of influencer type (human vs. virtual) and disclosure (no disclosure vs. disclosure). Further, moderated mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether perceived credibility mediates the effect of influencer type on purchase intention, conditional on disclosure (Hayes 2013)

Summary of Findings

Results indicate that influencer type exerts significant main effects across the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, with human influencers consistently eliciting more favorable responses

than virtual influencers. Further, the findings indicate that disclosure does not exert a significant main effect on our attitudinal or behavioral outcomes. However, there is a significant interaction between influencer type and disclosure on purchase intention (but not on attitude toward the influencer). Disclosure increases purchase intentions in the human influencer condition but reduces purchase intentions in the virtual influencer condition. In the no disclosure condition, there is no difference between human and virtual influencer. As to the moderated mediation, results reveal significant indirect effects of influencer type on purchase intention via perceived credibility in both the no-disclosure condition and the disclosure condition.

Statement of Key Contributions

First, the study extends source credibility theory to virtual influencers. Credibility has long been recognized as critical in determining an influencer's effectiveness (Ohanian 1990; Lou and Yuan 2019). However, applying traditional credibility models to artificial actors has been questioned in previous research (Gerlich 2023; Hedhli et al. 2023). Our findings demonstrate that consumer evaluations of credibility remain robust even when influencers appear artificial. Second, we add to the debate on disclosure in influencer marketing. Disclosure is often treated as a trigger for persuasive knowledge, leading to skepticism and decreased persuasiveness (Lim and Lee 2023; Muniz, Stewart, and Magalhães 2024). While this view holds in some contexts, our results did not uniformly reduce effectiveness (attitudes toward influencers, purchase intention). This aligns with previous research showing transparent communication can improve perceptions of honesty in social media environments (Evans et al. 2017; Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016; Van Berlo and Breves 2025). Lastly, this study supports earlier findings that disclosure affects virtual influencers differently than human influencers. Disclosure is more disadvantageous for virtual

influencers. For human influencers, it primarily signals commercial intent without undermining authenticity.

References are available upon request

Meme Magic: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Directions

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Meme Magic: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Directions

Abstract

In today's digital era, marketers face increasing challenges in capturing consumer attention due to rising ad avoidance and declining engagement with traditional advertising. Evidence indicates that consumers increasingly ignore online advertisements and sponsored content, prompting a need for alternative strategies to engage audiences effectively. User-generated content, particularly memes, has emerged as a promising avenue, offering high levels of organic engagement and participatory interaction. Despite their growing prominence in driving engagement, social influence, cultural influence, and other brand-related outcomes, research on memes lacks an integrated and systematic synthesis. A systematic review of the literature is therefore needed to consolidate existing knowledge on internet memes. Thus, this study undertakes a systematic literature review and outlines directions for future research, offering guidance to scholars and practitioners seeking to leverage memes to enhance consumer engagement and brand-related outcomes.

Keywords: Memes, Internet Meme, Systematic Literature Review, Future Research Directions

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, marketers face unprecedented challenges in capturing and maintaining consumer attention amidst rising ad avoidance and declining engagement with traditional advertising. Customer attention toward brand communication has sharply declined, leading to lower levels of engagement (Sewak et al., 2025; Agrawal et al., 2024). Recent evidence supports this trend, as click-through and conversion rates in digital media have been decreasing, signaling that consumers increasingly ignore online advertisements and promotional content (Razzaq et al., 2023). A 2023 Statista survey found

that 65.9% of app users consistently skip in-app video ads when given the option after a brief period, highlighting the limitations of conventional marketing strategies in effectively reaching audiences.

This persistent challenge has drawn considerable attention from both practitioners and researchers seeking more effective ways to engage consumers. One promising avenue lies in user-generated content, particularly memes. Memes, defined as cultural units such as ideas, symbols, or behaviors that spread online, have shown remarkable potential in engaging audiences. Customers increasingly prefer user-generated content over conventional commercial messages (Malodia et al., 2022), and memes have been reported to generate up to ten times more organic engagement than traditional marketing approaches (Tsai et al., 2025). Beyond their marketing impact, memes are inherently participatory and socially driven, allowing users not only to consume but also to modify, remix, and circulate content in ways that reflect personal, social, and cultural contexts. This participatory nature makes memes powerful instruments for communication, social influence, and audience engagement, bridging the gap between brands and digitally active communities.

Despite their growing prominence, academic research on memes remains dispersed across disciplines such as marketing, communication, and cultural studies, resulting in limited cumulative insights. Existing studies largely focus on isolated aspects, including virality, humor, or cultural expression, without systematically connecting these perspectives to explain how memes function as strategic tools in marketing and consumer engagement contexts. Addressing these gaps, this study conducts a systematic literature review of research on memes, with particular attention to their role in marketing. By synthesizing fragmented findings, the review not only consolidates current knowledge but also outlines directions for future research. In doing so, the paper aims to guide scholars and practitioners in leveraging memes not merely as humorous content, but as strategic instruments capable of enhancing consumer engagement

and brand-related outcomes such as brand awareness, brand image, brand love, brand equity, electronic word-of-mouth, and purchase intentions. Accordingly, to build on the above discussion, the following research objectives are proposed:

RO1: To provide a comprehensive synthesis of insights on internet memes reported in the existing literature.

RO2: To propose directions for future studies on the use of internet memes in marketing.

2. Memes - Conceptual Background

The original roots of memes are in the 1976 book 'The Selfish Gene', written by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins mentions that the term 'meme' originates from the Greek word 'mimema,' meaning something that is imitated and compares a meme to a gene, describing it as a cultural unit - such as an idea, belief, or behavior that spreads from person to person, forming the basis of memetics (Malodia et al., 2022).

Memes encompass ideas, symbols, or practices that manifest in various forms, such as melodies, catchphrases, clothing styles, or architectural designs (Shifman, 2013; Razzaq et al., 2023). Shifman (2013) describes memes as 'a group of digital items that share common characteristics of content, form, and stance; created with awareness of each other; and are circulated, imitated, and transformed through the internet by multiple users'. This definition, as highlighted by Razzaq et al. (2023), proposes three important characteristics of meme: (a) content, which includes ideas or information valuable to receivers; (b) form, which refers to tangible elements like 'images, texts, tunes, phrases, or videos'; and (c) stance, which is the communication perspective of memes.

3. Methodology

This review adopts a systematic literature review approach, which is a rigorous and

scientific method for conducting secondary research. To ensure methodological transparency and replicability, the study follows the ‘Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol,’ which includes three stages: assembling, acquisition, and assessing. In the assembling stage, the research scope is defined, objectives are set, and keywords and search criteria are identified to ensure a focused review. The acquisition stage involves systematically collecting relevant studies from databases, journals, and other sources based on the predefined search strategy. Finally, the assessing stage evaluates the quality and relevance of the gathered literature, including screening, coding, and synthesizing findings to generate insights and identify gaps for future research.

The scope of the review was established after an extensive examination of the existing literature in the domain. Articles were retrieved from the Scopus database from its inception till November 2025. Scopus was selected because it is more comprehensive than comparable databases and adheres to rigorous indexation quality standards (Sharma et al., 2026). The subject area was restricted to Business, Management, and Accounting. Keywords were identified after a thorough review of prior research on memes. In addition, only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were included in the review. The search string used in this study is as follows:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (‘meme’ OR ‘internet meme*’) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , ‘BUSI’)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , ‘ar’)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , ‘English’))*

The initial pool of studies retrieved from the database was subsequently refined using clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and quality. Following selection, the papers included were analyzed to identify key themes, conceptual developments, and research trends relating to memes and internet memes.

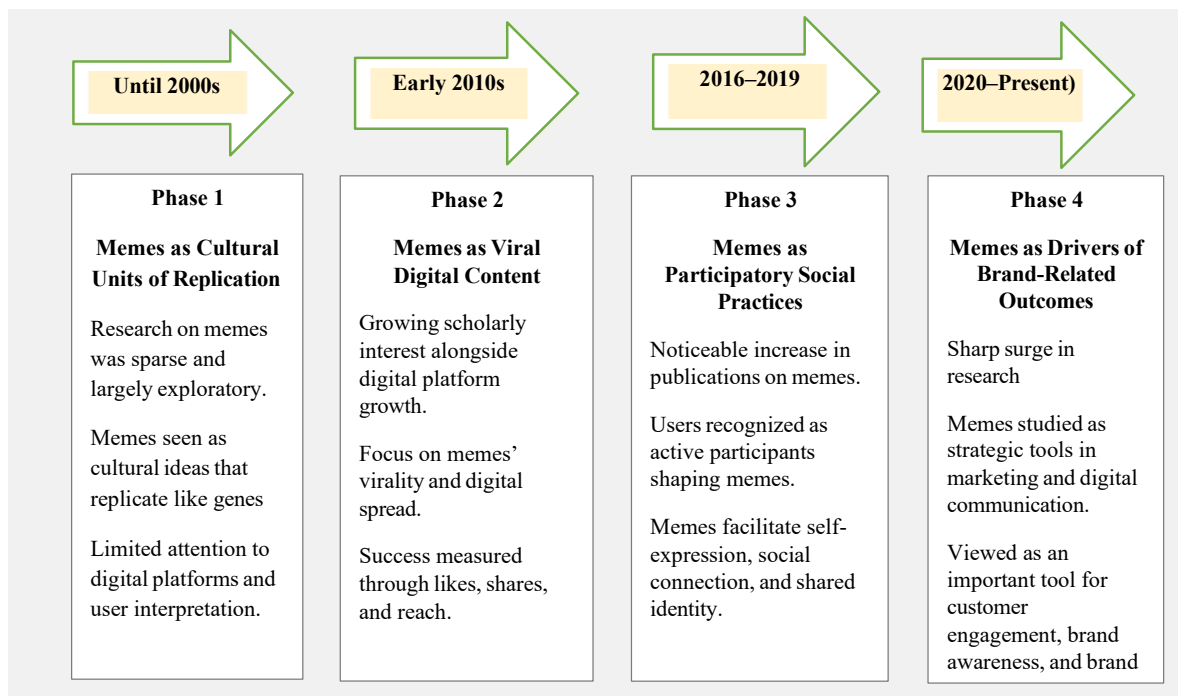
4. Analysis

4.1 Evolution of Meme Research

Research on memes has evolved considerably alongside changes in digital technologies and online communication practices. Early studies focused on understanding how memes spread as cultural ideas, while later work increasingly recognized the active role of users and the strategic relevance of memes in digital marketing contexts. Rather than progressing in a strictly linear manner, meme research reflects a gradual shift in how memes are conceptualized, from passive cultural units to interactive and engagement-driven phenomena. The following sections outline four key phases that capture this conceptual evolution in literature (Refer to Figure 1).

4.1.1 Phase 1: Memes as Cultural Units of Replication

Early research approached memes as cultural ideas that move from one person to another, much like genes replicate biologically (Marsden, 2002). Scholars were primarily interested in how these ideas spread, change, and survive over time. In this view, people were largely seen as carriers who passed memes along rather than as active contributors shaping their meaning (Pech, 2003). While this perspective helped establish memes as an object of



academic inquiry, it paid little attention to how digital platforms and everyday user interactions influence how memes are interpreted, adapted, or reimagined.

Figure 1: Evolution of Meme Research

4.1.2 Phase 2: Memes as Viral Digital Content

As social media platforms became central to online interaction, researchers began to focus on memes as viral pieces of digital content (Miles, 2014). Studies in this phase examined what makes a meme spread widely, emphasizing elements such as humor, emotional appeal, simplicity, and novelty (Fox et al., 2015).

4.1.3 Phase 3: Memes as Participatory Social Practices

Over time, scholars started to recognize that memes do not simply spread on their own but are actively shaped by the people who engage with them (Borgerson & Miller, 2016). This led to a shift toward understanding memes as participatory social practices (Chuah, 2020). Users were no longer viewed as passive audiences but as participants who comment on, remix, and reinterpret memes in ways that reflect shared experiences, identities, and social norms (Benaim, 2018). Memes became a way for people to connect, express themselves, and feel part of a collective conversation. While this phase significantly enriched the social understanding of memes, it often stopped short of explaining how these participatory practices translate into outcomes for brands.

4.1.4 Phase 4: Memes as Drivers of Brand-Related Outcomes

More recent research has begun to look at memes through a strategic lens, particularly within marketing and digital communication (Kim & Kim, 2024). In this emerging view, memes are seen as dynamic engagement systems that evolve through ongoing participation and emotional resonance. Rather than being short-lived or purely entertaining, memes are increasingly understood as capable of shaping customer engagement, brand perceptions, and

even brand equity (Tsai et al., 2025; Baek et al., 2025; Sewak et al., 2025). Despite this growing recognition, research in this area is still developing, leaving substantial room for deeper theoretical and empirical exploration.

4.2 Thematic Analysis

4.2.1 Theme 1: Memes in Marketing Communication

A substantial body of research approaches memes primarily through a marketing communication lens, viewing them as deliberate strategic tools used to persuade, engage, and influence consumers. Within this stream, scholars focus on outcomes such as advertising effectiveness, brand engagement, purchase intention, virality, and electronic word-of-mouth, most often on social media platforms (Baek et al., 2025; Sewak et al., 2025; Agrawal et al., 2025). Memes are commonly portrayed as effective because of their humorous, playful, trendy, and sometimes unexpected nature, which allows brands to capture attention and resonate with audiences in cluttered digital environments (Mi et al., 2025). These studies reflect a predominantly managerial orientation, where memes are framed as tactical solutions to challenges such as advertising fatigue and consumer resistance to sponsored content.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Consumer Meaning-Making, Interpretation, and Engagement

Another prominent theme that shifts attention from managerial use to the audience side of memes, foregrounding how users make sense of, feel about, and engage with meme content. Rather than treating memes as universally effective stimuli, these studies explore how differences in meme literacy, humour appreciation, and emotional responses shape engagement quality (Razzaq et al., 2024). Drawing largely on cognitive and behavioural perspectives, several studies explain meme resonance through shared cultural references and the ability of users to participate in meaning-making through interpretation and reinterpretation.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Memes as Cultural, Social, and Ideological Artefacts

A further stream of research conceptualizes memes as artifacts situated within wider

social, political, and ideological landscapes (Horbyk & Orlova, 2023). Several studies adopt interpretive and qualitative approaches such as content analysis, netnography, ethnography, and semiotic analysis to examine how memes circulate within participatory cultures, fandoms, activist movements, and political discourse (Logan-McFarlane, 2025). In this perspective, memes are understood not merely as communicative artefacts but as culturally meaningful artifacts through which users articulate social commentary, shared meanings, and collectively express values and positions within digital culture.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Computational and Multimodal Approaches to Meme Analysis

An emerging stream of literature approaches memes through technical and AI-driven lenses, reflecting a growing interest in analyzing meme content at scale. This work concentrates on areas such as multimodal sentiment analysis, the detection of harmful or misogynous memes, and the examination of cross-modal consistency between textual and visual elements (Duan et al., 2025). By drawing on machine learning techniques, semantic extraction, and decision-support models, these studies prioritize classification, prediction, and automated detection over interpretive understanding.

5. Future Research Directions

The following table (Refer to Table 1) presents potential directions for future research in the area of memes and meme marketing. It synthesizes key questions related to meme formats, participation, social and emotional engagement, brand outcomes, and marketing strategies.

Table 1: Future Research Directions

Research Area	Future Research Questions
<i>Types and Formats of Memes</i>	• How do different meme formats (images, GIFs, videos, text-based) influence consumer engagement, emotional response, and brand perception?
<i>Brand Memes vs. User-Generated Memes</i>	• Do branded memes or user-generated/community-created memes generate higher engagement, brand attachment, or advocacy? • How does perceived authenticity of memes affect consumer response to brands?

<i>Cross-Cultural and Demographic Differences</i>	• How do demographics and culture influence the interpretation, sharing behavior, and engagement with memes? • Are meme marketing strategies equally effective across different cultural or demographic segments?
<i>Meme Communities</i>	• How do online meme communities form and evolve over time? • What motivates individuals to participate in these online meme communities, and how does this participation influence engagement with memes?
<i>Emotional Responses</i>	• What is the impact of emotional factors (e.g., humor, nostalgia, surprise, joy) on engagement with memes? • How do emotional responses to memes influence brand perception, attachment, and advocacy?
<i>Psychological Responses</i>	• How do psychological aspects such as social identity signaling and self-expression affect engagement with memes? • How do these psychological responses shape consumer behavior and interactions with brands?
<i>Long-Term Impact on Brand Equity</i>	• What are the long-term effects of meme engagement on brand awareness, loyalty, and brand equity? • Can memes contribute to sustainable brand engagement, or are their effects primarily short-term?
<i>Integration with Marketing Strategy</i>	• How can memes be integrated into broader marketing campaigns, such as omnichannel or influencer strategies, to maximize engagement? • What metrics and frameworks are most effective for evaluating meme marketing performance?
<i>Memetic Virality and Predictive Factors</i>	• What factors predict the virality of memes, including content, timing, platform features, and network effects? • How can brands anticipate trends and optimize meme creation for maximum reach?

6. Key Contributions

This systematic literature review advances meme scholarship by providing a comprehensive synthesis of research at the intersection of marketing, communication, and digital consumer behavior. While previous reviews have primarily focused on conceptualizing meme marketing and establishing memes as marketing communication tools (e.g., Malodia et al., 2022; Razzaq et al., 2023), the present review extends this literature by integrating a broader body of recent empirical research and organizing it into a coherent conceptual structure. Specifically, the review proposes an evolutionary perspective of meme research, demonstrating how scholarly understanding has progressed from viewing memes as cultural units of replication to recognizing them as participatory social practices and, more recently, as strategic drivers of brand-related outcomes. This evolutionary synthesis provides a clearer

understanding of the foundations of meme research.

A second contribution lies in the thematic integration of literature. Rather than presenting isolated applications of memes, the review identifies four dominant research streams: memes in marketing communication, consumer meaning-making and engagement, memes as cultural and ideological artefacts, and computational approaches to meme analysis. Third, the review develops a structured future research agenda by identifying important conceptual and empirical gaps. These include the need to examine consumer participation within meme communities, compare branded and user-generated memes, investigate psychological and emotional mechanisms underlying meme engagement, assess the long-term effects of memes on brand equity, and explore the integration of meme marketing within broader digital marketing strategies. These directions provide a roadmap for advancing both theory development and empirical research in this emerging field.

From a managerial perspective, the review demonstrates that memes should be viewed not merely as humorous promotional content but as participatory communication mechanisms capable of strengthening consumer-brand relationships. The synthesis suggests that brands are more likely to achieve engagement when meme strategies are authentic, culturally relevant, and aligned with user participation, enabling brands to become credible participants within digital culture rather than external advertisers.

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PLAYING TOGETHER, ENJOYING TOGETHER: IMMERSION, SOCIAL TELEPRESENCE, AND GROUP PLAYING CONTINUANCE IN ONLINE MULTIPLAYER GAMES

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Keywords: *Multiplayer gaming; Social telepresence; Perceived immersion; User gratification; Enjoyment; Group playing continuance intention*

Description: This study investigates how perceived immersion and user gratification influence players' intentions to continue participating in online multiplayer games through the mediating roles of social telepresence and enjoyment. Findings reveal that social telepresence is a stronger predictor of continuance intention than enjoyment, highlighting the central role of social connectedness in sustaining multiplayer gaming engagement.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

Online multiplayer games have transformed digital entertainment by enabling players to interact, cooperate, and compete in real-time virtual environments. While previous research has extensively examined factors such as motivation, enjoyment, and immersion as predictors of gaming engagement, relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding why players continue participating in group-based multiplayer experiences over time. As multiplayer gaming increasingly relies on social interactions and collective experiences, continuance behaviour may depend not only on individual enjoyment but also on perceptions of social connectedness within virtual environments.

Two theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant in explaining sustained multiplayer engagement. Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that individuals actively engage with media to satisfy entertainment and social needs, while Social Presence Theory emphasizes the importance of feeling connected to others within mediated environments. Although prior studies have separately examined gratification, immersion, and social presence, the mechanisms through which these factors jointly influence group playing continuance remain insufficiently understood. Accordingly, this study investigates how perceived immersion and user gratification influence group playing continuance intention through the mediating roles of social telepresence and enjoyment. The central research question guiding this study is:

How do perceived immersion and user gratification shape group playing continuance intention through social telepresence and enjoyment in online multiplayer games?

By addressing this question, the study seeks to advance understanding of whether sustained multiplayer participation is driven primarily by hedonic experiences or by socially embedded experiences that foster a sense of togetherness among players.

METHOD AND DATA

This study adopts a quantitative research design using survey data collected from online multiplayer game players in India. Data were gathered through a self-administered online questionnaire distributed using convenience sampling. To ensure contextual relevance, only respondents with prior experience in group-based multiplayer gaming were included. The final sample comprised 303 valid responses from young adults aged between 18 and 30 years who actively participated in multiplayer games across mobile, PC, and console platforms.

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature and operationalized using five-point Likert scales. Perceived immersion, user gratification, social telepresence, enjoyment, and group playing continuance intention were measured using validated scales widely employed in gaming and digital media research.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data using SmartPLS 4. The analysis followed a two-stage approach. First, the measurement model was assessed to establish reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and absence of multicollinearity. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test hypothesized relationships and mediating effects. The significance of direct and indirect effects was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. This approach enabled a rigorous

examination of the experiential mechanisms underlying continuance behavior in multiplayer gaming environments.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that both social telepresence and enjoyment significantly influence group playing continuance intention. However, social telepresence emerged as the stronger predictor, indicating that perceptions of social connectedness play a more influential role than purely hedonic experiences in sustaining multiplayer engagement.

User gratification exhibited significant positive effects on both enjoyment and social telepresence, suggesting that fulfilment of entertainment and social needs enhances both affective and relational aspects of the gaming experience. Perceived immersion also positively influenced social telepresence, indicating that immersive environments strengthen players' perceptions of being together with others during gameplay. However, immersion did not significantly affect enjoyment, suggesting that immersion alone may be insufficient to generate pleasurable experiences without meaningful social interaction.

Mediation analyses further revealed that social telepresence significantly mediated the relationship between perceived immersion and continuance intention. Similarly, enjoyment mediated the relationship between user gratification and continuance intention. User gratification also influenced continuance intention indirectly through social telepresence, highlighting the coexistence of social and hedonic pathways. In contrast, the indirect effect of immersion through enjoyment was not significant.

Overall, the findings indicate that while enjoyment remains important, social telepresence serves as the dominant mechanism through which multiplayer gaming experiences translate into sustained group participation. These results suggest that continued engagement in multiplayer games is fundamentally social in nature and driven by perceptions of shared presence and interpersonal connection.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes several important theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it advances consumer behavior and digital gaming research by demonstrating that continuance intention in multiplayer games is shaped primarily through experiential mechanisms rather than direct effects of immersion and gratification. The findings extend Uses and Gratifications

Theory by showing that gratification influences sustained participation indirectly through enjoyment and social telepresence rather than exerting direct effects on continuance intention.

The study also contributes to Social Presence Theory by identifying social telepresence as a more influential determinant of continuance intention than enjoyment in multiplayer gaming environments. By demonstrating that immersion primarily enhances continuance through social telepresence rather than through enjoyment, the research provides a more nuanced understanding of how immersive experiences translate into behavioral outcomes.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that game developers and platform managers should prioritize features that strengthen social interaction and perceptions of co-presence. Features such as real-time communication, cooperative gameplay, shared objectives, community-building mechanisms, and team-based activities may be more effective in promoting long-term engagement than investments focused solely on graphical realism or immersive game mechanics. The results further indicate that retention strategies should emphasize collective experiences and social bonding among players to foster sustainable multiplayer gaming ecosystems.

Collectively, the study positions social telepresence as a critical driver of long-term engagement and provides new insights into how socially embedded digital experiences influence continuance behavior in online multiplayer games.

References are available upon request.

PRESENCE IN MARKETING AND RELATED FIELDS: CONCEPTUALIZATION, TAXONOMY, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Keywords: social presence, spatial presence, immersion, flow, computer-mediated environments.

Description: This paper develops a unifying conceptual framework that clarifies the concept of presence, organizes different presence constructs into the orthogonal dimensions of spatial and social presence, introduces a taxonomy of social presence, and synthesizes its key antecedents and outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Presence, defined as the perceptual illusion of nonmediation (Lombard and Ditton 1997), has become a central construct for understanding consumer experiences in physical and computer-mediated environments. Despite its importance, the literature on presence remains fragmented and is characterized by overlapping labels and inconsistent definitions. Prior research has

introduced numerous presence-related constructs, including telepresence, spatial presence, social presence, co-presence, mere social presence, automated social presence, local presence, and virtual presence, yet little consensus exists regarding their conceptual boundaries and relationships. Moreover, presence has frequently been conflated with related constructs such as immersion and flow.

We address these issues by asking how the diverse presence constructs identified across marketing and related disciplines can be conceptually organized within a coherent higher-order framework. Specifically, we seek to (1) delineate presence from conceptually adjacent constructs such as immersion and flow, (2) examine whether the different manifestations of presence can be integrated into a parsimonious organizing framework built around the orthogonal dimensions of spatial presence and social presence, (3) develop a taxonomy of social presence across physical and computer-mediated environments and across human and non-human social actors, and (4) synthesize the key antecedents and outcomes of social presence identified in the extant literature.

Method and Data

Not applicable. This is a conceptual theory-building paper.

Summary of Findings

The paper proposes a unifying conceptual framework that organizes the fragmented literature on presence into two orthogonal dimensions: spatial presence and social presence. Presence is conceptualized as a subjective perceptual experience that is distinct from technological affordances such as immersion and from optimal experiential states such as flow. Within the spatial dimension, the framework distinguishes between telepresence and local presence. Within

the social dimension, social presence is defined as the degree of salience of other humans or non-human actors in an interaction and the resulting sense of interpersonal connection.

Building on three foundational axioms, we develop an eight-cell taxonomy that differentiates between mere and interactive social presence across physical and computer-mediated environments and across human and non-human social actors. The framework further organizes antecedents of social presence into medium-level, social entity-level, and individual-level factors. Across the literature, trust and engagement emerge as the central outcomes of social presence. In computer-mediated environments, anthropomorphism typically has a positive influence on social presence. Based on these insights, the paper identifies several promising avenues for future research, including examining the dynamic interplay between spatial and social presence, extending research on automated social presence, and investigating potential negative consequences of social presence.

Key Contributions

This paper makes several conceptual contributions to the literature on presence in marketing and related fields. First, it provides conceptual clarification by systematically delineating presence from closely related constructs such as immersion and flow, thereby resolving persistent ambiguities regarding the conceptualization of presence. Second, it introduces a higher-order organizing framework demonstrating that the diverse presence constructs identified in prior research can be understood as manifestations of two orthogonal dimensions: spatial presence and social presence.

Third, the paper develops a taxonomy that distinguishes mere from interactive social presence across physical and computer-mediated environments and across human and non-

human social actors. This taxonomy provides researchers with a coherent structure for positioning existing research, identifying conceptual overlaps, and recognizing underexplored research contexts. Fourth, the paper synthesizes prior research by organizing the principal antecedents and outcomes of social presence into a coherent conceptual framework, identifying medium-level, social entity-level, and individual-level antecedents, while highlighting trust and engagement as central mechanisms underlying managerially relevant outcomes. Finally, by integrating insights from marketing, consumer research, information systems, human–computer interaction, and social psychology, the paper provides a comprehensive foundation for future research on presence and offers a common conceptual language for studying presence across diverse research domains.

References are available upon request.

**TITLE: RECONCILING COMMERCIALIZATION AND ENGAGEMENT: THE
OPTIMAL ROLE OF USAGE EXPERIENCE SHARING IN INFLUENCER
MARKETING**

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Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Authenticity Dilemma, Usage Experience Sharing, Digital Engagement

Description: This study investigates how influencer commercialization intensity reduces digital engagement and evaluates a moderate application of Usage Experience Sharing (UES) as an optimal creator-led strategy to reconcile this tension.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The modern influencer economy relies heavily on sponsored content, with global spending exceeding \$20 billion annually. As content creation professionalizes, influencers must increase commercialization—the extent to which paid sponsorships saturate their portfolios—to sustain their platforms. However, this drive introduces a fundamental conflict: the commercialization-authenticity dilemma. Influencers build followings on perceived authenticity, transparency, and genuine connection. When audiences perceive excessive commercial content, they suspect purely financial motives, triggering persuasion knowledge and driving down digital engagement.

While regulatory transparency requires sponsorship disclosures, mere disclosure does not restore audience trust. Influencers must proactively manage integrity by demonstrating a sincere connection to sponsored products. This study introduces Usage Experience Sharing (UES), defined as the degree to which an influencer demonstrates product use and shares personal experiences within sponsored content. We position UES as a proactive content strategy to mitigate the negative effects of commercialization. However, UES is a delicate balancing act; while low-to-moderate sharing provides informational value, excessive sharing can appear insincere or manipulative, suggesting a non-linear relationship that demands empirical investigation.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This research addresses two critical gaps at the intersection of influencer monetization and audience behavior. First, how does a creator's overall commercialization intensity (the long-term ratio of sponsored to total videos in a portfolio) affect audience digital engagement? Second, how does the strategic deployment of Usage Experience Sharing (UES) within sponsored videos

influence engagement, and can it serve as a content-based boundary condition to mitigate the detrimental impacts of over-commercialization?

We formalize these questions through three hypotheses:

- **H1:** Influencer commercialization intensity has a negative effect on digital engagement.
- **H2:** Usage experience sharing has an inverted U-shaped effect on digital engagement.
- **H3:** Moderate usage experience sharing mitigates the negative effect of influencer commercialization on digital engagement.

By investigating these relationships, this study moves beyond single-post disclosure issues to examine portfolio-level commercialization dynamics. It aims to discover whether creators can use integrity-based content design to sustain commercial monetization without triggering audience alienation or skepticism.

METHOD AND DATA

We tested our hypotheses using sponsored video data from Bilibili, a major video-sharing platform where video content serves as an ideal medium for dynamic product demonstration and storytelling. Our sample was drawn from the platform's 2021 top content creators list across 15 distinct categories. The final dataset comprised 467 sponsored videos published by 74 professional influencers.

Variables and Measurement:

- **Digital Engagement (DV):** Measured as the cumulative sum of user interactions per sponsored video, including Likes, Favorites, Comments, and Shares.

- **Influencer Commercialization Intensity (IV):** Operationalized as the quarterly ratio of sponsored videos to total published videos, capturing cumulative audience perceptions over time.
- **Usage Experience Sharing (IV & Moderator):** Quantified via a content coding scheme applied by two expert coders evaluating product usage demonstrations and shared opinions.
- **Controls:** Influencer-level (follower count, gender), video-level (length, category, brand fit, timing), and brand-level factors.

Estimation Strategy: To address potential endogeneity concerns regarding sponsorship volume and unobserved heterogeneity, we utilized a Control Function Approach (CFA). The first stage instrumented commercialization intensity using the weighted average peer commercialization strategy within identical creator categories.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The empirical results derived from our Control Function Approach model provide robust support for all three hypothesized relationships.

First, the analysis confirms a significant negative main effect of influencer commercialization intensity on digital engagement ($\beta = -1.031, p < 0.01$). This offers strong quantitative validation for the authenticity dilemma, showing that portfolio saturation with sponsored posts alienates audiences.

Second, the model reveals a highly significant non-linear relationship between content delivery and engagement. Specifically, Usage Experience Sharing (UES) exhibits a distinct, robust inverted U-shaped effect on digital engagement (UES: $\beta = 0.224, p < 0.01$; UES²: $\beta = -0.054, p < 0.01$). This verifies that engagement is maximized at a moderate level of product sharing, whereas minimal or excessive sharing yields sub-optimal results.

Third, we find a significant moderating interaction effect (Commercialization $\times$ UES: $\beta = 1.263, p < 0.05$; Commercialization $\times$ UES²: $\beta = -0.265, p < 0.10$). Marginal effect analysis establishes that the negative impact of commercialization is significantly buffered when UES is kept at a moderate, focused level, whereas high or low UES fails to provide an effective strategic shield.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study yields meaningful contributions for academic marketing and industry stakeholders by offering a scalable resolution to the influencer authenticity dilemma.

Academic Significance: We expand the literature on influencer marketing and authenticity by introducing UES as a distinct, creator-led strategy. Rather than treating commercialization as an isolated, single-post occurrence, we evaluate it at the content-portfolio level. By demonstrating a non-linear, inverted U-shaped effect, we introduce theoretical nuance to content strategy: showing that moderate product integration outperforms both superficial showcasing and over-enthusiastic personal testimonials. Furthermore, establishing UES as a moderator provides a concrete, integrity-driven mechanism that advances authenticity theory beyond mandatory disclosures.

Managerial Value: For brands, agencies, and creators, our data offers precise content policy parameters. We advise marketers to move away from rigid scripts or plain product displays and instead encourage influencers to practice moderate UES—focusing on thorough technical application and brief anecdotes. This design optimization safeguards audience trust, preserves channel integrity, and maximizes campaign ROI even when an influencer's commercialization intensity remains high.

RETHINKING THE PERSONALIZATION-PRIVACY-PARADOX IN MOBILE AND OMNICHANNEL MARKETING: CONSUMER RESPONSES TO AI-POWERED PERSONALIZATION

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Keywords: personalization, privacy, omnichannel, mobile marketing, consumer responses

Description: This paper conducts a multi-method approach to investigate consumer responses to AI-powered personalized messages in a mobile and omnichannel marketing context through the lens of the personalization-privacy paradox.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI), mobile technologies, and digital in-store displays have enabled personalization in omnichannel and mobile marketing to move beyond static customer segmenting toward real-time, context-aware, and individual-level personalization approaches (Batista et al. 2024). Given the importance of personalized offerings, understanding consumers' perceptions and responses to various personalization contexts is critical to designing effective marketing strategies. This research draws on the personalization-privacy paradox, rooted in the privacy calculus theory (Aguirre et al. 2015), to investigate how personalization design elements (depth, channel, and form) shape consumers' benefit-risk perceptions, attitude toward personalization, and subsequent relational and behavioral responses. Specifically, we examine the following two research questions: (1) How do consumers perceive and react to different personalization settings and configurations? and (2) How do product-related and context-related factors influence the consumers' benefit-risk assessments and responses to personalized messages?

To address these research questions, we first investigate the benefit-risk trade-off consumers face when interacting with personalized messages in omnichannel settings with particular focus on the joint effects of form and channel of the personalization. Additionally, we examine how consumers react to different products with varying levels of privacy sensitivity and explore how these reactions manifest across different cultures.

Method and Data

First, we conducted a pretest to validate our measurement scales. To gain initial insights into consumers' real purchasing experiences and to trace the pathways and stages of consumer decision-making across personalization settings, we conducted an online survey with 720 university students from Germany. Respondents recalled a personalization experience and rated its depth (low/demographic, moderate/behavioral, high/real-time), channel (mobile app or in-store display), and form (discount or recommendation) for subsequent survey analysis. We mostly used multi-item scales adapted from the literature which we assessed using confirmatory factor analysis. To test the hypothesized model, we applied covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) explicitly accounting for measurement error and scale properties (Fornell and Larcker 1981). In Addition, to test potential interaction effects between the personalization elements depth, channel and form we conducted a MANCOVA and subsequent univariate ANOVAs. As an exploratory follow-up study, we conducted a 2 (product privacy sensitivity: privacy-sensitive vs. privacy-non-sensitive) $\times$ 4 (product category: skin care, clothing, sexual wellness, supplements) scenario-based between-subjects experiment ($N = 298$) in the U.S. and Germany to investigate product-level differences regarding consumers' privacy sensitivity (measured as a second-order formative construct comprising five first-order reflective dimensions).

Summary of Findings

We answer two research questions related to the personalization-privacy-paradox and find empirical support for most of our hypotheses. Our results demonstrate that the benefit-risk trade-off consumers make in personalization interactions differs across channels: As such,

personalized messages conveyed through digital in-store displays are associated with higher perceived shopping efficiency but also with lower perceived relevance and increased perceived security threats, compared to mobile in-app personalized messages. Furthermore, we observe that price discounts (form) are most effective across both channels, particularly when presented through in-store displays (channel), increasing consumers' willingness to pay, willingness to disclose, and repurchase intent and are less evident in mobile app settings. However, product recommendations in apps are more successful at encouraging repurchase intent. Based on this channel-form congruence, we delineate the channel and form as critical contextual boundary conditions for omnichannel personalization. Further, our findings suggest that consumers perceive a higher privacy sensitivity for the sensitive product than for the non-sensitive product across different product categories. A cross-cultural analysis reveals that overall, German and U.S. consumers showed similar perceptions of product intimacy, but German consumers tended to perceive privacy-sensitive products as less socially acceptable and more stigmatizing.

Key Contributions

Our work contributes to research on the personalization-privacy paradox in mobile marketing and omnichannel retailing in three ways:

First, this study advances personalization-privacy research by demonstrating consumers' perceptions and reactions to personalized messages vary across delivery channels. We consider the channel for personalization a crucial yet understudied contextual factor in benefit-risk assessments and related consumer outcomes of personalized messages.

Second, this study examines how different personalization configurations based on depth, channel, and form affect consumer responses. We find that responses to personalized messages are context-

dependent, indicating a significant congruence effect of channel-form combinations. Hence, channel and form are important boundary conditions in omnichannel personalization, redirecting the theoretical focus toward how their influence on value-related outcomes varies across different touchpoints.

Third, this study explores contextual and product-related constraints in consumer responses to personalization. We show that consumers' perceptions of privacy sensitivity vary across both product categories and cultural contexts. Specifically, U.S. consumers do not perceive most high-sensitivity products as stigmatized, unlike German consumers. This insight highlights the underexplored cross-cultural differences in personalization responses, underscoring the need for future cross-cultural personalization research.

References are available upon request.

SINGING FOR UNSUNG: EFFECT OF “PRO-SOCIAL” SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON BRAND ATTITUDE

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Keywords: Pro-social social media influencers; influencer marketing; social marketing;
parasocial interaction; fsQCA

Description: This paper examines how congruence among pro-social influencers, viewers,
brands, and social causes shapes positive brand attitude in an influencer-driven social marketing
campaign on a short-video platform.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how a new class of social media influencers, termed pro-social social media influencers (pro-social SMI), shapes consumers' attitudes toward sponsoring brands in social marketing campaigns. Unlike celebrities, vloggers, or macro influencers, pro-social SMI are ordinary consumers who create short-video content around acts of kindness and societal support, such as donating food or clothes to homeless people. Existing influencer marketing research largely explains brand outcomes through credibility, attractiveness, expertise, authenticity, and influencer-brand congruence, while social marketing research emphasizes fit among causes, consumers, and brands. However, little is known about how these two streams operate together when social media users themselves become pro-social influencers. Drawing on parasocial theory, the paper argues that viewers process pro-social influencer content through cognitive and affective responses based on perceived fit among the influencer, viewer, cause, and brand. This is especially

relevant for short-video platforms where one-time exposure can still create meaningful parasocial responses. The central research question is: What combinations of influencer-driven social marketing program elements – pro-social SMI, consumers, brands, and social causes – lead to a positive brand attitude?

Method and Data

The empirical context is #AchchaiKaChatkara, a social marketing campaign on Josh App, a short-video platform. The campaign invited subscribers to upload short videos of good deeds, thereby positioning participating users as pro-social SMI. In total, 532 videos were posted, with the dominant cause themes involving donation of food and clothes to homeless people. Data were collected through an email survey of 253 viewers of these influencer-driven campaign videos. Respondents rated their agreement on five-point Likert scales measuring attitude toward the brand and perceived congruence between key campaign elements: influencer-cause, influencer-viewer, influencer-brand, consumer-cause, and cause-brand. The sample included 37% male and 63% female respondents; 45% were aged 18-25, 30% were 26-35, 20% were 36-45, and 5% were above 46. The study applies fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), which is appropriate for identifying multiple conjunctural pathways to the same outcome. The analysis involved case and condition selection, calibration of summed scores at full non-membership, crossover, and full membership thresholds, necessity analysis, truth table construction, and sufficiency analysis to identify causal configurations.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that no single condition is necessary for positive brand attitude, indicating that brand responses emerge through configurations of campaign elements rather than through one dominant driver. The fsQCA results identify two distinct pathways. The first pathway suggests

that positive brand attitude occurs when viewers perceive strong shared values and beliefs with the pro-social influencer and when the influencer is meaningfully connected with the supported cause. In this route, the cognitive response generated through parasocial processing – especially perceived influencer-cause and influencer-viewer congruence – becomes central. The second pathway indicates that pro-social influencers can also generate positive brand attitude when viewers recognize the influencer's pro-social behavior, but this effect depends on viewers' pre-existing relationship with the cause and their perception that the cause-brand association is appropriate. Thus, affective responses based on cause relevance and brand-cause fit complement the influencer's role. Overall, the study demonstrates that pro-social SMI can create favorable brand attitudes through kindness contagion and parasocial processing, but only when the campaign's influencer, viewer, cause, and brand elements align configurationally. The results therefore support an equifinal view of influencer-driven social marketing outcomes.

Key Contributions

The study makes four key contributions. First, it extends parasocial theory into the emerging context of pro-social influencer marketing by showing how ordinary consumers, rather than celebrities or professional influencers, can generate parasocial responses through short-video acts of kindness. Second, it integrates influencer marketing and social marketing by conceptualizing influencer-driven social marketing as a configuration of pro-social SMI, viewers, brands, and causes. Third, it clarifies parasocial interaction processing by distinguishing cognitive responses, reflected in influencer-cause and influencer-viewer fit, from affective responses, reflected in influencer-brand, consumer-cause, and cause-brand fit. Fourth, it offers managerial guidance for brands using short-video platforms for social marketing: partnering with pro-social SMI may create stronger authenticity than relying only on popular macro influencers, especially when the

cause and brand are perceived as compatible. The study also demonstrates the usefulness of fsQCA for examining influencer-marketing outcomes, because positive brand attitude can arise through multiple combinations of conditions rather than a single linear effect. For developing-economy contexts, it highlights how user-generated pro-social content can support both social causes and brand evaluation.

References are available upon request.

**STUCK BUT SCALING BACK: DISTINCT EMOTIONAL PATHWAYS FROM
APPROACH–AVOIDANCE STRESSORS TO SNS REDUCTION INTENTION VIA
SUNK COST MODERATION**

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Keywords: SNS exhaustion; fear of missing out; privacy concerns; sunk cost; reduction intention

Description: This paper examines how approach- and avoidance-oriented SNS stressors shape exhaustion and reduction intention through negative feelings toward SNS and perceived sunk cost.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Social network service (SNS) platforms face a growing challenge: users remain connected while increasingly experiencing emotional depletion and seeking ways to reduce use. This study asks how two opposing SNS stressors—fear of missing out (FoMO), which pulls users toward engagement, and privacy concerns, which push users away—contribute to SNS exhaustion and reduction intention. Drawing on the Stressor–Strain–Outcome framework, the study examines whether negative feelings toward SNS serve as an affective mechanism linking FoMO and privacy concerns to exhaustion and whether these mediating pathways differ across the two

stressors. The study also asks whether perceived SNS sunk cost changes how exhaustion translates into reduction intention. Rather than treating disengagement as complete withdrawal, the study focuses on reduction intention as a moderate self-regulatory response in which users scale back intensity, frequency, or exposure while maintaining some platform connection.

Method and Data

The study uses a self-administered online survey of 571 SNS users in South Korea. A professional research firm collected the data using quota sampling across gender, age, education, occupation, and income. All focal constructs were measured with validated multi-item scales using seven-point Likert-type response formats. To ensure conceptual equivalence, the survey items were translated and back-translated through a collaborative process involving bilingual faculty, followed by pretesting with SNS users and minor wording adjustments. The empirical model was tested using structural equation modeling. Measurement validation included tests of reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias. The moderating role of perceived SNS sunk cost was examined by comparing structural models with and without the latent interaction term, and the conditional effect was further assessed using PROCESS Model 1.

Summary of Findings

The results show that SNS exhaustion is positively associated with users' intention to reduce SNS use, supporting reduction intention as a meaningful response to emotional strain. Perceived SNS sunk cost strengthens this relationship: when users feel more invested in SNS through time, effort, emotional energy, or social capital, exhaustion more strongly translates into reduction intention. FoMO is positively associated with both negative feelings toward SNS and SNS

exhaustion, whereas privacy concerns significantly predict negative feelings but do not directly predict exhaustion. Negative feelings toward SNS strongly increase SNS exhaustion and serve as the key affective pathway linking stressors to strain. Mediation patterns differ across the two stressors. FoMO shows partial mediation, suggesting that its effect on exhaustion reflects both affective strain and additional engagement-driven mechanisms. Privacy concerns show full mediation, indicating that privacy-related exhaustion emerges when perceived threats are emotionally internalized as negative feelings toward SNS.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to SNS exhaustion and digital disengagement research in four ways. First, it extends the Stressor–Strain–Outcome framework by modeling negative feelings toward SNS as an explicit affective mechanism connecting stressors to exhaustion. Second, it demonstrates that approach- and avoidance-oriented stressors do not operate uniformly: FoMO retains both direct and affective pathways to exhaustion, while privacy concerns operate through negative feelings. Third, it positions reduction intention as a realistic and theoretically meaningful outcome between continued use and complete withdrawal. Fourth, it challenges the conventional view that sunk cost simply sustains engagement by showing that, under exhaustion, perceived sunk cost can amplify users’ intention to scale back. Managerially, the findings suggest that platforms should address privacy-related emotional vulnerability, manage FoMO-driven over-engagement, and design tools that help users regulate usage without abandoning accumulated social and identity investments.

References are available upon request.

Substance or Hype? Multimodal AI Communication Credibility and Financial Market

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Keywords: Multimodal communication; CEO; Entrepreneurship; Visual delivery

Description: This paper uses AI-enabled multimodal analysis to examine when investor-facing video communication is interpreted as credible substance rather than promotional hype, and how this shapes financial-market and private-investment outcomes.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Financial-market communication increasingly occurs through video, where CEOs and entrepreneurs do not simply disclose information but present value claims through words, voice, and visible bodily delivery. This raises an important question for marketing and financial-market research: when do multimodal communication cues make investor-facing claims appear credible and substantive, and when might they be dismissed as promotional hype? Existing research has primarily examined verbal disclosure, textual tone, financial information, and firm-level marketing assets. However, market participants often encounter managerial and entrepreneurial communication in rich multimodal environments, where visual delivery may affect whether claims are seen as clear, grounded, and worthy of further scrutiny.

This paper asks whether AI-measured multimodal delivery shapes the credibility of investor-facing value claims and, in turn, capital allocation across public and private investment settings. We focus on visible hand gesture delivery as a theoretically important visual channel because gestures can organise ideas, emphasise key claims, and make abstract business information easier to process. We further examine diagnostic inquiry as a stakeholder mechanism through which communication moves from performance to substance: when journalists or investor-panelists ask more capital-relevant questions, they help test whether a speaker's value claims are economically meaningful. Thus, we study how visible delivery, diagnostic questioning, and market-facing expertise jointly shape financial-market reactions and investment decisions.

Method And Data

We test our predictions using two empirical studies based on naturally occurring investor-facing videos. Study 1 examines CEO interviews published by CNBC and matched to publicly listed firms. We use the video publication date as the event date and measure short-window financial-market reactions using cumulative abnormal returns. We apply AI-enabled computer vision to extract CEOs' visible hand gestures and operationalise gesture delivery using two measures: gesture prevalence, defined as the proportion of valid frames in which visible hand gestures are detected, and gesture intensity, defined as the magnitude of hand movement across frames. We also transcribe each video and identify journalist questions to measure diagnostic inquiry, defined as the proportion of question words devoted to capital-relevant fundamentals such as profitability, risk, market demand, valuation, strategy, and financial outlook.

Study 2 examines entrepreneurial pitches from Shark Tank, allowing us to test the same theoretical logic in a private investment market. We measure founders' gesture delivery

during pitch interactions and link it to deal formation, investment amount, equity concessions, and implied deal valuation. Across both studies, we include controls for business fundamentals, speaker characteristics, verbal content, audio delivery, industry, year, and video features to isolate the informational role of multimodal communication credibility.

Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that AI-measured visual delivery is meaningfully associated with capital-allocation outcomes. In Study 1, CEOs' gesture prevalence and gesture intensity are positively related to short-window stock market reactions following investor-facing video publication. These results indicate that visible delivery can affect how financial markets respond to managerial communication, even after accounting for firm characteristics, CEO characteristics, earnings-related information, verbal tone, uncertainty, and video-level controls.

We also find evidence for a stakeholder information mechanism. CEOs who use more visible gesture delivery receive more diagnostic inquiry from journalists, and diagnostic inquiry is positively associated with market reactions. This suggests that credible multimodal delivery does not merely create favourable impressions; it can also encourage stakeholders to ask more capital-relevant questions, thereby shifting communication from surface-level performance toward substantive evaluation.

Study 2 extends the evidence to private investment decisions. In entrepreneurial pitches, gesture intensity is positively associated with deal formation, while gesture prevalence is associated with more favourable deal terms among funded ventures, including lower equity concessions and higher implied valuations. The effects are stronger when speakers have stronger market-facing capabilities, suggesting that visual delivery is most persuasive when it is grounded in credible business substance rather than appearing as unsupported promotional hype.

Statement of Key Contributions

These findings offer four contributions. First, we advance marketing–finance research by developing a role-based multi-stakeholder framework of investor-facing communication. Rather than treating capital allocation as a dyadic firm-to-investor signalling process, we show how CEOs and founders initiate value claims, questioners probe and clarify those claims, and investors use the resulting information to allocate capital. Second, we extend embodied communication research by conceptualising hand gesture delivery as an interface-dependent credibility cue. In investor-facing video settings, gestures can make value claims more salient, processable, and evaluable, thereby linking multimodal delivery to financial-market outcomes. Third, we introduce diagnostic inquiry as a questioner-side information process. By focusing on capital-relevant fundamentals, journalists and investor-panelists help convert visible claims into information useful for investment evaluation. Fourth, we identify market-facing capability as a role-enabling condition. Gesture delivery is more likely to signal substance rather than hype when supported by marketing expertise, customer understanding, and commercial framing. Methodologically, the paper demonstrates how AI-enabled video and text analytics can capture naturally occurring multimodal communication processes in public and private capital markets. Practically, the findings suggest that effective investor-facing communication depends not on gesturing more, but on visually emphasising claims that merit diagnostic follow-up and substantive evaluation.

THE IMPACT OF TIME INTERVAL OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

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Keywords: timing, electronic word-of-mouth, online customer reviews, social media

Description: This paper investigates whether the time intervals between electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) messages impact product sales and finds that temporal information can be as effective as traditional numerical rating metrics.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The primary research question is whether and how the timing information of eWOM messages influences consumer responses (Berger, 2012). While existing research extensively analyzes numerical ratings (valence, volume, and variance), textual content, and visual elements, temporal information—specifically when messages arrive—has been largely ignored (Liu et al., 2024).

This study examines the time intervals of the latest eWOM messages to determine if these independent temporal characteristics play a critical role in sales performance. Drawing a parallel to advertising scheduling in traditional media, the paper explores if the "spacing" of reviews determines whether consumer responses are reinforced or diminished over time, similar to how timing can strengthen advertising intensity or engage consumers at optimal times (Vakratsas & Naik, 2007).

Method and Data

The empirical analysis utilizes an Amazon user review dataset comprising 12,750 movie and TV products (Leskovec et al., 2009). Using Python, we collected posting times to calculate five time

intervals: span_12 (lapse between the two most recent reviews) through span_56 (lapse between the fifth and sixth most recent reviews). For comparison, the study included traditional metrics: valence (mean 4.24), volume (mean 60.61), and variance (mean 1.18). Product price served as a control variable. We employed linear regression models, using the logarithm of Sales Rank as the dependent variable to test the impact of these timing spans against non-timing metrics.

Summary of Findings

The results demonstrate that short time intervals between eWOM arrivals are associated with higher product sales. Regression estimates for all time spans were significant and positive, meaning longer gaps between reviews correlate with a higher sales rank (and thus lower sales). Critically, temporal information can outperform traditional metrics in model fit. While a model combining valence, volume, and variance yielded an adjusted R squared of 0.114, a model using the last four time spans achieved a higher adjusted R squared of 0.127. Higher volume and valence also correlated with higher sales, while the impact of variance was mixed depending on the model configuration.

Key Contributions

This research extends the eWOM research from message content to temporal dynamics (Babić Rosario et al., 2016). It fills a literature gap by identifying timing as an independent characteristic of eWOM (Berger, 2012). Empirically, it proves that the speed of review arrival is a predictor of product success, matching or exceeding the impact of summary statistics like valence and variance. Theoretically, it establishes a link between eWOM and advertising scheduling, suggesting that the spacing of consumer content functions like traditional media pulsing strategies (Mahajan & Muller, 1986). Practically, it offers marketers a new dashboard metric of review arrivals—to more accurately gauge and influence market momentum.

TRANSPARENCY, DOES IT HELP OR HURT? EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF AI VOICE ASSISTANT DISCLOSURE ON CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOR AND PRIVACY SENSITIVITY

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Keywords: AI transparency, voice assistants, privacy cynicism, continuance intention, brand avoidance.

Description: This study examines how transparency in AI voice assistant recommendations influences consumer behavioral responses, including continuance intention, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and brand avoidance, through the mechanism of privacy cynicism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

AI-powered voice assistants are increasingly shaping consumer decisions through personalized recommendations, yet the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses to these recommendations remain insufficiently understood. While transparency is often positioned as a tool to enhance trust and fairness, emerging research suggests it may also trigger skepticism or

resistance. However, prior studies largely focus on positive outcomes such as trust, satisfaction, or adoption, while giving limited attention to negative emotional responses or resistance behaviors. Moreover, existing research rarely examines positive and negative behavioral outcomes together, creating an incomplete understanding of transparency's overall impact. Critically, the role of deeper emotional mechanisms, particularly privacy cynicism, remains underexplored in voice-based, AI-mediated interactions.

This study addresses two key questions. First, how does transparency in voice assistant-generated recommendations influence consumer behavioral responses, specifically continuance intention, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and brand avoidance? Second, what role does privacy cynicism, defined as a resigned belief that data misuse is inevitable, play in shaping these relationships?

Drawing on Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory, the research proposes that transparency acts as a boundary signal that can either reinforce users' sense of control or heighten awareness of data practices, with negative effects emerging indirectly through privacy cynicism rather than as direct behavioral responses.

Method and Data

The research employs two scenario-based, between-subjects experiments manipulating transparency (disclosed vs. undisclosed) in voice assistant recommendations. Study 1 examines the direct effects of transparency on consumer behavioral responses. Participants (N = 157) all familiar with voice assistants, were randomly assigned to one of two conditions and exposed to a product recommendation scenario delivered by a voice assistant. Established multi-item scales were used to measure continuance intention, e-WOM intention, and brand avoidance.

Study 2 (N = 174) extends this design by incorporating privacy cynicism as a mediating variable. Using a similar experimental structure with a different product context, participants evaluated recommendations under varying transparency conditions and completed measures of perceived transparency, privacy cynicism, and behavioral outcomes. Mediation effects were tested using PROCESS Model 4.

Both studies relied on validated scales and seven-point Likert measures. Manipulation checks confirmed that transparency levels were successfully perceived across conditions. This dual-study design strengthens internal validity and allows for a more comprehensive assessment of both direct and indirect effects of transparency.

Summary of Findings

Across both studies, transparency consistently produced positive behavioral outcomes. Participants exposed to disclosed recommendations reported higher continuance intention and e-WOM, while brand avoidance was lower compared to the undisclosed condition. These results suggest that providing clear explanations enhances users' sense of understanding and engagement with AI-driven recommendations.

Importantly, Study 2 demonstrates that privacy cynicism serves as a key psychological mechanism underlying these effects. Lower transparency increased privacy cynicism, which in turn reduced continuance and e-WOM intentions and increased brand avoidance. This highlights how perceived loss of control over personal data weakens consumer engagement even when AI systems offer functional benefits.

The findings further indicate that transparency does not directly generate negative behavioral responses. Instead, any adverse effects emerge indirectly through heightened privacy cynicism.

This distinction helps reconcile mixed findings in prior research by showing that transparency primarily supports positive consumer outcomes, while negative reactions arise through an emotional pathway linked to perceived data vulnerability.

Overall, the results provide a more nuanced understanding of transparency by demonstrating its benefits alongside its indirect psychological costs in AI-mediated environments.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the literature on AI transparency and consumer behavior in several important ways. First, it introduces privacy cynicism as a central psychological mechanism in voice commerce, moving beyond traditional constructs such as trust or satisfaction. By doing so, it explains how consumers can simultaneously engage with and feel resigned toward AI systems, offering a more nuanced understanding of consumer–AI relationships in digital marketing and voice commerce contexts.

Second, the study extends Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory into algorithmic contexts, demonstrating that privacy boundaries are negotiated not only through interpersonal interactions but also through opaque, data-driven systems. This broadens the applicability of CPM Theory in contemporary digital environments. Third, the findings refine the understanding of transparency by showing that its effects are primarily positive, while negative responses emerge indirectly through privacy cynicism. This helps reconcile mixed evidence in prior research and clarifies the conditions under which transparency may lead to unintended consequences.

Finally, the study provides practical and policy-relevant insights by emphasizing that transparency is not merely a compliance requirement but a strategic communication tool. Approaches such as

progressive disclosure can help maintain users' sense of control while minimizing negative emotional responses, thereby supporting more responsible and user-centered AI design.

TITLE

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS OR HUMAN INFLUENCERS? - THE IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL ATTRIBUTES

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Keywords: Influencer Marketing, Virtual Social Influencer, Brand Sponsorship, Game Theory

Description: A firm can engage in influencer marketing by hiring either a virtual social influencer (VSI) or a human social influencer (HSI) to promote its product, thereby attracting followers whose preferences are less congruent with the product. VSIs differ from HSIs in three important respects. First, VSIs are inherently constrained in their ability to credibly convey non-digital product attributes, limiting both followers' valuation of the promoted product and the influencer's persuasive power. Second, unlike an HSI, whose personal traits are exogenously given, a VSI's perceived ideal point can be endogenously designed, with the associated design cost decreasing as digital attributes account for a larger share of consumer valuation. Third, because VSIs exert weaker persuasion over non-digital product attributes, they are less likely to induce post-purchase follower disappointment, thereby generating lower expected losses from follower backlash than HSIs. This paper examines how the relative importance of digital attributes, together with influencer–product congruence, the cost differential between VSIs and HSIs, and the expected cost of follower backlash, shapes a firm's optimal choice between VSIs and HSIs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers increasingly rely on social media when making purchase decisions, prompting firms to invest heavily in influencer marketing. This paper examines the relative effectiveness of human social influencers (HSIs) and third-party virtual social influencers (VSIs) within a unified analytical framework. Although VSIs are inherently constrained in their ability to credibly convey non-digital product attributes, this limitation also reduces the likelihood of post-purchase follower disappointment, thereby lowering the expected cost of follower backlash. Moreover, the scalability and designability of VSIs allow firms to endogenously align a VSI's perceived position with the promoted product, with the efficiency of such alignment increasing as digital attributes account for a larger share of consumer valuation. This paper develops an equilibrium model of influencer marketing to characterize how the importance of digital attributes shapes firms' optimal choice between VSIs and HSIs.

The analysis yields four main results. First, holding all else constant, firms become more likely to prefer VSIs over HSIs as digital attributes account for a larger share of consumer valuation. Second, relative to HSIs, marketing using VSIs generates lower expected losses from post-purchase follower disappointment, allowing firms to offer lower upfront compensation. Third, although the scalability and designability of VSIs allow firms to improve influencer–product congruence at relatively low marginal cost, the optimal design does not necessarily maximize influencer–product congruence. Greater congruence strengthens persuasion and increases the proportion of followers whose purchases deviate from their true preferences, thereby increasing the expected cost of follower backlash. Finally, once influencer costs, product characteristics, and expected follower backlash are jointly considered, hiring a macro-level VSI is not always optimal, even when it has a large follower base.

Research Questions: This paper addresses the following questions:

- (i) How does the importance of digital attributes in consumer valuation affect the relative effectiveness of marketing using VSIs versus marketing using HSIs?
- (ii) Under what conditions would a firm prefer marketing using VSIs despite their weaker ability to credibly convey non-digital product attributes?
- (iii) How do designability, scalability, and follower backlash jointly determine the firm's optimal influencer–product congruence and its choice between VSIs and HSIs?

Summary of Findings: The analysis yields four main results. **First**, holding all else constant, firms become more likely to prefer VSIs over HSIs as digital attributes become more important in consumer valuation. **Second**, relative to HSIs, marketing using VSIs generates lower expected losses from post-purchase follower disappointment, allowing firms to offer lower upfront compensation. **Third**, although the scalability and designability of VSIs enable firms to improve influencer–product congruence at relatively low marginal cost, the optimal design does not necessarily maximize congruence. Greater congruence strengthens persuasion and increases the proportion of followers whose purchases deviate from their underlying preferences, thereby increasing the expected cost of follower backlash. **Finally**, once influencer costs, product characteristics, and expected follower backlash are jointly considered, hiring a macro-level VSI is not always optimal, even when it has a large follower base.

Key Contributions: Prior analytical research on influencer marketing has examined how human social influencers (HSIs) affect consumer decisions through persuasive advertising, emphasizing the roles of influencer–product congruence, persuasion strength, and follower size in determining firm profitability. This paper extends that framework by introducing virtual social influencers (VSIs) and identifying three novel contributions.

First, the model explicitly distinguishes between digital and non-digital product attributes and shows that the importance of digital attributes in consumer valuation is a key determinant of the firm's optimal choice between VSIs and HSIs.

Second, the model identifies a novel economic advantage of VSIs. Although VSIs provide weaker persuasion over non-digital attributes, they reduce post-purchase follower disappointment, lowering expected backlash costs and required upfront compensation. These advantages can outweigh the reduction in persuasion, making marketing using VSIs more profitable under certain conditions.

Third, the paper introduces endogenous influencer design as a strategic decision variable unique to VSIs. Firms optimally determine influencer–product congruence by balancing persuasion gains against expected follower backlash, implying that the optimal design does not necessarily maximize congruence.

WHEN “NOT SPONSORED” WORKS: SOME PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE

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Keywords: influencer marketing, impartiality disclosure, engagement, signaling theory

Description: This paper provides field evidence on whether impartiality disclosures in influencer posts are associated with engagement and whether this association varies by execution.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumers increasingly question the commercial intent behind influencer recommendations, making credibility a central challenge in influencer marketing. An emerging tactic is impartiality disclosure, a voluntary non-sponsorship statement to signal independence from brand sponsorship. However, most studies focus on perceptions, attitudes, or engagement intentions, leaving limited evidence on observable engagement in real social media settings. Drawing on signaling theory, we argue that impartiality disclosures can serve as transparency cues that signal independence from commercial sponsorship under information asymmetry, and are therefore more unlikely to be associated with higher engagement than comparable posts without such cues.

Beyond cue presence, we further examine whether the disclosure-engagement association varies by cue execution. Specifically, we focus on two execution features. The first is cue placement: whether the disclosure appears in the title, body, or both locations. The second is repetition beyond presence or reinforcement: whether there are additional cue mentions, after accounting for basic presence. Together, we aim to provide field evidence on whether impartiality disclosures are associated with higher engagement and whether this association varies with how the cue is presented.

Method and Data

To provide preliminary evidence, we analyzed lifestyle recommendation and sharing posts, posted between September 1 and October 5, 2025 on Xiaohongshu (RED), a major Chinese social media platform. The analytical sample contained 11,937 posts. Impartiality disclosures were identified using a predefined dictionary of Chinese cue terms indicating no advertising, self-purchase, or no payment. A random subset was manually checked to verify that the terms captured claims of independence rather than unrelated uses. Because cue use is not randomly assigned, we used propensity score matching to construct comparable cue and no-cue posts, resulting in 1,542 matched posts, including 771 cue posts and 771 matched no-cue posts. We estimated negative binomial generalized linear models with creator-clustered standard errors. Model 1 estimated cue presence, Model 2 added placement interactions, and Model 3 further added reinforcement interactions while retaining placement terms.

Summary of Findings

The results show three main patterns. First, cue presence is positively associated with engagement. In the matched sample, posts containing impartiality disclosures receive higher average engagement than matched no-cue posts. Model 1 shows this association: cue posts are associated with about 72.5% higher expected engagement than comparable no-cue posts. Second, the disclosure-engagement association varies by cue placement. Relative to body-only cues, title-plus-body cues are associated with substantially higher engagement, whereas title-only cues are associated with lower engagement. This placement pattern remains consistent after accounting for reinforcement, suggesting that cues appearing across both the title and body are associated with the strongest engagement pattern, while title-only cues are associated with the weakest. Third, repetition beyond presence shows a threshold pattern. Adding one additional cue mention is not associated with higher engagement. In contrast, heavier repetition, defined as two or more additional mentions beyond basic presence, is positively associated with engagement. Together, these findings suggest that impartiality disclosures are not only associated with engagement through cue presence, but that their association with engagement also differs by how the cue is presented and reinforced.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to influencer marketing research by examining impartiality disclosure in relation to observable engagement. Prior disclosure research has largely focused on sponsorship labels or on perceptual and attitudinal outcomes, leaving limited field evidence on how stated non-sponsorship cues relate to actual engagement behavior. By using social media field data, this

study extends impartiality disclosure research beyond experimental and intention-based settings. It also highlights cue placement and reinforcement as two execution features that may be relevant to disclosure-engagement associations. In doing so, the study suggests that impartiality disclosures should not be treated only as cues whether present or absent; rather, how the cue is presented may also matter for engagement patterns. For practice, the findings suggest that adding impartiality cues may be associated with stronger engagement in lifestyle posts. Because these cues are interpreted as claims of independence from paid promotion, brands should be cautious not to treat them as generic engagement tactics. Instead, brands may benefit from building long-term creator relationships and encouraging real customers to share transparent organic experiences, creating conditions under which impartiality cues can be used appropriately and credibly.

**WHEN BRANDS CLOSE THE CONVERSATION: COMMENT-DISABLING,
PERCEIVED SINCERITY, AND CRISIS DIFFUSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

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Keywords: Comment-disabling; brand crisis; perceived sincerity; secondary crisis
communication; social media moderation

This paper examines when and why disabling comments during brand crises backfires by
reducing perceived sincerity, weakening forgiveness, and increasing consumers' willingness to
spread crisis-related information.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Social media gives brands unprecedented reach during crises, but it also exposes them to visible
criticism, accusations, misinformation, and online firestorms. One increasingly common
managerial response is to disable comments on crisis-related posts. Although this tactic may
appear to limit hostile engagement, its broader marketing consequences remain unclear. This
research asks: How does comment-disabling during negative publicity influence consumers'
perceived brand sincerity, brand forgiveness, and secondary crisis communication? We further
ask whether the effect depends on the brand's crisis response posture, especially whether
comment-disabling is paired with an accommodative response such as apology or compensation
versus a defensive response such as denial or blame shifting. Drawing on cognitive dissonance

theory, we argue that comment-disabling creates a mismatch between a brand's public communication and consumers' expectation of dialogue and accountability. This mismatch should reduce perceived sincerity, thereby lowering forgiveness and motivating consumers to continue the crisis conversation elsewhere.

Method and Data

The research uses a multi-method design combining naturalistic social media text analysis with controlled experiments. Study 1 applies Latent Dirichlet Allocation topic modeling to retweet comments from six actual brand crises on Weibo, including three cases in which brands disabled comments and three comparable cases in which comments remained enabled. After cleaning, the analysis includes 1,025 retweets from comment-disabled cases and 2,792 retweets from comment-enabled cases. Study 2 uses a between-subjects experiment with 238 participants and three comment conditions: disabled comments, enabled comments, and a controlled enabled-comment condition showing comment count without comment content. Participants evaluated a fictitious cosmetics brand facing a product safety crisis. Study 3 uses a 2 x 2 experiment with 272 participants crossing comment condition (disabled vs. enabled) with response type (accommodative vs. defensive) in a fictitious juice-brand crisis. Across experiments, participants report perceived sincerity, brand forgiveness, and secondary crisis communication intentions using established multi-item scales.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 shows that comment-disabling changes the nature of crisis discourse. When brands disabled comments, consumers' retweet discussions focused more on apology sincerity, profit motives, arrogance, and avoidance of responsibility. When comments remained enabled, discourse focused more on the substantive crisis, such as product consequences, safety concerns,

and avoidance intentions. Study 2 provides causal evidence: compared with enabled-comment conditions, comment-disabling significantly lowers perceived brand sincerity and brand forgiveness while increasing secondary crisis communication intentions. Mediation analysis shows that perceived sincerity is a central pathway linking comment-disabling to both lower forgiveness and greater crisis diffusion. Study 3 replicates the negative main effects and identifies an important boundary condition. Comment-disabling is especially damaging when combined with accommodative responses. In that case, consumers perceive a stronger inconsistency between the brand's apology or compensation offer and its refusal to allow dialogue. The indirect effects through sincerity are significant under accommodative responses but not under defensive responses. Thus, closing the conversation can make an apologetic response appear strategically inconsistent and less sincere.

Key Contributions

Academically, the study contributes to marketing knowledge by conceptualizing comment-disabling as a brand-initiated, technology-enabled crisis response strategy rather than a neutral platform setting. It extends crisis communication research beyond message tone by showing that response affordances - what consumers are allowed to do after a brand speaks - can shape evaluations as strongly as message content. It also connects content moderation research with brand crisis management and identifies perceived brand sincerity as the psychological mechanism through which restricted interactivity reduces forgiveness and amplifies secondary crisis communication. Finally, the findings refine cognitive dissonance theory by showing that inconsistency between an accommodative message and a restrictive channel can be more damaging than a consistently defensive posture. Non-academic stakeholders will also find value in the research. Brand managers, social media teams, public relations agencies, and customer

care units can use the findings to decide when comment-disabling is likely to escalate a crisis. Firms issuing apologies or compensation should be especially cautious about closing comment channels, because doing so can invite accusations of insincerity. Nonprofits, public agencies, and platform designers can use the results to support transparency-oriented moderation policies, such as visible explanations or alternative feedback channels that manage abuse without fully silencing stakeholder voice.

References are available upon request.

WOMEN'S FIRST-PERSON PRONOUNS IN ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH

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Keywords: gender, pronoun, electronic word-of-mouth, online customer reviews, social media

Description: This research investigates how the usage of first-person singular pronouns in online reviews interacts with a reviewer's gender to influence the perceived helpfulness of the message

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The primary research question is whether electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) messages are perceived differently based on the usage of first-person singular pronouns and how this perception interacts with the sender's gender. While gender roles are well-documented in traditional marketing (Peñaloza et al., 2023), their impact on the linguistic style of social media reviews remains under-researched. This study examines if pronouns such as “I,” “me,” and “my” serve as "persuasion cues" that signal honesty, sincerity, and personal ownership (Wang & Karimi, 2019). Specifically, the research tests whether these linguistic cues enhance the perceived helpfulness of a review and whether this association is stronger for female reviewers than for male reviewers. This inquiry aims to bridge the gap between gender studies and linguistic influence in digital consumer-to-customer interactions (Kim et al., 2019).

Method and Data

This empirical study utilizes a dataset of 34,275 Amazon user reviews (Leskovec et al., 2009). The data includes numerical ratings (valence), the text of the reviews, and the number of "helpful votes" received from other users. Using Python scripts, we identify reviewer gender based on

profile names, with 78% of the sample identified as female and 22% as male. To analyze the data, a Poisson regression model was specified, as the dependent variable—the count of helpful votes—is a discrete measure. The independent variables included the total number of votes received, the review's valence, gender, and the frequency of first-person singular pronouns (e.g., “I,” “myself,” “mine”). An interaction term between gender and pronoun usage was included in the model to specifically test the disparity in how these linguistic cues are perceived across genders.

Summary of Findings

The analysis supports both primary hypotheses. First, the use of first-person singular pronouns is positively associated with a higher number of helpful votes, confirming that self-referential language increases perceived review utility. Second, the interaction between female gender and first-person pronoun usage is positive and significant, indicating that the association with helpfulness is stronger for women than for men. The results also show that women generally receive more helpful votes than men and that negative reviews (lower valence) are more likely to be deemed helpful. These findings suggest that for female reviewers, the use of “I” more effectively signals high immediacy and personal authenticity, leading consumers to perceive them as more trustworthy and relatable compared to their male counterparts.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to the marketing and communication literature by addressing the overlooked role of gender in eWOM linguistic styles (Peñaloza et al., 2023). It applies persuasion knowledge theory to specific linguistic markers, demonstrating that consumers use pronouns to navigate a reviewer's psychological state and sincerity (Friestad & Wright, 1994). By identifying a significant positive interaction between female gender and the use of “I,” the

study provides empirical evidence that women's self-referential language more effectively builds a "shared reality" and enhances perceived credibility in digital environments (Goodman & Mayhorn, 2023). Practically, these insights are valuable for digital platforms and brands seeking to understand the dynamics of consumer engagement and the gendered nature of linguistic influence in building trust through customer touchpoints.

Branding

**CORPORATE CONSCIENTIOUS BRAND (CCB): EXAMINING BRAND
AUTHENTICITY, LEGITIMACY, TRUST AND CONSUMER WELL-BEING IN
ESTABLISHING BRAND LOYALTY**

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Keywords: Corporate conscientious brand (CCB), Brand authenticity, Brand legitimacy, Consumer well-being (CWB), Brand trust

Description: This study demonstrates a process model of brand loyalty in a CCB context.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question — 1). What are the effects of CCB authenticity (quality, sincerity, consistency) and CCB legitimacy on CCB trust and customer well-being (CWB)? 2). What are the impacts of brand trust and CWB on brand loyalty, particularly in a CCB context? 3). Do brand trust and CWB exert the mediating effects between brand authenticity, legitimacy and brand loyalty (behavior, attitude) in a CCB environment? 4). Do important moderators, e.g., altruistic motive, ethical consumption and other demographic variables, influence the proposed relationships in the model?

Method and Data—This study uses survey as the method. It selects nine agrifood-related

CCBs, e.g., 7-11 retail store, from the three well-established CSR awards in Taiwan. The respondents were first asked to read the definition of a CCB (Iglesias & Ind, 2016). After reading this statement, each respondent chose a CCB from these nine brands (or write their own), to answer the questionnaires. The convenience and snowball sampling method were used to collect data via either online Google Form or offline paper questionnaires. This study uses the existing items in literature to measure the main constructs, including 3 dimensions (i.e., quality, sincerity, consistency) for CCB authenticity (Eggers et al., 2013; Napoli et al., 2014), 3 items to measure CCB legitimacy (Guo et al., 2017), 4 item proposed by Delgado-Ballester (2004) to measure CCB trust, 3 items for customer well-being (CWB) (Lee et al., 2002), and finally 2 dimensions (behavioral and attitudinal) to test CCB loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Odin et al., 2001; Oliver, 1999). Two moderators (i.e., ethical consumerism, altruistic motive) are measured using 5 and 3 items (Kang & Namkung, 2018; Steele et al., 2008). The 5-items Likert-Scale was used to measure the constructs.

Summary of Findings — 1). CCB authenticity is a more important antecedent than CCB legitimacy in establishing CCB loyalty, and. 2). CCB sincerity authenticity is a main driver of CCB trust, and CCB legitimacy acts as the sole and significant antecedent of CWB. 3). CCB trust is a main driver of behavioral loyalty, while CWB is a main driver in establishing attitudinal loyalty in the CCB context. 4). Both CCB trust and CWB partially moderate the relationships between CCB authenticity, CCB legitimacy and CCB loyalty. 5). No significant

moderating effects are found.

Statement of Key Contributions — 1). This is one of the few empirical CCB-related studies, thus enriching a contribution to CCB literature; 2). It demonstrates a process model of brand loyalty in a CCB context, stimulated by brand authenticity, mediated by brand trust and CWB, in a way to contribute; 3). It demonstrates the validities of the theories, i.e., S.O.R. theory and the process model (Payne et al., 2008), and extend the commitment-trust relationship marketing theory (Morgan & Hunt 1994) by adding an emotional factor (i.e., CWB), into a CCB context; 4). It also offers suggestions to the non-academic stakeholders (e.g., governmental agencies and policy makers) in making sustainability-related policy, and/or social enterprises in understanding how consumers react to corporates' sustainable behaviors and in what ways the non-academic stakeholders should take actions.

References are available upon request.

HOW NEW SHOULD IT BE? – THE EFFECT OF BRAND-CONGRUENT PRODUCT NEWNESS ON CONSUMER ADOPTION INTENTION

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Keywords: product newness, brand personality, brand openness, innovation adoption

Description: Whether product newness boosts or hurts consumer adoption intention depends on how well the perceived novelty aligns with the brand's position on the conservation: alignment drives gains, while misalignment drives losses.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Though new products are invariably launched and evaluated under a brand, past research has largely examined product newness in isolation from brand personality. Drawing on gestalt theory, we propose that consumers integrate product newness with the launching brand's personality to form a holistic evaluation, jointly shaping adoption responses. A particularly relevant personality facet is brand openness—the extent to which a brand is

perceived as innovative and daring versus traditional and stable (Schwartz, 1992).

The present research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How does consumer adoption intention vary with perceived brand openness for the same level of technological or design newness? (2) Does the alignment between product newness and brand openness influence adoption beyond their independent effects? (3) What mechanism underlies this joint effect? (4) For highly new products, how does launch strategy (parent brand vs. standalone new brand) affect adoption intention?

Method and Data

We conducted three experimental studies. Study 1 recruited 400 participants from an online panel (54% female, mean age = 31.72). We manipulated technological newness (fully autonomous EV vs. improved drive control) and design newness (modern sleek vs. conventional), using Rolls-Royce or BMW (randomly assigned) as launching brands. In a 2×2×2 design, we measured purchase intention (PI), brand openness (10 items), and processing fluency (3 items) on 7-point scales.

Study 2 recruited 500 participants (55.20% female, mean age = 32.56). A really new product (a fully autonomous vehicle) was held constant, with each participant rating the openness of 5 of 21 established brands. We measured PI (on a 0–100 scale), brand openness (on a 7-point, 5-item scale), and brand-newness alignment (on a 9-point bipolar scale).

Study 3 recruited 444 participants (58.5% female, mean age = 30.00). Using a 2 (brand strategy: standalone vs. parent) × 2 (brand openness: low vs. high) design, we held the product constant. Mitsubishi (low openness) and Tesla (high openness) were selected based findings

from Study 2. The vehicle was introduced either under the parent brand or under a new standalone brand. PI and processing fluency were measured as in Study 1.

Summary of Findings

Across three experiments, we demonstrate that the congruency between a product's perceived newness and the brand's level of openness enhances consumer adoption intention by increasing processing fluency; incongruency, in contrast, dampens it. Moreover, we show that the alignment between brand openness and product newness drives adoption intention over and above the independent effects of product newness or brand personality alone.

Finally, we identify a critical boundary condition for brand extension strategy: when launching a highly innovative product, a parent brand perceived as low in openness benefits more from using a new, standalone brand, whereas a parent brand high in openness achieves greater success by launching the product under its own name.

Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions. First, it advances the innovation adoption literature by examining product newness in interplay with brand personality. We demonstrate a synergistic effect between product newness and brand openness, and introduce brand-newness alignment as a driver of adoption beyond either factor alone.

Second, we contribute to the brand personality literature by demonstrating that a brand's position on the conservation-openness continuum shapes how consumers perceive and evaluate ostensibly objective product attributes, highlights brand personality as a cognitive

lens that colors product judgment.

Third, we offer strategic insights for brand management. For highly innovative products, conservative (low-openness) brands benefit from launching under a standalone new brand, whereas high-openness brands gain more by leveraging their existing brand equity—providing a clear framework for a long-standing brand architecture challenge.

KNOCK-OFFS OR AUTHENTIC BRANDS: UNDERSTANDING THE GROWING DUPE MARKET

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Keywords: dupe products, branding, consumer attitudes, price perception, product category

Description: This exploratory study examines the emerging dupe products trend in the retail environment.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

- Do the product category (hoodies versus sneakers) influence consumer's attitudes toward the product, price, and brand as well as consumers' willingness to recommend the products?
- Do the brand category (dupe versus well-recognized brand) influence consumer's attitudes toward the product, price and brand as well as consumers' willingness to recommend the products?
- Will product type influence consumers' attitudes and recommendations toward dupes or well-known brands?

Method And Data

This research used an experimental design to examine consumer responses to dupe and well-recognized brands across two different product categories. A total of 114 participants were recruited to participate in an online study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. After viewing the stimuli, participants completed a survey with established scales, measuring their attitudes toward the product, perceptions of price fairness and value, brand

evaluations, and willingness to recommend the product to others. Data was analyzed using ANOVA to assess the main effects and interaction effects between brand type and product category.

Summary of Findings

Results show that product type and brand type separately influence consumer evaluations, however, there was no significant interaction between the product and brand cues. These exploratory findings highlight the distinctive roles of product and brand information on consumer perceptions and offer practical and theoretical insights for brand marketers navigating this growing dupe product category on digital platforms.

Key Contributions

This research makes several key contributions. First, it explores the growing dupe product category and its role in the brand management literature, extending prior work on counterfeit products. This study found that consumers evaluate product and brand information differently. Brands that ignore the dupe trends risk declining purchases and erosion of their brand awareness. At the same time, well-recognized brands must understand customers who may seek lower-price items but still want the look of a brand-named product. Brand marketers can also benefit by understanding how consumers who purchase these “knock-off” products may strengthen consumer trust and brand resilience in the well-recognized brand. Lastly, this research may impact policy related to the trademarking of both the well-recognized and the dupe brands. Developing the appropriate brand messaging and targeting is needed to address any ethical and social concerns. Overall, this research explores a timely topic, which can have economic and legal impacts in the retail marketplace.

References are available upon request.

RETHINKING BRAND IDENTITY: AN ADAPTIVE BRAND IDENTITY FRAMEWORK FOR THE DYNAMIC WORLD

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Keywords: Adaptive brand identity; brand-as-system; adaptive core; brand-as-language

Description: This conceptual paper reconceptualizes brand identity as a fluid, dynamic, and reflexive system that adapts across changing environments while maintaining coherence over time.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand practice has increasingly shifted toward flexible and context-responsive identity systems, yet branding theory lacks an integrative framework that explains how brand identity adapts while maintaining coherence over time. Traditional brand identity emphasizes fixed and static characteristics to establish differentiation among competitors and ensure consumer recognition. Many industries have experienced unpredictable shifts and transformations driven by rapidly evolving market contexts and the diverse interpretations of brand meanings across cultural groups. Additionally, the ubiquity of digital media with various content layouts across platforms requires brands to accommodate different content structures. Despite these significant shifts in products, markets, touchpoints, and distribution channels, limited research has explored how brand identity can adapt to these changes effectively. Accordingly, this paper asks: How can brand identity be reconceptualized as a fluid, dynamic, and reflexive construct that evolves

across changing environments while maintaining coherence over time? To address this question, this study conceptualizes adaptive brand identity as the malleability of a brand's identity assets in changing environments, functioning like a living organism. This conceptualization reflects the need for dynamism in sustaining brand identity across multicultural and multi-contextual digital environments.

Summary of Findings

This study introduces a novel adaptive brand identity framework grounded in Peircean semiotics. The framework theorizes brand identity through three interdependent components: brand-as-system, the adaptive core, and brand-as-language. Brand-as-system enables adaptation through internal structure and capabilities. It reflects the internal identity structure of the brand and includes adaptive intelligence and dynamic capabilities that allow brands to interpret market signals, understand consumer perceptions, and respond to cultural shifts, technological advancements, and changing touchpoints. The adaptive core serves as an abstract interpretive anchor of value, purpose, and promise. It is abstract enough to offer flexibility and adaptability across different contexts and purposes while preserving the brand's cohesive identity. Brand-as-language structures how brand identity is expressed through coherent and flexible configurations of visual, verbal, and symbolic elements. It functions as the tangible expression of brand identity through logos, colors, taglines, typography, packaging, environments, soundscapes, motion graphics, and interaction patterns. These three key elements do not operate in isolation, but rather through ongoing interaction among the adaptive core, brand-as-system, and brand-as-language. Together, they enable brand identity to operate as a common language while remaining responsive to changing cultural and market environments.

Key Contributions

This paper advances branding theory by reconceptualizing brand identity as a fluid, dynamic, and reflexive system rather than a fixed and enduring construct. First, it introduces adaptive brand identity as an integrative conceptual framework that explains how brands adapt across changing contexts while preserving meaning and coherence. Second, by grounding the framework in Peircean semiotics, the paper conceptualizes brand identity as a triadic and ongoing interpretive process involving the brand-as-system, the adaptive core, and brand-as-language. Unlike prior identity-based accounts that treat brand elements in isolation, this study integrates systems thinking to theorize brand identity as an adaptive whole shaped by learning, interdependencies, and feedback. Practically, this framework provides brand practitioners, managers, and identity designers with strategic guidance to remain responsive to complex branding challenges and offers actionable insights for brand refreshes or rebranding efforts. It positions brand identity as a strategic capability that enables meaningful, contextually relevant and coherent brand expressions over time.

THE EFFECTS OF TODAY'S POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT ON REBRANDING

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Keywords: rebranding, logo redesign, brand commitment, political polarization, brand loyalty

Description: This study looks at the effects of logo redesign for rebranding through a political lens. Looking at how political affiliations affect consumer perceptions when brands update their logos and branding to remove characters that could be seen as politically adverse. The research tests whether political affiliations affect brand attitudes and behaviors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

The marketing executives at Cracker Barrel probably never expected to find themselves in the middle of a cultural controversy when they decided to update their logo as part of a rebrand. In normal times, a company could make evolutionary changes to their brand aesthetics that are hardly perceptible to outside observers (Muzellac and Lambkin 2007). But these are not normal times, with politics and political polarization affecting numerous aspects of consumer psychology and welfare (Weber et al. 2021). While there have been studies on the effects of rebranding on consumer commitment and loyalty (e.g. Liang et al. 2024; Walsh et al. 2010; Williams et al. 2021), as well as research on how brand loyalty effects behavior with emphasis on commitment (e.g. Mellens et al 1996; Liang et al 2025; Ali 2025) there has not been research conducted on rebranding while considering the influence of politics. Therefore, this research attempts to answer the following question: How does a brand's logo redesign influence brand attitude in today's political environment? Additional questions answered include: (1) Does brand

commitment affect the influence of logo redesign on brand attitudes? and (2) Does political affiliation affect the impact of logo redesign on brand attitudes?

Method and Data

An 80-item survey was developed in Qualtrics and delivered online via Prolific to test the research questions by randomly assigning participants to one of two groups viewing logos from either Uncle Ben's or Chiquita. Participants first saw the original brand logo before reading a statement about their brand's logo update, viewed the new logo, and then answered questions on two dependent variables, brand loyalty and purchase intention, measured with existing Likert-type scales. Variables attitude toward the logo redesign and political affiliation were also measured with existing Likert scales. Commitment was assessed using an existing scale contextualized specifically to the brand to which participants were assigned. The survey concluded with a political affiliation scale and demographics, including self-identified political party affiliation.

Four hundred thirty-one participants initiated the survey. After removing those who did not complete the survey or failed attention checks, a final dataset of 400 was used for analysis. All scales proved reliable (Cronbach's alphas $> .07$). The mean age was 41.9 ($SD = 12.38$, range = 18-77), with the sample skewed slightly male ($n = 212$, 53%) and Caucasian ($n = 290$, 72.5%), with income and education showing normal distribution.

Summary of Findings

Using the PROCESS module to test mediation, results showed commitment was a significant mediator between attitude toward the redesign and purchase intention ($LLCI = .0733$, $ULCI =$

.2137) when all respondents saw the Chiquita logo. Conversely, commitment was not a significant mediator for those who saw the Uncle Ben's redesign. When brand loyalty was tested as the dependent variable, results were the same. When the effects of political affiliation were tested, results showed that attitude toward the redesigned logo mediated the relationship between political affiliation and purchase intention ($LLCI = -.1625$, $ULCI = -.0008$) for those who saw Uncle Ben's. However, there was no mediation for those who saw Chiquita. When brand loyalty was tested as the dependent variable, attitude toward the redesign did not mediate either rebrand.

When political affiliation was tested as the mediating variable, the results were quite different. There was a full mediation of political affiliation on purchase intention, but only for Republicans, whether they viewed the redesigned Uncle Ben's or the redesigned Chiquita logo. When testing brand loyalty, there was again mediation seen for only Republican groups, those who saw Uncle Ben's, and those who saw Chiquita. However, political affiliation was not significant for Democrats.

Key Contributions

The results reveal three major contributions. First, the interaction of attitude toward the rebrand and political affiliation showed that Republicans, regardless of brand seen, took politics into account when making choices about both brands after the redesign. However, political affiliation had little to no influence on their attitude toward either brand for Democrats in the same situations. This outcome shows that Republicans take their political beliefs into account when making a variety of decisions, especially about a brand after a rebrand. Second, commitment did mediate the relationship between attitude toward a logo redesign and behavioral variables, but only in specific cases. For example, Republicans who saw Chiquita and for Democrats who saw

Uncle Ben's. Third, marketers should be aware of the political leanings of their core customers when embarking on a potential brand redesign. When doing so, it is recommended they practice evolutionary rebranding, a subtle approach that, over time, uses multiple small changes instead of one large, sudden change, known as revolutionary rebranding. It appears Cracker Barrel's rebranding attempt was seen by Republicans as the latter.

References available upon request

THE LOCAL AI ADVANTAGE: DOUBLE STANDARDS IN CONSUMER EVALUATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN BRANDING

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Keywords: Local brands, Global brands, Brand authenticity, Consumer ethnocentrism, Purchase intention

Description: This study examines how local versus global brand origin influences purchase intention through authenticity, competence, brand attitude, and boycott attitudes, while investigating the moderating role of consumer ethnocentrism.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Global and local brands compete not only on product quality but also on symbolic meanings related to identity, authenticity, and cultural belonging. These dynamics have become increasingly important in markets characterized by political instability, economic crises, and heightened consumer sensitivity toward supporting domestic businesses. While previous research has

established that local brands often benefit from stronger perceptions of authenticity and cultural embeddedness, less is known about the psychological mechanisms through which brand origin shapes consumer purchase intentions in contexts where global brands may face political or moral resistance.

Drawing on brand authenticity theory, local-global branding literature, and consumer ethnocentrism theory, this study investigates whether consumers evaluate local and global coffee brands differently through perceptions of authenticity, competence, brand attitude, and boycott attitudes. Specifically, the study examines the effects of brand origin (Stories Coffee versus Starbucks) on three dimensions of brand authenticity - continuity, symbolism, and credibility and integrity - together with perceived competence, brand attitude, boycott attitude, and purchase intention. It further investigates whether competence and brand attitude explain the influence of brand origin on purchase intention and whether consumer ethnocentrism strengthens the effects of brand origin on authenticity and purchase intention.

Method and Data

The study employed a between-subjects experimental design in which participants were randomly assigned to evaluate either Stories Coffee, representing a Lebanese local brand, or Starbucks, representing a global coffee brand. The research focused exclusively on brand origin, with all advertising manipulations removed from the final study. Data were collected from university students in Lebanon because they represent an important consumer segment familiar with both brands and actively engaged with specialty coffee consumption. After removing incomplete responses, the final sample consisted of approximately 188 usable observations.

All constructs were measured using previously validated multi-item scales from the marketing literature. Brand authenticity was operationalized using the continuity, symbolism, and credibility

and integrity dimensions adapted from Morhart et al. (2015). Competence, consumer ethnocentrism, boycott attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention were measured using established scales widely adopted in branding and consumer behavior research.

The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS. Confirmatory factor analysis established construct reliability and validity before hypothesis testing. Direct relationships were examined using structural equation modeling. Mediation effects were assessed using bootstrapping procedures, while moderation analyses tested whether consumer ethnocentrism strengthened the influence of brand origin on authenticity dimensions and purchase intention.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that brand origin significantly influences consumer evaluations. Local brand origin positively affected purchase intention, perceived competence, brand attitude, authenticity based on symbolism, and authenticity based on credibility and integrity. Authenticity based on credibility and integrity, competence, brand attitude, and boycott attitude each positively predicted purchase intention.

The mediation analyses revealed that competence partially explained how brand origin influenced purchase intention, indicating that local brands benefit not only from symbolic advantages but also from enhanced perceptions of capability. In addition, brand attitude served as an important mechanism linking brand origin with purchase intention, suggesting that consumers' favorable evaluations of local brands translate into stronger purchase intentions through more positive overall attitudes.

Consumer ethnocentrism significantly moderated several relationships within the model. Higher ethnocentrism strengthened the positive influence of local brand origin on authenticity based on symbolism, authenticity based on credibility and integrity, and purchase intention. These findings

suggest that ethnocentric consumers derive greater symbolic value from local brands and are more willing to translate these perceptions into behavioral intentions. Overall, the results indicate that both symbolic evaluations and functional perceptions jointly explain consumers' preferences for local brands over global competitors in the Lebanese coffee market.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several theoretical and practical contributions to branding and international marketing literature. First, it extends research on local versus global branding by demonstrating that brand origin influences purchase intentions through multiple psychological mechanisms rather than through a single authenticity construct. By distinguishing between different dimensions of authenticity, the study shows that credibility and integrity, as well as symbolism, play more important roles than continuity in explaining consumer responses.

Second, the findings integrate symbolic and functional perspectives by demonstrating that competence serves as an important mediator between brand origin and purchase intention. This suggests that consumers evaluate local brands not only as culturally meaningful but also as capable and competitive marketplace alternatives.

Third, the study advances consumer ethnocentrism research by showing that ethnocentrism strengthens the positive effects of local brand origin on authenticity perceptions and purchase intention. These findings provide evidence that symbolic attachment to domestic brands becomes more influential among highly ethnocentric consumers, particularly within a context characterized by political tensions and consumer boycotts.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that local brands should emphasize authenticity, competence, and cultural embeddedness in their branding strategies, while global brands must strengthen credibility, integrity, and trust.

References are available upon request.

**USER REACTIONS TO DIGITAL PLATFORM ACQUISITIONS: THE ROLE OF
USER ENGAGEMENT, PERCEIVED COMPLEMENTARITY, AND ACQUISITION
SENSEMAKING**

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Keywords: Digital Platform Acquisitions; User Engagement; Sensemaking; Competence
Complementarity; Brand Acquisitions

Description: This study examines how users interpret digital platform acquisitions and
identifies the psychological factors that shape acquisition acceptance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

RESEARCH QUESTION

Digital platform acquisitions have become a dominant strategy for technology firms seeking growth, innovation and ecosystem expansion. While prior merger and acquisition research has focused primarily on financial, organizational and strategic outcomes, considerably less attention has been given to platform users whose continued participation creates value and determines long-term platform success. Unlike traditional consumers, digital platform users actively contribute content, build communities and develop psychological attachments to platform brands. Consequently, acquisition announcements represent organizational change events that require users to interpret whether the acquisition will preserve or diminish the value of their platform experience.

This study examines user reactions to digital platform acquisitions through a user sensemaking perspective. Specifically, it investigates how user engagement, perceived competence complementarity between the acquiring and acquired firms, and communicated acquisition motive influence users' evaluations of acquisition announcements i.e.

How do user engagement, perceived competence complementarity and communicated acquisition motive shape users' evaluations of digital platform acquisitions?

By positioning acquisition attitude as a sensemaking mechanism through which users interpret organizational change, this research extends user engagement theory beyond behavioral outcomes and contributes to a more user-centered understanding of mergers and acquisitions in digital environments.

METHOD AND DATA

The study employed a positivist research design using a 2×2 between-subjects online experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four simulated acquisition announcements describing Microsoft's hypothetical acquisition of Pinterest. The experimental design manipulated two strategic factors: perceived competence complementarity (high versus low) and communicated acquisition motive (user-focused versus company-focused).

Data were collected from 253 active Pinterest users recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants first completed measures of baseline user engagement and brand perceptions before being exposed to one of the experimental acquisition scenarios. Following the stimulus, respondents evaluated the acquisition and reported their post-acquisition attitudes toward the platform.

Validated multi-item scales were used to measure user engagement and post-acquisition brand attitudes, while perceived competence complementarity and acquisition evaluations captured users' interpretations of strategic fit and acquisition acceptance. Regression and mediation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among the constructs and to identify the psychological mechanisms underlying users' responses to acquisition announcements.

The use of an experimental design provided control over acquisition communications while maintaining ecological realism through the use of familiar digital platform brands.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. User engagement significantly increased positive evaluations of digital platform acquisitions, making engaged users more receptive to organisational change.

2. Perceived competence complementarity positively influenced acquisition acceptance, highlighting the importance of strategic fit between the acquiring and acquired firms.
3. Communicated acquisition motive had no significant effect; users relied more on existing platform relationships and perceptions of strategic fit than on corporate messaging when interpreting acquisition announcements.

The findings demonstrate that users evaluate digital platform acquisitions primarily through pre-existing psychological relationships with the platform rather than corporate communication. User engagement significantly predicted positive acquisition evaluations, indicating that highly engaged users were more likely to accept strategic organizational change. Perceived competence complementarity also positively influenced evaluations, suggesting users value acquisitions that demonstrate clear strategic fit and capability enhancement. In contrast, communicated acquisition motive did not significantly affect acquisition acceptance, indicating that users rely more on existing beliefs about the platform and strategic fit than on managerial messaging. Mediation analyses further showed that acquisition attitude serves as the psychological mechanism linking user engagement and perceived competence complementarity with post-acquisition evaluations. Overall, the findings suggest that users actively interpret acquisition announcements through established cognitive and relational frameworks rather than responding passively to corporate communications.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

- Extends User Engagement Theory by demonstrating that engagement shapes users' interpretation of strategic organisational change, not just behavioural outcomes.

- Identifies perceived competence complementarity as a key driver of acquisition acceptance, highlighting the importance of strategic fit in digital platform acquisitions.
- Advances organisational sensemaking research by showing that acquisition attitude mediates how users translate existing platform relationships into post-acquisition evaluations.

This study contributes to marketing and merger and acquisition research by positioning users as active interpreters of strategic organizational change. It extends User Engagement Theory by demonstrating that engagement shapes users' interpretation of acquisition announcements beyond behavioral outcomes.

The study also identifies perceived competence complementarity as a key driver of acquisition acceptance and advances organizational sensemaking by showing that acquisition attitude links existing platform relationships with post-acquisition evaluations.

Managerially, organizations should build strong user engagement and demonstrate credible strategic fit before announcing acquisitions, as corporate messaging alone is unlikely to influence user acceptance.

A limitation is the use of well-known brands, which may have introduced prior brand bias.

Although MTurk provides international access, the sample was predominantly U.S.-based.

Future research should compare real and fictitious brands using more geographically diverse samples.

References are available upon request.

WHAT MAKES A LOGO PREMIUM
HOW BRAND LOGO TRACKING AFFECTS PREMIUM BRAND EVALUATION

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Keywords: visual marketing, logo design, logo tracking, interstitial space, typeface logo, premium brand

Description: This research shows that the tracking of a brand logo, the interstitial space between its letters, affects consumers' perceptions of brand prestige and, in turn, leads to favorable downstream outcomes (including higher CTR, higher willingness to pay a price premium, and more favorable brand attitudes).

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Brand logos play an important role in building brand equity (Hagtvedt 2011; Henderson and Cote 1998). Logo design elements can influence consumers' perceptions and evaluations (Cian et al. 2014; Hagtvedt 2011; Jiang et al. 2016).

Logo tracking, an important logo design element, refers to the interstitial white space between letters in textual logos. Prior research suggests that spatial spaciousness signals higher prices and prestige. Spacious retail displays entail higher rental costs and are associated with higher prices (O'Guinn et al. 2015; Sevilla and Townsend 2016), and consumers may overgeneralize this association from offline to online contexts (Huang et al. 2019). Similarly, greater spatial distance between a product and a model in ads increases perceived prestige and willingness to pay a premium (Chu et al. 2021).

Thus, consumers may overgeneralize link between space and higher price from product displays to the spacing between logo letters, perceiving loose logos as more prestigious than tight logos, which further leads to favorable downstream outcomes, including higher click-through rates, greater willingness to pay a price premium, and more favorable brand attitudes.

Method and Data

Seven studies tested our hypotheses. Study 1 employed a single-factor between-subjects design to test whether loose logos elicited higher perceived prestige among 400 participants. Study 2 further tested the logo tracking effect in a packaging context using a single-factor between-subjects design ($N = 400$). Study 3 extended the logo tracking effect to an advertising context and examined its downstream effect on brand attitude using a between-subjects design with 400 participants. Study 4 adopted a single-factor

between-subjects design (logo tracking: loose vs. tight; $N = 400$) to test the downstream effect on consumers' willingness to pay a price premium. Study 5 used a single-factor between-subjects design (logo design: loose vs. tight vs. loose with a good-value label) with 1,201 U.K. participants to test the mediating role of prestige perception by directly weakening prestige perceptions through a good-value label. Study 6 examined the effect of logo tracking on advertising effectiveness, as reflected by click-through rate, using a single-factor between-subjects design (logo tracking: loose vs. tight) in a Facebook field Study. Study 7 examined the relationships between logo tracking and perceived prestige, willingness to pay a price premium, and brand attitude using a dataset of brand characteristics containing 629 brands.

Summary of Findings

Study 1 showed that a logo with loose tracking increases consumers' perceptions of prestige. Study 2 replicated the tracking effect in a product packaging context. Study 3 found that a logo with loose (vs. tight) tracking leads to higher perceived prestige and, in turn, improves consumers' attitudes toward the product. Study 4 further showed that a loose (vs. tight) tracking logo increases consumers' willingness to pay a price premium by enhancing perceived prestige. In Study 5, we found that when prestige was undermined via a good-value brand image, the positive effect of loose logo tracking on willingness to pay a price premium disappeared. Study 6, a Facebook field study, found that the logo with loose tracking improves the advertising effectiveness in terms of click-through rate and cost-per-click when promoting a premium image. By analyzing secondary data from a top U.S. national brand dataset (Lovett, Peres, and Shachar 2014), Study 7 further supported that the loose tracking of logos was associated with higher prestige perception, more favorable brand attitudes, and higher consumers' willingness to pay a price premium.

Key Contributions

This research makes several significant contributions. First, this research contributes to the literature of premium brand image by demonstrating that logo tracking, as a novel design element, can enhance prestige perception and build a premium brand image. Second, we extend the literature on logo tracking (Gupta and Hagtvedt 2021; Liu et al. 2025) by examining its influence on prestige perception, a new link that has received little attention. Third, our research enriches the literature on white space and prestige (Chu et al. 2021; Huang et al. 2019; Sevilla and Townsend 2016) by generalizing the established association between white space and prestige to the logo context.

This work also offers valuable practical implications. Subtle adjustments to logo tracking can enhance perceived prestige for brands and products, regardless of their inherent positioning, thereby increasing commercial value through greater advertising effectiveness, more favorable attitudes, and a higher willingness to pay a price premium.

**WHISPERING BRANDS: HOW ASMR STIMULI IN SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING
SHAPE BRAND IMAGE THROUGH MENTAL IMAGERY AND FANTASY
PRONENESS**

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Keywords: consumer behaviour, Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), sensory marketing, advertising, brand image

Description: This study examines how ASMR cues in social media coffee advertising shape brand image through mental imagery and how fantasy proneness strengthens the relationship between ASMR and mental imagery.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

ASMR has emerged as a popular trend across social media platforms, showing potential as an effective advertising tool for enhancing brand image, particularly because of its ability to capture consumers' attention. However, research examining its effects remains limited, and existing

studies have reported mixed findings. Prior research has identified positive, negative, and nonsignificant effects on brand-related outcomes, suggesting that additional psychological processes may influence how consumers respond to auditory cues and that individual differences may shape the effectiveness of ASMR. Two promising explanations lie in mental imagery and fantasy proneness. This study therefore examines three related questions in the context of social media coffee advertising. First, does exposure to an ASMR advertisement influence perceived brand image? Second, does mental imagery explain how ASMR cues shape brand image? Third, does fantasy proneness strengthen the relationship between ASMR exposure and mental imagery, such that consumers who are more inclined toward vivid imagination respond more strongly to subtle coffee-related sounds? By integrating ASMR, mental imagery, fantasy proneness, and brand image in one framework, the study seeks to explain both the mechanism and the individual-level boundary condition underlying the mixed effects reported in prior ASMR advertising research.

Method and Data

The study used a controlled, single-factor online experiment. A total of 402 participants were recruited from universities and online groups, and 396 valid responses remained after incomplete responses were removed. The final sample included 219 men and 177 women; 79.5% were respondents from universities in Taiwan. Participants were randomly assigned to an ASMR condition ($n = 196$) or a non-ASMR condition ($n = 200$). The stimulus was a video advertisement for Tazzina, an unfamiliar coffee brand in Taiwan. Both versions used identical visuals. The ASMR version included bean-grinding, coffee-pouring, and stirring sounds, whereas the control version used background music only. The procedure included a pre-experiment demographic questionnaire, advertisement exposure and a manipulation check, and a post-experiment

questionnaire measuring mental imagery, fantasy proneness, and brand image on seven-point Likert scales. Data were collected through Google Forms distributed on Instagram, Facebook, and LINE from May 22 to June 3, 2025. Reliability, validity, mediation, and moderation were assessed using bootstrapping procedures and PROCESS Macro 4.3.

Summary of Findings

The measurement results indicated strong data quality. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was 0.962 ($p < .001$), factor loadings were consistently above 0.70, and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.90. ASMR exposure significantly increased mental imagery ($b = 2.20, p < .001$), and mental imagery significantly improved brand image ($b = 1.03, p < .001$). However, after mental imagery was controlled, ASMR had a small but significant negative direct effect on brand image ($b = -0.2185, p = .018$). The indirect effect through mental imagery was positive and significant (effect = 2.2913, 95% CI [2.0877, 2.5069]), revealing a competitive mediation pattern in which a negative direct pathway coexisted with a stronger positive imagery-based pathway. Fantasy proneness significantly moderated the effect of ASMR on mental imagery (index = 0.7258, 95% CI [0.6307, 0.8179]). The conditional effect increased from $b = 0.6522$ at low fantasy proneness to $b = 1.6089$ at the mean and $b = 2.5655$ at high fantasy proneness. All five hypotheses were supported.

Statement of Key Contributions

The study contributes to the body of scholarly marketing literature by deepening our knowledge of auditory sensory marketing, particularly the impact of ASMR cues on brand image in coffee advertising. Addressing gaps in auditory sensory marketing research, the findings demonstrate that ASMR effect depends on whether consumers transform product-related sounds into vivid

mental imagery. The competitive mediation pattern helps reconcile inconsistent findings: ASMR produced a small negative direct effect but a stronger positive indirect effect through mental imagery.

The study also identifies fantasy proneness as an individual-level moderator. When exposed to ASMR, people who are more prone to fantasy have stronger mental imagery reactions, which amplifies the positive effects of ASMR on brand image. By integrating personality-based heterogeneity into sensory advertising models and showing that immersive aural strategies are not equally effective across audiences.

Managerially, marketers should not use ASMR solely for novelty. Coffee-related sounds should align with visuals and narratives that help consumers imagine preparing, tasting, smelling, or consuming the product. Campaigns may also target consumers receptive to ASMR or immersive sensory content. Overall, the study offers a conditional, psychologically grounded explanation of how ASMR advertising shapes brand image.

Marketing Research & Marketing Analytics

TITLE: BIBLIOMETRICS IN MARKETING RESEARCH: GROWTH, PRACTICES, AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Keywords: Bibliometric Analysis; Marketing Research; Science Mapping; Knowledge Structure; Systematic Literature Review.

Description: Using 717 articles published between 1997 and 2026, this study maps the growth, intellectual structure, and methodological foundations of bibliometric research in marketing and identifies opportunities for greater theory development.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Research Questions**

Bibliometric analysis has become an increasingly popular method for reviewing and synthesizing marketing knowledge. Researchers have used bibliometric techniques to examine topics such as artificial intelligence, social media, sustainability, and consumer behavior. Despite this growth, little attention has been devoted to bibliometric research as a distinct stream within marketing scholarship. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how bibliometric studies have evolved, which themes and methods dominate the field, and whether these studies contribute meaningfully to theory development.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the evolution, intellectual structure, and methodological foundations of bibliometric research in marketing. Specifically, it investigates four questions: (1) How has bibliometric research in marketing developed over time? (2) What conceptual themes and intellectual foundations characterize this research stream? (3) Which methodological approaches, analytical tools, and publication outlets dominate bibliometric scholarship in marketing? (4) To what extent does bibliometric research contribute to marketing theory development, and where do opportunities for future advancement lie? By answering these questions, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of bibliometric scholarship in marketing and identifies directions for strengthening its theoretical and methodological contributions.

Method and Data

The study uses a bibliometric research design to examine the development and structure of bibliometric scholarship in marketing. Data were collected from the Web of Science Core Collection and restricted to the Social Sciences Citation Index to ensure inclusion of high-quality publications relevant to marketing and related disciplines. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles that used bibliometric, science-mapping, citation-based, or structured review methodologies. Conference proceedings, books, editorials, and non-English publications were excluded to maintain consistency across records.

The final dataset comprised 717 articles published between 1997 and 2026. Bibliographic information included author names, titles, abstracts, keywords, publication years, source journals, and cited references. Data preparation involved cleaning and standardization, including consolidating semantically similar keywords with a manually developed thesaurus. The dataset

was analyzed with Bibliometrix and Biblioshiny in R, supplemented by VOSviewer for network visualization.

Performance analysis examined publication trends, influential authors, and leading outlets.

Science-mapping methods, including keyword co-occurrence networks, thematic mapping, and overlay visualization, were used to identify conceptual structures and emerging themes.

Together, these approaches provided a comprehensive assessment of the social, intellectual, and conceptual foundations of bibliometric research in marketing.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal substantial growth in bibliometric research in marketing, particularly after 2017, reflecting the growing acceptance of bibliometric methods as a mainstream approach to synthesizing marketing knowledge. The field exhibits a concentrated intellectual structure, in which a relatively small group of prolific scholars and interdisciplinary journals accounts for a significant share of research output.

Thematic analysis indicates that bibliometric research in marketing is organized primarily around methodological themes rather than substantive marketing theories. Core themes include market research, systematic literature reviews, bibliometric analysis, performance evaluation, and artificial intelligence, reflecting the institutionalization of science-mapping practices. In contrast, emerging approaches such as topic modeling, machine learning, and big data analytics remain peripheral and only weakly integrated into mainstream bibliometric research.

The results further show that most bibliometric studies emphasize descriptive mapping, performance assessment, and knowledge synthesis. While these studies effectively identify

intellectual structures, influential contributors, and evolving research trends, relatively few extend their findings to theory development. Overall, the field appears to be in a transitional stage in which methodological advances have outpaced theoretical integration, creating opportunities for future research to leverage bibliometric insights to strengthen theory building and marketing knowledge development.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to marketing scholarship by examining bibliometric research itself rather than a specific marketing topic. Although bibliometric studies have become increasingly common in areas such as artificial intelligence, sustainability, social media, and consumer behavior, little attention has been paid to how bibliometric knowledge is produced, organized, and developed within marketing.

Using 717 articles published between 1997 and 2026, this study identifies the dominant themes, intellectual foundations, leading contributors, and emerging methodological directions that characterize bibliometric research in marketing. The findings show that the field has become highly institutionalized around science-mapping and performance-analysis techniques, yet it remains more focused on knowledge mapping than on theory development. The study further highlights opportunities for greater integration of computational approaches and for stronger theoretical positioning.

The findings are valuable to researchers conducting bibliometric studies, as well as to editors and reviewers evaluating such work. By documenting how bibliometric research in marketing has evolved, where it is concentrated, and which themes remain underdeveloped, this study provides a roadmap for future scholarship. More importantly, it highlights opportunities for bibliometric

research to play a greater role in theory development, helping transform bibliometric analysis from a tool primarily used for knowledge synthesis into a mechanism for generating new marketing insights and shaping research agendas.

**CAN BRAND PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY INCREASE PURCHASE INTENTION
FOR SUSTAINABLE LUXURY PRODUCTS? EXPLORING THE MODERATED
MEDIATION EFFECTS OF PARTNER BRAND COOLNESS, FUNCTIONAL
VALUE, AND GREEN CONSPICUOUSNESS**

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Keywords: sustainable luxury product, brand partnership, brand coolness, functional
value, green conspicuousness, purchase intention

Description: This study investigates how the perceived coolness of a partner brand affects
purchase intention for sustainable luxury products, highlighting the mediating role of
functional value and the moderating effect of green conspicuousness.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

As sustainability awareness rises, luxury brands increasingly face the challenge that sustainable products are often perceived as lower in quality, creating tension between sustainability and traditional luxury cues (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2020). Although prior research shows that co-branding can elevate perceived luxuriousness (Lee & Cho, 2023), studies have largely examined sustainable extensions within a single luxury brand, offering limited insight into how negative quality inferences can be alleviated. Because less cool brands typically emphasize practicality and functionality (Alba & Williams, 2013; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), co-branding with such brands may compensate for these consumer doubts.

To address this gap, this study asks: Can brand partnership strategies increase purchase intention for sustainable luxury products? Specifically, we propose a moderated mediation framework to test four hypotheses: H1: Luxury brands' co-branding partnerships with less cool (vs. highly cool) brands yield higher perceived functional value. H2: Functional value positively influences purchase intention. H3: Functional value mediates the relationship between partner brand coolness and purchase intention. H4: Green conspicuousness moderates the relationship between co-brand coolness and functional value; as green

conspicuousness increases, the positive effect of low cool brand collaborations on functional value diminishes.

Method And Data

To test hypotheses, a single-factor (brand coolness: high vs. low) between-subjects experiment was conducted via Prolific. U.S. consumers ($N = 166$) who purchased luxury goods within the past year provided anonymous responses (66.9% female, 47.9% college-educated, 50.9% income >\$75,000). Participants were randomly assigned to fictitious scenarios featuring GUCCI and a partner brand launching a sustainable bag (100% recycled nylon/discarded leather). The cool partner (MysticThreads) featured street aesthetics; the less cool partner (SimpleStyle) emphasized practicality. A pretest ($N = 85$) confirmed manipulation success: MysticThreads yielded a higher brand coolness score ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.98$) than SimpleStyle ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(83) = 3.67$, $p < .001$.

Focal constructs—brand coolness, functional value, green conspicuousness, and purchase intention—were adapted from established scales (Warren et al., 2019; Talukdar & Yu, 2020) and measured using seven-point Likert scales, with environmental consciousness and perceived fit as controls. All measures exceeded reliability thresholds (Taber, 2018). Harman's one-factor test checked common method bias from the cross-sectional design; the single emerging factor accounted for only 35.89% of the variance, well below the

conservative 50% threshold, indicating no internal validity threat. Finally, the moderated mediation framework was analyzed using PROCESS Model 7.

Summary of Findings

The analysis provided robust support for the proposed moderated mediation framework. In support of H1, collaborating with a less cool partner brand significantly enhanced perceived functional value ($b = -.58, p < .001$). Second, this functional value positively influenced purchase intention ($b = .69, p < .001$), supporting H2. Third, the analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect ($coeff = -.21, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.45, -.01]$), demonstrating that functional value mediated the relationship between partner brand coolness and purchase intention (supporting H3). This suggests that a less cool, practicality-oriented brand successfully offsets negative quality inferences associated with sustainable materials.

Finally, the study identified a significant interaction between brand coolness and green conspicuousness ($b = .19, p < .05$). The index of moderated mediation was significant ($Index = 0.13, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.25]$), consistent with H4. Johnson-Neyman analysis revealed that when consumers' green conspicuousness was low, partnerships with a less cool brand provided a significantly higher functional value advantage; however, as green conspicuousness increased, this positive effect weakened. In sum, while less cool partners elevate functional credibility and purchase intention, this advantage is constrained by status-

driven motives, highlighting how co-branding strategically mitigates skepticism toward sustainable luxury under specific boundary conditions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research contributes to sustainable luxury literature by utilizing co-branding to resolve the fundamental tension between sustainability and luxury. Conceptually, it identifies the mediating role of functional value and the moderating effect of green conspicuousness.

Findings reveal that partnering with a low-coolness brand significantly enhances functional value, driving purchase intention. However, because green conspicuousness represents hedonic value, it dilutes emphasis on functional value, weakening the functional advantage of low-coolness partners. Furthermore, perceived brand fit and consumer environmental consciousness positively influence purchase intention, enabling consumers to express personal traits through compatible collaborations.

Managerially, the study provides actionable guidance for sustainability transitions. An independent t-test proves that low-coolness co-branding ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.95$) is more effective for enhancing functional value than a luxury brand's own sustainable line extension ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.07$), $t(115) = 2.81$, $p = .006$. Consequently, luxury brands partnering with less cool brands should limit green conspicuousness cues in promotions to preserve functional benefits. Conversely, high-coolness collaborations should strategically emphasize

green conspicuousness to amplify hedonic appeal. Finally, practitioners must evaluate brand fit and highlight environmental attributes to attract environmentally conscious consumers, offering a strategic roadmap for marketing sustainable luxury.

DECEPTIVE ESSENCES: HOW ESSENTIALIST BIAS IMPEDES THEORY DEVELOPMENT FOR FORMATIVE SCALES

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Keywords: formative measurement, reflective measurement, essentialist bias, abductive reasoning, construct validation

Description: By integrating psychological essentialism and abductive philosophy of science, this paper explains why formative scales remain controversial and offers strategies for theorizing, evaluating, and validating formative constructs and composite indices.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Why does formative measurement remain controversial in marketing research even though the distinction between reflective and formative indicators is well established conceptually? This paper argues that the controversy persists partly because of essentialist bias: the intuitive tendency to treat constructs as if they possess stable underlying essences that generate observable indicators. Such intuitions fit reflective measurement, in which indicators are treated as manifestations of an underlying latent variable, but they can distort formative measurement, in which indicators jointly constitute the construct. The paper therefore asks how essentialist

assumptions shape common critiques of formative scales, when essentialist intuitions can aid early theorizing, when they become deceptive, and how an abductive approach can help scholars design, evaluate, and validate formative constructs and composite indices more appropriately.

Method and Data

This paper is conceptual. It synthesizes marketing measurement research on reflective and formative models, the psychological essentialism literature, and abductive philosophy of science. The analysis develops a cognitive-theoretical explanation for recurring disputes about formative scales and uses illustrative construct examples to show how reflective validation logic can misdiagnose well-specified composites. The paper then derives practical strategies and best practices for construct labeling, indicator selection, boundary specification, and formative validation.

Summary of Findings

The analysis shows that essentialist intuitions make reflective measurement appear natural and formative measurement appear suspect. When researchers assume that a construct has a hidden internal essence, they expect indicators to covary, behave redundantly, and pass common-cause validation tests. These expectations are appropriate for reflective models but can be misleading for formative constructs, where indicators define the construct, need not be interchangeable, and may be valuable precisely because they capture different parts of the construct domain.

Essentialism therefore produces three recurring harms: inappropriate reliability expectations, reified construct boundaries, and misapplied validation logic. The paper also shows that essentialist intuitions are not always harmful; they may help researchers notice regularities and

search for unifying explanations during early theory development. They become deceptive, however, when the reflective "essence" view becomes the default standard for judging all constructs. An abductive perspective reframes formative constructs as constructed explanatory tools that should be judged by interpretability, domain coverage, mechanism plausibility, nomological performance, robustness, and comparative explanatory performance rather than by reflective-style internal consistency alone.

Key Contributions

This paper contributes to the marketing measurement literature in three ways. First, it reframes recurrent disagreements about formative indicators as a cognitive-theoretical problem, explaining why scholars and reviewers often import reflective assumptions into formative settings. Second, it integrates psychological essentialism with the abductive theory of method to provide a roadmap for developing formative constructs: define the problem, specify the construct domain, select theoretically relevant but nonredundant indicators, clarify mechanisms, and compare plausible operationalizations. Third, it offers practical guidance for researchers, doctoral students, reviewers, and marketing analytics practitioners. The paper emphasizes function-revealing construct labels, transparent boundary conditions, and validation portfolios that include sensitivity analyses for alternative indicators, weights, and rival indices. A brief sensitivity report can compare alternative weighting schemes when weights materially affect interpretation. It also clarifies that nonredundancy depends on theoretical relevance to the construct domain, not merely low inter-indicator correlation; diversity without domain relevance is irrelevance rather than coverage. Collectively, these contributions support more rigorous and practically useful use of formative scales and composite indices in marketing research and decision making.

References are available upon request.

FROM SCREEN TO STORE: HOW EMOTIONAL RESOLUTION IN MOVIES DRIVES POST-VIEWING RETAIL BEHAVIOR

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Keywords: machine learning, motion pictures, retailing, affect regulation, mixed method

Description: Combining a machine-learning measure of movie emotional resolution, large-scale linked movie-and-retail panel data, and a randomized experiment, this paper shows that emotionally unresolved movies are associated with a higher likelihood of same-day post-viewing store visits, consistent with an affect-regulation account.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Consumer journeys increasingly connect entertainment and shopping: multiplex cinemas anchor shopping malls, and moviegoers often pass retail stores minutes after a film ends. Yet little is known about how the content of an entertainment experience—rather than its mere occurrence—shapes what consumers do next. We ask whether the emotional structure of a movie narrative, specifically its degree of emotional resolution (the extent to which the story's emotional arc is brought to completion at the end), influences consumers' post-viewing retail behavior. Drawing on affect-regulation theory, we propose that emotionally unresolved endings leave viewers with residual psychological tension and a heightened readiness to act, increasing the likelihood that

they visit an accessible retail outlet immediately after the movie. We examine (1) whether lower emotional resolution is associated with a higher likelihood of same-day post-movie store visits in the field, (2) whether such visits reflect opportunistic rather than routine shopping, and (3) whether unresolved narratives causally heighten negative affect and general action readiness.

Method and Data

We develop a scalable, content-based measure of emotional resolution by applying machine-learning sentiment analysis to films' narrative arcs, validated through a blind human-coding audit of 120 films. We link this measure to a unique two-year panel from a major retail-entertainment conglomerate in Dubai, which combines transaction-level records from a large-format hypermarket chain with ticket records from co-located cinemas via unique customer IDs (609,297 moviegoers; 60,849 customers with same-day movie-plus-store trips enter the estimation sample). Our models relate the likelihood of a same-day post-movie store visit to the emotional resolution of the movie watched, including customer and temporal fixed effects and rich movie- and occasion-level controls. Robustness analyses include alternative clustering schemes, randomization inference, falsification tests on pre-movie purchases, alternative measure constructions, and supplementary instrumental-variable analyses based on creative teams' persistent stylistic tendencies. To probe the psychological process, a between-subjects online experiment ($N = 200$, Prolific) manipulated only the ending of a movie plot summary (high vs. low emotional resolution) and measured negative affect and general action readiness.

Summary of Findings

In the field data, movies with lower emotional resolution are associated with a significantly higher likelihood of same-day post-viewing store visits ($p < .01$). The magnitude of this association is economically meaningful relative to the low base rate of same-day post-movie

store visits, and benchmark contrasts between clearly resolved and clearly unresolved films imply a noticeably higher incidence of post-viewing purchase visits. The association is robust across clustering schemes, randomization inference, and alternative measure constructions; it does not appear in pre-movie purchasing on the same occasions; and it is descriptively larger for highly rated films. Complementary analyses suggest that post-movie visits reflect non-routine, opportunistic shopping timing rather than routine stock-up trips. In the experiment, participants who read an emotionally unresolved ending reported significantly greater negative affect and a stronger general readiness to act ($p < .001$), with mediation patterns consistent with an affect-regulation account. Because movie content is not randomly assigned in the field, we interpret the field estimates as conditional associations, complemented by causal experimental evidence on the proposed affective process.

Key Contributions

Theoretically, this research extends affect-regulation and consumer-journey perspectives by showing that the emotional structure of an upstream entertainment experience—not merely its occurrence—spills over into downstream retail behavior, identifying emotional resolution as a novel, behaviorally consequential content attribute. Methodologically, it introduces a scalable, machine-learning-based measure of narrative emotional resolution that can be computed for any scripted content and validated against human judgment, and it links content attributes to individually matched entertainment and retail transactions at unusual scale. For practitioners, the findings offer guidance to mall operators, co-located retailers, and content platforms: the emotional composition of a screening window is a planning-relevant signal of post-show retail demand, and our aggregate benchmarks translate resolution differences into expected additional purchase visits. More broadly, the results suggest that marketers managing connected consumer

journeys—physical or digital—should attend to the psychological states created by adjacent experiences they did not design themselves.

References are available upon request.

Big Data and Artificial Intelligence

DESIGN AND VALIDATION OF TESTS ON IDEA CREATIVITY, QUALITY, AND ADOPTION INTENTION

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Keywords: autonomous AI agents, creative ideation, technology adoption, governance, human-AI collaboration

Description: This study validates a dual-level adoption framework showing that perceived creativity drives marketing professionals' adoption of AI-generated ideas, while usefulness, trust, and governance drive their intention to use autonomous AI agents.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Generative AI agents can autonomously produce marketing concepts, yet little is known about whether professionals perceive these ideas as creative, trust the agents enough to integrate them into workflows, and under what conditions they adopt them. Prior adoption models (TAM, UTAUT) emphasise usefulness and ease of use but treat the technology as the sole object of evaluation, conflating assessment of the tool with assessment of its output. This conflation is untenable for generative AI, whose outputs are novel and indeterminate and must be evaluated independently from the tool's usability. We therefore ask: (RQ1) How do marketing professionals evaluate AI-generated ideas across creativity, marketing quality, and feasibility?

(RQ2) Which factors—at the idea level and the agent level—predict intention to adopt AI-generated ideas and to use AI agents in future work? (RQ3) What roles do governance and trust mechanisms play in shaping adoption intentions? We address these questions through a dual-level framework that distinguishes idea-level evaluation (creativity, marketing quality, feasibility) from agent-level evaluation (usefulness, ease of interaction, trust, governance), and tests how each level drives a distinct adoption outcome.

Method and Data

We conducted a field experiment at a professional marketing event in Portugal with 107 participants (68 marketing professionals with 2 to 15+ years of experience across retail, financial services, technology, FMCG, and consulting; and 39 advanced marketing students). Participants were assigned to one of four real-world marketing briefs (omnichannel activation, digital acquisition, CRM personalisation, product launch), each specifying a product category, target audience, and brand positioning constraint. They interacted with the Unlimited Ideas Generator (UAI), a GPT-4-based autonomous ideation agent configured with a marketing knowledge base, multi-step reasoning chains, diversity sampling, and a governance layer (explainability, human validation, bias-check and brand-safety safeguards). Participants evaluated AI-generated ideas in a blind procedure and completed a 36-item questionnaire measuring nine constructs on seven-point Likert scales. We analysed the data using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SmartPLS 4.0), with measurement validation (Cronbach's α , composite reliability, AVE, HTMT), structural estimation via 5,000 bootstrap resamples, a G*Power-based sample adequacy check, PLS-Predict cross-validation, and multi-group comparison between professionals and students.

Summary of Findings

The dual-level framework explained 48.3% of idea adoption variance and 53.2% of future use variance. At the idea level, perceived creativity was the dominant predictor of adoption ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < .001$) and strongly shaped marketing quality ($\beta = 0.637$, $p < .001$), whereas

feasibility/risk ($\beta = 0.041$) and marketing quality ($\beta = 0.050$) were non-significant. This indicates that during ideation professionals operate in a divergent-thinking mode in which creativity functions as a sufficient heuristic and feasibility is deferred to later innovation stages. At the agent level, perceived usefulness dominated future use intention ($\beta = 0.580$, $p < .001$) while ease of interaction was non-significant ($\beta = -0.150$)—an effect concentrated among professionals, who tolerate interface complexity for advanced capability. Trust predicted future use ($\beta = 0.410$, $p < .001$), and governance built trust ($\beta = 0.394$, $p < .001$), generating a significant indirect governance-to-use path ($\beta = 0.141$, $p = .015$). Explainability and human-validation features were the most valued governance items. Discriminant validity (all HTMT < 0.85) and a robustness model confirmed that idea adoption and agent use are empirically distinct outcomes.

Key Contributions

This study advances technology adoption theory in creative AI contexts in three ways. First, it introduces and validates a dual-level adoption framework that resolves a structural limitation of TAM and UTAUT: by separating evaluation of the AI-generated output from evaluation of the agent, it captures an evaluative mechanism that deterministic-software adoption models cannot, since those models assume tool and output are inseparable. Second, it demonstrates that perceived creativity—not feasibility or marketing quality—drives idea adoption during ideation, offering a stage-contingent account in which feasibility becomes a gatekeeper only at downstream evaluation stages. This challenges the assumption that professionals prioritise “safe” ideas and has direct implications for how organisations structure AI-augmented ideation. Third, it positions governance as a strategic adoption enabler operating through trust, rather than a compliance burden, and identifies explainability and human oversight as the most valued mechanisms. For practice, the findings suggest organisations should institutionally separate creativity-led ideation from feasibility-led evaluation, demonstrate concrete agent usefulness over interface simplicity, and make governance visible to build the trust that underpins adoption. We also provide a validated 36-item instrument for assessing AI-generated ideas.

References are available upon request.

Extended Abstract

TITLE- Bridging Black-Box Clustering and Explainability: An Integrative Deep Embedded Learning Framework for Market Segmentation

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Keywords: Deep embedded clustering, AI in Marketing, Explainable AI (XAI), Consumer segmentation, Data-Driven Insights, Clustering Algorithms

Description: Integrative Clustering and Interpretability Framework (ICIF), a novel approach that combines supervised machine learning (ML), explainable artificial intelligence (XAI), and deep learning (DL) for deep embedded clustering.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The Integrative Clustering and Interpretability Framework (ICIF) as an innovative approach that effectively segments and profiles clients in a marketing dataset by combining Deep Embedded Clustering (DEC) with feature interpretability methodologies. The inherent intricacy of deep learning models employed in clustering presents difficulties in comprehending the process by which these segments are produced. The demand for openness and comprehensibility in the results of ML has prompted the creation of this framework. LIME enhances the interpretability of complicated models, allowing marketers to obtain a better understanding of the elements that influence consumer segmentation. This helps bridge the gap between the results produced by algorithms and the marketing strategies that can be implemented based on those results. Data-driven methodologies equipped with explainable AI approaches aid in industry-specific segmentation analysis and provide greater customer

insights for improved customer experience and engagement (Sharma et al., 2021). Therefore, considering the traditional segmentation approaches and those of emerging approaches in a changing data-driven environment, this paper aims to address two research objectives:

RO1: Can Explainable AI be utilized to interpret and validate the features influencing consumer clusters derived from deep learning models?

RO2: Can key consumer segments be identified through the Integrative Clustering and Interpretability Framework (ICIF) with their distinguishing characteristics?

Method And Data

The study utilised data created using SAS data maker using online e-commerce customers from public dataset on Kaggle.com (Thecleverprogrammer, 2021) to showcase the effectiveness of DEC, a method that obtains feature representations to enhance clustering performance. This dataset has 29 columns and 2240 Rows. Random forest technique for data modelling is applied after data cleaning. Subsequently, LIME was employed to detect significant features, which were then incorporated into a deep learning model using TensorFlow. Deep Embedded Clustering was applied to find suitable clusters and the accuracy of these cluster was then evaluated. Finally, clusters were analysed and interpreted.

Summary of Findings

The LIME study indicate that income, expenditure patterns, and frequency of web visits are the most significant factors influencing cluster assignments. The insights were crucial in training a deep learning model, facilitating targeted feature selection, which enhanced both clustering accuracy and interpretability, thereby fulfilling our initial study goal. Employing Deep Embedded Clustering (DEC), we attained more coherent and significant clusters through the acquisition of embedded representations of the data. This method provided substantial advantages for personalised marketing techniques by establishing clearly delineated consumer profiles for each cluster.

Statement of Key Contributions

The customer of today is highly knowledgeable about technology and its uses. In addition, they are expressive of their experience across various physical as well as digital channels that supports internet businesses transition into predictive personalisation. Deep mining of user

purchase behaviour helps today's e-commerce platforms understand user preferences and precisely provide products that meet user expectations, boosting customer satisfaction and lowering platform marketing costs. Analysing users' purchasing activity extensively on e-commerce platforms is beneficial for understanding their preferences and providing correct product recommendations. This can improve consumer happiness and reduce marketing expenses for the platform. Our study analyses and shows how application of ICIF approaches is best suited to segment online e-commerce customers that can be managed in real time and customer classification and recommendation engines can be optimized. This can be extremely useful for personalising marketing messaging and enhancing customer engagement, leading to a better customer experience. This study illustrates how Artificial Intelligence (AI), now ubiquitous in digital marketing for functions like chatbots, content production, and predictive modelling, might extend into theoretical realms often approached qualitatively. The integration of AI-driven insights with conventional qualitative methods establishes a synergistic framework that enhances comprehension of consumer behaviour, elevates customer experiences, and fosters more efficient and ethical marketing strategies.

References are available upon

LOWERING BARRIERS, UNEQUAL GAINS: HOW GENERATIVE AI RESHAPED PARTICIPATION AND RECOGNITION IN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION ON KAGGLE

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Keywords

Generative AI (GenAI); difference-in-differences (DiD); online Communities; knowledge production; knowledge sharing; platform design

Description:

We examine the impact of ChatGPT's release on Kaggle notebooks using a difference-in-differences framework, finding that while notebook production increases, primarily driven by new users, but average quality does not improve, with intermediate users receiving fewer votes and experienced users exhibiting a comparable decline and performing significantly better relative to intermediate users.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study investigates how the release of ChatGPT affects user behavior in an online knowledge-production platform. Specifically, it examines:

- Whether ChatGPT increases the quantity of user-generated content (Kaggle notebooks).
- Whether ChatGPT affects the quality of contributions, as measured by community recognition (votes).
- How these effects vary across different user groups (new, medium-experienced, and experienced users).

Method and Data

The study employs a difference-in-differences (DiD) research design at the user-week level to identify the causal impact of ChatGPT's release. The empirical analysis compares outcomes before and after November 30, 2022 (ChatGPT launch), using both treatment and control cohorts. Regression models are used to estimate the effects on both content quantity and quality, with additional interaction terms to examine heterogeneous effects across user experience levels. The study uses data from the Meta Kaggle dataset, consisting of over 2.4 million user-week observations. The dataset captures user activity on Kaggle, including notebook creation and voting behavior, covering a time window before and after ChatGPT's release.

Summary of Findings

The results show that:

- ChatGPT significantly increases content production, especially among new users, consistent with prior evidence that AI lowers entry barriers (Noy & Zhang, 2023).

- However, average content quality does not improve, aligning with concerns about AI-generated content lacking depth or differentiation (Augenstein et al., 2024).

The effects are heterogeneous:

- Intermediate users experience a decline in recognition (fewer votes).
- Experienced users exhibit a comparable decline and perform significantly better relative to intermediate users.

Overall, generative AI lowers participation barriers but reshapes the distribution of attention and recognition, potentially disadvantaging mid-tier contributors.

Key Contributions

This research extends existing literature on generative AI and online communities by:

- Shifting the focus from knowledge-seeking platforms to knowledge-production environments.
- Providing causal evidence on how AI affects both participation and recognition.
- Highlighting a participation–quality tension, where increased output does not necessarily improve quality.
- Demonstrating that AI adoption can redistribute visibility and rewards unevenly across users, complementing prior work on social influence and attention dynamics (Muchnik et al., 2013).

From a practical perspective, the findings offer implications for platform design, organizational AI adoption, and policy development in AI-mediated environments.

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**MITIGATING AI AVERSION THROUGH DISCLOSURE FRAMING: FIELD
EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE FROM AI-CREATED WEBCOMICS**

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Keywords: AIGC Disclosure; Framing Designs; Platform Management; Algorithm Aversion; Field Experiment

Description: This paper uses a field experiment in a webcomic company to show how strategically framing AI-generated content disclosures can mitigate consumer AI aversion while satisfying transparency demands.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Recent advances in generative AI tools such as Stable Diffusion, Midjourney, and DALL-E enable high-quality content creation with minimal skill, and the content industry is rapidly integrating these technologies—often without viewers' knowledge. As regulators increasingly demand transparency about AI's role in content production, producers worry that disclosure will trigger "algorithm aversion," a well-documented

tendency for people to develop negative attitudes toward AI. Although prior research has examined AI aversion and its interventions, many existing strategies cannot be directly transferred to the AI-generated content (AIGC) context. We propose that disclosure messaging is a critical and underexplored intervention point. Drawing on framing theory—the practice of selectively emphasizing particular aspects of information to shape audience interpretation—we argue that how an AI disclosure is framed can fundamentally alter consumer response even when the underlying facts remain constant. Accordingly, this paper addresses two research questions: (1) Does AI aversion exist in the content industry when viewers learn that content is AI-generated? (2) How can this potential AI aversion be mitigated through disclosure message framing? Answering these questions clarifies whether transparency and engagement can coexist in the rapidly growing AIGC industry.

Method and Data

We conducted a field experiment with a pioneering company that produces AI-created webcomics for paid consumption. To hold content constant, a single focal comic was used across all conditions, with identical advertising campaigns and settings ensuring viewer homogeneity. Interested viewers clicked an ad and were directed to a WeChat mini-program hosting the comic's first episode. We embedded a minimalist, non-intrusive AI disclosure message that varied by condition: Simple Disclosure ("This content is generated by AI"); Normative Framing ("...generated by an AI model accepted by users"); Technology Framing ("...generated by cutting-edge AI

image creation technology”); and Effort Framing (“...generated by an AI model trained with millions of computing hours”). We administered the experiment to 800 viewers (200 per condition) and obtained a random control group of 199 viewers who saw no AI disclosure. Data comprised three parts: (1) viewer-comic performance metrics—conversion, payment amount, number of viewed episodes, total viewing time, and average viewing time per episode; (2) viewer-episode viewership (not read, read but incomplete, completed); and (3) demographics (gender, new/returning status, registration time). We analyzed effects using logistic regression for conversion and OLS regression for continuous outcomes.

Summary of Findings

The results confirm the existence of AI aversion: a Simple Disclosure produced a net decrease in viewer engagement across all performance metrics, including conversion rate, payment amount, number of viewed episodes, and total viewing time. Crucially, the framing strategies effectively counteracted this aversion. Normative Framing largely overcame the negative impact of disclosure—across all five metrics, it showed no significant differences from the No Disclosure condition, although mean values remained slightly lower. Technology Framing was equally effective for the key financial indicators (conversion and payment amount), showing no significant difference from No Disclosure; however, it remained inferior for broader engagement, specifically number of viewed episodes and total viewing time, partly due to a higher pre-paywall churn rate. Effort Framing was the least effective, performing similarly to

the Simple Disclosure condition for paying users, though it still helped reduce aversion among non-paying viewers. Finally, none of the framing strategies altered average viewing time per episode, suggesting framing affects acquisition and retention decisions rather than moment-to-moment viewing behavior. A cost-benefit analysis indicated that productivity gains from AI adoption significantly outweigh the disclosure-related losses under normative and technology framing.

Statement of Key Contributions

Theoretically, this study is the first systematic investigation of framing theory for mitigating AIGC aversion. While prior work has examined various AI-aversion interventions, it has overlooked framing strategies that selectively emphasize particular information to achieve specific objectives. We propose three theoretically grounded disclosure frames that target distinct aversion sources—social acceptance (normative), technological advancement (technology), and creative cost (effort)—thereby extending framing theory to the emerging AIGC domain. We also document, for the first time in the field, AI aversion in the context of AIGC for hedonic consumption, supporting the AI-aversion argument over AI appreciation, and showing that user behavior can be organically nudged through message framing without heavy regulatory intervention. Managerially, we identify actionable disclosure strategies: both normative and technology framing substantially mitigate disclosure's negative impact on conversion, while effort framing helps reduce aversion among non-paying viewers. Platforms should align disclosure choices with their revenue

models—normative/technology framing for paying-viewer models, and additionally effort framing for advertising-supported models. Because productivity gains exceed disclosure costs, we recommend adopting AI while maintaining transparency, even as disclosure regulations tighten.

NORM-GOVERNED HUMAN-AI CO-CREATION IN MARKETING: AN ARTIFICIAL COLLECTIVE INTENTIONALITY FRAMEWORK

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Keywords: human-AI collaboration; marketing co-creation; AI governance; explainable AI; trust calibration

Description: This paper develops and tests Artificial Collective Intentionality as a governance-ready framework for brand-safe human-AI co-creation in marketing.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This paper asks how human-AI co-creation in marketing can be made governable, measurable, and brand-safe. Specifically, it examines whether Artificial Collective Intentionality (ACI) can explain how a human-AI ensemble forms, sustains, and revises shared marketing goals under explicit constraints. The study focuses on three linked questions: how semiotic alignment supports audience fit and brand voice; how normative governance translates duties, permissions, and prohibitions into contestable rule-linked explanations; and how collective action enables commitments, delegation, repair, and consensus in campaign, launch, and crisis settings. The broader question is not whether generative AI can produce creative content faster, but whether marketing teams can use AI as an accountable collaborative partner without losing control over claim validity, compliance, or reputational risk.

Method and Data

ACI is instantiated in three brand-facing scenarios: environmental campaign, rebranding/new launch, and social-media crisis dialogue. For each scenario, eight matched briefs were created with tone variants, channel information, and low/high risk tags. The study compares four system configurations: Base LLM (C1), LLM with Prolog-style policy-as-code guardrails (C2), interaction scaffolding using an Intent | Evidence | Self-check protocol (C3), and combined scaffolding plus guardrails (C4). The final corpus contains 96 structured six-turn dialogues, 24 per condition, involving Digital Marketer, AI Assistant, and End User roles. Two trained annotators coded turns using a shared codebook for speech acts, goal states, norm references, evidence use, explanations, commitment, conflict, and repair. Measures include Semiotic

Alignment, Normative Governance/Explanation Quality, Collective Action, Outcome Quality, Trust, and Time-to-consensus.

Summary of Findings

Results show clear improvements over Base. Mean ACI rises from 0.387 in C1 to 0.435 with guardrails, 0.529 with interaction scaffolding, and 0.480 in the combined condition. Outcome Quality and Trust follow the same pattern: C3 produces the strongest results, with Trust increasing from 0.477 in C1 to 0.865. Guardrails improve performance over Base and provide auditable rule traces, but the combined condition does not outperform scaffolding alone, suggesting that governance layers can introduce friction if they are not tuned for marketing fluency. Explanation presence alone has approximately zero effect on acceptance. However, explanation quality is risk-contingent: it slightly increases acceptance in low-risk briefs and slightly decreases acceptance in high-risk briefs by making constraints more visible. Co-creation balance does not predict outcomes once governance condition is controlled, indicating that structured interaction and governance design matter more than superficial conversational symmetry.

Key Contributions

This paper contributes a marketing-native framework for trustworthy human-AI co-creation. Conceptually, ACI integrates semiotic alignment, normative governance, and collective action into a single account of collaborative marketing under constraints. Methodologically, it translates philosophical ideas about shared agency into measurable dialogue indices and outcome metrics that can be used in marketing workflows. Empirically, it shows that interaction scaffolding and policy-as-code guardrails can improve alignment, trust, quality, and consensus while preserving auditability. Managerially, ACI offers a practical blueprint for building marketing copilots as

auditable systems: encode policies as lightweight rules, require actionable explanations, gate high-risk claims through evidence and human review, and monitor collaboration quality over time. The study also refines the assumption that more explanation is always better by showing that explanation depth should be calibrated to risk, especially in sustainability claims, regulated communication, and social-media crisis response.

References are available upon request.

New Product Development, Innovation, and Technology

**BEYOND ADOPTION: LINKING PRE-ADOPTION PERFORMANCE
EXPECTATIONS TO POST-ADOPTION CONTINUANCE INTENTION TOWARD
AUGMENTED REALITY TRY-ON APPLICATIONS**

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Keywords: Augmented Reality Try-on, Continuance Intention, Post-Adoption Behavior, Performance Expectancy

Description: This study examines how pre-adoption performance expectations drive post-adoption confirmation, satisfaction, and sustained continuance intention toward augmented reality try-on applications.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Augmented reality (AR) virtual try-on applications are evolving from novelty-driven innovations to technologically mature, critical consumer platforms. Despite technological advances over the past decade, existing AR adoption research predominantly applies traditional acceptance frameworks to explain initial behavioral intention while neglecting post-adoption mechanisms that drive sustained use.

This study offers a conceptual framework grounded in the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM) (Bhatacherjee, 2001) for understanding post-consumption continuance intentions. The primary research question examines how consumers' pre-adoption performance expectations (Venkatesh et al., 2012) relate to actual try-on experiences, explores the cognitive and affective processes that contribute to satisfaction, and identifies the determinants of subsequent intentions to continue using AR try-on applications.

Method and Data

This study uses a quantitative survey design grounded in the ECM and UTAUT2. Data were collected via the Prolific crowdsourcing platform using authenticated scales adapted from prior literature. To ensure a consistent AR experience, all participants used a web-based AR eyewear try-on application during the survey. The survey was administered online to US residents with prior experience using AR try-on applications. Following the removal of incomplete responses, the number of valid responses remaining for analysis was 221. For data analysis, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied.

Summary of Findings

The findings provide solid empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework. Performance expectancy significantly influences perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.153$, $t = 2.551$, $p < .005$) and post-adoption confirmation ($\beta = 0.197$, $t = 2.867$, $p < .002$). The impact of expectation confirmation on perceived usefulness is exceptionally strong ($\beta = 0.710$, $t = 14.587$, $p < .00$), highlighting confirmation as the fundamental mechanism by which expectations translate into cognitive value. Furthermore, perceived usefulness ($\beta = 0.479$, $t = 6.971$, $p < .00$) and confirmation of expectations

($\beta = 0.450$, $t = 7.047$, $p < .00$) both significantly enhance satisfaction, indicating that satisfaction is jointly determined by utility value and expectation fulfillment. Finally, satisfaction is a primary affective driver that strongly predicts continuance intention ($\beta = 0.483$, $t = 6.849$, $p < .00$). At the same time, perceived usefulness also directly leads to continued use ($\beta = 0.363$, $t = 5.334$, $p < .00$). These findings illustrate that the confirmation of expectations effectively drives sustained engagement with AR try-on.

Key Contributions

This research makes three key contributions to theory and practice. First, it advances the AR try-on literature by shifting the focus from early acceptance to post-acceptance continuance, showing how pre-adoption performance expectancy influences post-adoption confirmation, usefulness, satisfaction, and continuance intention. Second, the study introduces a new theoretical framework by integrating the ECM with the UTAUT2. This integration extends the scope of ECM from traditional information systems to immersive, interactive, and experiential technologies. It empirically demonstrates their complementarity and highlights performance expectancy as an essential lens for understanding the confirmation process. Third, it contributes to consumer experience research by moving beyond hedonic fun or ease of use, revealing that continuance intention is driven by cognitive and affective assessments grounded in expectation confirmation. For practitioners, the findings suggest that successful AR try-on implementation requires consistently meeting or exceeding consumer expectations to foster sustained customer value and engagement.

References are available upon request.

CHARACTERIZING THE INNOVATIVE DESIGNS OF SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS —AN APPROACH OF THINGS THAT TRIGGER THINGS

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Keywords: sustainable product, things that trigger things, design-driven
ecosystem (DDE), design independency, design complementarity

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

This study addresses the following questions: (1) how do sustainable product innovations function as triggers that stimulate subsequent innovations across products, organizations, and industries? (2) what roles do design independency, design complementarity, and design modularity play in shaping the trigger-based relationships that characterize sustainable innovation ecosystems? (3) how can the Design-Driven Ecosystem (DDE) framework help explain the mechanisms through which sustainable products contribute to systemic sustainability transformation beyond the environmental performance of individual products?

Method and Data

Drawing on Wiberg's (2022) concept of "things that trigger things," this study examines sustainable products as innovation triggers capable of stimulating subsequent innovations and sustainability-oriented actions across ecosystems. To operationalize this perspective, the author applies the Design-Driven Ecosystem (DDE) framework proposed by Huang (2022), which focuses on the structural relationships among design activities through the dimensions of design independency, design complementarity, and design modularity. Using a qualitative multiple-case study approach, three sustainability-oriented brands—Spring Pool Glass, Patagonia, and adidas—are analyzed to identify how sustainable product innovations generate cascading effects within and beyond their original industries.

Summary of Findings

The comparative analysis of Spring Pool Glass, Patagonia, and adidas reveals a common pattern in which sustainable product innovations function not merely as isolated outcomes but as triggers that stimulate subsequent innovations across broader networks of actors, products, and industries. Through the lens of Design-Driven

Ecosystem (DDE), these cases demonstrate that sustainable innovation emerges from interconnected design activities characterized by design independency, design complementarity, and design modularity.

Across the three cases, innovations in materials, production processes, products, services, and community engagement generate cascading effects that encourage further design activities and collaborations. These trigger-based relationships illustrate how sustainable products can initiate new value creation opportunities beyond their original functional boundaries. In this sense, sustainable products become active agents that mobilize additional innovations, rather than passive artifacts designed solely for environmental performance.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that trigger-based sustainable innovation is not limited to high-technology sectors or digitally connected ecosystems. The case of Spring Pool Glass demonstrates that traditional manufacturing industries can also generate significant innovation spillovers through the strategic development of design complementarity and circular resource flows. Similarly, Patagonia and adidas show how sustainable material innovations can diffuse across organizational and industry boundaries, encouraging broader adoption of environmentally responsible practices.

In sum, these findings indicate that the innovative potential of sustainable products should be evaluated not only by their direct environmental benefits but also by their capacity to trigger subsequent innovations, partnerships, and sustainable practices throughout a wider ecosystem. This perspective extends the understanding of sustainability from product optimization toward systemic transformation, where sustainable products serve as catalysts for long-term ecological, social, and economic value creation.

Key Contributions

This study might contribute to the sustainable innovation and design literature in three important ways as follows. First, it extends Wiberg's (2022) concept of "things that trigger things" by moving beyond its primarily conceptual treatment and developing an operational framework for understanding how trigger-based relations generate sustainable product innovations. While prior studies have emphasized the interconnected nature of things and sociotechnical systems, limited attention has been paid to the specific design mechanisms through which innovations propagate across products, organizations, and infrastructures. Second, this study introduces the Design-Driven Ecosystem (DDE) as a design-centered analytical framework for characterizing sustainable innovation. By examining design independency, design complementarity, and design modularity, the framework reveals the structural

conditions that enable products to trigger subsequent innovations and create cascading sustainability effects. In doing so, the study provides researchers with a novel method for analyzing sustainable innovation beyond conventional business ecosystem or lifecycle perspectives. Third, this study advances a new perspective on sustainable products. Rather than viewing sustainable products as isolated artifacts with improved environmental performance, it conceptualizes them as innovation triggers capable of activating broader networks of actors, practices, and material flows. This perspective shifts the focus of sustainable design from optimizing individual products toward designing for systemic transformation, thereby offering valuable implications for designers, managers, and organizations seeking to create long-term sustainability impact through innovation ecosystems.

SMARTER FIELDS, SMARTER CHOICES: A VALUE-DRIVEN APPROACH TO FARMERS' ADOPTION OF SMART FARMING SYSTEMS

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Keywords: Smart Farming Systems; Technology Adoption; Perceived Value;
Innovation Resistance; Digital Agriculture

Description: This study explains how perceived value influences farmers' adoption of smart farming systems through cognitive evaluations and how innovation resistance weakens this process.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Smart farming systems have been widely promoted as a solution for improving agricultural productivity, reducing resource consumption, and supporting sustainable development. Despite substantial investments by governments and agritech firms, adoption among smallholder farmers remains relatively low. Existing research generally explains adoption from either a perceived value perspective or an innovation

resistance perspective. However, these two streams have largely developed independently.

As a result, an important question remains unanswered: Why do many farmers recognize the potential value of smart farming systems but still hesitate to adopt them?

To address this gap, this study develops a value–cognition–resistance framework by integrating Perceived Value Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Innovation Resistance Theory. We propose that functional, emotional, and social value influence adoption intention through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, while value, risk, and tradition barriers weaken these cognitive mechanisms.

Method And Data

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods design. Survey data were collected from 236 farmers in Henan Province, China, a major agricultural region characterized by smallholder farming. Perceived value was measured through functional, emotional, and social value dimensions. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and adoption intention were adapted from established technology adoption scales. Innovation resistance was measured through value, risk, and tradition barriers.

Reliability and validity tests confirmed satisfactory measurement quality. Mediation effects were examined using PROCESS Model 4, while moderated mediation effects were tested using PROCESS Model 8.

To enrich the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 farmers representing different ages, farm sizes, and technology experiences. The interviews explored perceived benefits, concerns, and decision-making processes regarding smart farming systems.

Summary of Findings

All three value dimensions positively influence adoption intention. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use mediate the effects of emotional and social value, whereas functional value retains a strong direct effect. Innovation resistance weakens these cognitive pathways, particularly those involving perceived ease of use, suggesting that ease of use is the most vulnerable mechanism under conditions of resistance.

Interview findings provide additional insight into these relationships. Farmers frequently associated smart farming systems with visible productivity gains, labor savings, and improved farm management. Social value often emerged through peer demonstration, as farmers became more willing to adopt technologies after observing successful outcomes among neighboring farmers. Emotional value was linked to increased confidence and peace of mind through real-time monitoring.

Importantly, resistance was rarely driven by outright rejection. Instead, farmers expressed concerns about learning difficulty, financial uncertainty, and potential mistakes. Many preferred to observe early adopters before making their own adoption decisions.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to marketing and technology adoption research in three ways.

First, it integrates Perceived Value Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and Innovation Resistance Theory into a unified value–cognition–resistance framework, explaining how perceived value is translated into adoption intention under conditions of resistance.

Second, the study extends technology acceptance research to the context of smallholder agriculture, a setting characterized by uncertainty, resource constraints, and reliance on experiential knowledge. The findings demonstrate that resistance beliefs significantly shape cognitive evaluations of technology, particularly perceived ease of use.

Third, qualitative evidence suggests that farmers are not necessarily resistant to technology itself but to uncertainty surrounding its implementation and outcomes. This insight extends innovation resistance research by highlighting the importance of confidence-building processes in technology adoption.

Managerially, the findings suggest that agritech firms and policymakers should complement value communication with peer demonstrations, training programs, and risk-reduction strategies to accelerate smart farming adoption.

Retailing and Pricing

BEYOND DIGITAL GRAVITY: THE EFFICIENCY-OPTIMIZATION EFFECT OF MATURE MOBILE APPS ON THE OFFLINE GROCERY JOURNEY

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Keywords: Customer Journey Experience, Efficiency-optimization, Digital Gravity, Omnichannel Retailing, Bayesian Gaussian Copula

Description: This study investigates how short-term promotional exposure and long-term habitual engagement with a non-transactional CRM app differentially drive offline visit frequency and per-trip purchase amount, and whether mature app engagement amplifies or attenuates consumers' sensitivity to spatial travel costs, using a Bayesian joint Poisson–Lognormal copula model.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers have increasingly invested in mobile applications under the assumption of "Digital Gravity" — the belief that digital touchpoints universally mitigate spatial friction and drive both visit frequency and transaction value (Neslin, 2022). This optimistic framing was largely established by studies of transactional apps that directly enable purchase and delivery, where any observed behavioral shift conflates the app's informational role with channel-substitution effects (Lim, et al., 2022). We instead examine a non-transactional CRM app —

providing digital flyers, promotions, and loyalty features but incapable of processing purchases itself — isolating pure informational engagement from channel cannibalization. As such apps mature into everyday infrastructure rather than novel marketing channels, we challenge the industry myth that engagement acts as an unconditional revenue booster across the customer journey (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), proposing instead an "Efficiency-Optimization Effect" whereby mature, habitual usage induces stage-dependent behavioral changes (Van Heerde et al., 2019). Specifically: (1) How do short-term promotional exposure and long-term habitual app engagement differentially affect physical visit frequency versus purchase amount? (2) Does mature digital engagement amplify or diminish consumers' distance sensitivity in store-visit decisions? (3) How do these asymmetric, stage-dependent effects reconfigure the offline customer journey in a mature omnichannel environment?

Method and Data

We utilize a 36-month longitudinal panel dataset (July 2021–June 2024) covering 1,186 consumer panelist, integrating three data streams: GPS and Wifi fingerprint spatial tracking of in-store dwell time, CRM mobile application screen-time logs, and credit card transaction records. To establish robust temporal precedence and mitigate reverse-causality concerns, we anchor app exposure measurement to each daily transaction episode, decomposing engagement into a short-term metric (a 3-day window capturing tactical promotional exposure) and a long-term metric (a 28-day window capturing habitual usage intensity). These episode-level measures are subsequently aggregated into monthly averages, both to align temporal resolution with purchase outcomes and to attenuate daily time-series noise; this aggregation procedure substantially reduces the location-data missing rate from 15.75% to 6.48%. We estimate a Bayesian joint model

combining a Poisson specification for purchase frequency with a Hurdle Log-Normal specification for conditional purchase amount, linked through a Gaussian copula and estimated via Hamiltonian Monte Carlo with the No-U-Turn Sampler (Chintala, et al., 2023; Lim, et al., 2022). To ensure model convergence and prevent overfitting given data sparsity in the conditional amount equation, we specify a parsimonious heterogeneity structure incorporating random effects exclusively on baseline intercepts, while residual missing entries are handled through principled Missing-at-Random Bayesian imputation.

Summary of Findings

The empirical results reveal a striking temporal asymmetry in how digital engagement reconfigures offline shopping behavior. For purchase frequency(β), both short-term promotional exposure ($\beta_{\text{short}} = +0.195$, $p < 0.01$) and long-term habitual engagement ($\beta_{\text{long}} = +0.441$, $p < .01$) significantly increase store visits, functioning as effective "trip generators" regardless of exposure horizon. A more striking duality, however, emerges in the purchase-amount equation(γ): while short-term promotional exposure modestly expands immediate spending ($\gamma_{\text{short}} = +0.138$, $p < .01$), long-term habitual app usage systematically reduces per-trip purchase amounts ($\gamma_{\text{long}} = -0.090$, $p < .01$) — the same underlying engagement construct exerts opposing effects depending on its temporal horizon. Furthermore, contrary to the Digital Gravity hypothesis, long-term app engagement significantly sharpens rather than dampens distance sensitivity in the frequency equation ($\beta_{\text{long} \times \text{dist}} = -0.135$, $p < .01$), indicating that habituated consumers become more, not less, selective about which physical store to patronize. Finally, the Gaussian copula dependence parameter ($\rho = 0.051$, $p < .01$) confirms a statistically meaningful positive endogeneity between frequency and amount decisions, empirically validating that jointly modeling these two outcomes

is methodologically necessary to correctly disentangle the nuanced, stage-dependent effects of mobile CRM engagement on offline shopping behavior.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances the omnichannel marketing literature by dismantling the aggregate "Engagement Myth" that has dominated both academic and managerial thinking about mobile apps. First, we demonstrate that within a mature app ecosystem, long-term engagement triggers a previously undocumented efficiency-optimization mechanism: habituated consumers leverage the app as a digital information filter to execute precise, plan-directed purchasing that minimizes incidental in-store spending, even as it continues to generate more frequent visits. Second, we overturn the prevailing Digital Gravity hypothesis by empirically demonstrating that mature app usage sharpens, rather than dulls, spatial selectivity — making consumers more sensitive, not less, to travel costs when deciding which store to visit. Methodologically, by isolating pre-transaction 3-day and 28-day exposure windows anchored to each purchase episode, and by employing a joint Poisson-Hurdle Log-Normal model with Gaussian copula framework with an intercept-only heterogeneity structure suited to sparse conditional data, we resolve the temporal-precedence confound that has limited prior adoption-phase studies and ensure robust, identifiable estimation. Managerially, our findings advise retailers operating mature CRM ecosystems to reorient mobile strategy away from blanket engagement maximization and toward information-utility design that accommodates the efficient, plan-directed execution goals characteristic of habituated digital consumers.

References are available upon request

THE IMPACT OF INFLATED REFERENCE PRICE ON E-COMMERCE STORE PREFERENCE: THE ROLES OF SUGROPHOBIA AND PERCEIVED DECEPTION

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Keywords: Inflated reference price, perceived deception, sugrophobia, e-commerce

Description: our research demonstrates that inflated reference prices can backfire when consumers compare identical products offered at the same sale price across competing online retailers.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers frequently use inflated reference prices to create the perception of steeper discounts. This practice remains widespread, from mega-retailers such as Amazon to smaller online sellers (Harding 2024; ClassAction.org 2025), suggesting that competition among ecommerce platforms does not necessarily eliminate deceptive pricing practices (Staelin et al. 2023). Despite extensive research on reference pricing, little is known about how inflated reference prices affect consumers' platform choice when sale prices are identical. To address this

gap, we propose that inflated reference prices in e-commerce can backfire, reducing sales for the retailer that employs it, particularly for mass-produced products that are widely available across platforms. We argue that consumers prefer retailers that list lower reference prices, even when sale prices are the same, and that this backfire effect is amplified among sugrophobic consumers and driven by perceived deception.

Method and Data

We conducted two experimental studies to address our research questions. The first study consisted of a 2 (Sugrophobia: high vs. low) x 2 (Reference prices: same vs. different) between-subjects design. To manipulate one's level of sugrophobia, we offered two scenarios (deceptive vs. neutral) to condition the respondents to be high- versus low-sugrophobia groups. This study tested the main effect of inflated reference price and the moderation effect of sugrophobia on store preferences. The second study was a two-cell, between-subjects design with the mediator, perceived deception. This study examined the mediating role of perceived deception on store preferences. Both studies had similar stimulus designs, with the only differences being the product category and the reference and sale prices. The first study used a mattress priced at \$420.99, while the second study used a TV priced at \$699. Across studies, standard attention and manipulation checks were included.

Summary of Findings

In study 1, we found that the participants preferred the store with a lower reference price to the store with a higher reference price. This finding contradicts existing literature that the inflated reference price helps gain more sales. In addition, we found that the more sugrophobic

participants, the higher preference for the store with a lower reference price even when the sale price is the same. In study 2, we replicated the finding of study 1 that the customers preferred to shop at the store with a lower reference price than the store with a higher reference price. More importantly, we found support that customers preferred the store with a lower reference price because the store with a higher reference price was perceived to be deceptive. This result indicates that inflated reference price could reduce sales in eCommerce, rather than increasing them by creating the perception of larger discounts.

Key Contributions

This research makes three contributions. First, we extend the reference pricing literature by demonstrating that inflated reference prices can backfire in competitive online settings. Second, we identify consumer sugrophobic tendencies and perceived deception as key mechanisms shaping store choice under reference price inflation. Finally, our findings offer important implications for retailers and policymakers by highlighting the potential negative consequences of inflated reference pricing in e-commerce.

WHEN BIG DISCOUNTS BACKFIRE: THE ROLE OF FRAMING AND PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE

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Keywords: discount framing; persuasion knowledge; pricing tactics persuasion knowledge
(PTPK); skepticism; purchase intentions

Description: This research examines when framing discounts as "Was X% higher" versus "Now Y% lower" increases purchase intentions and identifies consumer persuasion knowledge and skepticism as key boundary conditions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Retailers frequently communicate discounts using percentage-based claims, yet equivalent discounts can be framed differently depending on the reference point. Prior research demonstrates that framing discounts relative to the sale price (e.g., "Was 54% higher") produces larger numerical percentages and higher purchase intentions than framing them relative to the original price (e.g., "Now 35% lower"). However, it remains unclear whether this effect extends to deep discounts, where the implied percentage may exceed 100%.

Drawing on persuasion knowledge theory, we propose that the effectiveness of "Was X% higher" framing depends on both discount magnitude and consumers' Pricing Tactics Persuasion Knowledge (PTPK). Specifically, while moderate discounts benefit from the larger numerical percentage, extremely large discounts may trigger skepticism among consumers who recognize persuasive pricing tactics. Accordingly, we expect the effect of "Was X% higher" framing to weaken, and potentially reverse, for consumers with high PTPK when evaluating large discounts. We further propose that skepticism mediates the relationship between discount framing and purchase intentions.

Method and Data

Three experimental studies tested the proposed framework. Study 1 employed a 2 (discount size: moderate vs. large) $\times$ 2 (discount framing: "Now Y% lower" vs. "Was X% higher") between-subjects design using 304 MTurk participants evaluating mattress advertisements. Study 2 (N = 360 undergraduate students) incorporated Pricing Tactics Persuasion Knowledge (PTPK) as a

measured continuous moderator while retaining the framing manipulation from Study 1. Moderated regression analyses using PROCESS examined the three-way interaction among discount size, framing, and PTPK. Study 3 (N = 159) focused on large discounts using an espresso machine advertisement and tested whether skepticism mediated the interaction between framing and PTPK through moderated mediation (PROCESS Model 7). Across studies, purchase intentions served as the primary dependent variable, while validated scales measured PTPK and skepticism.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that the effectiveness of framing discounts as "Was X% higher" depends on both discount size and consumers' Pricing Tactics Persuasion Knowledge (PTPK). Study 1 replicated prior findings by showing that, for moderate discounts, "Was X% higher" framing resulted in higher purchase intentions than "Now Y% lower" framing. However, this effect did not extend to large discounts. Study 2 demonstrated that PTPK moderated these effects. Consumers with high PTPK responded more favorably to "Was X% higher" framing for moderate discounts but less favorably when the same framing generated very large percentage claims. In contrast, consumers with low PTPK preferred "Was X% higher" framing across both discount levels. Study 3 demonstrated that skepticism mediates these effects. High-PTPK consumers viewed large "Was X% higher" claims as less credible, leading to greater skepticism and lower purchase intentions, whereas skepticism did not account for responses among low-PTPK consumers. Overall, the findings identify an important boundary condition for discount framing and explain the process through which persuasion knowledge influences consumer responses.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to comparative price-framing literature by identifying discount size as an important boundary condition for the effectiveness of sale-price-based framing. It also introduces PTPK as a moderator that explains when consumers respond favorably to large numerical discount claims and when those claims instead increase skepticism. By identifying skepticism as the underlying process, the research connects work on discount framing with persuasion knowledge and consumer skepticism.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that framing discounts as "Was X% higher" is effective for moderate discounts but should be used cautiously for deep discounts, particularly when targeting consumers who are knowledgeable about pricing tactics. These findings also have implications for retailers and policymakers concerned with misleading price claims and deceptive promotional practices.

References are available upon request.

B2B Marketing and Interorganizational Issues

BEYOND THE POLANYI PARADOX IN B2B MARKETING: LEVERAGING AI TO EXTRACT TACIT USER KNOWLEDGE IN PRODUCT-LED GROWTH(PLG)

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Keywords: Product-Led Growth, Agentic AI, Tacit Knowledge, Buying Center, Cognitive Entrenchment

Description: This paper develops a conceptual framework examining how agentic artificial intelligence can overcome the Polanyi Paradox in B2B marketing by extracting non-codified tacit user knowledge from digital exhaust to accelerate product-led growth.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Traditional B2B marketing relies heavily on salesperson-led discovery to navigate complex organizational buying centers and capture the deep, non-codified domain expertise of prospective buyers (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981). With the rapid emergence of Product-Led Growth (PLG) as a self-service customer acquisition strategy, organizations face a critical knowledge constraint known as the Polanyi Paradox: users routinely know more than they can explicitly articulate (Polanyi, 1966). This paper addresses three interrelated research questions. First, how can small, resource-constrained firms utilize agentic artificial intelligence capabilities to analyze unstructured intent data and bypass traditional organizational gatekeepers (Morgan, Slotegraaf, and Vorhies, 2009). Second, through what exact mechanisms can agentic AI systems dynamically extract and operationalize implicit user habits and workarounds from digital exhaust to achieve a value-first product experience (Wedel and Kannan, 2016). Finally, how do interorganizational governance conditions, specifically strategic relationship value and the

buying firm's customer-centric organizational structure, moderate the efficacy of this bottom-up adoption funnel in driving long-term relationship stickiness and value co-creation (Heide and John, 1992; Lee, Kozlenkova, and Palmatier, 2015).

Method and Data

This paper is a conceptual study that synthesizes disparate theoretical streams to build a comprehensive framework for AI-augmented B2B marketing. Consequently, traditional empirical data collection methods are not applicable to this work. Instead, the methodology relies on a rigorous theoretical integration of Buying Center theory (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981), the organizational knowledge-creation literature on the Polanyi Paradox (Polanyi, 1966), and Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2014). By mapping the capabilities of advanced agentic artificial intelligence against unstructured digital behavioral traces, the study develops an explanatory system comprising six distinct research propositions. To demonstrate the real-world plausibility of these conceptual relationships, the paper analyzes contemporary practice illustrations from market-leading enterprise tools, including intent platforms like 6sense and automated productivity suites like Microsoft 365 Copilot (Chintagunta and Haldar, 2023; Moorman and Day, 2016). This multi-domain conceptual synthesis establishes a reliable boundary framework and sets up concrete operational directions for subsequent empirical field testing, longitudinal case analysis, and platform-based A/B experiments.

Summary of Findings

The framework demonstrates that agentic AI serves as a powerful catalyst for funnel smoothing, enabling small, resource-constrained B2B firms to bypass traditional buying-center gatekeepers by acting on unstructured intent data. The core mechanism introduces a tacit-to-value conversion

process, wherein AI systems learn from behavioral observation rather than explicit interrogation, thereby resolving the burden of uncodified discovery. This operationalization of tacit knowledge creates immediate value-first experiences that compress organizational adoption cycles and foster interorganizational value co-creation. Furthermore, the study identifies critical boundary conditions that alter these performance outcomes. Strategic relationship value acts as a negative moderator: when formal inter-firm ties and protocols are dense, automated bypassing is often interpreted as norm-violating passive opportunism, thereby dampening funnel effectiveness (Heide and John, 1992). Conversely, a customer-centric organizational structure within the buying firm serves as a positive signal amplifier, legitimizing grassroots, user-led technology trials and accelerating the product's institutional scaling (Lee, Kozlenkova, and Palmatier, 2015). Over time, this deep behavioral alignment culminates in cognitive entrenchment, generating a highly defensible relationship moat grounded in shared transactive memory.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research offers vital contributions to both academic scholarship and marketing practice. Academically, it extends the Polanyi Paradox by showing that agentic AI can capture the functional signature of non-codified human expertise from digital traces, converting tacit knowledge into usable product utility (Polanyi, 1966). It reorients Buying Center theory by positioning the end-user as the primary initiator of B2B procurement, establishing a bottom-up adoption pathway where influence accumulates through demonstrated workflow fit rather than mediated sales persuasion (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981). Additionally, it introduces cognitive entrenchment as a modern foundation for relationship stickiness, locating competitive advantage within the learned loop of the user-machine interaction rather than traditional contract-based lock-in (Moorman and Day, 2016). For practitioners, particularly resource-constrained small

firms, it provides a viable strategy to scale efficiently without the capital requirements of large-scale sales infrastructures (Morgan, Slotegraaf, and Vorhies, 2009). Finally, it alerts managers to the operational boundary of relational governance, highlighting the risk of a gatekeeper backlash or shadow IT label, and prescribes a dual strategy that builds organizational legitimacy in parallel with user-led adoption (Wathne and Heide, 2000).

References are available upon request.

Collective Service Sensemaking in B2B Buying: How Decision-Making Units Interpret and Align Evaluations of Complex Service Offerings

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Keywords: collective service offering sensemaking; organizational buying / buying center; identity-based interpretive frames; interpretive sufficiency; B2B service evaluation

Description: This paper conceptualizes complex B2B service offering evaluation as collective service offering sensemaking, explaining how buying centers transform identity-rooted interpretive fragmentation into interpretive sufficiency, negotiated adequacy that enables collective action despite persistent disagreement, when service value-in-use cannot be verified before adoption.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Organizations increasingly procure complex B2B service offerings—managed digital infrastructures, enterprise data platforms, financial risk solutions—whose value-in-use cannot be verified before adoption. Unlike goods, service offerings lack a stable pre-adoption evaluative referent: technical actors cannot confirm integration performance, financial actors cannot model lifecycle cost from observed usage, and compliance actors cannot verify regulatory alignment until the service is enacted. Such evaluations are undertaken by buying centers comprising functionally differentiated actors. Buying center theory has mapped who participates and how influence is distributed, yet offers limited insight into how cross-functional actors collectively construct and stabilize shared evaluations when their initial interpretations diverge. This study asks how buying centers construct, contest, and align interpretations of a vendor's service offering under conditions where value cannot be observed in advance. Three sub-questions guide the inquiry: (1) How do identity-rooted interpretations of expected value-in-use emerge among buying center members? (2) Through what interactional mechanisms do these interpretations evolve during collective evaluation? (3) How do contextual and institutional conditions shape alignment or persistent divergence? We conceptualize B2B service offering evaluation as collective service offering sensemaking, integrating sensemaking theory, social identity theory, and shared mental model research to explain why interpretations diverge and how they are provisionally reconciled.

Method and Data

We employed a multi-phase, cross-sectional qualitative multiple-case study across six organizations spanning three procurement-intensive B2B service sectors—telecommunications, insurance, and financial services—in Ghana (2022–2024). Two organizations per sector were theoretically sampled for formalized multi-stakeholder procurement, high-stakes service evaluation, and variation in governance and decision structures. Adopting an abductive stance, we iterated between data and sensitizing concepts (sensemaking, social identity, shared mental models) while remaining open to emergent patterns. Data collection proceeded in three iterative phases. Phase 1 comprised 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews with procurement, finance, IT, engineering, and operations managers (8–30 years’ experience), yielding 476 pages of transcripts. Phase 2 involved three sector-mapped focus groups of practitioners independent of Phase 1, enabling sector-level triangulation and producing 287 pages. Phase 3 entailed non-participant observation of five live procurement meetings across three organizations (86 pages of field notes), capturing deliberation sequences, role dynamics, and consensus-building in situ. Analysis used NVivo, beginning with line-by-line open coding, phase-tagging of quotations to track temporal salience, and iterative synthesis into themes. Trustworthiness followed Lincoln and Guba’s criteria through data triangulation, independent analyst cross-checks, participant reflection, rich contextual description, and verification of theoretical saturation.

Summary of Findings

Service evaluations originate not in aggregated independent judgments but in identity-rooted interpretive frames that differ systematically across technical, financial, procurement/compliance, and operational roles. These frames reflect professional commitments rather than mere role differences and shift in salience across the evaluation arc—technical frames dominate early,

financial and compliance frames ascend during cost and risk review, and operational frames during implementation planning. Because value-in-use cannot be verified pre-adoption, each function constructs its evaluation from anticipated rather than observable evidence, intensifying fragmentation. Buying centers navigate this divergence through four interactional sensemaking practices: interpretive bridging (translating one function's logic into terms others accept), narrative negotiation (co-constructing endorsable storylines), controlled dissent (surfacing then containing minority concerns), and evaluative rituals (scoring grids and templates that substitute for absent performance data). These practices crystallize into interpretive sufficiency—a threshold of negotiated adequacy enabling action despite residual disagreement—which manifests as three alignment forms: interpretive stability (position adjustment), selective amplification (frame dominance), and stable misalignment (proceeding while dissent persists on record). Throughout, contextual sensemaking anchors—organizational culture, relationship history and trust, and regulatory regime—condition which interpretations gain legitimacy, explaining why similar buying center compositions produce divergent alignment outcomes across organizations and sectors.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study advances buying center theory, sensemaking research, and service scholarship by explaining the interpretive mechanics that structural accounts leave unaddressed. First, we introduce interpretive sufficiency, a novel construct explaining how buying centers proceed with decisions amid unresolved disagreement: they act once a threshold of negotiated adequacy is reached rather than upon full convergence. This extends shared mental model theory beyond its consensus assumption and identifies three distinct forms of service value alignment. Interpretive

sufficiency differs from satisficing in being a collectively constructed threshold emerging from interaction, not an individual decision heuristic. Second, we specify four interactional mechanisms—interpretive bridging, narrative negotiation, controlled dissent, and evaluative rituals—through which fragmented identity-based logics become workable collective evaluations, filling the processual gap structural buying center research has left open. Two supporting contributions follow. Third, grounding the model in social identity theory establishes professional identity commitments, not role assignments or information asymmetries, as the micro-foundational source of evaluative fragmentation, and explains the temporal layering of frame salience. Fourth, we identify contextual sensemaking anchors as cross-cutting conditions that substitute for absent pre-adoption evidence, explaining cross-organizational variation. Collectively, these contributions reposition B2B service evaluation as a negotiated interpretive process shaped by identity, interaction, and context.

References are available upon request.

INTERORGANIZATIONAL PROXIMITY AND MARKETING COOPERATION

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Keywords: Interorganizational Proximity; Marketing Cooperation; Cluster Internationalization; Export Market Intelligence; Green Marketing Cooperation

Description: This paper develops an integrative conceptual framework explaining how non-spatial proximities shape and support marketing cooperation in cluster internationalization contexts.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Industrial and geographic clusters are established to enhance regional competitiveness, innovation, and economic development. However, achieving sustained success requires that cluster organizations and their member firms develop and maintain effective connections with international markets. Understanding how firms can cooperate to achieve collective advantages while preserving their individual competitive positions remains a significant challenge in cluster and marketing research.

To address this challenge, this extended abstract synthesizes findings from five interrelated studies to show how non-spatial proximity shapes marketing cooperation and internationalization in cluster organizations. The first study identifies the key marketing-related themes associated with the international success of cluster organizations. The second investigates the relationships among the dimensions of non-spatial proximity. The third examines how these proximity dimensions influence marketing cooperation and the generation and dissemination of export marketing intelligence. The remaining studies build on these findings by exploring collaborative green marketing and integrating them into a comprehensive conceptual framework that links proximity, marketing cooperation, export marketing intelligence, and sustainability within cluster organizations.

Collectively, these studies answer the overarching research question: How do non-spatial proximity dimensions influence marketing cooperation, export marketing intelligence, and collaborative green marketing in cluster organizations, and how can these relationships contribute to international competitiveness and sustainable development in industrial clusters?

Method and Data

As a conceptual review article, this study does not involve primary empirical data collection. Instead, it synthesizes findings from five empirical studies using methodologies that include bibliometric analysis, cluster analysis, data collection from industrial clusters and their organizations, and qualitative and quantitative analyses. By integrating these approaches, the paper provides a reference for future research in this field.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that different dimensions of proximity relate to marketing cooperation and the generation of export marketing intelligence. They also show that each dimension of proximity provides a distinct foundation for different forms of marketing collaboration. Finally, this research conceptualizes a framework that integrates firms' interactions, interorganizational proximities, and collaborative activities across the different stages of green marketing.

Key Contributions

This research synthesizes the validated findings of five previous studies into a coherent conceptual framework. By consolidating evidence from multiple empirical investigations, the study highlights the core determinants of successful interorganizational cooperation rather than repeating earlier exploratory work. Consequently, the study provides a clear and practical roadmap for future research.

Integrating diverse research methodologies within a single framework also offers useful methodological guidance for researchers investigating similar topics and supports the selection of appropriate research designs.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers, decision-makers, and cluster managers should create conditions that support the specific forms of interorganizational

cooperation needed to enhance cluster competitiveness and international performance. Finally, the conceptual model proposed in this study highlights the need for closer collaboration among academics, policymakers, and cluster organizations to advance both research and practice.

MICRO-FOUNDATIONS OF VALUE-BASED SELLING: THE ROLES OF PURPOSE, GRIT, AND MARKETING–SALES RIVALRY

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Keywords: Sense of purpose, value-based selling, salesperson's grit, intra-organizational conflicts

Paper description: Value-based selling succeeds not only because salespeople possess purpose and perseverance but also because organizations minimize marketing–sales rivalry that undermines value realization.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Value-based selling (VBS) has become a central strategic capability in business-to-business (B2B) markets because it enables firms to create and communicate customer value beyond

product features and price. Although prior research identifies organizational capabilities, sales processes, and managerial support as important drivers of VBS, relatively little is known about its micro-foundations. Specifically, why do some salespeople consistently engage in value-based selling while others rely on more transactional approaches? Moreover, under what organizational conditions does VBS actually translate into superior sales performance?

We address these questions by developing a person-behavior-context framework that integrates meaningful work theory, grit theory, and research on the marketing–sales interface. We argue that a salesperson's sense of purpose provides the motivational foundation for engaging in VBS, while grit supplies the persistence required to sustain complex customer value-creation behaviors. We further propose that marketing–sales rivalry constrains the effectiveness of VBS by weakening the firm's ability to convert customer value creation into sales performance. The framework offers a more complete explanation of how individual psychological resources and organizational context jointly shape value-based selling effectiveness.

Method and Data

The proposed model was tested using survey data collected from 235 business-to-business salespeople employed in the Indian IT services and manufacturing sectors. Established multi-item measures were used to operationalize sense of purpose, grit, value-based selling, marketing–sales rivalry, and sales performance. Reliability and validity were confirmed through assessments of internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common method bias.

Hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Direct effects examined the influence of sense of purpose and grit on value-based selling and the effect of VBS on sales performance. To test the proposed contingency, an interaction term between value-based selling and marketing–sales rivalry was estimated. The analytical approach enables simultaneous examination of psychological antecedents, behavioral mechanisms, contextual moderation, and performance outcomes within an integrated framework.

Summary of Findings

The results provide strong support for the proposed framework. Sense of purpose positively predicts value-based selling ($\beta = .673, p < .001$), suggesting that salespeople who view their work as meaningful are more likely to engage in customer value creation. Grit also exhibits a significant positive relationship with VBS ($\beta = .200, p < .001$), highlighting the importance of perseverance in sustaining complex selling behaviors.

Consistent with value-based selling literature, VBS positively influences sales performance ($\beta = .275, p < .001$). However, this relationship is contingent upon the internal organizational environment. Marketing–sales rivalry significantly weakens the positive effect of VBS on performance ($\beta = -.175, p < .001$), indicating that cross-functional conflict limits the firm's ability to convert customer value creation into realized business outcomes. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that successful value-based selling depends not only on motivated and resilient salespeople but also on organizational conditions that support value delivery across functional boundaries.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to marketing theory in three important ways.

First, it advances value-based selling research by identifying sense of purpose and grit as micro-foundational psychological resources that explain why salespeople engage in value-based selling. This shifts the theoretical focus beyond capabilities and organizational practices toward individual motivation and self-regulation.

Second, the study extends research on the marketing-sales interface by theorizing and demonstrating marketing-sales rivalry as a boundary condition that constrains the effectiveness of customer-centric selling strategies. Rather than viewing cross-functional relationships solely through the lens of integration, the findings reveal how rivalry impedes value realization.

Third, the study develops and empirically validates a person–behavior–context framework that integrates individual psychology, salesperson behavior, and organizational climate within a single explanatory model. This framework offers a richer theoretical understanding of how customer value creation is transformed into firm performance and provides actionable guidance for organizations seeking to institutionalize value-based selling through both salesperson development and cross-functional alignment.

MOVING BURIDAN'S DONKEY: HOW CATEGORY ADVISING CHANGES POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE DEVIANCES BETWEEN PRINCIPALS

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Keywords: Category Captain (Advisors), Category Management, Customer-Oriented Deviance, Information Asymmetry, Interfirm Relationship

Description: A category captain (advisor) places their organization at a higher risk of positive customer-oriented deviance compared to traditional category managers who do not fall under retailer process, outcome, or structural controls.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question: Retailers allow supplier category managers exclusive information access and direct influence on merchandising decisions when acting as category captains. The category captain is managed by both retailer and supplier under process, outcome, and structural controls like an NDA (Anderson & Oliver, 1987; Crosno & Brown, 2015; Jaworski & Macinnis, 1989). Previous research established that while a supplier category captain has the potential to behave opportunistically, the arrangement is mutually beneficial for both supplier and retailer (Alan et

al., 2017; Chimhundu et al., 2015; Gooner et al., 2011; Hamister & Fortsch, 2016; Kim et al., 2023; Morgan et al., 2007; Subramanian et al., 2010; Timoumi et al., 2023).

The category captain balances conflicting goals from the supplier and retailer principals. A category captain prioritizes providing non-biased category merchandising recommendations due to competitive category managers competing for the category captain role (Alan et al., 2017; Nijs et al., 2014; Subramanian, Raju, et al., 2010). Both principals, the supplier and the retailer, use control mechanism to monitor and direct category captain behavior (Jaworski & Macinnis, 1989). This may cause the category captain to express indecision between their principals in the form of positive (Customer-Oriented) and negative (Information Asymmetry) deviance when sharing information between principals.

When prioritizing their relationship with the retailer, the captain may withhold or skew information, creating negative deviance, or bend or break supplier norms, creating positive deviance towards the retailer (Fazel-e-Hasan et al., 2019; Gaski, 1984; Leo & Russell-Bennett, 2014; Palmatier et al., 2007). Leading to the research question: *how does acting as a dual agent change positive and negative deviances between principals?*

Methods and Data: Data was collected through the Category Management Association and Shopper Insights Management Association (CMA | SIMA); they provided a 5,800-practitioner email distribution list for recruitment for the study. This resulted in 102 completed responses, of which 91 fit within the research framework of category captains and managers who are employed by suppliers.

To examine how communication and behavior changed based on job role classification, respondents were divided into three category advising groups: never, previous, or current experience as category captains. Customer-oriented deviance scales focusing on deviant service communication were used from Leo and Russell-Bennett's (2014) multidimensional scale. Information asymmetry was measured using the seven-item repeating scales asking about information held by a manager and by oneself (Jaworski & Macinnis, 1989). The difference score was calculated following Jaworski and Macinnis' (1989) methodology.

Linear models were estimated predicting 1) customer-oriented deviance and 2) information asymmetry. Both models included relevant control variables: years in role, reliance on retailer, work site location, self-evaluation on skills, performance review rating, self-efficacy, task ambiguity, altruism, and level of education. Scales without sufficient internal consistency ($\alpha < 0.7$) were dropped. Separate ANOVA tests were run using the three groups to measure how the means differed from one another. The ANOVA tests were followed by a Tukey's HSD post-hoc test to identify the exact factors that differed significantly (Cronk, 2008).

Summary of Findings: Respondents' experience with their level of category advising predicted their relationship to customer-oriented deviance. While the statistical model is strong, there is still a great deal of unexplained variance in the model ($R^2=0.25$). Multiple control variables were examined to see if there were other factors determining the model outcome.

Respondents showed a statistically significant effect in the ANOVA tests between the three groups ($F(2,88) = 15.23, p < 0.000$). A supplier incurs customer-oriented deviance risk when placing their category manager under retailer controls to act as category captains. Compared to the group with no experience as a category captain, respondents' level of customer-oriented deviance increases 1.1 points for having a history of acting as a category captain and 2.0 points if they are a current category captain.

Respondents had no statistically significant effect seen in the ANOVA test ($F(2, 88) = 1.46, p = 0.24$) on information asymmetry. We also did not find a moderating effect from output controls strengthening or process controls attenuating customer-oriented deviance or information asymmetry.

Summary of Key Contributions:

A supplier manager needs to be mindful that the category captain is more likely to deviate from their communication against supplier rules and norms. The difference between a category manager who never worked as a captain and current captains was a +2.0 increase in customer-oriented deviance $p = 0.000$. This effect remained present after a category manager who once worked as a captain returned to other roles. They had a +1.1 higher customer-oriented deviance from than a non-captaincy traditional category manager.

This research expands on dual agency theory by focusing on the way principal controls change the agent's communication and information sharing between principals. Previous research examined how a salesperson who negotiates for both the supplier and customer will experience

success in mutually beneficial ways to both sides (Lawrence et al., 2021). However, this research uncovered that the category captain acting as a dual agent will align closer to one of their two principals through customer-oriented deviance.

Future research should focus on the cause of customer-oriented deviance, as well as retesting controls or information asymmetry with higher sample sizes.

References available upon request

WHEN B2B MARKET THREAT INTENSITY HURTS GROWTH: EVIDENCE ON THE ROLE OF CEO DUALITY

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Keywords: B2B market threat intensity, CEO duality, Business growth performance, Threat–rigidity

Description: This study investigates how exposure to B2B market threat intensity shapes firms' subsequent business growth performance and whether CEO duality conditions this relationship.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The extant B2B research has largely focused on specific relational or transactional areas instead of examining the broader market-level threats faced by B2B firms. Our research question lies in understanding how the intensity of B2B threats—that is, the severity and relevance of unfavorable conditions—affects a firm's growth outcomes and influences managerial responses.

Method and Data

We test the proposed framework on publicly listed U.S. firms over a three-year observation window, yielding a panel dataset of B2B firms identified using the Compustat primary industry classifications. Business growth performance is operationalized as year-over-year sales growth,

with all independent variables lagged by one year, and CEO duality included as the moderator affecting the relationship between B2B market threat intensity and subsequent firm performance. A fixed-effects panel regression model was estimated to control for unobserved time-invariant firm heterogeneity. We control for leverage, firm size, R&D intensity, and capital expenditure intensity to account for heterogeneity in firms' financial constraints, organizational scale, innovation investments, and long-term capital commitments, all of which may affect growth outcomes independent of the focal relationships.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that B2B market threat intensity has a significant negative effect on subsequent business growth performance, indicating that firms exposed to higher interfirm uncertainty experience a marked decline in sales growth. The interaction between B2B market threat intensity and CEO duality is negative, suggesting that concentrated executive–board leadership amplifies the adverse growth consequences of B2B threat exposure. Taken together, these findings underscore that governance structure is a critical contingency shaping how firms absorb and respond to threats arising in business-to-business markets.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study offers two main contributions to marketing strategy and governance literature. First, drawing on threat–rigidity theory (Staw et al 1981), we highlight the importance of B2B market threat intensity and demonstrate how heightened interfirm threats debilitate firms' business growth performance. Second, the study is firmly rooted in investigating the pivotal role of CEO duality in shaping inter-firm discordant performance: by demonstrating that concentrated executive–board authority amplifies, rather than buffers, the adverse growth effects of B2B

threats. We add nuance to the long-standing agency–stewardship debate on dual leadership (Finkelstein and D'Aveni 1994; Krause et al. 2014) and reposition CEO duality as a governance contingency that conditions how firms convert market threats into performance outcomes.

“References are available upon request.”

Marketing Strategy and Management

IMPACT OF USER METRIC PERCEPTION ON METRIC UTILIZATION AND FIRM PERFORMANCE – “MARKETING THE MARKETING METRICS”

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Keywords: Marketing Metrics, Perception, Metric Use, Metric Adoption

Description: Using the lens of a user-centric perspective and bounded rationality of decision-makers, this paper aims to provide an explanation on how metric perception leads to different metric use behaviors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms routinely rely on marketing metrics that are objectively inferior, such as the Net Promoter Score or last-touch attribution, while under-adopting metrics with stronger validity and predictive power. Objective metric quality alone cannot explain this pattern. Through the lens of a user-centric perspective and bounded rationality of decision-makers, this research asks: (1) What is the impact of user perceptions on metric use and metric search? (2) How do users generate heterogeneous perceptions of a metric based on its characteristics? While prior research has largely focused on the problem that one cannot manage what cannot be measured possessing metrics alone is not sufficient to drive marketing performance. Therefore, we examine the mechanisms through which managers or metric users translate objective metric characteristics into heterogeneous metric use decisions. (Or how about something like “We therefore shift attention from the objective properties of metrics, which prior scholarship has established, to the subjective perceptions through which managers select, deploy, and ultimately benefit from them.”

Summary of Findings

We conceptualize User Metric Perception (UMP), a user's subjective evaluation of a metric, as the lens through which objective metric quality is converted into metric use. UMP has two components: Perceived Metric Characteristics (PMC), capturing how trustworthy, relevant, and diagnostic a user believes a metric to be, and Metric Utility (MU), capturing the user's assessment of its benefits, costs, and risks. Users do not perceive a metric's objective properties

directly. Through appraisal, they form perceptions that diverge from the objective baseline in two distinct ways: across construct spaces, where reliability, validity, and predictiveness are reconstrued as trustworthiness, relevance, and diagnosticity (the appraisal gap), and within construct spaces, where perceived benefits, costs, and risks depart in magnitude from their objective levels (the calibration gap). The interaction of PMC and MU predicts how a metric is used, from passive monitoring to active instrumental deployment, explaining why inferior metrics persist and superior ones are under-adopted. We also suggest user-, metric-, and firm-level moderators that shape these perceptions through distinct mechanisms, and a search process activates when metric outcomes disappoint.

Key Contributions

This research makes two main contributions. First, we introduce a user-centric framework, User Metric Perception (UMP), that explains how marketing metrics are selected, adopted, and used. Prior work has largely treated objective metric quality as the driver of metric use; we show instead that quality reaches use only through user perception. UMP captures this perceptual layer, opening the black box between a metric's objective properties and its deployment, and we identify the antecedents and moderators that shape it. Second, because the framework isolates the controllable factors that shift perception independently of objective quality, it offers prescriptions not available under an objective-quality view. For managers, it guides the selection and deployment of metrics that most effectively drive performance. For metric designers and operators, it identifies the perceptual levers, such as user education and metric presentation, that improve how measurement systems are received and used. For executives, it informs leadership and governance policies that steer the firm toward its most

beneficial metrics. In doing so, the framework reframes the practical question facing managers from whether a metric is good to whether users will perceive and use it well.

COMPETENCY RECONFIGURATION IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI: REVISITING THE TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL

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Keywords: Generative AI, Technology Acceptance Model, Competency, Task Performance, Human–AI Collaboration

Description: This study examines how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of generative AI influence task performance through the mediating role of individual competency.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming knowledge-based work by supporting content creation, problem solving, analysis, and decision-making. However, existing technology acceptance research provides limited explanation of how perceptions of generative AI translate into actual performance outcomes. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) has traditionally emphasized perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as key determinants of technology acceptance, often assuming that adoption and usability lead to improved performance. In generative AI contexts, this assumption may be insufficient because users must not only use the technology but also interpret, evaluate, and apply AI-generated outputs in task-specific situations. Accordingly, this study asks: How do perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use affect individual task performance in generative AI contexts, and does competency mediate these relationships? By positioning competency as a capability-based mechanism, the study revisits TAM and examines whether performance gains from generative AI arise through the reconfiguration of individual knowledge, skills, and judgment rather than through technology acceptance alone.

Method and Data

This study employed a quantitative survey design using data collected from professionals in South Korea who reported using generative AI in their work tasks. An online questionnaire was administered in May 2025, and after excluding incomplete or inconsistent responses, 204 valid observations were retained for analysis. Respondents represented diverse functional areas, including marketing, sales, information technology, business planning, and research, providing an appropriate empirical context for examining generative AI-enabled competency and task performance across organizational roles. All constructs were measured using multi-item scales

on a five-point Likert scale. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were adapted from the Technology Acceptance Model, while competency and task performance were measured using established scales modified for the generative AI context. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess reliability and validity. Structural equation modeling was then used to test the hypothesized relationships, and bootstrapped mediation analysis with 5,000 resamples was conducted to examine the mediating role of competency.

Summary of Findings

The results show that perceived usefulness plays a central role in explaining both competency and task performance in generative AI contexts. Perceived usefulness has a positive and significant effect on competency and task performance, indicating that individuals who view generative AI as useful are more likely to develop task-related capabilities and achieve stronger performance outcomes. Competency also has a significant positive effect on task performance, confirming its role as a key mechanism through which generative AI perceptions translate into performance. In contrast, perceived ease of use does not have a significant direct effect on either competency or task performance. However, mediation analysis shows that perceived ease of use indirectly influences task performance through competency. These findings suggest that ease of use alone is insufficient to generate performance gains in cognitively demanding AI contexts. Rather, performance improvements emerge when individuals develop the competency required to interpret, evaluate, and contextually apply AI-generated outputs in their work.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to the marketing and technology acceptance literature by extending TAM from an adoption-oriented model to a competency-based framework for understanding performance in generative AI contexts. First, it identifies competency as a central mediating mechanism linking generative AI perceptions to task performance, thereby shifting attention from tool adoption to human capability development. Second, the findings refine the theoretical role of perceived ease of use. While ease of use has traditionally been emphasized in TAM, this study shows that its direct effect is limited in generative AI contexts, where users must exercise judgment, contextual reasoning, and adaptive application. Third, the study contributes to emerging research on human–AI collaboration by showing that performance gains depend on the reconfiguration of individual competencies rather than on simple technology usage. Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should move beyond usability-focused implementation and invest in competency-oriented training that helps employees critically evaluate, contextualize, and apply AI-generated outputs.

CRACKS OR CHANNELS? WHEN DEMOGRAPHIC FAULTLINES IN TOP MANAGEMENT TEAMS SHAPE MARKETING CAPABILITY

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Keywords: Top management teams; Demographic faultlines; Marketing capability; Executive diversity; Social identity theory

Description: This paper examines when and how demographic faultlines in top management teams, subgroup divisions formed by aligned age and gender, shape firms' marketing capability, and identifies the internal organizational conditions that strengthen or weaken this effect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketing capability, a firm's ability to translate strategic intent into coordinated market action, is a central driver of competitive advantage, yet research has paid limited attention to the role of top management teams (TMTs) in building it. This is striking, because TMTs set priorities, deploy resources, and align activity across the firm. We ask a question prior work leaves open: do demographic divides among top executives function as organizational cracks that hinder capability

building, or as channels that shape strategic execution? Drawing on upper echelons and social identity theory, we focus not on demographic diversity per se but on demographic faultlines, subgroup divisions created when attributes such as age and gender align. Such alignment can activate identity-based in-groups and out-groups that structure how information flows and how managerial inputs become firm-level action. Two gaps motivate the study. First, marketing-capability research has largely relied on demographic averages rather than subgroup structure. Second, executive-diversity research has emphasized external contingencies while overlooking internal conditions. We therefore ask when and how TMT demographic faultlines shape marketing capability, and which organizational conditions amplify or attenuate their effects.

Method and Data

We test the framework on an unbalanced panel of S&P 500 firms observed from 2005 to 2022. The final estimation sample comprises 5,137 firm-year observations from 622 firms after merging hand-coded executive data with Compustat financials and lagging all predictors by one year. TMTs are identified from 10-K and DEF 14A filings and verified against corporate disclosures, financial databases, and professional profiles. The dependent variable, marketing capability, is operationalized as an efficiency score from a panel stochastic frontier model in which firm sales is the output and marketing-related inputs (including the selling component of SG&A) and production factors are inputs; scores range from 0 to 1. The focal predictor, demographic faultlines, is measured with the average silhouette width (ASW) clustering algorithm applied to age and gender, allowing multiple subgroups rather than binary splits. Three moderators capture internal conditions: TMT turnover (proportion of executives entering or exiting), gender heterogeneity (Blau's index), and financial performance (mean-centered EBIT). We estimate population-averaged generalized estimating equation (GEE) models with robust standard errors clustered by

firm, and address endogeneity with a two-stage least squares specification instrumenting faultlines with their industry-year average.

Summary of Findings

The results support a contingency view of demographic faultlines. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, stronger TMT faultlines are negatively associated with marketing capability ($\beta = -0.088$, $p < .01$), an effect that is stable when moderators are added ($\beta = -0.091$, $p < .01$). The relationship, however, depends on internal conditions that govern whether subgroup structures persist. Supporting Hypothesis 2, TMT turnover attenuates the negative effect (interaction $\beta = 0.258$, $p < .05$): compositional change disrupts entrenched coalitions and resets interaction routines. In contrast, gender heterogeneity strengthens the negative effect (Hypothesis 3; $\beta = -0.210$, $p < .10$, marginal), consistent with heightened category salience, and strong financial performance also exacerbates it (Hypothesis 4; $\beta = -10.958$, $p < .05$), consistent with success entrenching existing routines and lowering the urgency to integrate across subgroups. Findings are robust across alternative operationalizations of marketing capability, two- and three-year lag structures, alternative control specifications, and a 2SLS endogeneity check whose second-stage estimates align with the GEE results in sign and significance. Faultlines are thus most damaging when subgroup boundaries are both salient and institutionally reinforced.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes two scholarly contributions. First, it identifies TMT demographic structure, specifically subgroup alignment captured by faultlines, as a structural microfoundation of marketing capability. Whereas prior work emphasizes cultural orientations, organizational learning, and resource configurations, we show that capability depends not only on what firms possess or prioritize but on whether executives can integrate those inputs into coordinated market

action; focusing on faultlines rather than demographic averages reveals coordination-relevant differences that aggregate measures cannot detect. Second, it advances faultline and upper echelons research by shifting attention from external contingencies, such as environmental dynamism, to internal organizational conditions that stabilize or disrupt subgroup dynamics, moving the debate beyond whether diversity “helps or hurts” toward when demographic divides become consequential. For boards, CMOs, and CHROs, the findings reframe executive diversity as a governance and execution challenge rather than a purely compositional one. Demographic faultlines are not inherently problematic but require active management: turnover can reset entrenched dynamics, while high-performing and gender-heterogeneous teams warrant particular attention. Rather than relying on diversity targets alone, firms should adopt integrative practices, planned succession, role rotation, cross-subgroup task ownership, and structured decision routines, to sustain marketing capability.

References are available upon request.

**DOING GOOD OR DOING WELL? THE IMPACT OF CSR-BASED VERSUS
BUSINESS-ORIENTED BRAND ACTIONS ON CONSUMER TRUST AND PURCHASE
INTENTION**

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Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, Consumer Trust, Purchase Intention, Consumer
Skepticism

Description: This study examines how CSR-based versus business-oriented brand actions
differentially shape consumer purchase intention through affective and cognitive trust pathways,
with consumer skepticism as a boundary condition.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

In markets marked by heightened ethical awareness, firms face a strategic choice about how to signal value: emphasizing corporate social responsibility ("doing good") or business-oriented performance ("doing well"). Prior CSR research shows inconsistent effects on purchase-related outcomes, suggesting that CSR's influence operates through deeper psychological mechanisms rather than message content alone. Integrating Attribution Theory, Signaling Theory, and trust scholarship, this study asks: how do CSR-based versus business-oriented brand actions differentially shape purchase intention through affective and cognitive trust, and how does consumer skepticism condition these pathways? Specifically, the study proposes that CSR-based actions primarily build affective trust by signaling benevolence and moral intent, while business-oriented actions primarily build cognitive trust by signaling competence and reliability. Both

trust routes are expected to positively predict purchase intention, but through distinct mediating mechanisms. Consumer skepticism is theorized as a boundary condition that redistributes persuasive influence, weakening CSR's affective-trust pathway while strengthening competence-based trust formation for business-oriented actions. This dual-route moderated mediation framework seeks to reconcile fragmented CSR and corporate-ability literatures by clarifying when firms should emphasize moral versus performance-based brand communication.

Method And Data

This study uses a between-subjects, scenario-based experiment ($N = 200$) in which participants were randomly assigned to one of two brand-action conditions describing "Digifit," a fictional technology brand launching a new fitness tracker. In the CSR-based condition, "Digifit" was described as using recycled materials, donating revenue to obesity-prevention programs, and ensuring fair labor practices. In the business-oriented condition, "Digifit" was described as offering AI-powered features, extended battery life, app integration, and fast delivery. After scenario exposure, participants completed established multi-item measures of purchase intention (Dodds et al., 1991), consumer skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), and affective and cognitive trust (Colquitt et al., 2007; Johnson & Grayson, 2005; McAllister, 1995). Demographic variables were collected to confirm balanced random assignment. Composite scores were computed by averaging item responses for each construct. Hypotheses were tested using independent-samples t-tests, regression analysis, and Hayes' PROCESS models (Model 4 for mediation, Model 1 for moderation, Model 7 for moderated mediation).

Summary Of Findings

Reliability was acceptable for purchase intention ($\alpha = .893$), consumer skepticism ($\alpha = .743$), and affective trust ($\alpha = .721$), but weaker for cognitive trust ($\alpha = .575$). Contrary to prediction,

purchase intention was significantly higher in the CSR-based condition than the business-oriented condition ($t = 2.352$, $p = .0098$). As expected, CSR-based actions generated significantly greater affective trust than business-oriented actions ($t = 3.646$, $p < .001$), while business-oriented actions produced a significant, though direction-mixed, effect on cognitive trust ($b = -0.290$, $p = .002$). Both affective trust ($b = 0.680$, $p < .001$) and cognitive trust ($b = 0.802$, $p < .001$) significantly and positively predicted purchase intention, confirming that both trust routes function as robust behavioral drivers. Moderated mediation analyses using Hayes' PROCESS could not be completed because the independent variable was coded as a non-numeric factor, preventing bootstrapped indirect and conditional effects. Overall, results support the conceptual foundation that CSR operates primarily through affective trust and that both trust dimensions robustly drive purchase intention, though formal tests of skepticism's moderating role await refined coding and measurement in a follow-up study.

Key Contributions

This research advances CSR and branding theory by integrating Attribution Theory and Signaling Theory into a dual-route moderated mediation framework that differentiates affective and cognitive trust as distinct mechanisms linking brand actions to purchase intention. It contributes to trust scholarship by empirically separating warmth-based and competence-based trust pathways and by theorizing consumer skepticism as a directional boundary condition that redistributes, rather than uniformly dampens, persuasive influence. The framework helps reconcile inconsistent findings in prior CSR research by showing that CSR's effectiveness depends on the psychological mechanisms it activates rather than message presence alone. Beyond academic contributions, the study offers practical guidance for for-profit firms seeking to segment messaging strategies: CSR appeals may be most persuasive among low-skepticism

consumers via affective trust, while competence-focused messaging may better reach skeptical consumers who prefer verifiable performance cues. For public policy actors and certification bodies, findings underscore the importance of transparency and credible verification standards for CSR claims. For nonprofits, the framework clarifies how authentic warmth cues and value alignment build durable consumer trust.

“References are available upon request.”

**THE CONTINGENT VALUE OF MARKET-ORIENTED RESILIENCE:
BEHAVIORAL AND COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS IN
BUILDING INTERNATIONAL MARKETING COMPETENCE**

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Keywords: Market-oriented resilience; Behavioral and cognitive dimensions; International marketing competence; Market turbulence; Employee autonomy

Description: This study explains how and when market-oriented resilience builds international marketing competence by distinguishing its behavioral and cognitive dimensions and examining the contingent roles of market turbulence and employee autonomy.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

How and when does market-oriented resilience help firms build international marketing competence in dynamic global markets? Although resilience has been widely discussed in psychology and organizational management, its role in international marketing strategy remains underdeveloped. To address this gap, we define market-oriented resilience as a firm's capacity to respond to, adapt to, and transform in dynamic international markets. Moving beyond the traditional unitary view of resilience, this study conceptualizes market-oriented resilience as a dual-dimensional construct comprising behavioral resilience and cognitive resilience. Market-oriented behavioral resilience reflects firms' behavioral generosity and agility, manifested in adequate resource investment and flexible resource deployment in response to international market dynamics. Market-oriented cognitive resilience captures cognitive consistency and continuity among organizational members in culture, ideology, and climate, providing a stable cognitive foundation for firms to reconfigure and transform amid international market dynamics. Building on this dual-dimensional view, this study further examines whether behavioral and cognitive resilience work differently under two important contextual conditions: market turbulence and employee autonomy.

Method and Data

We test the proposed framework using survey data from indigenous Chinese firms engaged in international export operations. Firms were randomly selected from the Directory of Chinese Foreign Economic and Trade Enterprises, and key informants were senior managers responsible

for international operations, including CEOs, general managers, marketing directors, and export managers. A total of 930 questionnaires were mailed, and 131 usable responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of 14.09%. All constructs were measured with established seven-point Likert scales. International marketing competence served as the dependent variable; market-oriented behavioral resilience and market-oriented cognitive resilience were specified as multidimensional constructs; and market turbulence and employee autonomy were modeled as moderators. We adopted PLS-SEM to evaluate the measurement and structural models, with controls for firm characteristics. Reliability, validity, and multicollinearity diagnostics met recommended thresholds. We also assessed common method bias, addressed potential endogeneity using control variables and a Gaussian Copula approach, and conducted robustness checks with an alternative performance outcome and reverse causality tests.

Summary of Findings

The empirical results support the central argument that market-oriented resilience contributes to international marketing competence, but the two dimensions operate differently across contexts. First, both behavioral resilience and cognitive resilience have significant positive effects on international marketing competence. Behavioral resilience improves competence by ensuring sufficient resource input, maintaining close local network connections, and enabling agile adaptation to international market changes. Cognitive resilience improves competence by fostering global innovation orientation, learning climate, and stakeholder-oriented ideology in international operations. Second, market turbulence has contrasting moderating effects. It weakens the positive effect of behavioral resilience because frequent resource redeployment becomes costly and experience-based adaptation is less effective under highly turbulent

international markets. By contrast, cognitive resilience becomes more valuable in highly turbulent markets because shared values and beliefs on innovation and learning help firms renew knowledge beyond existing experience, while stakeholder-oriented ideology helps firms maintain legitimacy and trust in local markets. Third, employee autonomy also produces divergent effects. It strengthens the effect of behavioral resilience by giving frontline employees discretion to use market information and adjust resource deployment quickly. In contrast, it weakens the effect of cognitive resilience because excessive individual discretion may undermine cognitive alignment and generate fragmented interpretations of strategic goals.

Statement of Key Contributions

For theoretical significance, this study primarily introduces the concept of resilience into the domain of marketing strategy, offering a novel theoretical lens for addressing the dynamic nature of international markets. Moreover, this study differentiates between the behavioral and cognitive dimensions of market-oriented resilience, advancing a more fine-grained understanding of the resilience construct and its role in international marketing competence. Further, this study investigates the boundary conditions of market-oriented resilience, showing that its impacts are contingent on specific internal and external conditions.

For managerial implications, this study emphasizes the strategic value of building market-oriented resilience. Firms should move beyond passive response thinking and proactively develop resilience for international operations. This requires managers to reposition resilience building as a core element of internationalization and marketing strategy. Next, this study offers both behavioral and cognitive approaches for firms to build market-oriented resilience. Finally,

this study suggests that firms should flexibly adjust the focus of resilience building according to the characteristics of their internal and external environments.

THE EFFECT OF LAYOFFS ON CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: layoff announcements, downsizing, customer engagement, firm performance, causal inference

Description: This paper provides causal evidence on how layoff announcements affect customer engagement, financial performance, and product evaluations, and examines the mechanisms through which downsizing signals shape customer behavior in digital service markets.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms adopt downsizing strategies to realign costs and capabilities, and layoff announcements are the most visible public manifestation of those strategies. Although layoffs are typically analyzed as internal employment decisions, announcements also function as capability-relevant signals to customers. In interactive digital service markets, where value is delivered continuously through technical support and community activity, a layoff announcement may lead customers to question whether the firm can sustain future value delivery, even when the current product remains unchanged. We ask three questions. First, do layoff announcements reduce customer engagement and financial performance at the product level? Second, are these effects persistent, or do they attenuate as the post-announcement environment stabilizes? Third, through which mechanisms do announcements operate. We further distinguish behavioral responses (usage and purchases) from evaluative responses (product ratings), because customers can curtail time and spending quickly when they anticipate lower future value, while stated evaluations may adjust on a different timescale. This behavior-versus-evaluation distinction, together with the severity gradient of workforce cuts, structures our inquiry into when, and for whom, layoffs generate customer-market spillovers.

Method and Data

We construct a weekly product-level panel linking verified layoff announcements to financial outcomes and employee-level workforce records. The sample comprises 207 treated video game companies (2021 to 2025) matched to 2,763 Steam titles and to Revelio Labs workforce data. Outcomes are weekly players, unit sales, revenue, and product ratings. Layoff severity, measured as departures scaled by pre-announcement firm size, and workforce composition serve as

moderators. Because announcements occur at different times across firms, treatment timing is staggered. This variation allows each treated title to be compared with titles that are not yet treated or never treated, but it also renders conventional two-way fixed effects estimates unreliable when treatment effects are heterogeneous. We therefore employ heterogeneity-robust staggered difference-in-differences estimators, with synthetic difference-in-differences (Synth DiD) as the primary specification because it improves pre-treatment fit and weakens reliance on the parallel trends assumption. Estimating effects across successively longer event windows identifies whether responses persist or attenuate. To examine mechanisms, we score the Steam review corpus with a transformer classifier, trained on a frontier-model-labeled sample, that measures layoff awareness, product support concern, peer engagement concern, and game affect distinct from the recommendation, aggregated to the game-week level.

Summary of Findings

Layoff announcements are followed by economically meaningful declines in customer engagement and financial performance at the product level. Declines in players, unit sales, and revenue are concentrated in the weeks immediately following the announcement and attenuate over longer horizons, a pattern consistent with customers revising expectations about future value delivery and subsequently updating those beliefs as service continuity becomes observable. Evaluative responses follow a distinct pattern from behavioral responses, revealing a divergence between what customers do and what they say after a layoff announcement. Firms that rely on evaluative metrics alone would therefore underestimate near-term demand and retention losses. The consequences of layoff announcements are also heterogeneous: effects are stronger when workforce reductions are more severe and when the business model depends on ongoing service delivery and an active user base, as in free-to-play and multiplayer titles. The review-text

measures enable the mechanism analysis to test whether these responses operate through concern about the firm's commitment to product support, the direct channel, or through concern about the departure of other users, the indirect channel; these analyses proceed within the same causal design.

Key Contributions

This study advances marketing knowledge on how a downsizing strategy, observed through layoff announcements, propagates into customer markets. First, we provide high-frequency, product-level causal evidence on a question previously studied with aggregated or survey data, revealing customer adjustments that coarser measures obscure. Second, by jointly tracking engagement, financial performance, and evaluations, we document a divergence between behavioral and evaluative responses, showing why reliance on any single metric can misstate the customer consequences of a layoff announcement. Third, we specify and measure two theoretically distinct mechanisms, product support concern and peer engagement concern, thereby separating the direct capability signal from network externality spillovers. For practice, the implications generalize to any offering whose value depends on continued delivery. Managers should treat a layoff announcement as a customer-facing event rather than an internal restructuring matter, monitor behavioral indicators at high frequency because evaluative scores lag, and pair announcements with credible commitments to product support and to sustaining the user community. Because customer penalties scale with layoff severity and with dependence on ongoing service, layoffs decisions should incorporate anticipated customer responses alongside expected labor cost savings.

References are available upon request.

THE TRUE COST OF CUTTING ADVERTISING: SELECTION, LEARNING, AND RECOVERY CYCLE

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Keywords: Advertising Cuts, Firm Risk, Selection Effects, Advertising Strategy, Recovery Cycle

Description: This study shows that the apparent risk of cutting advertising is driven primarily by selection effects, while the central managerial cost lies in the urgent recovery cycle that follows advertising reductions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

When firms face financial pressure, advertising budgets are often among the first items reduced because the cash savings are immediate and the contractual consequences appear limited. Yet marketing research and managerial practice frequently warn that cutting advertising is dangerous because it may be associated with declining sales, eroding brand equity, and heightened firm risk. This study examines a central identification problem in that relationship: do advertising cuts causally increase firm risk, or are riskier, financially distressed firms simply more likely to cut advertising in the first place? The research question is therefore not whether advertising cuts and risk are correlated, but why that correlation exists. We distinguish selection effects from causal

treatment effects and ask whether the negative outcomes associated with advertising reductions reflect the consequences of the cut itself or the underlying condition of the firms that decide to cut. This distinction has important theoretical and managerial implications. If advertising cuts directly increase firm risk, then the conventional advice to avoid reductions is strongly supported. If selection dominates, however, the advice must be refined: the danger may lie less in immediate risk escalation and more in the hidden costs and recovery dynamics that follow advertising reductions.

Method and Data

The study develops a dynamic framework that combines asymmetric adjustment costs with managerial learning and tests its implications using a comprehensive panel of U.S. public firms from 1987 to 2024. The data come from CRSP for stock returns and market capitalization, Compustat for firm-level accounting variables and advertising expenditures, and IBES for analyst forecast information. The final sample includes firm-year observations with positive advertising expenditures, excluding financial firms and utilities. Firm risk is measured primarily through idiosyncratic volatility, calculated from residuals of a Fama-French three-factor model using daily returns. Advertising change is measured as year-over-year advertising growth, with additional specifications separating increases from cuts and examining nonlinearities. To address endogeneity, the study uses an instrumental variables strategy based on cross-state industry advertising shocks. For each firm, the instrument captures average advertising growth among firms in the same industry but located in other states, helping isolate exogenous variation in advertising behavior. The empirical analysis proceeds through portfolio sorts, selection models, instrumental-variable estimates, event-study evidence, and mean-reversion tests. Regressions

include firm and year fixed effects, with standard errors clustered at the firm level, allowing the analysis to separate descriptive associations from causal effects and recovery dynamics.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that the elevated risk observed among firms that cut advertising is driven primarily by selection rather than by a direct causal effect of the cut in advertising. Firms that make extreme advertising cuts display characteristics associated with financial distress, including weak profitability, declining sales, and higher leverage. By contrast, firms that sharply increase advertising are more likely to exhibit growth opportunities and financial strength. Descriptive evidence indicates that firms cutting advertising appear riskier, but instrumental-variables estimates show that exogenous cuts in advertising do not directly increase firm risk. This result reframes the advertising-risk relationship: the observed risk reflects who cuts, not simply what cutting causes. However, the study also shows that advertising cuts are not costless. Event-study evidence links cuts to visible declines in sales growth and market share. Firms respond by rapidly restoring advertising, with mean reversion after cuts dramatically stronger than after increases. In fact, firms reverse cuts with extraordinary urgency, while increases tend to persist. Importantly, a substantial share of firms restore advertising even when financial conditions have not improved, suggesting that managers recognize hidden costs after observing market damage. The central cost of cutting advertising is therefore the recovery cycle, not an immediate escalation of firm risk.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes several contributions to marketing strategy and marketing-finance literature. First, it provides causal evidence that distinguishes selection from treatment effects in the

advertising-risk relationship. Prior research has often interpreted the correlation between advertising reductions and elevated risk as evidence that cutting advertising is inherently risky. This study shows that the correlation is largely attributable to financially distressed firms being more likely to cut advertising. Second, the research introduces the recovery cycle as a previously underemphasized cost of advertising reductions. Although cuts may create short-term cash relief, they often trigger urgent restoration once managers observe sales declines, market-share erosion, and weakening competitive position. Third, the study advances the asset view of advertising by emphasizing asymmetric adjustment costs: reducing brand support and later rebuilding it are not equivalent managerial actions. The evidence that cuts reverse far more quickly than increases suggests that advertising reductions deplete brand-related assets in ways that are costly to repair. Finally, the study contributes practical guidance for both CMOs and CFOs. The message is not simply that firms should never cut advertising. Rather, managers should evaluate whether they can afford the likely restoration that follows, especially when financial constraints limit their ability to repair brand damage quickly.

References are available upon request.

CRM and Customer Experience

IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU SAY, BUT WHEN YOU SAY IT

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Keywords: Positional effects; online reviews; topic modeling; large language models; consumer ratings

Description: This paper develops a valence-aware topic model that reveals how the position of review content, especially the final sentence, changes its influence on consumer ratings.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Online product reviews are typically analyzed as unordered collections of words or topics, even though reviewers deliberately sequence praise, criticism, and product attributes. This paper asks whether when a topic appears changes its relationship with the reviewer's overall rating after accounting for what the reviewer says and whether the sentence is positively or negatively valenced. We address three related questions. First, can sentence-level valence improve topic identification by separating favorable and unfavorable discussion of the same attribute? Second, can a common positional weighting function identify the part of a review that is most diagnostic of the rating while accommodating reviews of different lengths? Third, does the effect of a topic change when it appears at that influential position, creating a topic-specific “punchline” effect? By studying movie and airline reviews, we also examine whether positional patterns generalize across experiential products with different rating distributions and review styles. The central premise is that reviews are structured narratives rather than bags of words, so content, sentiment, and placement should be modeled jointly.

Method and Data

We develop an integrated Bayesian model with three components. First, domain-primed GPT-4o classifies every sentence as positively or negatively valenced. These observed labels enter a Valence-Based Sentence-Constrained Latent Dirichlet Allocation model, which assigns one topic to each sentence and estimates separate topic structures within the two valence groups. Second, a Beta transformation converts each sentence's relative location into weights that sum to one, allowing position effects to be compared across reviews of different lengths and identifying the most influential location. Third, a topic-specific punchline parameter adjusts a topic's rating coefficient when that topic occupies the influential location. We apply the model to 8,054 reviews containing at least five sentences: 4,427 IMDb reviews of *Joker*, *The Revenant*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, and 3,627 Skytrax reviews of Southwest and Delta. Movie reviews were posted before May 2023, and airline reviews were collected in February 2025. We compare LLM valence labels with Flair and TextBlob, benchmark against topic-only, valence-only, and nonpositional models, and evaluate fit using full-sample and 90/10 holdout analyses.

Summary of Findings

Sentence-level valence substantially improves rating prediction and produces more interpretable topics by separating positive and negative evaluations of the same attribute. The integrated model delivers the best full-sample fit in all five datasets, with R-squared values of 58.64% for *Joker*, 62.52% for *The Revenant*, 60.94% for *The Lord of the Rings*, 78.33% for Southwest, and 80.66% for Delta; its advantages generally persist in the holdout samples. Across every dataset, the estimated positional weights place greater importance on later sentences, and the final sentence is consistently the most influential. A fixed-position robustness analysis likewise shows that adding the punchline effect to the last sentence improves fit more than adding it to the first or middle sentence. The end-weighting is sharper in airline reviews than in movie reviews. Position alone, however, explains less than the interaction between position and topic: constraining the topic-specific punchline parameters materially reduces model fit, especially when the parameters for negatively valenced topics are removed. The punchline effects vary by topic and often moderate extreme evaluations,

tempering praise in favorable reviews and dampening criticism in complaint-heavy reviews.

Key Contributions

This research contributes to text analytics, consumer review research, and marketing practice in four ways. First, it incorporates LLM-derived sentence valence as observed information in a sentence-constrained topic model, reducing the averaging that occurs when one attribute is praised by some reviewers and criticized by others. Second, the Beta transformation offers a parsimonious, length-invariant way to estimate where information matters within a document rather than imposing arbitrary beginning, middle, and end categories. Third, the topic-specific punchline parameter distinguishes a general positional effect from the additional influence of a particular topic at the most diagnostic location, improving both prediction and interpretation. Fourth, the findings establish a robust substantive pattern: the ending of a review contains disproportionately diagnostic information, but its meaning depends on the topic and valence expressed there. Managers can identify issues that become especially consequential as closing statements, even when infrequent or mildly worded. Review platforms and AI summary systems can prioritize content by sentiment, topic, and narrative position rather than frequency alone.

THE EFFECTS OF MARKET ORIENTATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL FLEXIBILITY ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CRM USAGE

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Keywords: CRM utilization, competitive strategy, firm size, market orientation, resource-based view

Description: This study examines how market orientation, organizational structure, and competitive strategy drive CRM utilization and, in turn, firm performance among Taiwanese firms, and how firm size conditions the extent to which CRM utilization is converted into performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Customer relationship management (CRM) research has predominantly examined system adoption, leaving the depth of CRM utilization and the strategic conditions that drive it underexplored. It also remains unclear how firm size shapes the conversion of CRM utilization into performance. These gaps are salient in Taiwan, where small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) constitute over 97% of all firms yet face distinctive resource constraints. Grounded in

the resource-based view, this study argues that resource-constrained SMEs derive larger marginal returns from CRM utilization than do large firms. The study therefore addresses three questions: (1) Do market orientation, organizational structure, and competitive strategy (offensive versus defensive) function as antecedents that drive CRM utilization? (2) Does CRM utilization improve firms' perceived financial and non-financial performance? (3) Does firm size operate as a boundary condition that conditions how strongly CRM utilization is translated into performance? By treating competitive strategy as a direct antecedent and firm size as a theorized boundary condition rather than a control variable, the study reframes CRM utilization as the mechanism linking strategic context to firm performance.

Method and Data

Data were collected through an online survey (Google Forms) targeting managers involved in CRM and strategic decision-making at Taiwanese firms, using seven-point Likert scales. All items were translated from English and Korean into Chinese and back-translated to ensure accuracy, with a screening item restricting participation to qualified respondents. Using convenience sampling, 201 questionnaires were distributed and 154 returned (response rate 76.6%); after removing two careless responses, the final sample comprised 152 managers, of whom 45.4% worked at large firms and 54.6% at SMEs. The constructs were measured with established, adapted scales: market orientation (15 items), organizational structure (16 items), offensive and defensive competitive strategy (19 items), CRM utilization (36 items), and firm performance (12 items spanning perceived financial and non-financial outcomes). Reliability and validity were assessed via exploratory factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, and the Fornell-Larcker and HTMT criteria. Hypotheses were tested

through path analysis on item-mean scores in SPSS, with mediation evaluated using 5,000 bootstrap resamples (95% percentile confidence intervals) and a multigroup comparison by firm size.

Summary of Findings

Market orientation ($\beta = .313, p < .001$) and offensive competitive strategy ($\beta = .337, p < .001$) significantly increased CRM utilization, supporting H1 and H3a. Organizational structure ($\beta = .034, n.s.$) and defensive strategy ($\beta = .127, n.s.$) showed no significant effect; because the defensive coefficient was positive rather than the hypothesized negative direction, H2 and H3b were rejected. CRM utilization positively affected both perceived financial performance ($\beta = .257, p < .01$) and non-financial performance ($\beta = .263, p < .001$), supporting H4a and H4b, with greater explanatory power for non-financial outcomes. Mediation tests showed that market orientation influenced performance fully through CRM utilization, whereas offensive strategy was partially mediated. Firm size functioned as a boundary condition: CRM utilization converted into perceived financial performance among SMEs ($\beta = .428, p < .01$) but not large firms ($\beta = .101, n.s.$). Moreover, offensive strategy reached performance through CRM utilization in SMEs but directly in large firms. Overall, the conversion of CRM utilization into performance was markedly stronger among resource-constrained SMEs.

Key Contributions

First, the study shifts the analytical focus from CRM adoption to the depth of CRM utilization and elevates firm size from a control variable to a theorized boundary condition. Consistent with the resource-based view, resource-constrained SMEs realize larger marginal performance returns

from CRM utilization than large firms, demonstrating that the strength of the same variable relationship varies across resource contexts. Second, by integrating market orientation, organizational structure, and competitive strategy as antecedents while modeling their direct paths to performance, the study positions CRM utilization as the mediating mechanism linking strategic orientation to firm performance—full mediation for market orientation and partial mediation for offensive strategy. Third, the findings offer size-contingent managerial guidance: SMEs should couple CRM utilization with a market-oriented culture and an aggressive strategic posture, whereas large firms require structural alignment, decentralization, and data standardization. The stronger effect on non-financial performance further implies that managers should evaluate CRM through long-term, customer-centric metrics. Finally, the study extends CRM evidence to an underexplored Asian, SME-intensive context, offering implications for economies with a similar industrial structure.

“References are available upon request.”

FROM DYADIC TO TRIADIC: CHARACTERIZING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT IN B2B2C ECOSYSTEMS THROUGH SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC

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Keywords: Customer Experience Management, B2B2C ecosystems, Service-dominant logic, Business-to-Consumer (B2C), Business-to-Business (B2B)

Description: This conceptual paper develops a supplier-centric framework characterizing customer experience management in triadic B2B2C ecosystems through a Service-Dominant Logic lens.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Customer Experience Management (CXM) research has developed almost exclusively within dyadic Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Business-to-Business (B2B) settings, where firms are assumed to design and control customer experiences directly (e.g. Homburg et al.2017; Witell et al. 2020). Yet the growing prevalence of B2B2C service ecosystems challenges this assumption: suppliers increasingly depend on autonomous intermediaries—agro-dealers, distributors, and

platforms—to shape end-customer experiences across touchpoints they neither own nor manage (Aspara et al. 2021; Iankova et al. 2019). Existing frameworks, mostly built on clear organizational boundaries, single customer journeys, and firm-level touchpoint control, offer limited guidance for these triadic structures (Lipkin and Heinonen 2022). This conceptual paper therefore asks: how can customer experience be characterized and managed in triadic B2B2C ecosystems from the supplier’s perspective? We disaggregate this into three sub-questions. First, what dimensions characterize CXM when experience emerges across autonomous, interdependent actors rather than within a single firm? Second, what systemic challenges distinguish triadic CXM from established dyadic approaches? Third, how can Service-Dominant Logic—through resource integration, beneficiary-determined value, and institutional arrangements—reframe CXM in B2B2C contexts as an ecosystem-level orchestration capability (Vargo and Lusch 2016)? Addressing these questions responds to repeated calls for theory development that accommodates distributed touchpoint control, multi-stakeholder governance, and triadic value co-creation (De Keyser and Van Vaerenbergh 2024).

Method and Data

Not Applicable. This is a conceptual paper.

Summary of Findings

We introduce a supplier-centric framework comprising four interrelated dimensions that reposition CXM as an ecosystem-level capability. Stakeholder governance provides the institutional infrastructure aligning resource-integration practices across the triad through hybrid formal, relational, and digital mechanisms. Experience orchestration shifts CXM from control to enablement, equipping autonomous intermediaries to translate the supplier’s strategic intent into

coherent value across parallel journeys. Adaptive experience learning integrates asynchronous, multi-actor feedback loops, moving firms beyond descriptive analytics toward diagnostic, predictive, and prescriptive capabilities. Value proposition integration synthesizes divergent stakeholder needs into coherent experiences, replacing either/or trade-offs with both/and strategies. The framework further identifies five systemic challenges for triadic contexts: triadic expectation divergence, dispersed touchpoint control, B2B–B2C value dissonance, customer journey fragmentation, and temporal governance misalignment. These challenges arise from the simultaneous operation of B2B and B2C logics within a single ecosystem. Collectively, the dimensions and challenges demonstrate that experience in B2B2C settings emerges from coordinated action among autonomous actors rather than unilateral firm design, thus relocating CXM from firm-level optimization to ecosystem coordination, substituting influence for authority, and introducing multi-temporality as a defining feature of triadic experience management.

Statement of Key Contributions

This paper makes three contributions to CXM theory. First, it extends CXM conceptualization beyond dyadic boundaries by developing a framework specifically designed for triadic B2B2C orchestration through intermediaries. The four-dimensional framework shifts CXM from control toward coordination and enablement, repositioning customer experience management as an ecosystem capability rather than a firm-centric activity, and clarifies which traditional assumptions must be abandoned, adapted, or retained in triadic settings. Second, it operationalizes Service-Dominant Logic for B2B2C CXM by translating SDL's abstract axioms into actionable practices: collaborative governance reconciling conflicting logics (Axiom 5), orchestration processes enabling intermediaries (Axiom 3), and adaptive learning integrating multi-actor feedback (Axiom 4) addressing longstanding critiques of SDL's limited managerial applicability. Third, it bridges

the traditionally separate B2B and B2C CXM literatures by synthesizing relationship-oriented and emotion-oriented perspectives, revealing that both logics operate simultaneously in triadic ecosystems and surfacing five triadic-specific challenges that signal B2B2C CXM as a distinct theoretical domain requiring indigenous construct development. For practice, the framework offers suppliers actionable guidance such as tiered service agreements, shared performance dashboards, partner councils, and dual-speed governance for orchestrating coherent experiences across complex, multi-actor service ecosystems.

References are available upon request.

Sales Force Management and Personal Selling

The Effect of Personal Selling on Customer Conversion under Partial Compliance

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Keywords: Personal selling; Partial compliance; Causal inference; Propensity score matching; XGBoost

Description: This study develops a causal framework for evaluating personal selling in observational settings by jointly addressing firms' strategic targeting decisions and customers' partial compliance, demonstrating that compliance-informed targeting substantially improves both estimated sales effectiveness and firm profitability.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Personal selling is one of the most resource-intensive marketing activities, yet measuring its causal effectiveness is challenging because two sources of selection bias arise simultaneously. First, firms strategically target customers who are expected to be more profitable or more likely to convert, making targeted and non-targeted customers systematically different. Second, many targeted customers never actually receive treatment because they ignore or decline sales efforts. In outbound phone selling, the majority of calls go unanswered. Ignoring either source of bias

can substantially distort estimates of sales effectiveness and lead to suboptimal salesforce allocation.

We examine these issues using outbound phone calls promoting prescription home-delivery services at one of the largest U.S. pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs). Although phone calls generate higher conversion rates than other communication channels, they are costly and exhibit low compliance, with only 15–17% of targeted patients answering. This study addresses three questions: (1) What is the causal effect of personal selling after accounting for firms' strategic targeting? (2) How much does customer non-compliance attenuate the measured effectiveness of personal selling? (3) How should firms redesign customer targeting under salesforce capacity constraints by incorporating customers' predicted compliance probabilities?

Method and Data

We analyze observational data from approximately 79,000 patients targeted between July 2019 and June 2020. To isolate the incremental effect of personal selling, To isolate the incremental effect of personal selling, we compare two communication channel mixes: email vs. email + phone and email + direct mail vs. email + direct mail + phone. To address firm-side selection bias, we leverage institutional knowledge of the firm's targeting policy and estimate each patient's propensity to receive a phone call using XGBoost, which flexibly captures nonlinear relationships and high-dimensional interactions among customer characteristics. We then construct matched samples using nearest-neighbor propensity score matching.

To address customer-side selection bias, we exploit one-sided partial compliance. Patients are considered targeted when selected for a phone call but treated only when they answer it. Because unanswered calls are automatically terminated without leaving messages, targeting assignment

satisfies the exclusion restriction and serves as an instrumental variable for actual treatment. We therefore estimate the Local Average Treatment Effect (LATE) among compliers while recovering their counterfactual outcomes from matched controls.

Finally, we estimate each patient's probability of complying with phone call using XGBoost and conduct a counterfactual targeting analysis that prioritizes customers based on predicted compliance and expected customer value under the firm's salesforce capacity constraints.

Summary of Findings

Compliance with phone call is remarkably low, with only 15–17% of targeted patients answering sales calls. Consequently, the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect of personal selling is modest despite being statistically significant. After accounting for partial compliance, however, the estimated Local Average Treatment Effect (LATE) is substantially larger. Phone calls increase conversion rate by 10.72% in the email vs. email + phone comparison and by 9.62% in the email + direct mail vs. email + direct mail + phone comparison, approximately six times larger than the corresponding ITT estimates. These findings demonstrate that customer non-compliance substantially masks the true effectiveness of personal selling. The economic implications are equally important. A naïve evaluation based on ITT effect suggests an incremental profits of only about \$1.60 per targeted patient, whereas accounting for partial compliance increases expected profit to approximately \$10.07 in the email + phone comparison and \$9.16 in the email + direct mail + phone comparison.

Furthermore, incorporating predicted compliance into customer targeting substantially improves salesforce allocation. Relative to the firm's current policy, the counterfactual targeting strategy increases expected profit per targeted patient from \$18.65 to \$23.74 (27%) in the email + phone comparison and from \$20.79 to \$30.53 (47%) in the email + direct mail + phone comparison.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study makes three contributions. First, it contributes to the causal inference literature by developing a framework that jointly addresses firms' strategic targeting decisions and customers' partial compliance when evaluating marketing interventions using observational data. While previous studies typically address these issues separately, we integrate machine-learning-based propensity score estimation with instrumental-variable estimation to obtain causal treatment effects under partial compliance.

Second, we contribute to the personal selling literature by demonstrating that customer compliance is a critical determinant of measured sales effectiveness. We show that ignoring customers' decisions to engage with sales representatives substantially understates the causal impact of personal selling and can mislead firms' targeting and salesforce allocation decisions. Our findings suggest that evaluating personal selling requires considering both customers' purchase propensity and their likelihood of engaging with sales efforts.

Finally, we provide actionable guidance for firms operating under limited sales resources. By jointly considering predicted compliance and customer value when allocating sales resources, firms can substantially improve salesforce productivity and profitability. These insights extend beyond healthcare to other service-intensive industries, such as financial services and business-to-business markets, where customer engagement is voluntary and sales capacity is constrained.

References are available upon request.

**SCROLL TO CLOSE, STRUGGLE TO COPE: INVESTIGATING THE
AMBIVALENT EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON WELL-BEING AND
PERFORMANCE OF B2B SALESPEOPLE**

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Keywords: Social media, B2B sales, sales management, well-being

Description: This paper conducts a quantitative approach to investigate the effect of social media (SM) on B2B salespeople's well-being and sales performance.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT**Research Question** (149 words)

Social media (SM) has become a central tool in B2B sales, with most salespeople integrating SM into their daily activities. A litany of prior research demonstrates that active SM engagement generates sales opportunities that ultimately enhance sales performance. However, despite these benefits, the potential negative consequences of SM use in B2B sales remain underexplored. This gap is problematic because salespeople's well-being is closely linked to sales effectiveness, meaning that negative well-being outcomes could reduce the ability to pursue sales opportunities consistently.

Building on literature concerning SM use and well-being, this study addresses two key gaps: the adverse effects of SM use on B2B salespeople and the organizational resources that may mitigate these effects. Specifically, we pose the following research questions: How does SM use affect the well-being and sales performance of B2B salespeople? Which organizational resources moderate the impact of SM use on B2B salespeople's well-being and sales performance?

Method and Data (180 words)

Pretest. We conducted a pretest to ensure construct and wording clarity. The pretest sample included 50 B2B sales professionals from diverse industries and revealed no substantive issues.

Data collection and sample of main study. Following the pretest, we conducted the main study using an online survey. For the survey, we recruited B2B professionals with a selling function at different management levels via an online networking platform in Germany and the United States. To ensure key informant competence, we asked respondents to self-rate their competence in the topic ($M = 6.16$ on a 7-point scale). To determine the topic's relevance, we assessed respondents' perceived importance of the topic ($M = 6.15$ on a 7-point scale). We conclude that the respondents were sufficiently knowledgeable about the components of our research endeavor (Homburg et al. 2012).

After we eliminated answers that failed attention checks (Kumar, Stern, and Anderson 1993), the final sample comprised 319 respondents.

Measures. We adapted scale items from the literature, foremost multi-item measures whenever possible. Nonetheless, we assessed the reliability and validity of our constructs using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Summary of Findings (155 words)

We answer two research questions regarding SM use in B2B sales. First, we shed light on the ambivalent effect of SM use in B2B sales. Accordingly, we reveal that SM in B2B sales operates simultaneously as a driver of motivation and a source of strain. Specifically, we show that SM use enhances motivation by strengthening organizational embeddedness and facilitating work-related processes. At the same time, our findings reveal a countervailing pathway through which SM impairs strain experienced by B2B salespeople by intensifying technostress, blurring work-home boundaries, and increasing social comparison.

Second, we identify contingencies that shape the effects of SM use on salespeople's well-being and performance. Specifically, we demonstrate that implementing an SM strategy mitigates the strain associated with SM use while enhancing its motivational benefits. In addition, our findings indicate that the relationship between salespeople's well-being and sales performance is contingent on the extent of organizational mental health support and access to mental healthcare.

Key Contributions (189 words)

First, we are among the first to provide empirical evidence of the downsides of SM use in B2B sales.

As such, we extend the literature on SM use in B2B sales by moving beyond the predominantly positive perspective that has characterized prior research. Specifically, we provide evidence that SM use increases salespeople's strain. As such, we contribute to the emerging discussion on the hidden psychological costs of integrating sales technology into sales activities. Importantly, we find that integrating an SM strategy can reduce strain, highlighting the buffering role of organizational guidance. This finding advances sales technology theory by showing that the benefits of sales technology are contingent on support from organizational resources.

Second, our study addresses growing calls for greater attention to salesperson well-being. Given the high prevalence of mental health challenges in sales, understanding how SM affects well-being is critical. Our findings show that organizational support, including mental health support and access, mitigates the negative relationship between salespersons' emotional exhaustion and sales performance. Thus, the study positions well-being not only as an important outcome but also as a key mechanism linking the sales environment to B2B sales performance.

References are available upon request.

Service Marketing

DESIGNING AI FOR THE JOURNEY: A META-ANALYSIS OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC CUES AND CUSTOMER RESPONSES ACROSS PRE-PURCHASE, PURCHASE, AND POST-PURCHASE STAGES

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Keywords: artificial intelligence; customer journey; anthropomorphism; meta-analysis; customer experience

Description: This meta-analysis of 1,425 effect sizes shows that the AI–human service gap varies systematically across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages, such that anthropomorphic design factors must be aligned with the cognitive, affective, and social priorities dominant at each stage.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) agents are increasingly deployed across the customer journey, from pre-purchase product search to purchase facilitation to post-purchase service. With the conversational AI market projected to reach \$41.39 billion by 2030, a critical managerial question emerges: When can AI agents achieve parity with human agents across different stages of the customer journey? Existing research cannot adequately address this question for two reasons. First, studies have predominantly examined AI–human differences within isolated journey stages rather than across them, leaving unclear how customer responses evolve as interaction objectives shift. Second, prior frameworks, trust, algorithm aversion, social presence,

and anthropomorphism, conceptualize AI–human differences as stable properties of the agent or task, implying consistent effects across interactions. This assumption conflicts with evidence that the same AI agent may be welcomed at some journey points yet resisted at others. We therefore ask: Does the AI–human gap vary systematically across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages, and how do anthropomorphic design factors moderate this gap at each stage? We propose experience-dimension primacy as the mechanism: the dominant evaluative dimension shifts from cognitive to affective to social as customer goals evolve across the journey.

Method and Data

We conducted comprehensive meta-analysis synthesizing evidence from 1,425 effect sizes across 401 independent studies reported in 129 publications published between 2006 and 2025. Three search strategies were employed: electronic databases (EBSCO, ABI/INFORM, PsycINFO, Web of Science), backward and forward citation searches, and gray literature searches. An initial 3,195 articles were screened against five inclusion criteria: studies must compare AI and human agents, use quantitative methods, address employee–customer contexts, measure customer responses (perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors), and report or enable calculation of effect sizes. By journey stage, 74 articles (205 studies; 737 effect sizes) examined pre-purchase, 23 articles (66 studies; 235 effect sizes) examined purchase, and 46 articles (116 studies; 416 effect sizes) examined post-purchase. We computed standardized mean differences (Cohen’s d) between AI and human conditions and transformed these into Pearson correlations (r), where positive values indicate more favorable responses to AI. Each study was coded for AI design factors, journey stage, and control variables. We corrected correlations for measurement-error attenuation and estimated pooled effects using random-effects multilevel meta-analytic

models with study-level random intercepts. Moderators were tested via random-effects multilevel meta-regressions within the same framework.

Summary of Findings

The overall pooled effect across stages and outcomes is $r = -.140$ ($p < .001$), a small but robust negative effect supporting AI aversion overall. However, these aggregate masks systematic stage-level variation. The negative effect is most pronounced in pre-purchase ($r = -.157$, $p < .001$), attenuates post-purchase ($r = -.116$, $p < .001$), and remains negative during purchase ($r = -.130$, $p = .002$). Perceptions are consistently negative across stages ($r = -.207$), whereas attitudes are stage-contingent, approaching zero post-purchase. Anthropomorphic design factors produce stage-contingent rather than uniform effects. In pre-purchase, male gender, humanlike design, and servant roles weaken AI's disadvantage, while verbal emotional cues strengthen it. In purchase, male gender, humanlike design, and robotic names ($b = -1.157$, $p = .004$) weaken the disadvantage, suggesting transparent machine identity builds trust at the point of commitment. In post-purchase, human names, visual emotional cues, and multimodal communication weaken the disadvantage, with partner roles and female gender showing marginal effects. These reversals confirm experience-dimension primacy: features aligning with the dominant evaluative dimension at each stage reduce the gap, while misaligned features widen it.

Key Contributions

For theory, we make three contributions. First, we demonstrate that the AI–human gap varies systematically across journey stages rather than remaining a stable property of agents or tasks, reframing AI–human differences as journey-contingent. Second, we introduce experience-dimension primacy, a novel mechanism explaining why the same design factor (e.g., emotional cues) harms responses at one stage yet enhances them at another. Operating at the evaluative

level, it shows that cognitive, affective, and social experience dimensions shift in relative salience as customers progress through the journey. Third, we provide the first systematic evidence that anthropomorphic design factors produce stage-contingent rather than uniform effects, revealing dramatic reversals overlooked by prior meta-analyses. For practice, we transform AI deployment from one-size-fits-all to journey-aligned design. Managers should deploy competence-signaling features (male gender, servant roles, minimal emotion) in pre-purchase; employ trust-building cues (robotic names signaling no hidden motives) during purchase; and maximize social presence (human names, partner roles, emotional cues, multimodal communication) post-purchase. These insights enable firms to calibrate AI anthropomorphism across touchpoints, leveraging AI's efficiency while preserving, or enhancing, customer experience throughout the journey.

References are available upon request.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH METRO RAIL SERVICES IN BANGLADESH: APPLICATION OF MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

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Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Dhaka Metro Rail, Mixed Methods Research, Public Transportation, Bangladesh.

Description: This paper examines how metro rail services in Bangladesh contribute to women's empowerment by improving mobility, safety, accessibility, and socioeconomic opportunities using a mixed methods research approach.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Social and economic inclusion of women are ominously predisposed by urban transportation infrastructures. The introduction of metro train services in Bangladesh is a revolutionary intervention that might influence females' empowerment. However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies examining how metro rail services have influenced women's social experiences, mobility patterns, and economic activity. This study will investigate how metro rail services help to increase women's empowerment in Bangladesh. A mixed-methods research design with purposive sampling technique will be utilized to conduct in-depth interviews with 25 metro-rail women

passengers of Dhaka City. 265 respondents will also be selected based on snowball sampling to conduct a structured questionnaire survey. Moreover, six major themes: safety, mobility, security, job opportunity and access to education have been considered based on prior research. Content analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be applied to analyze qualitative and quantitative data respectively. Study findings are expected to demonstrate that metro rail services improve women's perceptions of safety and mobility, which increases their work participation, ease of commuting, and more freedom in decision making.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Research question of this study can be stated as follows: RQ1: How do empowerment-related outcomes like employment participation, perceived autonomy, and social inclusion in metropolitan Bangladesh get shaped by women's practical service experiences with metro rail systems, including perceptions of safety, mobility, and reliability?

METHOD AND DATA

Research Design: In order to investigate how Metro Rail in Bangladesh affects women's empowerment, this study will use a mixed method approach.

Sample and data collection: Participants who can give rich, relevant data for the study will be selected using purposive sampling. The study may include 25 in-depth interviews with Metro Rail woman users in Dhaka, Bangladesh. After the initial interviews, 265 snowball-sampled respondents will complete a structured questionnaire survey by referring other women from their social networks.

Data Analysis: The acquired data will be analyzed using thematic content analysis, following a systematic process: Transcripts will be read several times to acquire a thorough knowledge of the

qualitative data, while Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be used to analyze quantitative data.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To provide initial empirical insights and refine the subsequent quantitative phase, few preliminary semi-structured interviews were conducted with female users of the Dhaka Metro Rail. The interviews addressed individuals' perspectives regarding safety, mobility, accessibility, career prospects, educational access, and general perceptions of empowerment.

According to preliminary results, the most commonly mentioned benefits of metro rail services were perceived safety, reduced travel time, and improved independence. Several participants claimed that the metro gave them the confidence to go longer distances, allowing them to pursue work prospects further away from home while lessening their fears of harassment while commuting. Participants also stated that the metro system's efficiency and reliability made it easier to attend educational institutions and manage work and family duties.

These initial observations were utilized to improve the questionnaire items' phrasing, ensure their relevance to the Bangladeshi context, and verify that the suggested study constructs accurately reflected women's experiences with metro rail services. The results also provided preliminary evidence in favor of the conceptual framework, indicating that increased safety and mobility could lead to women's greater independence, labor force involvement, and educational opportunities.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

This study would conceptualize women's empowerment through metro services, contributing to the literature on gender, transportation, and urban development. By examining safety, mobility, economic opportunities, access to education, and security, this study would extend empowerment theory beyond individual and family issues to include urban transport infrastructure as a structural

facilitator. By demonstrating how safety and mobility impact female independence and participation in public spaces, the literature on women's empowerment would also be strengthened. Additionally, by grounding the analysis in Bangladesh, the study would offer a contextually comprehensive framework that enhances empowerment and can direct future research on women's mobility and empowerment in developing nations.

For those working for women's empowerment and urban development in Bangladesh, this paper provides useful guidance. The results highlight how crucial it is for legislators to design public transport with gender equality in mind. It is anticipated that transportation policies that put safety, security, and accessibility first will facilitate women's access to social, professional and educational possibilities. These initiatives increase women's self-esteem, transportation usage, and sustainable urban transportation.

BEYOND THE BALLOT BOX: HOW POLITICAL IDEOLOGY SHAPES CUSTOMER TIPPING BEHAVIOR IN SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

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Keywords: tipping behavior, political ideology, moral-identity activation, social presence,
service encounters

Description: Across two experiments and a study of actual restaurant tipping, this research shows that liberal customers tip more generously than conservatives because tipping situations more strongly activate their moral identity, a difference that emerges in private settings but disappears under high social presence.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Tipping is one of the most consequential yet understudied phenomena in service encounters. For millions of frontline employees in restaurants, hotels, and cafés, tips constitute 50–70% of total earnings, making customer generosity a fundamental determinant of employee livelihood and service motivation. Prior research has explained tipping mainly through situational and episodic

factors—service quality perceptions, server–customer interpersonal dynamics, environmental cues, and the design of digital tipping interfaces—while largely neglecting the enduring value systems customers bring to every service encounter. This research asks whether political ideology, as a deep-seated moral framework, systematically shapes tipping behavior. Drawing on Moral Foundations Theory, we theorize that liberals, who prioritize care and fairness, interpret tipping as a moral obligation that helps reduce income inequality, whereas conservatives, who emphasize proportionality, individual responsibility, and merit, view tipping as a performance-contingent reward. We address three questions: (1) Do liberal customers tip more generously than conservative customers? (2) Does moral-identity activation—the situational heightening of one’s moral self-concept—mediate this relationship? (3) Does social presence moderate when ideological differences in tipping emerge or attenuate?

Method and Data

We tested our hypotheses across three complementary studies combining hypothetical scenarios and actual behavior. Study 1 (N = 387 U.S. adults; 56.1% female; Mage = 37.36), an online survey conducted via Prolific, established the main effect. Participants imagined dining at their favorite restaurant with a \$65.87 bill and indicated their tip amount. Political ideology was measured with both a single-item 11-point liberal–conservative scale and a seven-item political-stance scale; analyses controlled for willingness to tip, dining frequency, and demographic variables. Study 2 (N = 378; CloudResearch) tested the mediating mechanism using a tipping scenario featuring a realistic restaurant receipt (\$48.96 bill). Moral-identity activation was captured with a five-item scale ($\alpha = .888$) adapted from prior research, and mediation was assessed with Hayes’ PROCESS Model 4 (5,000 bootstrap resamples). Study 3 (N = 247; CloudResearch) examined actual behavior: participants recalled their most recent real-life dining

experience and reported the bill amount, tip amount, tip percentage, and dining companions, enabling a test of social presence as a moderator with real tipping data.

Summary of Findings

Results consistently supported our framework. In Study 1, conservative ideology negatively predicted tip size ($b = -.13$, $p < .05$), and the liberal-advocacy measure positively predicted it ($b = .36$, $p < .05$); both effects held after controlling for demographic variables, with explained variance consistent with prior tipping research. Study 2 revealed a significant indirect effect of ideology on tip size through moral-identity activation (95% CI $[-.06, -.01]$): ideology predicted moral-identity activation ($b = -.04$, $p < .001$), which in turn predicted tip size ($b = .77$, $p < .001$), indicating that liberals tip more generously because tipping situations more strongly activate their moral self-concept. Study 3 replicated the main effect with actual tipping behavior ($b = -.25$, $p < .05$) and revealed a significant ideology $\times$ social presence interaction ($F(1, 236) = 4.75$, $p < .05$). Under low social presence, liberals tipped significantly more than conservatives (20.21% vs. 18.46%, $p = .035$); under high social presence, this difference disappeared (18.98% vs. 20.11%, $p = .286$).

Key Contributions

This research offers the first comprehensive framework linking customer tipping to broader theories of morality and values. Theoretically, we (1) establish political ideology as an enduring, value-based predictor of customer discretionary behavior, moving beyond the situational factors emphasized in prior tipping research; (2) introduce moral-identity activation as a novel psychological mechanism explaining why ideologically different customers respond differently to identical service experiences; (3) identify social presence as a theoretically grounded boundary condition clarifying when ideological effects emerge or diminish; and (4) strengthen empirical

credibility by incorporating actual behavioral data from real service encounters, addressing the intention–behavior gap. Managerially, hospitality operators can use regional voting patterns as proxies for customer ideology and tailor messaging accordingly, employing fairness-focused appeals in liberal-leaning markets and merit-highlighting service touches in conservative areas. Moreover, increasing the social visibility of tipping through guest-facing payment terminals or visible tip displays can reduce ideological variance and raise overall tips, particularly among conservative customers, improving frontline employee earnings without additional operational cost.

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Data Availability: Data, survey instruments, and analysis code are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References are available upon request.

DOES EMPATHETIC AI LEAD TO CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT?

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Keywords: Empathetic AI; Customer Engagement; Chatbots; Perceived Interaction Quality; Social Response Theory

Description: This study examines whether empathetic AI enhances customer engagement and whether perceived interaction quality strengthens this effect.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence refers to machines that demonstrate aspects of human intelligence by learning, connecting, and adapting, with the degree of these capabilities varying across application contexts (Huang & Rust, 2021a). In service settings, AI has become increasingly visible through smart assistants and frontline service technologies, while also shaping less visible activities such as social media, purchase recommendations, stock trading, and pricing (Esmaeilzadeh & Vaezi, 2022). A key application in marketing and service is the chatbot, defined as an automated program that communicates with users through text-based interaction (Przegalinska et al., 2019). Chatbots provide continuous support across sales, service, and marketing functions (Ashfaq et al., 2020) and allow customers to obtain information, place orders, or request services in real time (Luo et al., 2019). Yet, despite their growing use, limited research explains whether empathetic AI can foster customer engagement.

This gap is important because conversational AI increasingly generates responses aligned with users' emotional states to enhance engagement, build rapport, and simulate intelligence (Curry & Curry, 2023). In this study, empathetic AI refers to AI systems that simulate empathy by responding to users' emotional cues through perspective-taking, emotional responsiveness, and empathic concern. More broadly, AI in services is evolving from a rational tool into a "feeling machine" intended to address customers' emotional needs (Bagozzi et al., 2022). Drawing on social response theory, which suggests that people apply social rules to computers during human-computer interaction (Nass & Moon, 2000), this study asks: How does empathetic AI influence customer engagement? and How does perceived interaction quality moderate this relationship?

Method And Data

This research will use two experimental studies. Study 1 will employ a one-factor between-subjects design comparing empathetic AI with a control condition to test the direct effect of empathetic AI on customer engagement. Study 2 will extend this investigation by using a 2×2 between-subjects design: empathetic AI versus control and high versus low perceived interaction quality.

The experimental context will involve a travel insurance chatbot interaction adapted from Juquelier et al. (2025). Participants will imagine planning a trip and seeking assistance from a chatbot regarding travel insurance concerns. A video-based experimental format will be used because prior research suggests that videos can enhance ecological validity in simulated service settings (Bateson & Hui, 1992; Morales et al., 2017). The empathetic chatbot will express perspective-taking, emotional responsiveness, and empathic concern, consistent with Juquelier et al.'s (2025) manipulation. The control chatbot will provide more mechanical,

information-driven responses. Data will be collected through Prolific, with an expected sample of approximately 250 respondents. Perceived interaction quality will be measured using items adapted from Kim and Niehm (2009) and Juquelier et al. (2025), while customer engagement will be measured using items adapted from Kumar et al. (2010), Kumar and Pansari (2016), and Rather (2025).

Summary of Findings

The study expects that empathetic AI will positively influence customer engagement. Participants exposed to the empathetic AI condition are expected to report higher engagement than those exposed to the mechanical control condition. This engagement is expected to include stronger word-of-mouth intentions, greater willingness to reuse the AI service, increased willingness to provide suggestions, and greater helping behaviors toward other users. This expectation is grounded in the idea that empathic responses can convey understanding, concern, and perspective-taking during service interactions (Bagozzi et al., 2022; Poushneh et al., 2024).

The study further expects perceived interaction quality to moderate this relationship. Interaction quality refers to the communicative aspect of service encounters (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Ekinici & Dawes, 2009). In AI-enabled service settings, interaction quality is important because customers increasingly rely on chatbots and virtual agents for service communication (Ashfaq et al., 2020; Pelau et al., 2021). When customers perceive the AI interaction as accurate, relevant, timely, and useful, empathetic responses are expected to appear more credible and supportive. However, when interaction quality is low, empathy may be less effective because customers may focus more on functional deficiencies than emotional responsiveness.

Statement of Key Contributions

This study contributes to AI-enabled services, customer engagement, and human–computer interaction research in three ways. First, it extends social response theory to empathetic AI by examining whether empathy cues in chatbot interactions lead customers to respond more socially to AI service agents (Nass & Moon, 2000). Second, it advances research on empathetic and human-like AI by examining whether empathy in AI service interactions enhances engagement rather than assuming that human-like responses are always beneficial. Third, it identifies perceived interaction quality as a boundary condition that may determine when empathetic AI is more or less effective.

The study also contributes to customer engagement research by examining engagement as a multidimensional behavioral outcome. Specifically, customer engagement includes word-of-mouth, reuse intention, suggestions, and helping behaviors, consistent with prior engagement research (Kumar et al., 2010; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Rather, 2025). Managerially, the study suggests that firms should not treat empathy as a stand-alone feature. Instead, empathetic AI is likely to create stronger engagement when emotional responsiveness is paired with accurate, relevant, timely, and useful interaction quality.

References are available upon request.

Marketing Education

EVIDENCE IN EPISODES: TEACHING SERIAL DEMONSTRATION ADVERTISING THROUGH A SIX-EPISODE CAMPAIGN DESIGN SPRINT

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Keywords: serial demonstration advertising; marketing education; advertising strategy; B2B marketing; experiential learning.

Description: This conceptual marketing-education paper introduces serial demonstration advertising as a teachable evidence-based campaign architecture and presents a 60-90-minute team activity for designing six-episode demonstration campaigns.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Marketing students often learn campaign thinking through one-shot deliverables, yet many marketplace campaigns unfold as linked demonstrations that accumulate proof. This paper asks: How can serial demonstration advertising (SDA) be defined, theorized, and taught as an evidence-based campaign architecture, and how can a short team activity improve students' ability to connect creative strategy with claim-evidence logic? SDA is conceptualized as "evidence in episodes": a planned series of advertisements or branded videos that repeatedly demonstrates performance-relevant attributes through repetition, escalation, and contextual variation. The focal pedagogical problem is that students may generate attention-getting ideas without specifying what a viewer should infer, what evidence supports a claim, or how a skeptical audience might evaluate credibility. The paper addresses this problem by developing a

Conceptual Model of SDA Mechanisms and Learning Outcomes and translating it into a structured, 60–90 minute six-episode campaign design sprint for undergraduate and graduate marketing courses.

Method and Data

This is a nonempirical conceptual and pedagogical paper; therefore, no primary data are reported. The paper synthesizes literature on visual attention, narrative engagement, persuasion knowledge, repetition, virality, constructive alignment, experiential learning, cooperative learning, and retrieval practice to develop the SDA teaching model. It also uses illustrative campaigns only as classroom stimuli, not as cases for empirical inference. Examples include Volvo Trucks' 2013 "Live Tests" series, including "The Hook," "The Ballerina Stunt," "The Hamster Stunt," "The Technician," "The Chase," and "The Epic Split," as well as other serial demonstration series such as Blendtec's "Will It Blend?," Ken Block's "Gymkhana," Apple's "Shot on iPhone," and Pepsi Max "Test Drive." The teaching module asks student teams to deconstruct SDA examples, select a product, identify a verification barrier, and design a six-episode evidence arc with a claim-evidence map, storyboard panels, repetition device, channel sequence, and skepticism safeguards.

Summary of Findings

As a conceptual teaching contribution, the paper's findings are presented as expected instructional outcomes and research propositions rather than empirical results. The model suggests that SDA is effective as a learning object because it makes persuasion mechanics visible: students can observe how attention is directed toward diagnostic cues, how mini-narratives create suspense and engagement, and how transparency and test design can build credibility while anticipating skepticism. The classroom activity is expected to improve students'

ability to distinguish diagnostic proof from spectacle, map claims to observable evidence, design logically escalating episodes, integrate brand meaning through repetition, and justify creative choices using theory. The proposed evaluation plan compares the SDA module with a standard one-shot campaign brief across course sections or semesters. Suggested outcomes include concept-test scores, rubric scores for campaign artifacts, perceived learning and self-efficacy, and delayed retention checks. The paper also identifies boundary conditions: the activity is especially useful in high-risk and B2B contexts but can apply to B2C products when students specify what buyers cannot easily verify before purchase.

Key Contributions

First, the paper defines SDA as a theory-grounded construct for marketing education: a serial proof architecture in which each episode functions as an evidence unit and the full series functions as an accumulating argument. Second, it develops a Conceptual Model of SDA Mechanisms and Learning Outcomes organized around attention capture and guided processing, episodic narrative engagement, and credibility formation and skepticism management. Third, it provides a replicable 60-90-minute team activity that can be used in advertising, IMC, B2B marketing, digital marketing, and graduate marketing electives. Fourth, it supplies assessment tools and researchable propositions, including a five-criterion rubric emphasizing claim-evidence diagnosticity, seriality and escalation, credibility management, brand integration and repetition, and theory justification. The contribution is practical as well as scholarly: instructors receive a ready-to-use classroom module, students practice evidence-based creative strategy, and practitioners gain a structured way to distinguish persuasive demonstration architecture from mere spectacle.

References are available upon request.

BRIDGING THE GLOBAL MARKETING TALENT GAP: USING SOCIAL SENSEMAKING TO IMPROVE ASSESSMENT EQUITY AND PERFORMANCE

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Keywords: Rubric Sensemaking, Marketing Briefs, Global Marketing Talent, Assessment Literacy, Career Acculturation

Description: This study uses Weick's sensemaking framework to demonstrate how pedagogical scaffolds improve marketing students' rubric literacy, preventing socio-cultural interpretive gaps from being misdiagnosed as skill deficits in subsequent organizational jobs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

When international marketing students transition from graduate programs to Western organizational roles, they encounter an underrecognized *hidden curriculum* embedded in professional evaluation artifacts such as marketing strategy briefs and KPI appraisal matrices. While firms assume terms like *consumer-centric justification* or *market disruption* are self-explanatory, these frameworks are deeply encoded with Western corporate conventions. When diverse talent struggles to decode these ambiguous professional cues, managers may routinely misdiagnose a socio-cultural interpretive gap as an inherent marketing skills deficit. This challenge mirrors the globalized marketing classroom, where standardized grading rubrics—intended to ensure transparency—presuppose an assessment literacy that privileges some socialized students while leading others to prioritize superficial compliance with criteria. Grounded in Weick's organizational theory of sensemaking, this study addresses this critical

classroom-to-career bottleneck. We ask: How do different instructional scaffolds shape international marketing students' capacity to decode ambiguous evaluative criteria and align their work with professional standards? More importantly, can intentional pedagogical design mitigate systemic interpretive disadvantages in the classroom to better prepare global marketing students for the unwritten rules of corporate discourse in the workplace?

Method and Data

This study utilizes a multi-section, quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the performance and equity consequences of varied instructional scaffolding within an aggregate sample of 243 graduate business students from all business programs in a required marketing graduate class. The sample is a highly globalized cohort with 67% of participants having completed their undergraduate degrees in India, 24% in the United States, and 9% in 11 other countries. To simulate the ambiguous, judgment-dependent tasks common in the workplace, the empirical context features a complex, ill-structured marketing ethics case that requires interpretive judgment regarding multi-stakeholder retail challenges. Across parallel sections holding the instructor, case prompt, and grading criteria constant, we evaluate three instructional conditions reflecting distinct sensemaking affordances: (1) temporal spacing via early assignment and criteria release to permit iterative reflection; (2) passive information delivery via a non-interactive instructor walkthrough video; and (3) interactive social sensemaking implemented through structured, peer-to-peer, and instructor discussions. The analytical framework estimates Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models using section-clustered robust standard errors to control for nested cohort dependencies. In addition, a separate non-rubric analytical assignment serves as a falsification test to isolate true rubric-specific interpretive literacy from general academic ability or effort.

Summary of Findings

Baseline analysis confirms a significant initial equity gap, with prior assessment socialization strongly predicting performance on rubric-graded marketing tasks ($p < .001$). Standardized effect sizes (Glass's Δ) reveal a clear hierarchy across the instructional treatments. Passive information transfer via video walkthroughs yields no significant performance gains compared to text-only controls ($\Delta = 0.16, p = .365$), indicating that one-way explanation does not bridge complex interpretive boundaries. In contrast, temporal spacing significantly improves rubric-aligned outcomes ($\Delta = 0.34, p = .023$), demonstrating that distributed time reduces working memory load. Most critically, interactive social sensemaking via peer calibration discussions yields the largest positive improvement in performance ($\Delta=0.62, p < .001$). Multivariate regression models reveal a significant negative interaction effect between the social sensemaking scaffold and prior rubric familiarity ($b=-1.87, p = .030$). This interaction confirms that peer-led interpretation acts as a powerful equalizer, disproportionately benefiting students who enter with low rubric literacy and effectively closing the achievement gap. The falsification test shows no positive spillover on non-rubric assignments, indicating that the interventions specifically enhance targeted interpretive literacy rather than merely lifting baseline student compliance or motivation.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research bridges marketing pedagogy, organizational behavior, and assessment literacy, offering high-impact contributions tailored directly for the marketing education literature. Academically, it challenges the assumption that standardized evaluative rubrics are culturally neutral instruments of transparency, providing evidence that *fairness-through-standardization* in

global business schools is conditional on *fairness-through-sensemaking*. By identifying rubrics and marketing briefs as ambiguous cue systems, we specify the precise cognitive mechanism explaining why interactive, social scaffolds succeed where passive delivery fails. Managerially, this study offers practical value to corporate marketing departments, agencies, and recruiters hiring global marketing talent. By demonstrating that cross-cultural performance variations often reflect structural interpretive gaps rather than core marketing capability deficits, we provide firms with an actionable framework for organizational jobs. Implementing peer calibration groups and annotated corporate exemplars within corporate onboarding allows companies to accurately evaluate and retain international marketing students based on true marketing competency rather than unwritten cultural fluency with Western corporate discourse. Finally, from an AACSB accreditation and Assurance of Learning perspective, this study provides insights for business schools seeking or maintaining accreditation. It highlights the importance of shifting from performative artifact compliance toward process-oriented evaluation that emphasizes how students interpret and apply rubrics to improve learning outcomes.

References are available upon request.

**Hope by Facilitation and Relation: A Study of Futures Thinking in Business School
Education**

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Key words: Hope; Management Education; Futures Thinking; Critical Pedagogy;
Transformative Learning

Description: This study examines how futures-oriented pedagogy cultivates hope as a moral, relational, and pedagogical resource that enables management students to engage constructively with uncertainty.

Research Question: Business schools increasingly operate within a context characterised by climate change, geopolitical instability, technological disruption, and growing social inequalities. These conditions create profound uncertainty for students, many of whom report anxiety regarding both their personal futures and the long-term sustainability of social and ecological systems. Traditional management education, often grounded in instrumental rationality and technical problem-solving, has been criticised for inadequately preparing graduates to navigate moral ambiguity, emotional complexity, and uncertain futures. As a result, scholars have called for educational approaches that foster critical reflection, ethical awareness, and the capacity to imagine alternative futures. Within this context, hope emerges as a potentially important pedagogical resource. Rather than viewing hope as naïve optimism or a fleeting emotional state, this study conceptualises hope as a moral, relational, and

developmental capacity that enables constructive engagement with uncertainty. Drawing on virtue ethics, critical pedagogy, and futures thinking, the research explores how hope can be intentionally cultivated within management education. The study addresses two research questions: (1) What pedagogical conditions enable hope to emerge among management students? and (2) How is hope experienced and enacted across individual and collective levels of learning? By examining an innovative futures-focused undergraduate module at a UK business school, the research investigates how pedagogical design, facilitation, dialogue, and collaborative inquiry contribute to students' development of agency, ethical awareness, and future-oriented purpose.

Method and Data: A qualitative research design was adopted to explore the emotional, relational, and reflective dimensions of hope within a futures-oriented learning environment. The study focused on a final-year undergraduate module designed around Futures Thinking principles, integrating experiential learning, collaborative inquiry, gamification, reflective practice, and facilitated dialogue. Data were collected across two student cohorts (2023/2024 and 2024/2025) through semi-structured interviews and supported by teaching-team observations. In total, 48 interviews were conducted with 41 participants who had completed the module. Interviews lasted approximately 50 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or online via Microsoft Teams. The interview protocol was informed by the 3R-EC Framework and encouraged reflection, reflexivity, and future-oriented sensemaking. To enhance rigour and reduce researcher bias, responsibility for interview design, data collection, and analysis was distributed across the research team. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and analysed using inductive thematic analysis guided by the Gioia methodology. Ethical approval procedures included informed consent, confidentiality protections, and assurances that participation would not affect academic outcomes.

Summary of Findings: Three interconnected themes emerged from the analysis: emotional engagement and evolving courage, the emergence of hope through collaboration, and the reimagining of responsibility and personal purpose. Together, these themes reveal hope as a developmental process shaped by facilitation, dialogue, reflection, and collective meaning-making. First, students described moving from apprehension and uncertainty toward greater emotional resilience and confidence. Engagement with topics such as climate change, geopolitical instability, and societal disruption initially generated anxiety, yet carefully facilitated discussions enabled students to confront uncertainty constructively. Through reflective practice and dialogue, students developed courage, self-awareness, and confidence in navigating ambiguous futures. Second, hope emerged through collaborative learning and respectful engagement with diverse perspectives. Scenario-building activities, group discussions, and creative problem-solving fostered collective imagination and shared purpose. Students frequently described collaboration as emotionally sustaining, enabling them to transform uncertainty into opportunities for learning, solidarity, and mutual support. Third, participation in the module prompted students to reconsider their future careers and professional identities through an ethical lens. Many reported stronger commitments to sustainability, social responsibility, and values-driven decision-making. Rather than viewing employability solely in instrumental terms, students increasingly framed professional success as aligned with broader ethical and societal responsibilities.

Key Contributions: This study makes significant contributions to management education scholarship by repositioning hope as a central pedagogical resource rather than a peripheral emotional outcome. While critical management education has successfully challenged instrumental and managerialist assumptions, it has often provided limited guidance regarding how students can be supported to act constructively in uncertain environments. By integrating virtue ethics, critical pedagogy, futures thinking, and narrative theory, this research offers a

novel framework for understanding hope as a developmental and relational capacity. The study develops the Hope in Management Learning Model, which explains how facilitation and social relationships interact to generate four interconnected forms of hope: personally transformative hope, collaborative and dialogic hope, ethically grounded and introspective hope, and communal and solidary hope. The model demonstrates how hope develops through the interaction of individual reflection and collective engagement, providing a theoretically integrated account of emotional, ethical, and social learning processes. Beyond theory, the research provides practical guidance for educators, curriculum designers, leadership development professionals, and organisational learning practitioners.

References available upon request.

HUMAN FLOURISHING INNOVATION: A NOVEL DESIGN THINKING METHOD FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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Keywords: Human Flourishing Innovation, Design Thinking, Innovation Method

Description: This paper introduces Human Flourishing Innovation, a novel and effective design thinking method, through theorizing, teaching and testing the approach to solve difficult, real-world problems.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Design thinking (DT) is an increasingly popular approach to tackle wicked or stubbornly difficult human problems, whether social, economic, or material in nature. Originating in the field of design, it uses design tools and mindsets to solve these problems through developing human-centered innovations. Yet the profusion of interpretations and the absence of a conceptual basis have impeded understanding of DT and its applications. Also, articulations have thus far ignored the chief challenge of any innovation method: effectively managing human behaviors in project teams that undermine or elevate outcomes. Finally, due to limited theorization on DT, there exists a dearth of empirical evidence on whether and how it works.

This paper redresses these gaps by proposing and testing a novel, theory-based DT method. We call it Human Flourishing Innovation (HFI) to reflect both intended results (solutions to improve the well-being of users) and processes (elements to effectuate team members' human collaborative and creative behaviors). The method is geared towards business students and practitioners who have no familiarity with design. Drawing on theories of human flourishing, we conceptualized HFI as an approach to solve complex human problems, taught it to MBA students in a project course, and longitudinally tested the model through surveys.

Method and Data

Over an 8-week period, 105 MBA students at a U.S. university were taught the HFI framework as an integrated problem solving process composed of three “being” capacities (growth mindset, character strengths, and mindfulness) and three “doing” capabilities (discovery, design, and delivery, or design thinking collectively). Student teams applied the framework to an innovation project on a wicked human problem, while online surveys captured their perceptions in week 1 (T1), week 6 (T2), and after the project concluded and before grading in week 9 (T3). The being measures were adapted from existing ones, while doing capabilities were created de novo.

To assess the measurement model consisting of seven reflective measures, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Each scale surpassed the .70 threshold for Cronbach alpha and the .60 threshold for composite reliability, while all AVEs were greater than shared correlations.

Together the values supported convergent and discriminant validities. One formative measure for design thinking was created as a higher order construct composed of discovery, design, and delivery. As predicted by the conceptual framework, PLS-SEM analyses showed that all being

capacities directly (mindfulness) or indirectly (growth mindset and character strengths through mindfulness) increased design thinking (formative measure), which in turn improved the quality of the innovations.

Statement of Key Contributions

This research makes contributions to business scholars and practitioners by introducing, applying, and assessing a new and novel DT method called Human Flourishing Innovation (HFI). The method contributes one of the first theoretically coherent and anchored frameworks of DT, drawing on human flourishing concepts and outlining what DT is and how it works. Past articulations of DT are somewhat vague and not theoretically grounded. Critically as a second contribution, the study addresses perhaps the main challenge of any innovation approach, namely human conundrums such as conflict and misunderstanding that arise in team projects. By integrating ways to strengthen and leverage human “being” capacities such as the growth mindset towards the uncertain, messy, and frustrating activities of co-invention, HFI attempts to proactively mitigate unhealthy conflict and promote collective creativity. The third and last contribution is providing quantitative empirical evidence on HFI. In light of limited quantitative testing of DT frameworks as a whole (beyond existing case studies and qualitative research), we substantively advance knowledge on innovation and marketing by demonstrating that HFI is an effective *and* human-sensitive approach to complex problem solving.

THE RELUCTANT ARCHITECT: THE AI TRUST PARADOX IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS

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Keywords: artificial intelligence adoption; trust in automation; privacy paradox; technology acceptance; marketing workforce readiness

Description: This study profiles the *Reluctant Architect*, an emerging marketing professional who adopts AI tools while strategically withholding personal data and documents a confidence–competence gap with implications for AI governance and marketing education.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

The rapid embedding of artificial intelligence in marketing work raises a question that conventional adoption theory does not fully answer: when a tool is probabilistic and semi-autonomous, what governs whether emerging professionals rely on it, and how much of themselves they reveal to it? We investigate an emerging pattern we term the AI Trust Paradox, in which individuals express high intention to use AI tools while remaining markedly less willing to share the personal data that would deepen personalization. Specifically, we ask: (1) Do emerging marketing professionals endorse AI use while resisting data disclosure? (2) Which factor most strongly predicts intended AI use: trust, perceived usefulness, perceived skill, or privacy concern? and (3) Do self-perceived AI skills align with demonstrated proficiency?

Together these questions probe whether AI adoption is best understood as a utility decision, as

classic technology-acceptance models emphasize, or as a trust-and-governance decision shaped by disclosure boundaries and calibration between confidence and competence.

Method and Data

We surveyed business students enrolled in marketing-relevant courses at a U.S. university (N=308), a population that constitutes the near-future marketing workforce currently forming professional norms around AI use. The instrument captured intended AI use, willingness to share personal data, trust in AI, perceived usefulness, privacy concern, and perceived AI skill using multi-item Likert scales (all internal consistencies above conventional thresholds). To move beyond self-report, we paired these attitudinal measures with a scenario-based assessment of demonstrated proficiency, in which respondents acted on realistic AI outputs involving factual verification, prompt construction, and data-disclosure judgment; responses were scored against a predetermined key and scaled for comparison with self-perceived skill. We tested the hypothesized structure with structural equation modeling, evaluating fit against established thresholds, and complemented it with a random forest model to assess the relative predictive contribution of each construct. A paired-samples comparison tested the central gap between intended use and disclosure willingness, and between perceived and demonstrated skill.

Summary of Findings

Three findings emerged. First, the AI Trust Paradox was empirically supported: intended AI use was significantly higher than willingness to share personal data, confirming that adoption and disclosure follow distinct logics. Respondents fit the *Reluctant Architect* profile, building AI-augmented workflows while strategically withholding personal data rather than rejecting the tools outright. Second, trust showed the largest standardized association with intended use, exceeding perceived usefulness, with privacy concern operating primarily as a negative predictor

of disclosure rather than use. Both the structural model and the random forest converged on trust as the leading predictor of intended adoption, though we interpret these associations as predictive rather than causal given the cross-sectional design. Third, we document a confidence paradox: self-perceived AI skill was essentially uncorrelated with demonstrated proficiency, and respondents significantly overestimated their skill relative to performance. Taken together, the results suggest that adoption can scale rapidly even as data permissions stay constrained and as users' confidence outpaces their verification ability.

Key Contributions

This study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it extends the Technology Acceptance Model to generative contexts by showing that perceived usefulness, while still relevant, may be necessary but not sufficient for adoption: probabilistic, semi-autonomous tools appear to require a prior permission to rely grounded in trust. It also reframes the privacy paradox as strategic withholding, recasting privacy not as a barrier to adoption but as a boundary condition on personalization depth. Empirically, it profiles the *Reluctant Architect* and documents a confidence–competence gap that has direct implications for how AI readiness is measured. For practice, the findings caution that self-reported readiness surveys are poorly calibrated proxies for capability, and that governance should shift from compliance-only messaging toward warranted trust: sanctioned toolchains, workflow validation, tiered data permissions, and verification training calibrated to task criticality and data sensitivity. For marketing education, the work argues for teaching not just how to prompt, but how to audit AI outputs—building the verification habits that confidence alone does not supply.

References are available upon request.

LEARNING ACROSS OCEANS: THE IMPACT OF GAMIFIED RITUALS ON INTERCULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ON SEMESTER AT SEA

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Keywords: Study abroad, Semester at Sea, Rituals, PERMA

Description: This paper examines how gamified rituals within the Semester at Sea program shape intercultural learning, identity formation, and relationships, highlighting the role of shared practices in structuring transformative study abroad experiences.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Study abroad experiences are widely framed as transformative rites of passage that shape students' identities, intercultural competence, and global outlook. However, prior research has focused primarily on individual learning outcomes and program duration, with limited attention to the role of shared rituals and traditions in structuring these transformations. Rituals, defined as repetitive, symbolic, and socially embedded practices, may be critical in fostering belonging, emotional engagement, and intercultural learning within diverse student cohorts.

This study examines how such rituals function within Semester at Sea, a 105-day, ship-based study abroad program in which approximately 500 students live and learn while traveling across 10-12 countries. Beyond classroom and port-based learning, the program creates a unique, immersive “contact zone” where shipboard traditions such as Neptune Day and the Sea Olympics structure social interaction and community building.

Drawing on ethnographic observations and student narratives, this research asks: How do gamified, program-embedded rituals shape intercultural identity, relational dynamics, and learning in highly mobile, multicultural environments? By foregrounding participant observation and longitudinal student accounts, the study challenges the assumption that immersion alone drives transformation and instead highlights the social and symbolic mechanisms underpinning study abroad experiences.

Method and Data

This study adopts an ethnographic and phenomenological approach (Maggs-Rapport, 2000) to examine how rituals shape intercultural learning and identity in study abroad. The empirical context is the Semester at Sea (SAS) Fall 2024 Voyage, during which both authors were embedded as faculty teaching marketing and intercultural communication. SAS is structured around three interconnected pillars: (1) shipboard education through courses delivered at sea, (2) in-port experiences including field classes and cultural immersion, and (3) ship life, encompassing a dense system of communal rituals and traditions.

Data collection draws on the authors' participant observation, complemented by a review of 16 student blogs published between 2001 and 2023. The analysis focuses on two highly ritualized shipboard events: (1) Neptune Day, a maritime rite of passage marking the crossing of the equator through symbolic and embodied practices, and (2) Sea Olympics, a ship-wide competition in which student groups ("Seas") engage in coordinated, gamified challenges. Data was analyzed thematically using the PERMA framework to capture how rituals shape emotional engagement, relationships, meaning, and intercultural identity development.

Summary of Findings

Findings show that shipboard rituals function as central mechanisms of intercultural learning, identity formation, and relational development, structured through the five dimensions of the PERMA framework.

- (1) Positive emotions are amplified through rituals such as Neptune Day and the Sea Olympics, which create moments of joy, release, and shared excitement that counterbalance academic and intercultural stress. Students repeatedly describe these events as energizing and emotionally meaningful.
- (2) Engagement is intensified through embodied and collaborative participation. Preparation and performance in ritualized activities foster deep involvement, with students investing significant time and effort, often experiencing flow and collective immersion.
- (3) Relationships are strengthened as rituals actively generate social bonds across culturally diverse groups, transforming acquaintances into a cohesive “ship community.”
- (4) Rituals provide meaning by operating as symbolic rites of passage that help participants interpret their journey and negotiate evolving identities. Events such as crossing the equator provide shared narratives that anchor personal transformation.
- (5) Finally, accomplishment emerges through both collective and individual achievements, as diverse forms of participation are recognized beyond traditional academic performance.

Overall, rituals function not as peripheral activities but as central pedagogical mechanisms that enable experiential, relational, and emotionally grounded intercultural learning.

Key Contributions

This study contributes to global marketing education and study abroad design by positioning rituals as core pedagogical mechanisms rather than peripheral social activities. First, it highlights the importance of the full study abroad ecosystem within SAS, demonstrating that learning extends beyond formal instruction and in-port experiences to include ship life as a

critical third pillar. This perspective is particularly relevant for educators involved in immersive, multi-country programs, where informal practices shape student outcomes.

Second, the study advances understanding of intercultural learning by showing how structured, gamified rituals foster engagement, belonging, and identity development in culturally diverse environments. Events such as Neptune Day and the Sea Olympics illustrate how intentionally designed practices create spaces for interaction across differences, enabling students to experiment with identities, negotiate belonging, and build trust.

Finally, the paper offers a design lens by positioning rituals as scalable tools for experiential learning. By linking embodied participation, emotional engagement, and reflection, rituals extend learning beyond cognitive outcomes to include affective and relational dimensions, thereby enhancing students' readiness to navigate complex global environments.

References are available upon request.

DO STUDENTS RETAIN WHAT AI HELPS THEM CREATE? OBSERVATIONS FROM AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT IN WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, retrieval practice, cognitive load, cognitive engagement, authentic assessment

Description: This paper reports observations from practice showing how AI interaction logs, oral defences, and reflective activities can reveal student learning that remains hidden in final polished outputs.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping education, especially the creative disciplines. Tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and CoPilot can produce creative artefacts almost instantly, offering students new opportunities to experiment with ideas and learn industry-relevant digital skills. However, they also raise concerns about how students learn, think, and develop creativity. The challenge is most critical in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) courses which require students to solve practical problems from industries and pitch their creative solutions to clients. If students use AI as a shortcut, they risk producing generic outputs not of industry standard (Anantrasirichai & Bull, 2022). Another concern is that students may rely on AI too much, so they may submit polished work but not fully understand it or be able to justify their ideas.

The aim of this research is to explore how AI can be embedded in WIL courses in a way that supports creativity instead of replacing it. To achieve this aim, the study has three research questions: 1) how students use AI tools in WIL creative assessments; 2) how AI affects students' creative processes, knowledge retention, and ability to defend their work; and 3) what strategies educators can apply to integrate AI meaningfully while still supporting creativity.

Method and Data

To answer these questions, we redesign the authentic assessments using a framework of four theories: desirable difficulties, generative learning, retrieval practice, and reflective practice. The paper draws on observations from the implementation of the assessments in an undergraduate marketing course which incorporates work-integrated learning (WIL) through a live industry project. Over a twelve-week semester, student teams collaborated with an external client to develop marketing artefacts and strategic recommendations.

Rather than restricting the use of AI, the teaching team integrate AI into the authentic assessment tasks while students account for their learning processes, decision-making, and outputs. The redesigned assessments required students to explain, reflect upon, and defend the reasoning underpinning their work, thereby creating opportunities to examine learning retention, metacognitive engagement, and the extent to which students could retain knowledge.

Summary of Findings

The findings show that AI became a routine part of students' learning and assessment processes. However, students engaged with AI in different ways. Some treated AI as a tool for exploration, comparing outputs across platforms, verifying information, and adapting recommendations to suit audience needs. Others use AI to generate ideas, organise information, or improve efficiency, with limited evidence of critical evaluation or refinement.

Differences in cognitive engagement emerged across four stages of learning: idea generation, reasoning and selection, content creation, and reflection. While most students used AI to brainstorm and overcome uncertainty, deeper learning was evident when students critically evaluated AI outputs, integrated external evidence, and reflected on how AI shaped their thinking. In contrast, less engaged students focused primarily on task completion and productivity.

Oral defence assessments further revealed variations in learning retention and understanding. Although students could present campaign outputs and describe individual activities, many struggled to recall processes, explain decision-making, and connect different stages of their work into a coherent strategic narrative. Students often described AI as a useful support tool but found it difficult to articulate how they evaluated AI-generated outputs or applied explicit criteria to judge their quality and relevance. Overall, AI supported learning, but the depth of learning outcomes varied substantially across students.

Key Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to marketing education research and practice in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). First, it shifts the focus from short-term performance outcomes to students' cognitive retention, engagement, and creative judgment when using AI. While many studies evaluate the quality of AI-assisted outputs, this research highlights the limitations of relying on polished final creative outputs.

Second, the study contributes a theory-based framework for designing AI-integrated work-integrated learning (WIL) assessments. By combining desirable difficulties, generative learning, retrieval practice, and reflective practice, the research offers a structured and practical approach for embedding AI into creative coursework without diminishing student agency.

Third, the findings provide evidence that scaffolded AI use, supported by reflective checkpoints and retrieval activities, strengthens knowledge retention and metacognitive awareness. The use of AI interaction logs, think-aloud protocols, and layered assessment tasks demonstrates how educators can capture students' reasoning, not just their final outputs.

References are available upon request

CAREER READY BY DESIGN: AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR WORKFORCE-READY STUDENT MARKETING TALENT

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Keywords: Experiential Learning, Career Ready, Marketing Education, Professional Identity, Workforce Development

Description: This study develops the Career-Ready by Design framework, demonstrating how intentionally designed experiential learning fosters career readiness and professional identity development among marketing students.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Questions

Business schools face increasing pressure to demonstrate that graduates possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also the professional competencies required for successful workforce participation. In marketing education, employers consistently identify communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem solving, analytics, and digital marketing competencies as essential for entry-level positions. Despite the widespread adoption of experiential learning,

many initiatives remain isolated activities rather than intentionally designed systems supporting career readiness. As a result, limited research has examined how students make sense of their evolving capabilities and how experiential learning contributes to workforce-ready marketing talent.

This study investigates how structured experiential learning can be intentionally designed to align marketing education with employer expectations and support professional identity development. Specifically, the research asks: (1) How do marketing students and alumni make sense of their career readiness through participation in a longitudinal experiential learning program? (2) How does structured experiential learning support the development and integration of hard skills, soft skills, and professional identity over time? (3) In what ways do experiential learning roles, feedback mechanisms, and client-facing projects contribute to students' transitions from student to professional? and (4) How do current students' perceptions of career readiness differ from alumni reflections on the same experiential learning program?

Method and Data

This research employs a qualitative participatory case study design to examine how experiential learning can be structured to develop workforce-ready marketing talent. The study was conducted at California Lutheran University and focuses on the School of Management Brand Ambassadors (SOMBA), a student-led experiential marketing program that functions as an in-house marketing laboratory. The program engages students in content creation, analytics, institutional representation, client-facing projects, and team-based marketing activities within an ongoing developmental environment.

Data were collected through 34 semi-structured interviews, including 22 current student participants and 12 alumni of the program. Current students provided perspectives on their ongoing experiences within the program, while alumni offered reflections on the applicability of those experiences following graduation. Interview protocols were informed by employer-identified marketing competencies, experiential learning literature, and career readiness research.

Data analysis followed an inductive and iterative approach grounded in a participatory action research orientation. Findings informed the development of the Career-Ready by Design framework, which conceptualizes career readiness as an ongoing sensemaking process unfolding through four phases: gap analysis, reformulate and integrate, implement and evolve, and evaluate metrics and measure feedback.

Summary of Findings

Career readiness does not arrive at graduation. Across 34 interviews, findings reveal it develops as an iterative sensemaking process through four phases: gap analysis, reformulation and integration, implementation, and evaluative reflection. Participants entered the program underestimating how much communication, professionalism, and analytical thinking professional contexts demand, confirming RQ1.

Hard skills, particularly content creation, AI-assisted ideation, and project management, functioned as entry points. Soft skills, including emotional intelligence, peer accountability, and client-facing communication, ultimately determined how deeply professional identity formed, addressing RQ2. Students managing external clients developed scope negotiation and resilience faster than those in internal-only roles, directly responding to RQ3.

The student-alumni divide was equally instructive. Students prioritized immediate execution; alumni retrospectively credited the program's structural rigor for neutralizing early-career disorientation, addressing RQ4. High-visibility campaigns accelerated executive presence in ways that classroom instruction did not replicate.

Two structural gaps warrant attention. Students had near-zero paid media and SEO exposure, and mid-semester velocity slumps revealed friction between continuous client-agency expectations and fixed academic calendars. These are not peripheral findings; they mark the precise boundaries where intentional program design can close employer-relevant gaps.

Key Contributions

The Career-Ready by Design framework makes three contributions that extend beyond this program and this institution.

Theoretically, the framework reframes career readiness as a longitudinal sensemaking process rather than a graduation-point outcome. By mapping development across four iterative phases, it provides marketing education researchers with a process-oriented alternative to static competency models, one grounded in how students actually interpret and recalibrate their capabilities relative to employer expectations over time.

Methodologically, the deliberate pairing of current student and alumni voices within a single program addresses a persistent limitation in experiential learning research. Alumni retrospection revealed that program value is systematically underestimated during participation and only fully recognized after professional entry. That finding alone has implications for how programs are evaluated and funded.

For practitioners, the framework translates directly into design decisions. Role clarity, client-facing accountability, analytics-informed feedback, and structured reflection are not incidental program features; the data show they are the mechanisms through which hard and soft skills compound into professional identity. Educators can use this framework to audit existing programs, identify structural gaps, and build experiential systems that produce workforce-ready graduates by design, not by accident.

References are available upon request.

**FROM CLASSROOM TO CLIENT: INTEGRATING NEUROMARKETING
TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN ADVERTISING
EDUCATION**

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Keywords: neuromarketing; experiential learning; advertising pedagogy; eye-tracking;
community-engaged learning

Description: This paper presents results from a quasi-experimental comparison- group study that showed how anchoring coursework in evidence - combining community-engaged client work with biometric consumer testing - led to significant increases in students’ self-efficacy, engagement and technology acceptance as well as sustained, delivered value to community clients.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Employers increasingly want marketing graduates who can generate creative work and defend it with evidence, yet conventional advertising courses rarely require students to test ideas against objective consumer response. We ask whether integrating two high-impact practices—community-engaged client projects and biometric consumer testing—produces greater learning than a standard case-based capstone, and, critically, why. We theorize a mechanism we term

evidence-anchoring. Grounded in Kolb's experiential cycle, client work supplies concrete experience; eye-tracking in a consumer-behavior lab converts reflective observation into objective attention evidence (fixations, dwell time, areas of interest); students form abstract principles about what captures attention; and they actively experiment by revising creative before final delivery. The integration is synergistic rather than additive: biometric evidence gives students an external, defensible anchor that replaces "it just looks good" with data-based reasoning, while the live client raises the stakes that motivate genuine revision. We test three questions: (1) Does the integrated design outperform a case-based comparison on self-efficacy, engagement, and technology acceptance? (2) Do students convert attention evidence into creative decisions? (3) Do community clients realize durable value beyond satisfaction?

Method and Data

We used a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent comparison-group design with pre/post measurement across four sections of an upper-division Advertising and Promotions course (N=94). The comparison condition (n=47; two sections) completed a textbook case-study capstone; the treatment condition (n=47; two sections) served eight community clients—restaurants, boutique apparel retailers, and nonprofits—and tested creative in a consumer-behavior lab using Tobii Pro Glasses 3 with iMotions. Students recruited target-market testers, standardized stimuli, ran eye-tracking sessions, analyzed fixations, dwell time, and areas of interest, and translated findings into creative revisions before client delivery. Validated multi-item scales captured marketing self-efficacy (creative strategy, consumer research, client communication, technology/neuromarketing), engagement (UWES-9S), technology acceptance (UTAUT2), satisfaction, and workload; treatment sections additionally reported community-engagement and biometric-creative-synergy measures. Internal consistency was strong

(Cronbach's $\alpha = .86-.99$). Client value was operationalized with a twelve-item partner survey administered at delivery and 30, 90, and 180 days, plus an implementation tracker recording adoption of 73 specific recommendations at the same intervals. We report between-condition effect sizes (Cohen's d) with 95% confidence intervals, subscale means and standard deviations, and implementation rates.

Summary of Findings

The integrated design produced large advantages over the case-based comparison. Overall marketing self-efficacy favored treatment students substantially ($d=3.27$, 95% CI [2.65, 3.89]).

The largest subscale gains appeared where students began least confident:

technology/neuromarketing (comparison post $M=2.89$ vs. treatment $M=5.28$; $d=2.72$) and consumer research ($d=1.53$). Client-communication self-efficacy also rose sharply ($d=1.54$).

Engagement increased across all UWES-9S dimensions (total $d=2.27$; vigor, dedication, and absorption each higher), as did technology acceptance—performance expectancy ($d=1.86$), hedonic motivation ($d=1.81$), and facilitating conditions ($d=1.35$)—and course satisfaction ($d=1.48$). Comparison-group scores were essentially flat from pre to post, indicating gains were not attributable to maturation or repeated testing. Community clients reported consistently high value across all eight partnerships and four timepoints: usefulness ($M=6.23/7$), intent to implement ($M=6.08$), likelihood to refer ($M=6.22$), and overall satisfaction ($M=6.05$). Crucially, value extended beyond satisfaction into action: 64% of 73 student recommendations were implemented by 180 days (37% by 30 days; 56% by 90 days), with creative recommendations adopted most often (73%). Self-report, behavioral, and client-side evidence converge on the same conclusion.

Key Contributions

This study makes four contributions. First, it provides the first comparison-group test of an advertising pedagogy that systematically integrates community-engaged client projects with biometric consumer testing, moving the literature beyond descriptive case reports toward evidence of effect. Second, it names and specifies a transferable mechanism—evidence-anchoring—and maps each implementation phase to Kolb’s experiential cycle, showing why the integration is synergistic rather than additive: objective attention data give students a defensible anchor for creative reasoning that neither client-only nor lab-only designs supply. Third, it demonstrates measurement rigor uncommon in pedagogy scholarship, using validated self-efficacy, engagement (UWES-9S), and technology-acceptance (UTAUT2) scales with strong reliability and reporting effect sizes with confidence intervals. Fourth, it treats mutual benefit as an empirical claim rather than an assertion, operationalizing client value through perceived usefulness, intent to implement, referral likelihood, and—most tellingly—documented implementation rates over 180 days. For faculty and practitioners, the paper supplies a replicable playbook covering client recruitment, phased project delivery, lab testing protocol, consent and biometric-data handling, and assessment, enabling adoption at institutions with varying resources. The design also yields clear directions for multi-site and longitudinal replication.

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