BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Soora Rasouli &

Harry Timmermans (eds.)

Introduction

This is the book of edited one-page abstracts of the 31st RARCS conference. It is compiled to help delegates creating their personal conference program. Because we accept both completed work and work in progress, not all abstracts summarize findings. It may be that authors will, however, be able to present some (preliminary) findings at the conference. Our goal is to create the perfect settings for exchange of ideas, constructive criticisms and recommendations, hoping for future collaborations, further improvement of research standards, dissemination of ideas and new innovative ideas.

In addition to this book of abstracts of all presentations, extended abstracts and full papers of some of the conference presentations are included in the proceedings, distributed in digital form.

Soora Rasouli & Harry Timmermans
Conference chairs

Graziano Abrate

University of Piemonte
Orientale
Department of Economics and
Business Studies
Novara, 28100
Italy

☏ +39 0321 375 440
✉ graziano.abrate@uniupo.it

Valeria Faralla

University of Piemonte
Orientale
Department of Economics and
Business Studies
Novara, 28100
Italy

✉ valeria.faralla@uniupo.it

Word of Mouth vs. Word of Machine: An Empirical Analysis on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Online Reviews

Consumer reviews play a crucial role in online retailing, helping consumer to evaluate products. A large body of literature has demonstrated that consumers use feedback from previous users in the form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) because they reduce their uncertainty, and a positive effect of eWOM on sales has been documented in different platform and product contexts (e.g. Babic Rosario *et al.*, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, researchers have disagreed on which eWOM metrics and dimensions are the most influential on consumer behavior and firm sales. In parallel to human-based recommendations, the rapid development and adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed and is transforming today's marketplace, where new forms of recommendations based on AI are pervasive. Longoni & Cian (2022) have introduced the term "word of machine", providing evidence that "*individuals are more (less) likely to choose AI recommenders when utilitarian (hedonic) attributes are important or salient*" (p. 92). Building on these premises, this paper contributes to the expanding literature on AI applications in retailing and proposes an empirical analysis to compare different form of human and AI-based recommendations and their impact on consumer behavior. The field of study is represented by the hospitality sector, where the use of eWOM is well established and a large amount of data is easily available through online platforms, and both utilitarian and hedonic attributes are important. Particularly, this paper is based on two complementary studies: an analysis of real-world data and an experimental assessment. The first study, based on data collected from booking.com and regarding a sample of hotels in Rome and London, investigates the (in)consistency between numerical and textual contents of human recommendations as evaluated by AI, by comparing the numerical ratings given by a consumer in online reviews with the numerical ratings that ChatGPT would assign to the textual review provided by the same consumer. The second study, based on a between-subjects experimental analysis, investigates the relative importance of different types and dimensions of recommendations on the consumers' purchase intention, by using different treatments (textual vs. numerical components and textual components formulated by humans vs. textual components derived from AI tools). Results document that, according to AI predictions, there are discrepancies between numerical and textual contents of human recommendation which may lead to significantly different ranking across hotels. This does not necessarily imply inefficacy of AI assessment, since there could be a bias in how customers represent their text reviews with a rating, leading to over- or underestimation compared to their textual assessments. Such evidence needs to be combined with the results from the experimental analysis, which focuses on the impact on consumer behavior. The managerial implications are primarily concerned with the use of AI in the area of online retailing and reputation management. For example, AI can help to classify and rank reviews not only by numerical scores, but also according to the assessment of textual contents, as the two dimensions might not always be coherent. Overall, this can enhance the ability of retailers to profile different groups of reviewers and customers, to optimize and enrich their experiences while remaining competitive in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Suhyoung Ahn

HanYang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Republic of Korea

✉ sahn1@hanyang.ac.kr

Yuhsuan Chen

HanYang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Republic of Korea

✉ bomichen06@gmail.com

Minsoo Kim

HanYang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Republic of Korea

✉ kimmin@hanyang.ac.kr

Anthropomorphic AI in Retail: Machine, Assistant or Co-Worker?

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in the retail industry, AI's role has evolved from simple automation to a more complex and nuanced presence. While AI is widely used to optimize customer service, inventory management, and sales forecasting, there remains a gap in research on how retail employees perceive AI. Specifically, whether AI is seen merely as an assistive tool or, due to its anthropomorphic characteristics, is perceived as a "colleague" is an underexplored issue. This study challenges traditional perspectives by redefining AI's role in the retail environment. By examining AI's anthropomorphic features, the study investigates how these characteristics influence retail employees' emotional connection to and attachment to AI. Additionally, it explores how these emotional responses impact employees' satisfaction with AI communication and their intention to continue collaborating with AI in the future. A key contribution of this research is the introduction of perceived AI coworker support as a moderating variable, assessing how the emotional and instrumental support provided by AI affects the relationship between AI anthropomorphism and employees' emotional responses. To test these hypotheses, this study employs covariance-based structural equation modeling, using data collected from retail employees who work alongside AI systems. The findings aim to fill the current gap in the literature concerning AI and employee emotional interactions while providing practical insights for businesses. These insights can guide the design and implementation of AI technologies that foster stronger collaboration between AI and employees, ultimately enhancing operational efficiency and driving further transformation in retail work models.

Per Kristian Alnes

Inland Norway University
of Applied Sciences
Lillehammer, 2603
Norway

☎ +47 95109394
✉ per.alnes@inn.no

Iveta Malasevska

Inland Norway University
of Applied Sciences
Lillehammer, 2603
Norway

☎ + 47 96677229
✉ iveta.malasevska@inn.no

Erik Haugom

Inland Norway University
of Applied Sciences
Lillehammer, 2603
Norway

☎ + 47 47067167
✉ erik.haugom@inn.no

A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis of Fairness Perceptions and Responses to Early-Bird Pricing Among Alpine Skiers in Scandinavia

Early-bird discounts provide savings for customers who buy the product or service in advance of usage, enabling the provider to utilize its relatively fixed capacity better. This pricing strategy has gained ground in several industries, such as hospitality, rental cars, cruise lines, railways, energy, and broadcasting. The success of variable pricing depends on the crucial factor of customer acceptance. An unfavorable response from consumers poses a substantial risk, potentially leading to negative behavioral reactions. In this article we explore customers' perceptions and reactions to discounts on pre-purchased ski passes, considering variations in the length of the pre-purchase period. Three dimensions are used to measure perceived unfairness: Perceived normative deviation, Perceived opacity and Negative affects. The three dimensions are included in a SEM analysis as constructs, where the first dimension is given by the reflexive indicators "Immoral pricing", "Shocking pricing" and "Unacceptable pricing". Perceived opacity includes the indicators "Incomprehensible pricing", "Unclear pricing" and "Illogical pricing", while negative affects consist of the indicators "I feel tricked", "I feel insulated" and "I feel manipulated". Customer reactions is included in the SEM-analyzes by the constructs Revenge Intentions and Purchase Intentions, where Revenge contain the indicators " Say negative things about the resort to friends/family", "Complain to the company about this pricing policy", "Post negative things about the resort on the internet" and "Switch to another ski resort if possible". Our analysis is based on a survey among Norwegian and Swedish alpine skiers (1000 respondents).

Lina Anggraini

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ l.anggraini@ieseg.fr

Nathalie Demoulin

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ n.demoulin@ieseg.fr

Helen Cocco

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ h.cocco@ieseg.fr

Navigating Resistance: Addressing Novel Consumer Barriers to Adopt Augmented Reality in Online Retail

The integration of Augmented Reality (AR) in online retail is reshaping consumer interactions by offering immersive and engaging experiences. Major retailers, including Amazon, IKEA, and Sephora, have adopted AR to provide features like virtual try-ons and home visualizations (Hilken *et al.*, 2017; Pantano *et al.*, 2017). The AR market is projected to reach a value of $198 billion by 2025 (Threekit, 2024). Despite this growth, consumer adoption remains lower than anticipated, presenting challenges for retailers (The Interline, 2024). Understanding consumer resistance to AR is crucial because failure to address barriers could lead to financial losses and weaken retailers' market positions (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2015; Mani & Chouk, 2018). While prior research, such as by Mani & Chouk (2018), addresses functional and psychological barriers to technology adoption, it does not fully cover the unique challenges posed by AR in retail. AR changes how consumers interact with products, offering virtual, real-time visualizations in their environment or on themselves. Unlike mobile banking or IoT, AR requires deeper engagement, including active participation in product simulations and personal data sharing. This research, grounded in technology resistance theory (Ram & Sheth, 1989), seeks to understand AR resistance in retail and provide opportunities for e-retailers to enhance the customer experience (Aggarwal, 2023). To investigate consumer barriers to AR adoption in online retail, we conducted interviews with 20 British non-adopters. Our results identify four novel barriers: loss of self-identity, where consumers feel that AR detaches them from the physical shopping experience they cherish, making them uneasy about embracing a more digital shopping identity; perceived inauthenticity, where consumers express concerns that AR may present a misleadingly positive image of products, making them feel manipulated into purchasing the product; technology ephemerality, where individuals worry that the rapid pace of technological advancement might render AR obsolete, making their time investment feel futile as newer, better options emerge; and ethical risk, where participants raised ethical concerns that AR might encourage consumerism, as retailers seek to enhance shopper engagement through this technology. Additionally, we identified moderators such as technology credibility, user knowledge, perceived augmentation, and social reassurance that influence technology resistance. These findings offer valuable insights for–retailers, suggesting that by addressing concerns related to AR realism, data transparency, and inclusive design, they can mitigate resistance and promote broader AR adoption in online shopping (Hilken *et al.*, 2017; Pantano & Timmermans, 2014). On the basis of these results, we will conduct a survey among consumers in order to test our conceptual model. The results of the survey will be presented at the conference.

Magnus Asgeirsson

University of Iceland
School of Tourism and
Geography
Reykjavík, 102
Iceland

☏ +354 8964693
✉ mha@hi.is

Thorhallur Gudlaugsson

University of Iceland
School of Business
101 Reykjavík
Iceland

☏ +354 8983540
✉ th@hi.is

The Effect of Service Quality, Reputation, and EWOM on Performance Variability

The significance of service quality, positive reputation, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in enhancing the performance of hospitality organizations is well established. However, the interplay among these factors and their collective contribution to performance variability remain underexplored. This paper aims to deepen our understanding of the individual and combined effects of service quality, reputation, and e-WOM on performance, defined as customer satisfaction and loyalty—both critical to the success of hospitality businesses. To achieve this, we conducted a quantitative study, collecting monthly data from hotel guests in Iceland between June 2023 and June 2024. The study yielded 4,335 valid responses from guests staying at nine hotels operated by the same Icelandic chain. Our findings reveal that service quality, reputation, and e-WOM account for 57% ($R^2 = 0.54$) of the variability in performance. Among these factors, e-WOM exhibits the strongest individual effect ($\beta = 0.53$; $P^2 = 0.10$), underscoring its powerful influence on customer perceptions. Tangible service quality follows with a notable effect ($\beta = 0.15$, $P^2 = 0.008$), and reputation exerts the smallest effect ($\beta = 0.13$, $P^2 = 0.01$). These results highlight the necessity for hotel managers to prioritize effective online presence management, as this can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. To further enrich this research, employing confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) could provide deeper insights into the relationships among these key factors. Ultimately, understanding these dynamics can help hospitality organizations optimize performance and improve guest experiences.

Magnus Asgeirsson

University of Iceland
School of Tourism and
Geography
Reykjavík, 102
Iceland

☏ +354 8964693
✉ mha@hi.is

Thorhallur Gudlaugsson

University of Iceland
School of Business
101 Reykjavík
Iceland

☏ +354 8983540
✉ th@hi.is

Service Orientation and Performance in the Hospitality Industry

Researchers have demonstrated that a strong organizational culture significantly enhances organizational performance. Moreover, it has been suggested that emphasizing service through service orientation (SO), which is a form of organizational culture, leads to improved organizational outcomes. Performance can be evaluated in diverse ways, ranging from precise metrics, such as financial calculations, to more subjective assessments, such as employee and customer satisfaction. This aim of this article is to explore the impact of SO on different aspects of performance in hospitality firms, on both individual and collective levels. The researchers followed the Denison organizational culture framework to assess both SO and performance. SO was measured using 25 questions that are related to various organizational culture elements, and performance was categorized into seven areas: sales growth, profitability and ROI, quality of products and services, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, innovation, and new product development (NPD), and overall performance. Data for this study were collected in spring 2024 from employees and managers ($N = 45$) of a hotel chain in central Reykjavík, Iceland. Results indicate that SO accounted for 49% ($R^2 = 0.49$) of the variance in the seven performance variables collectively. The strongest individual correlations were found between SO and overall performance ($\beta = 0.60$, $R^2 = 0.36$) and between SO and employee satisfaction ($\beta = 0.54$, $R^2 = 0.29$). Conversely, the weakest correlations were observed between SO and innovation ($\beta = 0.40$, $R^2 = 0.16$) and between SO and profitability ($\beta = 0.43$, $R^2 = 0.18$). Further testing, such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM), may provide additional insights into these findings. A limiting factor of this study is the small sample size, though all preliminary findings were statistically significant.

Nick Ashill

Victoria University of
Wellington
School of Marketing and
International Business
Wellington, 6011
New Zealand

☏ +64 44636459
✉ nick.ashill@vuw.ac.nz

Paul Williams

University of Southampton
Southampton Business School
Southampton, SO171BJ
United Kingdom

☏ +44 *23 80595000*
✉ paul.williams@soton.ac.uk

Rania Semaan

American University of
Sharjah
Department of Marketing and
Information Systems
Sharjah, 26666

☏ +44 5154641
✉ rsemaan@aus.edu

Creating Sparkle and Magic: Development and Validation of a Brand Charisma Scale

Grounded in Charismatic Leadership Theory, we develop and validate a scale to measure brand charisma as perceived by brand consumers. The new scale is developed and validated in a luxury context. Charisma is particularly relevant to luxury brands, as it encompasses many of the qualities that make luxury brands desirable and influential. We conceptualize brand charisma as a multi-dimensional construct capturing consumer perceptions of a luxury brand's exceptional qualities and its special magnetic charm or appeal. In accordance with established guidelines for scale development, we report the findings of a six-stage process to develop, and empirically validate, a 25-item scale to measure brand charisma as perceived by consumers of luxury goods. The scale comprises 5 dimensions (Honorable; Distinguished; Influential; Distinctive; and Magical) and shows internal consistency, reliability, and construct validity. In addition, we examine nomological validity by identifying variables that are related to brand charisma, including brand heritage and consumer devotion. We extend brand personality literature where research has shown that there is a strong connection between consumers and non-human characters, symbols, and use charismatic leadership theory as the theoretical base for exploring the brand-consumer interface when conceptualizing consumer perceptions of brand charisma. We validate the new scale using exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM), an alternative to traditional CFA approaches when evaluating scale structure and validity. A validated scale for measuring the charisma of luxury brands provides brand managers with a comprehensive view of how consumers perceive brand charisma and how to measure it holistically.

Daniel Baier

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business and
Economics
Bayreuth, 95447
Germany

☎ +49 921 55 4340
✉ daniel.baier@uni-
   bayreuth.de

Alexandra Rese

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business and
Economics
Bayreuth, 95447
Germany

☎ +49 921 55 4346
✉ alexandra.rese@uni-
   bayreuth.de

Danilo Randazzo

Liebherr-Hausgeraete
Ochsenhausen GmbH
88416 Ochsenhausen
Germany

☎ +49 7352 928 3032
✉ danilo.randazzo@
   liebherr.com

Idea Generation and Concept Development Using ChatGPT – A Sample Application for Fridge/Freezer Combinations

The availability of huge amounts of user-generated content (e.g., online customer reviews, posts in blogs and social networks, images and videos on media platforms) as well as transformer-based chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) for their analysis has the potential to fundamentally change the innovation process in many companies: Product/service providers can easily access such expressed attitudes and preferences of consumers (Guyt *et al.,* 2024) whereas ChatGPT and other chatbots allow summarizing this information as well as generating and visualizing product/service concepts that meet the expressed needs (Bouschery *et al.,* 2023, Filippi, 2023). The methodological and practical advances since the first product/service improvement approaches based on online customer reviews (e.g., Decker & Trusov. 2014, Rese *et al.,* 2014) are enormous. In this paper, we apply and evaluate these new transformer-based approaches to idea generation and concept development using fridge/freezer combinations as sample products. A team of product managers from a major European home appliance producer collects product comparisons by research institutes, reports of consumer surveys, and online customer reviews. ChatGPT is used to summarize this information and to interactively predict trends in the fridge/freezer combination industry. Concepts for products based on the company's current offerings and its competitors are generated automatedly. The results are promising: Large amounts of information can be collected and summarized by ChatGPT. Modifications of current offerings together with technical details and visualizations are developed with impressive details. However, the new approaches also demonstrate major deficits: So, e.g., the automated collection of user-generated content is limited compared to the collection by experienced product managers. Repetitions with identical prompts lead to varying results in scope and quality.

Fernanda Barzallo

Complutense University of
Madrid
Faculty of Business
Administration and
Economics
Madrid, 28223
Spain

☏ +34 623981223
✉ ferbarza@ucm.es

Carmen Abril

Complutense University of
Madrid
Faculty of Business
Administration and
Economics
Madrid, 28223
Spain

☏ +34 609280185
✉ cabrilba@ucm.es

Unlocking the Power of Multiple In-Store Technologies: A Consumer-Centric Framework for Retail Innovation

The integration of technologies in brick-and-mortar stores offers retailers a significant opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by enhancing the customer experience. While numerous studies have applied various models to understand technology acceptance, these models often lack cohesion, leading to fragmented knowledge and unresolved controversies. This study aims to analyze the influence of multiple in-store technologies (ISTs) on consumer behavior and to offer an integrated framework that advances and clarifies the current understanding in this field. We begin by identifying the most relevant technologies through a bibliometric analysis and proceed to organize a systematic literature review. The review is structured using the Antecedents-Decisions-Outcomes (ADO) framework and the Theories-Contexts-Methods (TCM) framework. By critically reviewing the outcomes of existing studies, we develop a new framework that represents the combinatorial effects of multiple technology implementations on the customer decision-making process. This study provides a unified framework that integrates existing models, offering a clearer understanding of how multiple in-store technologies jointly influence consumer behavior. Retailers can use this framework to effectively coordinate technology implementations, enhancing customer experiences and optimizing investment outcomes Finally, we propose a research agenda from a consumer perspective, highlighting key areas for future exploration.

Doris Berger-Grabner
Felix Puthenveetil

IMC Krems
University of Applied Sciences
Department Business
Krems, 3500
Austria

☏ +43 2732 802667
✉ doris.grabner@imc.ac.at

Understanding Consumer Purchasing Behavior When Buying Counterfeit Luxury Fashion Items with a Focus on Online Availability and Social Networks

This study examines the motivational factors that influence the purchasing behavior of consumers regarding counterfeit luxury fashion items, with a focus on online availability and social networks. The Internet has made it much easier to obtain counterfeit products and offers consumers a convenient way to order items without physical restrictions. A product piracy study shows that 28% of all respondents in Germany use the internet to buy counterfeit products (EY, 2022). The main risk is that sellers manipulate online advertising services by linking their criminal activities to brands and place ads on legitimate websites or social media platforms to drive commerce to external websites or online marketplaces offering their counterfeit products (BMF, 2023). Therefore, the following research questions were investigated: "What motives influence consumers' purchasing behavior when buying counterfeit luxury fashion items?" and "How do online availability of counterfeit products and social networks affect this behavior?". A systematic literature review was conducted including the Theory of planned behavior, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Perceived risk in consumer behavior theory as a theoretical foundation. The empirical data was collected via an online questionnaire (N = 173), 5-point Likert scale, in May 2024. People aged 18 and over, resident in Austria, were surveyed using quota sampling (age, gender). The data was analyzed univariate and bivariate, using SPSS. The results of the empirical study show that the price advantage was the strongest purchase motivation, rated significantly higher than product quality. A strong identification with a brand (lifestyle, values) correlated significantly with the number of purchased counterfeit luxury items. People who perceive less social stigmatization and low legal risk tend to be more willing to buy counterfeit luxury fashion items. The online availability of counterfeit items makes it easier for consumers to purchase them. The hypothesis that consumers under the age of 30 buy counterfeit items online more frequently than people over 30 could not be confirmed. On social networks, it is easier for consumers to justify the purchase of counterfeits, especially if the seller profile conveys a trustworthy image through many likes and positive comments. Social validation through likes and comments increases the perceived value and trustworthiness of sellers, peer influence increases the acceptance and normalization of buying counterfeit products. In summary, this study shows that price, identification with certain lifestyles or values of the original brands, online availability and the role of social media are key factors that influence purchasing behavior of counterfeit luxury fashion items. Social networks reinforce people's trust in the suppliers of counterfeit items through likes, comments and ratings, thus directly influencing purchasing behavior.

Euodia Isabella Botha

University of Pretoria
Department of Marketing
Management
Pretoria, 0081
South Africa

☎ +27 12 420 4415
✉ euodia.botha@up.ac.za

Adele Berndt

Jönköping University
Jönköping International
Business School (JIBS)
Jönköping, 551-11
Sweden

☎ +46 36 101 819
✉ adele.berndt@ju.se

Zero Waste: Are Retailers and Consumers on the Same Page?

Working towards the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) is crucial, requiring collaborative efforts from both organizations and consumers. The issue of sustainable consumption (SDG12) is particularly important owing to the significant contribution of over-consumption and the associated waste on climate change, but also because of the valuable economic opportunities sustainable consumption practices such as zero waste (ZW) behaviors provide. ZW is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of the 5R behaviors (refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and rot) that culminate in a consumer minimizing their waste and environmental impact. Retailers are key in encouraging such ZW behaviors among consumers. By making a range of strategic and operational decisions such as those relating to the selection of sustainable suppliers or the development of environmentally friendly products and packaging, and communicating these decisions to consumers, they can influence ZW behavior adoption among consumers. For example, many consumers recycle their plastic waste and thus look for products with recyclable packaging. Providing a recycling possibility for product packaging can require the retailer to carefully select their packaging supplier but also to facilitate the purchase of these recyclable packaged products by consumers through marketing efforts. Aligning consumers' ZW behaviors and retailers' operational and marketing efforts could thus provide a sense of synergy that promotes ZW behavior adoption. As a developing country, South Africa lags in sustainability issues. This society is characterized by both sophisticated and less sophisticated consumer groups, each of which engage in ZW behaviors to different extents. This means that as country, it does not exploit all the benefits associated with the 5R behaviors, despite their importance from an economical, societal and environmental perspective. As a consumer behavior, ZW, specifically the 5R behaviors are still poorly understood, and strategies for promoting these behaviors need further research. Thus, the purpose of this study was first to explore how retailer's approach 5R behaviors and second, to determine whether this aligns with South African consumers' 5R behaviors. This study used a mixed methods approach to address the research problem. First, qualitative research was conducted to understand three leading South African retailers' approaches to ZW. This was achieved by analyzing these retailers' annual sustainability reports using NVivo14 and searching for words related to the 5Rs. Second, quantitative data were gathered from a sample of 486 South African consumers, applying the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) to reveal which 5Rs they prioritized. Preliminary findings indicate that retailers mostly used terms related to the recycle and reduce Rs in their sustainability reports, while there was limited to no reference to terms related to the refuse, reuse and rot Rs. The AHP analysis revealed that respondents engaged in reuse behaviors most often, followed by the recycle, reduce, and rot Rs, while respondents engaged in refuse behaviors least often. This highlights a potential misalignment between the approach of retailers versus consumers toward 5R behaviors. This potential misalignment suggests that retailers and consumers have different imperatives, a lack of alignment that can have strategic and environmental implications for the attainment of various SGDs.

Generoso Branca

Bocconi University
Department of Marketing
Milan, 20136
Italy

✉ generoso.branca
@unibocconi.it

Sandro Castaldo

Bocconi University
Department of Marketing
Milan, 20136
Italy

✉ sandro.castaldo
@sdabocconi.it

Monica Grosso

Emlyon Business School
Department of Marketing
and Research Center for
Marketing Technology and
Customer Insights
Lyon, F-69007
France

✉ grosso@em-lyon.com

Diversity and Inclusion in Retail: Consumers' Perceptions and Brand Outcomes

As diversity and inclusion (D&I) become relevant in society and public policy, as well as in consumer expectations, companies face increasing demands to play a role through their policies. In line with Branca *et al.* (2024), retailers can contribute to a more inclusive marketplace by designing services that cater to diverse consumer needs. This includes providing accessible services for people with disabilities, creating inclusive experiences for all customers, representing minorities in marketing materials, and ensuring accessibility in-store and online (Song & Park, 2023; Yang, 2023; Rydzik *et al.*, 2021; Dias de Faria & Moreira Casotti, 2019). Retailers can also promote inclusivity by restructuring distribution channels to cater to a more diverse customer base and through their assortment design, as an example by offering products that appeal to underrepresented groups. An interesting initiative is the "*Quiet Hour*", designed to make shopping more comfortable for individuals on the autism spectrum, particularly sensitive to noise and visual stimuli, promoted by Carrefour. Indeed, it seems relevant to understand what the consumers' response might be when brands decide to implement targeted D&I actions. The study addresses two main research questions: (1) How can retail firms promote diversity and inclusion? and (2) What impact do inclusion-focused strategies have on brand reputation, brand trust, and brand loyalty? Previous literature studied the relationship between CSR policies and their consequences in terms of brand reputation, trust, and loyalty (e.g., Castaldo & Grosso, 2019). Promoting D&I can positively affect brand evaluation (e.g., Henderson *et al.*, 2023; Ruggs *et al.*, 2018; Strebinger *et al.*, 2018), and loyalty (Bennett *et al.*, 2013; Homburg & Ukrainets, 2021; Loughran *et al.*, 2013). Brand reputation has a positive effect on brand trust (Han *et al.*, 2015). Also, brand trust positively impacts brand loyalty, (e.g., Castaldo *et al.*, 2010). However, there still seems to be not much evidence investigating these relations driven by D&I policies in the retail sector. The methodological approach is based on three main elements. First, by conducting a desk analysis, we identify retail companies that promoted D&I initiatives in the Italian market. Second, employing a survey, we test the theoretical relations proposed in this research. Third, comparing the results of the survey at two separate time points, we aim to comprehend the evolution over time of consumer response to D&I initiatives. Preliminary results show that, among 300 brands cited by the respondents (more than 1000 Italian consumers), 12 retailers were perceived among the 50 top inclusive brands. Moreover, retail firms that commit to D&I initiatives not only enhance their brand reputation but also foster deeper consumer trust and loyalty, translating into long-term relational and competitive advantages. By emphasizing how retailers can act as catalysts for social inclusion, this research aims to inform both scholars and practitioners on the strategic importance of D&I in the retailing sector. Moreover, this study highlights the positive impact of commitment in D&I for retailers, in terms of consumer perceptions and business outcomes.

Rafael Bravo-Gil

University of Zaragoza
Faculty of Economics and
Business
Zaragoza, 50005
Spain

☎ + 34 976 76 10 00
✉ rbravo@unizar.es

Jesús Cambra-Fierro

University Pablo de Olavide
Faculty of Business Sciences
Sevilla, 41013
Spain

☎ +34 954 97 79 24
✉ jjcamfie@upo.es

María Román-Ojeda

University CEU-Fernando III
Facultad de Ciencias
Empresariales y Jurídicas
Sevilla, 41930
Spain

☎ +34 954 48 80 08
✉ maria.romanojeda@ceu.es

Rosario Vázquez
Carrasco

University Pablo de Olavide
Department of Business
Administration and Marketing
Sevilla, 41013
Spain

☎ + 34 954 34 98 58
✉ rvazcar@upo.es

The Effects of Films on Place Branding:
A Study of Generation Z Segment

Over the past decade, films have increasingly been recognized as significant motivational drivers for tourism. Blockbuster films, in particular, have the ability to attract international visitors to the locations where they were filmed, often spurring the development of new services and marketing activities in the surrounding area (e.g., guided tours based on the film, festivals, etc.). On a smaller scale, national or local productions can also enhance the attractiveness of the locations where they are shot. In the academic literature, most models of film-induced tourism focus on analyzing the impact of films on individuals' motivations to visit specific locations. However, the effects of films on individuals extend beyond merely increasing tourist numbers or motivating travel to a particular destination. Films can shape or alter individuals' perceptions of the location where the film was shot, influencing their attitudes and behaviors toward that place. The aim of this paper is to analyze the effects of films on the location where they are shot, both from an overall perspective and at an individual level, framing the location as a place brand. To achieve this, we conduct a review of the literature on film-induced tourism, alongside relevant literature on branding. This review delves into studies on place branding and country brand equity while also examining key concepts in brand management. This approach helps identify gaps in the film-induced tourism literature related to aspects of branding, such as brand authenticity, brand attachment, and brand engagement within the context of place branding. These under-researched areas are critical to understanding the impact of films on specific locations. Building on this foundation, we propose a conceptual model grounded in theories of film-induced tourism and branding. The model analyses the effects of films on individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward destination brands. It incorporates moderating variables related to the profile of film-attracted visitors and control variables tied to key determinants of destination branding. Furthermore, recognizing the heterogeneity in consumer behavior across age groups, we test the model within the context of Generation Z (born between 1994 and 2010). This generation is particularly relevant for film-induced tourism, as they prioritize unique travel experiences more than previous generations. Studies report that 70% of Generation Z members have been motivated to visit a destination after seeing it featured in a TV show, news source, or movie. Moreover, Generation Z not only constitutes an important segment of travelers but is also characterized by its significant influence on, and receptiveness to, social media. The results, based on a sample of over 500 individuals, reveal which aspects of the destination brand are most or least impacted by films. These findings allow to extract a series of conclusions and important implications for both the academic literature on tourism services and for destination management organizations.

Jeff Bray

Bournemouth University
Business School
Bournemouth
United Kingdom

☎ +44 1202 965232
✉ jbray@bournemouth.ac.uk

Hans De Steur

Ghent University
Belgium

Vinko Lešić

FER University of Zagreb
Croatia

Juliet Memery

Bournemouth University
United Kingdom

Maxime Michaud

Institut Lyfe
France

Djamel Rahmani

CREDA
Spain

Barbara Ronge

Ronge & Partner
Austria

Ádám Tarcsi

ELTE
Hungary

Esther Van Parys

Ghent University
Belgium

The FoodMAPP Project:
Supporting Local Food Provisioning

FoodMAPP is a European funded applied research project developing localized food supply transparency. Food retailing practice is concentrated toward large retail firms supplying a vast array of international products, but this food system contributes around 30% of global carbon emissions (Ritchie, 2022). Within the EU, food is transported an average of 171km from farm to fork (Wojciechowski, 2020) and 58 million tons is wasted annually at an estimated cost of €132bn (Eurostat, 2023). To address such issues, greater resilience must be built into future supply systems to reduce food waste, support the next generation of food producers with a fair income, and ensure food security for all European citizens. Utilizing short food supply chains (SFSC) where 'local' food is sold through a limited number of intermediaries, with independent price setting for producers, and production information available for consumers, may address these challenges. The research presented here summarizes consumer and stakeholder views toward digital food provisioning platforms that can facilitate short food supply chains and direct to provider relationships. An exploratory mixed methods approach was adopted. Five focus groups with consumers were undertaken alongside 53 stakeholder interviews. Findings from these qualitative data informed the design of an experimental survey $n = 3473$. All data collection was conducted across a diverse sample of European countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Spain & the UK). Findings covered three key areas: 1) definitions of local food, 2) drivers and barriers to local food provisioning, and 3) drivers and barriers in food provisioning with digital tools. Firstly, exploring consumers depictions of local food led to a heterogeneous and multifactorial definition of 'local food'. Key criteria discussed were origin, distance, type of products, number of intermediaries, packaging, type of transport, seasonality, and the context of purchase. Secondly, drivers of local food provisioning were found to be better quality (taste, freshness, healthiness), less waste/food waste, seasonality, and a reduction in the associated carbon footprint (although this was mentioned less than other drivers). Barriers to local food provisioning came in the form of expense as local food was considered more highly priced than alternatives, (although some saw this as a sacrifice to be made), lack of information (at times causing distrust) in the origin and length of the supply chain meaning consumers could not be certain it was 'local', and a lack of diversity. Thirdly, drivers of utilizing digital tools for food provisioning were established as convenience (gaining of time, a simplified daily/weekly schedule, physical ease), along with a reduction on one's mental load (through easily finding recipes, etc.), and finally financial drivers with consumers stating they had more control over expenses with a digital tool. Barriers to food provisioning using digital tools, were stated as a lack of variety in both products and recipes, waste associated with packaging, the proximity of other offers (such as those found in stores), and a loss of benefits such as interaction and physical presence (touch/smell, sociability) found with in-person food provisioning. This research establishes that whilst consumers may perceive some barriers to using digital tools in food provisioning, there is still potential for their use in SFSC. Prototypes of a proposed solution providing local food supply transparency will be shared.

Ruzica Brecic

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Economics and
Business
Zagreb 10000
Croatia

☎ +38 598271436
✉ rbrecic@efzg.hr

Matthew Gorton

Newcastle University
Business School
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE1 4SE
United Kingdom

☎ +44 191 208 1576
✉ matthew.gorton@
   newcastle.ac.uk

Luca Panzone

Newcastle University
School of
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE1 7RU
United Kingdom

☎ +44 (0) 1912083594
✉ luca.panzone@ncl.ac.uk

Promoting Healthy Food Choices: Analyzing the Impact of a Fruit and Vegetable Challenge Through a Loyalty App

Loyalty programs have become a key marketing strategy to promote customer loyalty and influence shopping behavior, particularly in competitive environments ((Bijmolt *et al.*, 2011; Bombaij & Dekimpe, 2020). However, they are underutilized for promoting societal benefits like healthier food consumption, especially in digital environments. Research shows that marketing promotions can effectively increase fruit and vegetable (F&V) sales during a campaign, but little is known about the long-term impact on healthier food choices post-promotion (Panzone *et al.*, 2024). The aim of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of a fruit and vegetable challenge through Konzum's MultiPlusCard loyalty app, designed to encourage healthier food choices. The challenge ran in June 2024, offering up to 20 BONUS euros based on customer purchases of specific fruits and vegetables. The impact of personalized rewards on shopping behavior, focusing on the relations between app engagement and fruit and vegetable consumption will be explored. Data includes sales, app interactions, and customer demographics. Planned analysis includes evaluating the challenge's effectiveness at stimulating F&V sales, evaluating the policy implications for the promotion of healthier food choices.

Jørgen Breivik

UiT – The Arctic University of Norway
School of Business and Economics
Harstad, 9404
Norway

☏ +47 77 05 82 07
✉ jorgen.breivik@uit.no

Nils Magne Larsen

UiT – The Arctic University of Norway
School of Business and Economics
Harstad, 9404
Norway

☏ +47 77 05 82 27
✉ nils.magne.larsen@uit.no

Valdimar Sigurdsson

Reykjavik University
Department of Business and Economics
Reykjavík, 102
Iceland

☏ +354 599 6200
✉ valdimars@ru.is

Shopping Trip Type Profitability in Food Retailing

In the realm of food retailing, shopping trip types have traditionally been segmented into major and fill-in trips, as delineated by Kahn & Schmittlein (1989). However, recent shifts in the retail landscape indicate a trend towards more frequent trips with fewer purchases, highlighting a significant evolution in consumer behavior. Despite revealing substantial heterogeneity in customer in-store behavior, the literature offers limited insights into the specific intentions behind shopping trip types and provides vague indications of the relationship between these trip types and profitability (Larsen *et al.*, 2020; Sorensen *et al.*, 2017). With 103 observations, this in-store study seeks to enhance the understanding of shopping trip profitability by introducing a customer-based classification that captures a broader spectrum of shopper motivations and behaviors. We conducted a comprehensive analysis that explores the underlying intentions of various shopping trips from the customer's perspective. We examined register receipts to assess key profitability related metrics such as discount ratios and total spending. Our findings indicate that fill-in trips, which are often overlooked in traditional classifications, exhibit the lowest discount ratios while having the highest frequency. This suggests a misdirected focus in current retail strategies towards discount-driven trips, which are shown to yield the lowest gross margins. Additionally, our analysis reveals that while shopping trip types are effective predictors for discount patterns, the selection of carrying equipment is a more robust indicator of total spending (Larsen *et al.*, 2020). By extending the classification of shopping trips beyond the conventional dichotomy, this paper challenges existing academic paradigms and provides empirical evidence linking key profitability metrics to carrying equipment and refined shopping trip intentions. The insights derived from this study advocate for a reevaluation of retail strategies, urging retailers to align their store layouts, marketing tactics, and overall offerings more closely with their customers' diverse and dynamic needs. This approach promises to enhance shopper experience and optimize profitability in an increasingly competitive market. The implications of this study are profound, suggesting that retailers should reconsider the emphasis traditionally placed on voluminous trips as the most valuable. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of trip types, especially the recognition and valuation of quick-trips, could lead to more effective retail strategies that attract a broader range of shoppers (Fader & Toms, 2018). This shift could potentially redefine the profitability landscape of food retailing, making it imperative for retailers to adapt to these changes by fine-tuning their operational and marketing strategies to better cater to the evolving shopper profiles.

Milos Bujisic

New York University
School of Professional Studies
New York, 10003
USA

☎ +1 212 992 3212
✉ milosbujisic@nyu.edu

Vanja Bogicevic

New York University
School of Professional Studies
New York, 10003
USA

☎ +1 (212) 9989107
✉ vb56@nyu.edu

AI Talks: Unveiling the Digital Customer Experience Revolution in Everyday Services

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, customer interactions are increasingly influenced by Artificial Intelligence. Understanding AI's impact on customer experience is crucial as businesses integrate AI into their services. This research explores the dynamic interplay between service contexts and varying levels of AI integration during phone support for essential (e.g., hospital reservation) and non-essential (e.g., hotel reservation) services. Through an online experiment, participants were assigned to one of six groups, examining the impact of service context and AI integration level on customer engagement during booking. Three categories of AI integration were tested: low AI with numeric options, high AI with natural language, and a control group with human support. Findings reveal nuanced insights into the evolving landscape of customer interactions. Consumers perceive human agents as providing the most natural service experience, followed by high AI integration, with low AI integration trailing behind. While overall satisfaction did not significantly differ between AI integration levels, high AI integration exhibited lower satisfaction, possibly due to the Uncanny Valley effect. Both types of AI integration induced higher anxiety levels among users compared to human agents, emphasizing the importance of understanding user emotions and responses to AI interactions. Low AI integration and human agents were equally convenient for users, while high AI integration was the least convenient, highlighting current limitations in AI technology. Theoretical implications include advancing the understanding of conversational AI's impact. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for industries leveraging conversational AI, suggesting strategic tailoring of AI integration levels to optimize consumer satisfaction.

Carmen Camarero

University of Valladolid
Facultad de Ciencias
Económicas y Empresariales
Valladolid, 47011
Spain

☏ +44 983423332
✉ carmen.camarero@uva.es

Ángel Herrero-Crespo

University of Cantabria
Facultad de Ciencias
Económicas y Empresariales
Santander, 39005
Spain

☏ +44 942203908
✉ angel.herrero@unican.es

Attracting Visitors and Generating Emotional Experiences Around Iconic Film Locations

Film-induced tourism has increased tourists' interest in certain destinations that, in addition to being film locations (Riley *et al.*, 1998; Teng &Chen, 2020), are also attractive for their natural beauty, landscapes, or monuments. Besides, some film locations are attractive because they are associated with iconic episodes from a film, captivating events, favorite performers, or a theme that represents everything popular and compelling about a movie (Riley *et al.*, 1998). These spaces are part of film history and can become pilgrimage sites for cinema lovers. In such cases, visitors seek to immerse themselves in the places that brought films to life, turning the experience into something that transcends mere curiosity or knowledge, becoming an emotional, even spiritual experience (Liukitas, 2017). In this context, the present work falls within the realm of film-induced tourism and pilgrimage tourism literature, with the aim of analyzing the factors that influence intention to visit a film location and the emotional experience and spiritual well-being experienced by visitors (Kujawa, 2017; Robledo, 2015). Three groups of factors are proposed: visitor factors, location factors, and social factors. Specifically, the study proposes key variables such as identity salience, i.e., the degree to which passion for cinema and the film defines the individual's identity (Arnett *et al.*, 2013), perceived intellectual, social, and cultural value (Seraj, 2012), perceived authenticity of the recreated setting, and activism or desire for participation in a collective phenomenon (Norman, 2012). The empirical study will focus on the specific case of the movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, which is ranked by critics and audiences as one of the greatest films of all time. The most iconic location of this film is undoubtedly the Sad Hill Cemetery (Burgos, Spain), where the legendary scene was filmed in which the three protagonists stand around the pavement, as Ennio Morricone's soundtrack plays. The fictional cemetery was completely abandoned after filming and covered by vegetation. In 2015, the Sad Hill Cultural Association was created, initiating the recovery of the film's shooting locations and transforming the area into a cultural landmark. The reconstruction began with the Sad Hill Cemetery through a sponsorship campaign, which marked the beginning of tourism and visits to this impressive location. The story of the recovery of this film set is narrated in the documentary *Sad Hill Unearthed*. With the collaboration of this association, a quantitative study will be carried out through surveys to the potential and actual visitors to the Sad Hill Cemetery.

Kenneth Carling

Dalarna University
School of Information and
Engineering
Falun, 791 88
Sweden

☏ +46 23 77 89 67
✉ kca@du.se

Charlie Lindgren

Dalarna University
School of Information and
Engineering
Falun, 791 88
Sweden

☏ +46 23 77 86 51
✉ clg@du.se

Ross May

Dalarna University
School of Information and
Engineering
Falun, 791 88
Sweden

☏ +46 23 77 80 00
✉ rom@du.se

Niklas Rudholm

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☏ +46 70 625 46 27
✉ niklas.rudholm@hfi.se

Collusion in Online Retail Markets: Are Firms Using Algorithmic Pricing More Likely to Collude?

The increased use of algorithmic pricing along with the introduction of self-learning algorithms has sparked a lively debate among the world's competition authorities. One reason for the debate is the concern that algorithmic pricing will lead to an increased incidence of price coordination, another that these actions would probably not be illegal, or at least extremely difficult to prosecute, under current competition law (Harrington, 2019; Calvano *et al.*, 2020a; Swedish Competition Authority, 2021). Regarding the use of algorithmic pricing, Chen *et al.* (2016) report that one third of the 1600 best-selling products on Amazon.com use algorithmic pricing, while the European commission (2017) report that over 50% of retailers in their survey use automated tracking of competitors prices, and that two-thirds of the firms that track their competitors' prices also use algorithmic pricing in some form. Based on theoretical contributions on the factors that simplify price coordination in traditional markets, it is likely that algorithmic pricing facilitates price coordination, mainly due to the high frequency of interactions between companies (Ezrachi & Stucke, 2015; Mehra, 2016). Experimental studies have also proved that algorithms can be made to create price coordination under certain conditions (Calvano *et al.*, 2020b; Calvano *et al.*, 2021; Klein, 2021), raising prices above competitive levels. Empirical studies that investigate the existence of price coordination via algorithmic pricing are rare. Assad *et al.* (2020) use data from gas stations in Germany, and can show that, under certain circumstances, firms that use algorithmic pricing can raise prices. Musloff (2021) examines how algorithmic pricing affects prices on Amazon's US marketplace and finds that in the short term it leads to lower prices, but that after a period, algorithmic pricing often creates Edgeworth cycles with a high initial price that is gradually lowered until some company raises the price to the initial, high level again. None of these empirical studies have found any direct evidence that algorithmic pricing has led to price coordination. Instead, higher average prices are observed in markets with algorithmic pricing, which is interpreted as price coordination. However, as Calvano *et al.* (2020b) point out, high prices are not in themselves evidence of price coordination, and unlike previous studies, we therefore plan to study whether price coordination in the form of bid rotation or parallel bidding is more common in markets where algorithmic pricing is used. We focus on bid rotation and parallel bidding since Granlund & Rudholm (2022) have shown that these are the most common types of price coordination in the Swedish pharmaceutical market, which, like e-commerce markets, is characterized by the retailer with the lowest price taking a large part of the market's total demand.

Kenneth Carling

Dalarna University
School of Information and
Engineering
Falun, 791 88
Sweden

☎ +46 23 77 89 67
✉ kca@du.se

Charlie Lindgren

Dalarna University
School of Information and
Engineering
Falun, 791 88
Sweden

☎ +46 23 77 86 51
✉ clg@du.se

Niklas Rudholm

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☎ +46 70 625 46 27
✉ niklas.rudholm@hfi.se

Market Integration in Nordic Online Retail Markets: Do Cross-Border Transaction Costs Still Matter?

It is well established that retail prices measured in a common currency have historically moved closely with the nominal exchange rate. For this to occur, it is necessary that cross-border arbitrage does not take place to any significant extent even if there are considerable price differences between countries. Knowing how and why retail prices move with the nominal exchange rate is important for understanding both the gains of increased international trade on prices, as well as the possibility of asymmetric shocks being transmitted across national borders. If online retail markets have become integrated to the extent that cost shocks in one country also affect pricing in other countries, asymmetric shocks to any one country in the region will spill over to neighboring countries as well. As such, the purpose of our research is to empirically investigate the degree of market integration between four Nordic national markets (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden) for twelve consumer electronics or household appliance product categories sold through the price comparison website, PriceSpy. From the work of Dornbusch (1987) and Krugman (1987), we know that if there is a high degree of market segmentation at national borders, cost shocks will not be transmitted across them because costs and pricing in one country do not affect pricing in the other. However, if there is the possibility of cross-border trade, this will not remain true (Gopinath *et al.*, 2011; Boivin *et al.*, 2012). To see this, assume that two international markets are fully segmented, and that there is a nationwide cost decrease that is specific to one of the countries while costs in the neighboring country remain constant. The cost decrease will then be passed through to prices in the country affected, but not to prices in the neighboring country due to the market segmentation. As such, relative price differences across the two international markets will move together with the relative cost decrease. As in Gopinath *et al.* (2011), we will use exchange rate movements to capture nationwide changes in relative costs between countries. If markets are segmented, we expect that the exchange rate pass-through will be (close to) one, while if the markets are integrated, the pass-through will be less than one because retailers will then have to adjust prices to avoid losing market share to retailers in the adjacent country. Contrary to previous studies, we use differences in product characteristics to divide the data into products that are easily transported across borders and those that are not. At the extreme end of the transportability spectrum, we investigate market integration for four types of games for computers or game consoles that are delivered via downloads, where the cross-border transaction costs should be close to zero. Our results show that markets for product categories where cross-border transaction costs are high are also segmented at the border, while markets for product categories that can easily be traded and transported between countries are not. We find an even higher level of market integration for games delivered via downloads than for the same games sold through traditional channels. As such, cross-border transaction costs still matter for market segmentation, but only for the sub-set of products where such costs are high.

Kathleen Cauwelier

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Faculty of Economic and
Social Sciences and Solvay
Business School
Ixelles, 1050
Belgium

✉ kathleen.cauwelier@vub.be

Heleen Buldeo Rai

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Faculty of Economic and
Social Sciences and Solvay
Business School
Ixelles, 1050
Belgium

✉ heleen.buldeo.rai@vub.be

Koen Mommens

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Faculty of Economic and
Social Sciences and Solvay
Business School
Ixelles, 1050
Belgium

✉ koen.mommens@vub.be

To Pay or Not to Pay: Exploring Financial and Non-Financial Nudges to Promote Sustainable Delivery Choices in E-Commerce

During the last decade, e-commerce has been growing at a double-digit rate, estimated to reach 30% of retail sales by 2030 (Lone & Weltevreden, 2023). This, in turn, has led to significant growth in home delivery packages, increasing the use of light goods vehicles for parcel deliveries and hence magnifying the externalities associated with greenhouse gas emissions, traffic congestion, pollution, and noise in urban areas. where pressure is already high due to increase in urban density (Allen *et al.*, 2018). Given the European Green Deal's goal of reducing transport emissions by 90% by 2050 (European Commission, 2023), and the continued expansion of e-commerce, it is crucial to fully understand the sector's impact on sustainability. While governments, logistic services providers and retailers are putting solutions into place to improve the sustainability of e-commerce, these initiatives frequently ignore the crucial and active role consumers have to take. Nudging, a behavior modification technique introduced by Thaler and Sunstein's book (2008), can help with engage consumers in the transition. It involves adapting consumers' choice architecture to influence their behavior. Existing research exploring methods to persuade consumers toward pro-sustainable delivery options mostly focus on individual experiments (Agatz *et al.*, 2021; Buldeo Rai *et al.*, 2021; Ignat & Chankov, 2020; Thomas *et al.*, 2022) rather than employing discrete choice designs. The use of discrete choice experiments, such as the choice-based conjoint design, enables researchers to understand the trade-offs individuals makes between the different factor influencing their decision-making process and choices. To address the gap in research and practice, the objective of this study is to examine the extent to which consumers are willing to adopt more sustainable last-mile delivery options, and how these options can be designed to remain attractive. Additionally, it explores the influence of different nudging techniques on consumer choices. An online survey targeting Belgian consumers with prior online shopping and delivery experience was conducted, employing choice-based conjoint experiments. The attributes included price, location, time, sustainability communication. To assess the impact of various nudging strategies, three distinct but homogenous samples of 600 respondents were gathered. Each group was presented with the same scenario description, but a different nudging strategy was applied to the "sustainability communication" attribute. Two non-financial nudges were tested: one group saw a traffic light labeling system (ranging from A to E), while the second group received a traffic light labeling joined with a social norm nudge. In the third group, the traffic light label was combined with a financial nudge, where consumers were asked to pay more for less sustainable options. The findings across all three groups show that delivery price it the most significant factor influencing consumer preferences, with home delivery emerging as the most preferred location. In group 1 and 2, where non-financial nudges were applied, the results were quite similar, with sustainability information playing a relatively minor role. However, in group 3, where a financial nudge was introduced, sustainability gained more importance, suggesting that consumers are more inclined to choose sustainable options when incentivized financially.

Edgar Centeno

EGADE Tecnológico de
Monterrey
Santa Fe, 01389
México

☎ + 52 (55) 9177 8000
✉ ecenteno@tec.mx

Mª Eugenia López-
Pérez

University CEU-Fernando III
Facultad de Ciencias
Empresariales y Jurídicas
Sevilla, 41930
Spain

☎ +34 954 48 80 08
✉ eugenia.lopezperez@ceu.es

María Lucila Osorio

EGADE Tecnológico de
Monterrey
Santa Fe, 01389
Mexico

☎ + 52 (55) 9177 8000
✉ lucilaosorio@tec.mx

From Screen to Retailing:
How Film Celebrities Shape Brand Authenticity

This study examines how brand extension authenticity and idol attachment influence product valuation within the context of celebrity brand extensions, with a specific focus on the film industry. It investigates how these relationships differ between actors compared to other celebrities, such as singers and athletes. As actors increasingly launch their own product lines, understanding the unique dynamics of their brand extensions in the film industry becomes crucial. The study explores how consumers perceive the authenticity of hedonic and functional products endorsed by their favorite celebrity and how these perceptions impact product valuation. A total of 668 participants from a Western economy were asked to select their favorite celebrity, establishing a strong basis for measuring idol attachment – the emotional bond fans develop with celebrities. Participants were then asked to imagine their favorite celebrity launching a self-endorsed brand extension, allowing researchers to assess how brand extension authenticity interacts with idol attachment to influence product valuation. The study also explores whether these effects vary by celebrity type, focusing on comparisons between actors and other celebrities. The research uses a moderated mediation model to analyze how brand extension authenticity affects product valuation, both directly and through the mediating role of idol attachment. Additionally, it tests whether the type of celebrity moderates the strength of this relationship. The findings reveal that idol attachment significantly mediates the relationship between brand extension authenticity and product valuation, particularly for actors. The deep emotional connections that audiences form with these figures, often developed through their cinematic roles and storytelling, amplify the impact of brand authenticity, especially when the product aligns with the celebrity's brand persona. The results confirm that idol attachment enhances the perceived authenticity of brand extensions for actors, especially for hedonic products that reflect their aspirational and lifestyle personas. While functional products also benefit from perceived authenticity, the effect is less pronounced for actors compared to athletes. Additionally, actors have a stronger influence on product valuation than other celebrities, likely due to their perceived credibility and deeper emotional engagement with their audiences. The study suggests that film industry celebrities are uniquely positioned to enhance product authenticity and drive purchase intention, particularly in lifestyle and luxury categories. This study contributes to the literature on celebrity brand extensions by emphasizing the unique role of film industry celebrities in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase intentions. While previous research has focused on athlete brand extensions, this study highlights the emotional and aspirational connections between audiences and actors, making them particularly effective in promoting certain products. By examining both hedonic and functional brand extensions, the study underscores the importance of brand extension authenticity and celebrity type in influencing consumer trust and purchase behavior.

Yuhsuan Chen

HanYang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Republic of Korea

✉ bomichen06@gmail.com

JungKun Park

HanYang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763

Republic of Korea

✉ viroid2007@gmail.com

AI Service at the Crossroads: How Customer Perceptions of AI Capabilities Drive Service Frustration and Satisfaction

The impact of AI on customer service interactions has introduced both opportunities and challenges for service industries. As a result, understanding customer responses to AI services has become increasingly important. While previous research often identifies customer trust in AI as the primary determinant of AI service success, this study broadens the discussion by examining how customers' perceptions of AI capabilities influence their emotional responses, particularly in terms of frustration and satisfaction within customer service contexts. Grounded in expectation-disconfirmation theory, this study dissects customer perceptions of AI capabilities into multiple dimensions, focusing on how perceived cognitive and operational abilities of AI affect subtle emotional variations in customer reactions, moving beyond the traditional binary trust framework. To provide a more comprehensive analysis, this study introduces social influence and psychological ownership as moderating variables that further explain patterns in customer responses. Social influence examines how customers' expectations and perceptions of AI capabilities are shaped by people around them or media exposure. Psychological ownership highlights how customers' emotional reactions to AI are influenced when they feel a sense of control or ownership over AI services. These external and individual factors make the study more contextually relevant than previous research, offering a more nuanced explanation of customer responses in diverse social and psychological settings. Using structural equation modeling and data collected from customers who frequently interact with AI services, this study provides fresh insights into the psychological impact of AI on customer experiences. The findings contribute to the literature on AI service management by revealing how social and psychological factors shape customer outcomes. Furthermore, the study offers practical recommendations for businesses, helping them better align AI capabilities with customer expectations, reducing frustration, enhancing satisfaction, and addressing privacy cynicism in AI-driven environments, ultimately promoting the use of AI to improve service satisfaction.

Helen Cocco

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ h.cocco@ieseg.fr

Nathalie Demoulin

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ n.demoulin@ieseg.fr

Persistence of Customers During Their Shopping Journey

Customer journeys take place over multiple channels and customers use different channels for different purposes (Tueanrat *et al.*, 2021). While switching between channels, customers may face several problems during shopping journeys that may lead to cart abandonment, lower customer engagement and switching behavior. When problems occur during the shopping journey, customers may not persist and switch to alternative retailers. This research investigates how retailers can encourage customer persistence during their shopping journey and identifies the consequences of customer persistence for retailers. Despite its relevance in learning (Müller, 2008; Shin & Chan, 2004). and gaming contexts (Neys *et al.*, 2014) , customer persistence has never been investigated in marketing. In this research, we define persistence as the customer willingness to complete their shopping journey to achieve their goals without allowing any difficulties to stop them. To develop our conceptual framework, we rely on the interdependence theory (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Dependence can be viewed in two ways; the desire to continue a relationship versus feeling obligated to continue a relationship (Levinger, 1999). In relationship marketing, two retention strategies have been identified (Bruhn, 2003). Indeed, retailers can use solidarity strategies (Bruhn, 2003) such as good value for money (Franke *et al.*, 2008), offer uniqueness (Tian *et al.*,2001; Dean, 1999), or they can rely on a dependence strategy (Bruhn, 2003) such as inducing switching costs (Jones, *et al.*, 2000). We conducted a survey amongst 377 respondents regarding a past shopping experience where they used several channels of the same retailer. We measured several independent variables such as value for money, uniqueness of offer, switching costs; one mediating variable i.e., customer persistence, and the dependent variables; retail engagement (cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions) and switching intention, and a moderating variable i.e., seamless shopping. Our results demonstrate that customers persist more when the retailer offers good value for money, a unique offer, switching cost and a seamless customer experience. The effect of offer uniqueness is strengthened by the seamlessness of the customer experience. Persistence is key for retailers as it creates strong cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement and avoids customer switching. Our study brings strong managerial recommendations for retailers.

Helen Cocco

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ h.cocco@ieseg.fr

Jan Klein

IESEG - School of
Management
LEM (UMR 9221)
Lille, 59800
France

☎ +33 320 545 892
✉ j.klein@ieseg.fr

Harmonizing Travel and Tourism Experience Measurement Across Varied Contexts

Measuring experiences in the tourism and travel industry is critical to enhancing satisfaction and repeat visits. Despite a range of economic and geopolitical challenges, the demand for authentic and immersive travel experiences that offer meaningful and desirable exchanges, has increased (Salem *et al.*, 2023; UN Tourism, 2024). As a result, there is a growing need for planning and management of tourism experiences. Despite its importance, existing research has led to fragmentation in the measurement of experiences with context-specific scales. These include emphasis on favorable curiosity-based aspects within the experience; entertainment, education, esthetics and escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh *et al.*, 2007). Contrastingly, a customer experience scale by Schmitt (1999) has been applied in a tourism setting, focusing on more hedonic aspects of sensory, emotional and word-of mouth perceptions (Tsaur *et al.*, 2007; Rather *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, customer experience measurement in tourism is often applied to more pleasurable, memorable or destination-specific contexts (Kim & Chen, 2019). overcoming fragmentation of existing scales, the purpose of this research is to harmonize existing experience measures and empirically validate a scale that can be used across travel and tourism contexts. We develop our conceptual framework by reviewing existing tourism experience scales and contexts. Drawing on Chalmers' (1996, 2010) experience theory, we redefine tourism experiences to account for multiple contexts and service agents (e.g., accommodation, trip type). We then empirically test and validate the dimensions of a context-encompassing experience scale. Finally, we demonstrate the scale's applicability by linking it to key experience outcomes, such as satisfaction. We conducted a pre-test amongst 147 respondents regarding recall of a previous travel experience of several types of trip (e.g. beach, city) and various accommodation types (e.g. Hotels, AirBnB). We measured established experience dimensions on satisfaction. Preliminary results establish a harmonized integration of experience dimensions that is useful across various contexts. Further analysis and study are planned, which will be presented at the conference. The findings provide valuable insights for multiple tourism agents, operators and businesses who can apply the refined scale to large-scale planned, small group or individually personalized adventures.

Noel Corbin

University of Georgia
College of Family
Consumer Science
Athens, GA 30602
USA

☏ +1 (706) 825 4954

✉ noel.corbin@uga.edu

Clair McClure

University of Georgia
College of Family
Consumer Science
Athens, GA 30602
USA

☏ +1 (706) 542-4847

✉ clairmcclure@uga.edu

Omnichannel Frameworks for Circulatory Fashion Retailers

As fast fashion continues to lead the way in consumer overconsumption while contributing to the increasing problems of fashion waste, a growing number of small fashion brands across the globe are staking their claim in the sector of circular fashion. These companies use an assortment of techniques and resources to combat the harmful effects of fast fashion including using up-cycling used textile goods into new products, breaking textiles down to fibers and notions, creating new fabrications, and repurposing trims for resale (Coscieme *et al.*, 2022, p. 454). To compete in today's fashion retail industry, these small individual or family-owned brands rely heavily on at least one brick-and-mortar storefront location and an online presence through a brand website to ship products nationally or globally. To reach their consumers and supply circular goods and services at the highest level of integration, many of these small successful brands utilize omnichannel tools, completing sales and services seamlessly in person or virtually. Omnichannel retailing provides products to consumers through two or more mediums in a seamless manner (Massi et al., 2023). To stay competitive in today's fast fashion market, circular fashion retailers must use omnichannel retailing to meet customer needs and increase profits (McNeill & Snowdon, 2019). Yet, there is one key point in their omnichannel integration that is an invaluable component of the circular fashion consumer journey. That component is circular fashion education. Education is a key component that serves as a medium to inform seamless integration back and forth between the in-person and the virtual consumer experience. Circular fashion education may include providing information about the harmful effects of fashion waste or teaching consumers how to mend or repurpose used textiles (Marcella-Hood, 2023, p. 8). This study aims to explore a small selection of American circular fashion brands and how their use of effective omnichannel retailing is serving their consumers. Two research questions help to guide this research. For circular fashion retailers, 1) How do their retail channels provide a seamless customer experience? And 2) How do their educational or awareness-building efforts impact their omnichannel approach? Considering background literature in circular fashion, omnichannel retailing, and customer behavior, circular fashion brands can maximize the output of fashion sustainability education and fashion waste awareness between their various retail channels, to positively impact the customers' journey through each channel. This research, currently in progress, will be conducted by interviewing several American circular fashion brands, to investigate their channel strategy, and education offered to consumers and circular fashion consumers. This data will be analyzed by using a framework which combines the three primary strategies for core omnichannel retailing set within a niche retail products framework (Bridis *et al.*, 2021, Bieline & Ulbinaite, 2020). This study will contribute to the ongoing efforts to promote sustainable fashion as a highly valued option, while from a retailing perspective, this study will analyze how circular fashion education positively impacts channel strategies used to meet the consumer's needs.

J. Joseph Cronin, Jr.

Florida State University
The Rockwood School of
Marketing
Tallahassee, Fl. 323105-1110
USA

✉ jcronin@fsu.edu

Brian L. Bourdeau

Auburn University
Raymond J. Harbert College of
Business
Auburn, AL. 36849
USA

✉ bourdbl@auburn.edu

Jordan Thorn

Terroir Selections
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33309
USA

Luxury Experiences: A Strategic Retail Option

Traditional retail strategies today are challenged by the multitude of online options that in 2024 accounted for 20.1% of global retail industry sales. Moreover, it is forecasted that the percentage of retail sales that are online will continue to increase as in the United States it is suggested that e-commerce's share will reach approximately 22.6% by 2027 (Statista 2024). One notable, but largely unexplored, strategic option for in-person retailers is the luxury (nee premium) experience. While experience marketing is not new, it emerged from the pioneering research of Pine & Gilmore (1998), experiences as a consumer marketing strategy have evolved from a focus on luxury goods targeting the affluent to middle market buyers seeking goods and services that meet their aspirational needs (Atwal & Williams 2008). Offering high levels of quality, performance, and authenticity, retailers such as Whole Foods, Ikea, and Nordstroms have fashioned in-store strategic experiences designed to address post-modern consumers' need and desire for unique, individualistic types of luxury that satisfy their aspirational needs in ways impossible for ecommerce retailers to provide. The objective of the research to be presented is to (1) offer a conceptualization of the dimensions of luxury experiences, (2) test the relative importance of these dimensions across goods- and service-based luxury experiences, (3) offer insight into how luxury experiences offer an important strategic option for a broad spectrum of retailers, and (4) identify potential areas for research. Next, a brief discussion of the theory that underlies the research is presented, followed by a short description of the research method and expected outcomes of the study. It is suggested that experiences are defined by the interactions between a provider and a customer, and that the outcomes of an experience (i.e., loyalty and +WOM) is based on perceptions of the quality, performance, and authenticity delivered (Atwal & Williams 2008). Given that performance is the basis for the conceptualization of service quality perceptions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994; Brady & Cronin, 2001), this conceptualization is interpreted as a consumer's perceptions of the physical goods and services quality attributed to an experience along with its authenticity. It is suggested that these outcomes are driven by four experience dimensions: (1) Entertainment, (2) Education, (3) Escapist, and (4) Aesthetics which are each evaluated based on a customer's perception of the level of their involvement in and the intensity the experience inherent in each dimension. The quality and authenticity perceptions then drive loyalty and +WOM. Paired responses from a convenience sample of providers and customers of a luxury (i.e., premium) experience will be the basis for the study. A short questionnaire and structured interviews of both providers and customers will be used to assess the dyadic nature of experiences. Specifically, the focus will be on an exploratory investigation as to whether the experience dimensions identified in Figure 1 have differing effects on the intermediate perceptions (i.e., authenticity and goods/services quality) and experience outcomes (i.e., loyalty and +word-of-mouth), as well as whether the intermediate perceptions have differing effects on experience outcomes depending on a variety of factors such as experience/customer type and customer/provider characteristics. Implications for practitioners and scholarly research will be identified.

Christy Crutsinger

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 369 6620
✉ christyc@unt.edu

Tania Heap

University of North Texas
Learning Analysis & Digital
Research
Denton, TX 76230
USA

☎ +940 369 6427
✉ tania.heap@unt.edu

Retail Leadership Development: An Explanatory Case Study of Active Learning and Student Engagement

Successful retail organizations understand the importance of leadership across all human resource (HR) levels and functions. From C-suite executives to entry level management trainees, leaders affect work motivation, enhance performance of employees, and drive transformative change. In today's evolving retail landscape, HR executives are concerned about the next generation of leaders, particularly with increasing pressures, high turnover, and reported developmental gaps (Spencer Stuart, 2023). Some areas of concern include aligning people around change, collaborating effectively, exerting influence, and building a leadership pipeline. While academic programs incorporate functional skills in their curriculum, few programs intentionally teach the leadership skills that are so vital to a retailer's success (Mwita *et al.,* 2023). This research will apply an explanatory case study method to describe student's engagement in a Seminar in Leadership course (n=25). There is increasing evidence to suggest that developing soft skills (e.g., adaptability, communication, teamwork, relationship building) may be better developed in informal settings and active learning spaces, suggesting that students play a role in their learning (Mwita *et al.,* 2023). The course purposively examines leadership theory using virtual simulations and case studies and is taught in a Collaborative Learning and Active Workspace (CLAW) classroom. The room is equipped with collaborative technology and moveable furniture that allows for SCALE-Up experiences, whereby learning is student-centric rather than instructor-centric. For the purposes of analysis, multiple data sources including observation, pre-test and post-test surveys, end-of-semester evaluations, and course materials will be collected and examined. Specifically, we will assess the impact of technology, spatial arrangement, and active learning (e.g., case studies, simulations, board activities) on student engagement and content knowledge (i.e., leadership competency). An observation protocol will be used to evaluate levels of engagement in the classroom. Coding and thematic analysis will be used to interpret the results. The future of retail relies on great leadership. Retail educators must reconceptualize pedagogy with the intent of developing confident, articulate, and transformative leaders. Findings from this case study will provide insight into curricular design and suggest best practices for teaching important leadership competencies through collaborative learning, active workspaces, and innovative course development.

Christy Crutsinger

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 369 6620
✉ christyc@unt.edu

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 3263
✉ sanjukta.pookulangara@
   unt.edu

Kelcie Slaton

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 2436
✉ kelcie.slaton@unt.edu

Technology and AI Readiness of the Retail Workforce: Understanding Creativity, Innovativeness, and Optimism

Innovative technologies are driving the retail industry and elevating the consumer experience at every level. The rapid pace of these changes is astounding. From interactive Artificial Intelligence (AI) smart displays that can detect customer facial expressions to intelligent tags that provide real-time product tracking, retailers are innovating daily to remain viable and profitable (Deloitte, 2024). Universities, however, are challenged to keep up with the emerging technologies. Inadequate resources, bureaucratic processes, general mistrust, lack of knowledge, and limited access to industry software and hardware are just a few of the barriers to curricular integration. There is strong evidence to suggest that 'tech savvy' retail employees are, and will continue to be, in high demand (McKinsey & Company, 2023). However, retailers also are seeking employees who have a deep understanding of consumer preferences and are able to manage and interpret big data. According to Woods *et al.,*(2021), a multi-disciplinary approach is warranted whereby retail training emphasizes the development of both technical and soft skills, with increasingly greater emphasis on creativity and problem-solving abilities. The proposed study will use the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) to investigate U.S. retail employees' technology and AI readiness. Our purpose is to determine the impact of creativity, innovativeness, and optimism on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes and behavioral intention regarding technology and AI readiness. Categories of technology, specific to retail tasks, will be conceptualized from existing literature (Kelly *et al.,* 2023). Data will be collected from a panel of retail employees and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. The digital disruption in retail calls for educators to fundamentally change the way that curriculum is developed, content is delivered, and programs are assessed if they are to remain relevant in the 21st century. Institutions must teach transferable skills that prepare students for the emerging roles and technologies in the retail sector. This study will provide insight into the types of activities and best practices that foster creativity and innovation. Without question, the future of retail relies on employees who continuously upskill and think outside the box.

Suné Donoghue

University of Pretoria
Department of Consumer &
Food Sciences
Pretoria, 0028
South Africa

☎ +27 12 420 2488
✉ sune.donoghue@up.ac.za

Eleni Roditis

University of Pretoria
Department of Consumer &
Food Sciences
Pretoria, 0028
South Africa

☎ +27 71 535 8317
✉ roditiseleni24@gmail.com

Bertha Jacobs

University of Pretoria
Department of Consumer &
Food Sciences
Pretoria, 0028
South Africa

☎ +27 12 420 2615
✉ bertha.jacobs@up.ac.za

Andries Masenge

University of Pretoria
Department of Statistics
Pretoria, 0028
South Africa

☎ +27 12 420 3645
✉ andries.masenge@up.ac.za

The Influence of Customer Service Well-Being, Perceived Justice, and Emotions on Consumers' Post-Complaint Behavioral Intentions Following Online Clothing Retailers' Complaint Handling

With increased online retailing, service delivery failures in the online clothes-retailing context are inevitable, necessitating practical service recovery efforts to retain customers. Awareness of customer service well-being perceptions and customers' evaluations of the fairness of the service recovery could facilitate retailers' complaint handling. Customer service well-being extends traditional service quality and satisfaction measures by focusing on how well the customer feels treated as a person, not just as a customer. This study used a cross-sectional survey involving a self-administered online questionnaire to describe the effect of customer-service well-being, perceived justice, and emotions on consumers' post-complaint behavioral intentions based on a service recovery scenario in the online clothing retail context. South African consumers older than 18 years and who purchased ready-to-wear clothing at online clothing retailers were recruited via convenience sampling (n = 355). The multi-sectioned, structured questionnaire measured respondents' customer service well-being perceptions, justice perceptions, emotions, and complaint behavioral intentions based on existing and self-developed scales. EFA, second-order CFA and SEM were conducted to analyze the data. The findings show that the second-order customer service well-being construct, in addition to perceived justice, influences the experience of negative emotions and post-complaint behavioral intentions, extending previous research in the field. Also, CSWB influences the experience of positive emotions in the context of service recovery, whereas PJ does not. Positive emotions do not influence post-complaint behavioral intentions. Cognitive appraisal theory and attribution theory posit that an individual is more likely to react to a negative situation/event than a positive event (i.e. appraise the negative event as stressful, experience negative emotions and cope by employing specific coping strategies, while positive experience may not result in the same intensity of emotions and coping behaviors). The researcher emphasizes the importance of following a human-centric approach to handling complaints.

Lieve Doucé
Jarne Thys
Stephanie van de
Sanden

Hasselt University
Agoralaan – Building D
3590 Diepenbeek
Belgium

☎ +32 11 26 86 44
☎ +32 11 26 84 11
☎ +32 2 629 13 15

✉ lieve.douce@uhasselt.be
✉ jarne.thys@uhasselt.be
✉ stephanie.vandesanden
   @uhasselt.be

Kim Willems

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
1050 Brussels
Belgium

☎ +32 2 614 84 28
✉ kim.willems@vub.be

Davy Vanacken
Gustavo Rovelo Ruiz

Hasselt University - EDM
3590 Diepenbeek
Belgium

☎ +32 11 26 84 13
☎ +32 11 26 84 37
✉ davy.vanacken
@uhasselt.be
✉ gustavo.roveloruiz
@uhasselt.be

The Effect of VR and Haptic Feedback Devices on Online Consumer Decision-Making

To properly evaluate *experience products*, consumers should – by definition - be able to experience the product. Often, however, this is not possible in the pre-purchase stage. This research aims to show that combining VR and haptic feedback will lead to more informed decisions and comprises two experimental lab studies on consumer decision-making regarding windows. When building or renovating a house, it is challenging to anticipate haptic properties of windows, such as (1) how ergonomically smooth a sliding window can be opened or (2) what the effect would be of investing in extra isolated windows to maintain a comfortable indoor climate. VR creates an immersive environment, allowing for more detailed visualization, while haptic feedback provides a sense of touch. According to mental imagery theory, when consumers are provided with richer sensory information (e.g., through both visual and haptic inputs), they can form more vivid mental images of the product, which leads to better understanding and evaluation. The more sensory information they have, the easier it is for them to imagine how the product would work in real life. This helps consumers feel more confident and satisfied with their decision. The two particular use cases are tested among a sample of 159 consumers in Belgium (M_{age} = 39.77; SD_{age} = 12.34, with 100 of 159 or 62.9% female). Both experiments are between-subjects designed, comparing 2x2 conditions each. Factor 1 represents visual information (i.e., video vs. VR) and Factor 2 corresponds with haptic information that the participant got (i.e., no haptic feedback or simulated haptic feedback). The simulated haptic feedback corresponded to a mechanical force feedback instrument built to simulate the force a consumer would need to open a sliding window in the first use case. For the second use case, the simulated haptic feedback was provided by an off-the-shelf haptic glove the participant could wear, giving haptic feedback on the insulation value of different window glazing types (i.e., double vs. triple). The experiment was staged with the scenario in which participants were asked to evaluate two alternatives (i.e., type of window sliding system or type of window glazing). We surveyed participants on both their experience with the particular medium (visual and haptic), as well as on the product (i.e., the window sliding system or the type of window glazing). Measures include mental imagery, ease of evaluation, perceived informativeness, multiple customer experience dimensions, processing fluency, satisfaction, and preference. Eye-tracking data were logged. The empirical results demonstrate positive effects of enhanced visual and haptic inputs on consumer decision-making. Specifically, VR and haptic feedback devices improve mental imagery, ease of evaluation, perceived informativeness, customer experience, processing fluency, and satisfaction. However, for higher-investment products like triple-glazed windows or advanced sliding systems, haptic feedback plays a more crucial role in persuading consumers to invest in options that enhance comfort, such as smoother sliding mechanisms or a better indoor climate.

Pia Drechsel

TUM Campus Straubing
Department Marketing and
Management of Biogenic
Resources
94315 Straubing
Germany

☎ +49 157 50269566
✉ pia.drechsel@tum.de

Alexander. H.
Kracklauer

Neu-Ulm University of
Applied Sciences
89231 Neu-Ulm
Germany

✉ alexander.kracklauer@
hnu.de

Klaus Menrad

TUM Campus Straubing
Department Marketing and
Management of Biogenic
Resources
94315 Straubing
Germany

✉ klaus.menrad@tum.de

Thomas Decker

TUM Campus Straubing
Department Marketing and
Management of Biogenic
Resources
94315 Straubing
Germany

✉ thomas.anton.decker@
mytum.de

A Sustainable Switch: Field Experiment on Consumer Acceptance of Environmentally Friendly Packaging in Retail

Plastic packaging is widely used in the food industry for its hygienic benefits, protection during transportation, extended shelf life, and low cost (Heidbreder *et al.*, 2020). However, packaging accounts for approximately one-third of global plastic consumption and is a significant contributor to environmental pollution, with the overuse of single-use plastics and their uncontrolled disposal having a particularly significant impact on the environment (PlasticsEurope, 2022). As a result, food manufacturers and retailers are under increasing pressure to reduce conventional plastic packaging and offer more sustainable alternatives. Understanding consumer preferences for environmentally friendly packaging is critical to developing effective, sustainable marketing strategies, as these will only succeed if they are aligned with consumer requirements. This study, conducted in partnership with EDEKA, Germany's largest retailer, examines consumer acceptance of sustainable packaging compared to conventional plastic packaging. The aim was to assess consumers' perceptions of different packaging alternatives and their willingness to pay a premium. The experiment was conducted over six weeks. It examined consumers' purchasing behavior for 250-gram packs of snack tomatoes. The standard offering was sold in conventional PET trays, and one sustainable alternative was introduced in a rotating system (change: every week) throughout the experiment. The sustainable alternatives included recycled PET (R-PET), bioplastic (PLA), and cardboard. The conventional PET tray was priced at €1.27, while the sustainable options were offered at €1.38, reflecting the higher production costs of the packaging materials. Approximately 1,500 units were sold during the trial, with 53% in sustainable trays, indicating that most consumers would pay more for eco-friendly options. An additional voluntary customer survey revealed notable differences in how the packaging options were perceived. Despite the lack of transparency, cardboard was rated the highest, followed by PLA, R-PET, and conventional PET. This ranking was also reflected in the willingness-to-pay, which was approximately 30% higher for carton packaging than conventional PET packaging. The Food Choice Questionnaire (Steptoe *et al.*, 1995) also revealed significant differences between customer groups; for example, those who chose conventional PET were more concerned about hygiene than those who chose R-PET. In addition, customers who chose cardboard showed a higher level of environmental concern and greater involvement in the purchase decision. The study results have considerable implications for the sustainable development of the food retail industry. It demonstrates that many consumers are willing to make environmentally conscious choices when suitable alternatives are available despite higher costs or packaging-related trade-offs. The experiment indicates considerable potential and consumer acceptance for environmentally friendly packaging solutions, which supports their marketability and should encourage retailers to introduce them more commonly. In addition, the study urges researchers to conduct more practical field studies to develop concrete measures to support the practical implementation of sustainable packaging for various product groups.

Akash Dubey

Jaipuria Institute of
Management
Jaipur, 302033
India

☎ +91 9625203259
✉ akash.dubey@jaipuria.ac.in

Rahul Meena

Jaipuria Institute of
Management
Jaipur, 302033
India

☎ +91 9625203259
✉ rahul.meena@jaipuria.ac.in

Evaluating Predictive Accuracy of Consumer Purchase Intention for Flick Business Using User Generated Content for Silver Screens: A Machine Learning Perspective

Availability of user-generated content (UGC) presents unique and vast opportunity to uncover consumer insights. To leverage this data in understanding consumer purchase intention (CPI) towards silver screen tickets for flick industry study uses machine learning techniques. The study focuses on predicting and improving upon the accuracy of the applied machine learning model (MLM) to understand flick-related and market-related drivers for CPI. For the study, a database of over 900 flicks for over 13 years for various drivers was collected. Comparing the MLM for time periods before and after covid imparted understanding related to change in drivers for CPI. This analysis was conducted for three MLM algorithms to reduce bias and increase predictive accuracy. The result verified and validated temporal shift in market-related and flick-related drivers of the CPI through displacement in ranks. This study would be among the only few to evaluate box office performance on this large scale for the flick industry across temporal shifts (pre and post covid) changes in market and flick-related drivers producing a prediction model with 77 percent accuracy. Understanding and predicting CPI drivers has multiple practical applications for flick business before and after release of the motion picture.

Kamel El Hedhli
Ibrahim Alnawas

Qatar University
College of Business &
Economics
Doha, 2713
Qatar

☎ +974 4403 6760
☎ +974 4403 7153
✉ khedhli@qu.edu.qa
✉ ialnawas@qu.edu.qa

Haithem Zourrig

Kent State University
Ambassador Crawford College
of Business and
Entrepreneurship
Kent, OH 44720
USA

☎ +330 672 1266
✉ hzourrig@kent.edu

Imene Becheur
Allam K. Abu Farha

Qatar University
College of Business &
Economics
Doha, 2713
Qatar

☎ +974 4403 5040
☎ +974 4403 7747
✉ imene.becheur@qu.edu.qa
✉ afarha@qu.edu.qa

Shopping Well-being Through Mobile Apps: A Congruence Theory Perspective

While a growing body of research examines the detrimental effects of shopping apps on shoppers' well-being, there is currently a dearth of research dedicated to exploring the positive effects of shopping apps on shoppers' well-being (cf. Flacandji *et al.*, 2024). As mobile shopping and apps become more ingrained in people's lives, they appear to play a significant role in shaping one's identity. However, previous research on mobile shopping has largely overlooked the identity aspect when examining the impact of apps on shopper behavior. Our aim is to address these two research gaps by delving into the positive effects of shopping apps on shoppers' well-being from an identity-based lens. We draw on theories from social psychology and retailing to investigate how shopping apps become part of shoppers' identities, and ultimately influence their sense of well-being as well as relevant retailing outcomes. Specifically, drawing on the congruence theory (e.g., Sirgy *et al.*, 2000), this research posits that, beyond the retail apps' functional utility, shoppers are drawn to shopping apps that align with their identities in terms of self-congruity and lifestyle congruity. These distinct app-related congruities are hypothesized to directly impact shoppers' well-being. Particularly, functional congruity, self-congruity, and lifestyle congruity with a shopping app are expected to exert differential and interactional effects on shoppers' well-being. The sense of well-being derived from shopping via apps is, in turn, likely to yield important retailing outcomes. Data was collected from a survey of actual mobile shoppers using fashion retail apps in two culturally distinct markets: the USA and Japan. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS was employed to validate the proposed model. The results generally support the hypothesized relationships, with different findings observed across both countries. Functional congruity and lifestyle congruity are the primary drivers of shoppers' well-being in the USA. Self-congruity is the primary driver of shopping well-being in Japan. Self-congruity and life-style congruity amplify the effects of functional congruity on shoppers' well-being exclusively in Japan. App-related shopping well-being significantly influences positive attitudes toward the app and continued usage of the app in both countries. However, app-related shopping well-being only positively influences retailer loyalty in Japan. This paper provides valuable insights for mobile retailers and offers theoretical contributions by advancing our understanding of how shopping apps shape shopper identity, well-being, and behaviors. It also discusses the limitations of the study and outlines directions for future research.

Niklas Elert

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☎ +46 703902751
✉ niklas.elert@hfi.se

Niklas Rudholm

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☎ +46 706254627
✉ niklas.rudholm@hfi.se

Hans Westerberg

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☎ +46 702233383
✉ hans.westerberg@hfi.se

Employment Effects of Payroll Tax Reforms: Evidence from Swedish Service Industries

High and persistent unemployment rates, as well as large numbers of individuals in neither employment, education nor training, are common in Europe (Bruno *et al.*, 2014; Daunfeldt *et al.*, 2021). The situation has been especially challenging for youths, with unemployment rates for people below 25 twice as high as for those above that age since the 1990-ties in OECD-countries (Egebark & Kaunitz, 2018). This situation is problematic, especially considering the increase in unemployment rates following the COVID-19 pandemic (Fana *et al.*, 2020). Policymakers in the Scandinavian welfare states have limited influence over wages as these are determined through negotiations between employer organizations and trade unions. For this reason, Swedish policymakers have often turned to payroll tax reductions to address unemployment among the young (Daunfeldt *et al.*, 2021). Notably, the Swedish employer paid payroll tax was reduced in two steps in 2007 and 2009. The first step reduced the tax rate by 11 percentage points for employers of workers that at the start of the year had turned 18 but not 25 years of age. In 2009, the payroll tax rate was cut by an additional 6 points, and the reform was extended to include those workers that at the start of the year had yet to turn 26. The purpose of this research is to empirically investigate how this Swedish payroll tax reform affected employment on both the extensive (i.e., the creation of new jobs) and intensive (i.e., hours worked by incumbent personnel) margins. Previous studies have focused on the impact of payroll tax reform on the extensive margin, i.e., the creation of new jobs. If the reform also affects employment on the intensive margin (i.e., hours worked by incumbents), doing so will underestimate the reform's broader impact on both new hires and existing employees, and can lead to suboptimal policy decisions. Our results show a substantial and statistically significant increase in employment on the extensive margin (regardless of whether jobs are full-time or part-time): the average firm added 2.3 new employees due to the reform, which is equal to a percentage increase in employment of 4.3%. Estimating the effects separately for full-time and part-time employment, we find that there is an increase of, on average, 1.4 full-time employees, and approximately 0.6 part-time employees (who, on average, work 84 hours per month, i.e. roughly half-time). However, the most interesting and novel result concerns the number of hours worked for incumbents. The increase in hours worked for incumbents equals, on average, for all industries, approximately 1.9 full-time employees. As such, a significant part of the payroll tax reform effect seems to be on the working hours for incumbent personnel. Our results reinforce previous findings on extensive margin employment effects of the Swedish payroll tax reform, while also acknowledging a significant increase in intensive margin employment which has been overlooked in previous research. These results highlight the broad impact of the reform, and that both intensive- and extensive margin employment must be considered in future policy decisions.

Lena Epperlein

FOM University of Applied
Sciences
44269 Dortmund
Germany

Carsten D. Schultz

University of Hagen
58097 Hagen
Germany

☎ +49 2331 987 2617
✉ carsten.schultz@fernuni-
hagen.de

The Impact of Corporate Influencers on the Corporate Brand

Influencer marketing has become an integral part of companies' strategies to reach pre-economic and economic objectives, such as increasing brand image, revenues, and sales. Influencers are (digital) opinion leaders who act as role models and utilize their social reach to influence attitudes and behavior of their followers (Leung *et al.*, 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers generally post regularly about their activities including their opinions and (product) recommendations in their personal narratives. A particular influencer type is a so-called corporate influencer who typically participates in social media activities based on the experiences as an employee of a company. Due to the close relationship between employee and employer, the direct experiences communicated are perceived as an authentic representation of the company, employer, and product brand – in the best case, without appearing to be part of the company's branding strategy (Hesse *et al.*, 2021). For corporate influencers, LinkedIn is particularly relevant as a social media platform for such influencers and companies. Companies in various industries, such as chemical, finance, health, media, retail, and public service (Ebner & Eck, 2022). In contrast to their recent relevance, research on corporate influencers is still scarce. The present study answers the question if LinkedIn posts of corporate influencers impact attitude towards the corporate brand. The framework for the present study is the Social Media Value Influencer Model (Lou & Yuan, 2019) that addresses the question of trust in branded posts to impact brand awareness and purchase intentions. We extend the framework in two ways. First, we draw on the source credibility theory (Rohanian, 1990) as another primary approach to explain credibility in influencers and influencer marketing. Second, we include Ducoffe's (1996) advertising value model to address the communicative nature of influencer posts. The primary aim of our comprehensive research model is to analyze the various effects on brand attitude towards a company brand. Based on established scales and a 2x3 experimental design, a randomized survey was conducted in October and November 2023. The final sample consists of 538 questionnaires. The sample is 43.2% female, 55.3% male, and 1.5% divers; average age is 33.6 years (SD 9.13). Variance-based structural equation modeling is used for data analysis. After eliminating five items (of 54) due to loading values below 0.7, all 14 latent variables are measured successfully based on item reliability, composite reliability, and discriminant validity. In the structural model, the empirical results support 15 of 16 hypotheses. The empirical data also allow to test boundary conditions, such as age, gender, and followership. The experimental set-up tests for differences between an established and a newer brand as well as the branding use in the corporate influencer communication. Answering the primary research question, corporate influencers positively impact attitudes towards the corporate brand through their LinkedIn posts. The dominant factor is the credibility of a corporate influencer, perceived credibility affects the attitude towards influencers, the advertising value, trust in the influencer post, and brand attitude. Furthermore, advertising value of an influencer post increases if it is entertaining and informative and without any irritating effect on LinkedIn users.

Alet C Erasmus

University of Pretoria
Gibs
Sandton, 2146
South Africa

✉ erasmusa@gibs.co.za

Khanyisa Nkuna

University of Pretoria
Gibs
Sandton, 2146
South Africa

✉ kbnkuna@gmail.com

Johan L Olivier

University of Pretoria
Gibs
Sandton, 2146
South Africa

✉ olivier.jo@gibs.co.za

Millennials' Perceptions of the Legitimacy of Clothing Brands During a Widespread Global Crisis: Surviving The Odds

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many clothing retail stores closed down; the survivors on the retail scene could not necessarily be linked to obvious characteristics such as price, brand origin, familiarity or reputation. This study, therefore, examined how brand attributes and personal values shape millennials' perceptions of brand legitimacy, providing insight into the volatile clothing retail landscape. Millennials were chosen because they constituted a major portion of the economically active market at the time. The authors argued that in order to remain relevant, retailers must understand the underlying motives that fundamentally influence millennials' perceptions of brand legitimacy, and develop brand strategies accordingly to "stand the test of time". Schwartz's ten-value typology (2012) served as the theoretical anchor. The mixed methods approach integrated a triple-stage Delphi technique, followed by an online focus group discussion, and using Means-Ends-Chain (MEC) analysis to uncover the preferred brand attributes and related consequences that millennials anticipated to derive from preferred clothing brands. The MEC procedure entailed the extraction of four subsequent hierarchical value maps. The value hedonism, associated with pleasure and indicating a higher-order need for self-enhancement and openness to change, was identified as the predominant personal value influencing millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements: an insightful finding considering the dark mood state of people during the pandemic. Another influential motive was security, indicating a desire for harmony and stability within oneself, relationships, and society. Therefore, legitimate clothing brands are those that evoke pleasure and harmony within individuals and the groups they associate with. Retailers who target millennials should, therefore, acknowledge the relevance of values in their target markets' evaluation of their product/brand offerings to remain relevant in the marketplace. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its identification of the values that direct millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a crisis period, translating the outcomes in terms of more tangible brand attributes that could guide retailers' brand strategies. Future research could focus on other market contexts, gender and income differences, and even refine the millennial age category depending on retailers' regard for particular market segments.

Jonas Falk

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 4471
✉ jonas.falk@
     uni-saarland.de

Bastian Popp

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 4475
✉ bastian.popp@
     uni-saarland.de

Subscription Models in Retail: An Analysis of the Motives for Using Predefined Subscriptions

Subscription models have existed in our society for hundreds of years (Rudolph *et al.*, 2017). From subscriptions to maps in the 16th century to newspapers and books and to streaming services like Netflix, subscription services have changed and evolved over time (Riesener *et al.*, 2020). This rapid development is made possible, above all, by advancing technology and digitalisation (Faccia *et al.*, 2023). Subscription models are generally characterized by a recurring payment for content, products or services (Lindström *et al.*, 2023). Thus, this type of business model inherently stands out for customer relationships over longer periods of time (Huyard, 2020), which creates the advantage of predictability of revenue streams (McCarthy *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, subscription models can be found for various products (e.g., food, FMCG, fashion) in many different retail categories including utilitarian products and hedonic products (Baek & Kim, 2022). Depending on purchase control and individualization, established typologies of subscription models differentiate between access subscriptions, surprise subscriptions, curated subscriptions and predefined subscriptions (Bischof *et al.*, 2020; Bray *et al.*, 2021). Given the huge market size and an increasing convenience orientation among customers, especially predefined subscriptions offer great potential to have a significant impact on the retail sector. Also known as replenishment subscriptions (Andonova *et al.*, 2021), predefined subscriptions represent a subscription model for products that are required on a regular basis and, therefore, can be delivered at fixed intervals (e.g., Amazon Subscribe & Save for groceries or Dollar Shave Club for razors) (Bischof *et al.*, 2020). Our empirical research aims to identify potential drivers of acceptance of such predefined subscription models. In particular, we study different drivers of consumers' attitudes towards predefined subscription models and their usage intentions. Using an online survey among German consumers (N=191), the results show that the intention to use predefined subscriptions is substantially determined by their attitude towards predefined subscriptions (β_{H6} = .749**). Among the drivers of consumer attitudes, we first identify the utilitarian motives of time-saving (β_{H1} = .267**) and cost-saving (β_{H2} = .153**). In contrast to our assumption, control, i.e. consumers' ability to plan and control their purchases, does not significantly influence their attitude towards predefined subscriptions (β_{H3} = .070). The analysis further shows that the hedonic motive of enjoyment (β_{H4} = .385**) is the most important driver of consumer attitude. Finally, consumers appreciate potential ecological aspects of subscription models as the ecological motive of environmental protection increases their attitude towards subscriptions (β_{H5} = .227**). Our findings highlight that, although we did not study surprise subscriptions, enjoyment is the most important driver of predefined subscription services. Retailers should thus emphasize how much enjoyment their subscription model is delivering to the customers and ensure a perfect customer experience, e.g. in terms of the website, orders, as well as design and delivery of the subscription boxes. Providers also are advised to address utilitarian aspects to retain and gain new customers by emphasizing convenience, cost and time advantages when promoting their subscription services. Besides these hedonic and utilitarian aspects, in times of an increasing demand for sustainable solutions, ecological aspects offer additional potential to attract customers by promoting the ecological efficiency of their businesses.

Robert J. Fisher

University of Alberta
Alberta School of Business
Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6
Canada

☎ +1 (780) 203 3851
✉ rfisher1@ualberta.ca

Oliver J. Rutz

University of Washington
School of Business
Seattle, WA 98195-3226
USA

☎ +1 (206) 221 1856
✉ orutz@uw.edu

Jennifer Argo

University of Alberta
Alberta School of Business
Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6
Canada

☎ +1 (780) 492 3900
✉ jargo@ualberta.ca

Eleni Stroulia

University of Alberta
Faculty of Science
Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6
Canada

☎ +1 (780) 492 2285
✉ jargo@ualberta.ca

Victor Fernandez Cervantes

University of Alberta
Faculty of Science
Edmonton, AB T6G 2R6
Canada

☎ +1 (780) 492 2285
✉ vf@ualberta.ca

When Brands Collide: Effects of Automobile Brand Perceptions on Driver Aggression

Our research seeks to understand how the relative status of automobile brands affect consumer interactions in everyday driving situations. We theorize that drivers of high-status automobile brands are more likely to respond aggressively in response to the discourteous or undesirable driving behaviors of others. Aggressive driving responses include honking, rude or angry hand gestures, tailgating, and can even involve physical altercations (i.e., road rage). We have undertaken two studies of the effects of brands on driver aggression that find support for our theory. Our first study is an experiment in which participants to drive a driving simulator in which they are randomly assigned to drive either a BMW or an Acura. In the simulation they are exposed to a dangerous driving situation (i.e., they are not allowed to merge onto a busy roadway by another driver). We find that participants assigned to the BMW versus the Acura are significantly more likely to honk their horn and flash their lights at the offending driver. In our second study, we analyze field data from police-reported accidents using insurance data. We find that drivers of European luxury cars (e.g., BMW, Mercedes, Acura, Jaguars, and Range Rovers) are significantly more likely to be involved in accidents because of aggressive driving. Our results have important implications for our understandings of brands and how their relative status affect consumer behavior.

Fatiha Fort

Institut Agro
Montpellier, 34060
France

☏ +33695580248
✉ fatiha.fort@supagro.fr

Solenn Latour

Université Paul Valery
Montpellier, 34000
Franc

☏ +33
✉ solenn.latour@etu.univ-montp3.fr

Florent Saucède

Institut Agro
Montpellier, 34060
France

☏ +33 611787301
✉ florent.saucede@supagro.fr

Balancing Pleasure and Purpose: How Consumers Navigate the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Dimensions of Food Consumption

Many people would argue that food plays a major role in their well-being. It is recognized that food experiences are embedded in a particular food culture and are shaped by that culture's history, social norms, values and beliefs. Eating, a multi-day act, plays an important role in achieving a good life and food-related well-being (Diener *et al.*, 2003; Ares *et al.*, 2016). Based on the Aristotelian philosophy of happiness, recent research considers two dimensions of wellbeing (Stark *et al.*, 2018; Kashdan *et al.*, 2018). The hedonic dimension focuses on the achievement of happiness and pleasure, and the eudaimonic dimension emphasizes meaning and self-realization (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic dimension of food has been the main focus of many researches due to its impact on health and the effectiveness of public health claims. A hedonic product provides an affective, multisensory, emotional experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) leading to enjoyment and pleasure (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Research has provided insights into how food consumption can lead to pleasure. Cornila & Chandon (2016a) have identified visceral pleasure and epicurean pleasure and consider that reducing the visceral one could contribute to healthy eating, Batat *et al.* (2019) consider a more holistic view of the experiential pleasure of food and have proposed that it could help shift consumer behavior towards well-being. The eudaimonic dimension of food has received less attention from researchers and a full understanding of the eudaimonic dimension of food experience is still little explored due to the lack of an agreed general theory, the usefulness of distinguishing it from the hedonic dimension and the difficulty of measuring it (Mugel *et al.*, 2019, Kashdan *et al.*, 2008). Based on the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of food well-being, we highlight this major tension that can arise in food choices. This paper analyses different ways in which consumers can manage pleasure and the hedonic dimension of food consumption, while maintaining the eudaimonic dimension of food in relation to individual fulfilment, health and sustainability. We conducted a QCA analysis of the discourse of 34 consumers of traditional foods that carry pleasure, health and ethical dimensions. Results showed that in a holistic food consumption experience, the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of food well-being were distinct and that consumers might have been motivated by one, both, or neither. Based on these results, we highlight different ways in which consumers can reduce the tension between pleasure and ethics.

Anne Fota

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 5234
✉ fota@marketing.
uni-siegen.de

Robér Rollin

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 3647
✉ rollin@marketing.
uni-siege.de

Hanna Schramm-Klein

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 4281
✉ schramm-klein@
marketing.uni-siegen.de

Social Media Trends: Unraveling the Phenomenon

This study examines the mechanisms underlying social media trends by combining large-scale trend data analysis, experimental designs, and consumer perception studies. Drawing from frameworks such as diffusion of innovations, social proof, and psychological reactance theory, the research aims to uncover what drives consumers to engage in, imitate, and share trends across social media platforms like TikTok or Instagram. By integrating structural, psychological, and influencer-related perspectives, the three interrelated studies offer a comprehensive understanding of trend formation, emotional appeal, and influencer impact. In the first study, 200 real-world TikTok trends are analyzed to investigate structural predictors of virality. The findings reveal that content format (e.g., lip-sync, dance, or music) does not significantly affect engagement or viewership. Instead, early diffusion patterns—especially through influencers—and metrics such as shares and saves are strong predictors of visibility. Interestingly, trends imitated by influencers early on tend to achieve higher reach and sustainability, but excessive imitation without variation leads to trend fatigue. Thus, influencer-driven visibility must be balanced with novelty and differentiation to maintain momentum. Building on these insights, Study 2 investigates psychological mechanisms underlying participation through an online experiment ($N = 196$). Emotional pleasure emerges as the primary determinant of behavioral intention, suggesting that affective responses outweigh cognitive evaluations in predicting engagement. Attitudinal measures fail to explain variance in participation, indicating limited power of evaluative judgments. Entertainment-seeking tendencies do not moderate this relationship, reinforcing the dominance of emotional appeal over rational constructs. Identity-related motives contribute to trend relevance, while social motives remain statistically insignificant. These results underline the affect-driven and self-referential nature of engagement, shifting the focus away from collective motivations. Extending the analysis to influencer dynamics, Study 3 ($N = 214$) examines how influencer characteristics shape consumers' willingness to share trend content. The results show that perceived authenticity significantly predicts sharing intentions, while thematic congruence does not. This suggests that sincerity in presentation outweighs strategic alignment in determining engagement. The spontaneous and affective nature of sharing is closely tied to authenticity, enabling influencers to engage with trends outside their domain if perceived as genuine. The study positions authenticity as a mediator of credibility and emotional resonance, challenging assumptions about brand-fit and expertise. Taken together, the findings offer clear implications for content strategy and influencer collaboration. Rather than optimizing for format or fit, brands should focus on emotional appeal and authenticity. Trend success depends more on emotional triggers than structural design. Influencers can adopt unfamiliar trends if performance feels credible, and brands can initiate viral dynamics without overt messaging. Facilitating authentic, enjoyable participation—rather than enforcing coherence—emerges as a more effective pathway to visibility and sustained engagement.

Anne Fota

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 5234
✉ fota@marketing.
  uni-siegen.de

Hanna Schramm-Klein

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 4281
✉ schramm-klein@
  marketing.uni-siege.de

AI Across Ages: How Emotional Intelligence and Anthropomorphism Shape Consumer Interactions with ChatGPT

Due to the widespread use of ChatGPT since its launch in November 2022 and its audio feature in September 2023, both in professional and personal contexts, questions remain about the ability to display emotional intelligence (EI) and how different age groups perceive this attribute. The lack of emotional intelligence in AI interactions has the potential to negatively impact consumer experiences, particularly given the generational differences in engagement with new technologies. Accordingly, the present study examines consumer interactions with contemporary AIs, such as conversational ChatGPT's audio feature, with a particular focus on the perceptions of emotional intelligence and social presence across different age groups: (1) How do different age groups perceive ChatGPT's emotional intelligence during audio interactions? (2) What is the role of anthropomorphism and social presence in influencing the quality of these interactions? The study involved 15 participants, aged between 16 and 69, interacting with ChatGPT's audio feature. These interactions were initially documented during distinct phases of an observational study, with the objective of evaluating the authentic emotional and social dynamics between the AI and the user. This was subsequently complemented by in-depth interviews, which sought to ascertain the participants' perceptions of the interaction. The data was subjected to analysis with a view to identifying differences in perception between age groups. The findings indicated that older participants were more inclined to anthropomorphize the AI, ascribing human-like characteristics to its responses. This resulted in increased engagement and perceived interaction quality, which has significant implications for retailers seeking to establish long-term customer relationships through digital assistants. The younger participants perceived the interactions to be more scripted, yet they found the technology to be useful for tasks such as product recommendations. The responses provided by ChatGPT were perceived as emotionally supportive by older users, which enhanced their willingness to share personal information. This suggests potential applications for healthcare or elderly care. For businesses, the capacity to evoke emotional engagement through AI, such as ChatGPT, could prove to be a transformative development. It is increasingly anticipated by consumers that they will receive experiences that are more personalized and empathetic, and businesses are able to utilize AI in order to enhance customer loyalty and trust. It is possible that older users, who may be more reluctant to adopt new technologies, could benefit from the use of AI that fosters a sense of social presence. Nevertheless, issues such as the "uncanny valley" phenomenon – whereby artificially intelligent systems that are excessively human-like can engender feelings of unease – must be addressed in order to prevent users from becoming disillusioned.

María Fuentes-Blasco

University Pablo de Olavide
Sevilla, 41013
Spain

☎ +34 954 97 73 28
✉ mfuebla@upo.es

Francesca Di Canio

University of Modena and
Reggio Emilia
Reggio Emilia, 42122
Italy

☎ +39 0522 523041
✉
francesca.decanio@unimore.it

Juan A. Mondéjar-Jiménez

University of Castilla-La
Mancha
Cuenca, 16071
Spain

☎ +34 926 05 38 93
✉ juanantonio.mondejar@
uclm.es

Joan B. Garau-Vadell

University of les Illes Balears
Palma de Mallorca, 07122
Spain

☎ + 34 971 17 33 88
✉ joan.garau@uib.es

Authentic vs Fictitious Destination Placement in TV-Series: The Authenticity and the Self-Congruence on Consumer Decision Process

Audiovisual content through platforms and Internet-based applications has increased exponentially in recent years. Companies are aware of the efficacy of tactical promotional and product placement strategies, due to their impact on consumer behavior within the context of these current forms of consumption, such as short videos (Qiu *et al.*, 2024), films (Nieto-Ferrando *et al.*, 2024), or series (Azavedo *et al.*, 2023). However, there is ongoing debate about the role that perceived authenticity of product placement plays in the consumer decision-making process. Moreover, Andonopoulos *et al.* (2023) conclude that inauthenticity can serve as a source of inspiration for consumers, that influences on their hedonic purchase intention. In the media-related tourism context, the literature of "branded entertainment" - understood as a more sophisticated strategy of use of product placement (Hudson & Hudson, 2006)- is not exempt from this controversy. While some studies have found that perceived authenticity exerts a positive and significant influence on the consumer's purchase and post-purchase stages (see, for example, Xue & Mattila (2024)), other authors have reached opposite conclusions (e.g. Teng & Chen (2020)), and some have even suggested that the effect may be negative (e.g. Azavedo *et al.*,(2024)). To contribute to this research line, this study examines how heterogeneous perceptions of destination authenticity influence consumer decision-making process. Specifically, the mediating role of consumers self-congruency between intra and interpersonal authenticity's perception about destination on inspiration and consumer engagement is studied. To validate the research objective, a famous TV series "*Emily in Paris*" is selected, as it meets the criteria of exhibiting both authentic (*Jardin du Palais-Royal* and *ue de l'Abreuvoir* in Paris, and the *Pincian Hill* and *Villa Borghese* in Roma, among others) and fictional (*Solitano*, an "*piccolo paese*") destinations. This TV series, screened on Netflix, has four seasons broadcasting since its premiere in October 2020. It has achieved 6.8/10 IMDb general rating. An online survey is conducted with a sample of 450 series' fans through Instragram groups. The survey includes validated scales to measure authenticity, self-congruence, trustworthiness, consumer visited related behavior and consumer not-visited related behavior, and consumer engagement with destination. The findings confirm the significant different impacts of perception of authenticity, and both the direct and indirect paths mediated by self-congruency show a significant dependency on consumer engagement.

Lea Galle

University of Kaiserslautern-Landau
Faculty of Business Studies and Economics
67653 Kaiserslautern
Germany

☎ +49 631 205 5248
✉ lea.galle@rptu.de

Stefan Roth

University of Kaiserslautern-Landau
Faculty of Business Studies and Economics
67653 Kaiserslautern
Germany

☎ +49 631 205 2923
✉ stefan.roth@rptu.de

Exploring the Challenges of Gamification in Retail

Several leading companies such as Amazon, LinkedIn and Nike have successfully implemented gamification as a marketing strategy, as they have recognized that playful elements not only promote interaction but can also sustainably improve customer loyalty (Bilos, 2021). These benefits can arise from the fact that gamification can optimize the customer experience in retail by making the shopping experience more enjoyable, entertaining, and appealing (Sheetal *et al.*, 2023; Lau/Ki, 2021). Despite the dynamic and relatively nascent nature of gamification literature, a consistent definition has yet to be established. In alignment with most existing literature, we define gamification as "the use of design elements characteristic of games in non-game contexts" (Deterding *et al.*, 2011, p.13). While gamification has been shown to fulfil basic psychological needs (Sailer *et al.*, 2017) and enhance user engagement (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2016), emerging research also identifies potential drawbacks. These include issues like saturation effects and increasing ethical concerns around data protection (Hammedi *et al.*, 2023; Barrat, 2017). Overall, the existing literature in this area is still very limited, as the focus has so far been increasingly on the benefits and positive effects of gamification. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of personalized and non-personalized gamification—compared to the absence of gamification—on key consumer perceptions, namely privacy concerns, satisfaction, and trust in the retailer. Drawing on Justice Theory, which emphasizes fairness and transparency in consumer interactions, we explore whether the integration of gamification can influence customer trust and satisfaction and if gamification reduces or increases privacy concerns. Furthermore, we control for factors such as age, gender, and general privacy sensitivity. Our empirical findings show that personalization raises privacy concerns. However, gamification itself does not raise privacy concerns. Furthermore, satisfaction remains positive across all groups, and no significant differences were observed in terms of trust in the retailer. These insights offer valuable guidance for retailers seeking to balance customer engagement with ethical considerations in their use of gamification.

Lily (Xuehui) Gao

Stockholm School of
Economics
Stockholm, 113 83
Sweden

☎ + 46 8 736 90 00
✉ xuehui.gao@hhs.se

Qiong Tang

University of Groningen
Groningen, 9747 AE
The Netherlands

☎ +31 50 36 37065
✉ q.tang@rug.nl

Xiangnan Zhang

Temple University
Fox School of Business
Philadelphia, PA 19122
USA

☎ +1 215 204 7676
✉ xiang.nan.zhang@
    temple.edu

Why Some Content Stands Out in the Digital Age? The Role of Interestingness in Shaping Success

In today's digital landscape, consumers have the unprecedented ability to share their experiences, opinions, and reactions instantly, from virtually anywhere in the world. However, despite the vast quantity of content being produced and shared, not all content garners the same level of attention or engagement. Some content quickly captures the public's interest and drives interaction, while other content fades into obscurity. Understanding the factors that make certain content stand out while others remain unnoticed is a pressing question in both academic research and industry practice. To address this gap, we collected and analyzed over 13 billion customer-generated comments (CGC) from YouTube, focusing on user interactions with movies released in 2023. This massive dataset was paired with daily firm sales data to investigate the link between content engagement and business performance. Using advanced deep learning models, we extracted measures of "interestingness" from the CGC and assessed its impact on firm success. Our approach allows us to quantify the elusive concept of interestingness and examine how it drives consumer behavior. This study provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics that lead to content success and offers actionable insights into how firms can leverage interestingness to enhance customer engagement and achieve positive business outcomes.

Hasan Gilani

Brighton University
Brighton Business School
Brighton, BN2 4GJ
United Kingdom

☎ +44 1273 641231
✉ h.gilani@brighton.ac.uk

The Influence of Digital Gaming Platforms on Gen Alpha's Consumer Preferences: A Study of In-Game Retail and Brand Integration

This research explores the influence of digital gaming platforms on the consumer preferences of Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha), focusing on in-game retail and brand integration. As digital natives, Gen Alpha's consumption behaviors are being shaped by their interaction with immersive gaming environments. This study will examine how brands use gaming platforms to influence purchasing decisions, consumer loyalty, and brand perception. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, will provide a comprehensive understanding of Gen Alpha's interaction with digital retail and brand integration in gaming.

Shaked Gilboa

Ruppin Academic Center
Faculty of Economics and
Business Administration
Emek Hefer, 4025000
Israel

☎ +972 98983818
✉ shakedg@ruppin.ac.il

Iris Vilnai-Yavetz

Ruppin Academic Center
Faculty of Economics and
Business Administration
Emek Hefer, 4025000
Israel

☎ +972 98983033
✉ yavetzir@ruppin.ac.il

Vince Mitchell

The University of Sydney
Business School
Sydney, 2006
Australia

☎ +61 8626458
✉ vince.mitchell@
   sydney.edu.au

Is Losing an Experience the Same as Losing a Product? Applying Prospect Theory to the Loss and Regain of Mall Experiences

Is losing an experience the same as losing a product? Interpreting the unique context of COVID-19 through the lens of prospect theory allows us to answer this question. This theory, which was introduced by Kahneman & Tversky (1979), provides a framework for understanding how individuals make decisions under risk. A key component of prospect theory is the value function, which is based on gains and losses. This function illustrates the concept of loss aversion—the tendency of people to be more sensitive to losses than to equivalent gains. People evaluate losses more negatively than they do non-gains, while gains are evaluated more positively than non-losses (Liberman *et al.*, 2005). Prospect theory has been applied to various consumer contexts, including finance, insurance, and product pricing (Barberis, 2013). In the context of places, research has shown that the threat of losing social facilities such as grocery stores or cafes triggers loss aversion, making their closure highly undesirable (Christiaanse *et al.*, 2023). The COVID-19 lockdown and the subsequent reopening of malls provide a unique opportunity to investigate whether the dynamics of losing and regaining mall experiences align with the predictions of prospect theory. To do so, we draw on the conceptual framework of four mall experiences: functional, seductive, social, and recreational (Gilboa and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013; Gilboa *et al.*, 2016). A within-subjects design was used to collect data from a sample of 198 London residents in two phases. In May 2020, 498 English-speaking mall shoppers who were at home during the COVID-19 lockdown completed an online questionnaire. In May 2022, the same 498 shoppers were invited to complete a follow-up questionnaire; the 198 shoppers who responded formed the final sample. The questionnaires, which were based on the four mall experiences model (Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013) and the associated measurement scale (Gilboa *et al.*, 2016), included 16 measures divided into four 4-item subscales assessing the perceived importance of the functional, social, seductive, and recreational experiences. During the lockdown, the respondents rated how much they missed the absent mall experiences as an indicator of the experiences' importance. After the lockdown, the respondents indicated the importance of each mall experience. The results confirmed the loss aversion effect for the seductive, social, and recreational experiences: their perceived importance was higher during the lockdown (a period of loss) than after reopening (a period of regaining). Employing an additional explicit measure of value—shoppers' willingness to pay—supported these findings. In accordance with the endowment effect described by prospect theory (Kahneman *et al.*, 1990), the respondents' willingness to pay for mall experiences was higher during the lockdown due to the loss of these experiences than after reopening. These findings affirm that losing an experience, much like losing a product, aligns with prospect theory and offer retailers valuable insights into managing relationships with shoppers in times of disruption.

Sharon-Marie Gillooley

Nottingham Trent University
Nottingham Business School
Nottingham, NG14FQ
United Kingdom

☎ +44 (0)115 848 4460
✉ sharonmarie.gillooley@
   ntu.ac.uk

Sheilagh Resnick

Nottingham Trent University
Nottingham Business School
Nottingham, NG14FQ
United Kingdom

✉ sheilagh.resnick@ntu.ac.uk

Embracing the Future:
Evaluating Time Perspective and Self-Identity in Midlife

Possible selves represent individuals' ideas of their ideal self, future self, and what they fear of becoming, providing a link between cognition and motivation (Markus & Nurius, 1986). People in midlife typically experience a shift in time perspective, from time-since-birth to time-left-to-live (Neugarten, 1968). Future Time Perspective (FTP) is an individual's perception of time left *and* opportunities remaining (Carstensen, 2006), – distinct from chronological age (CA) (Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2021a). FTP often correlates with CA but is theoretically distinct (Kuppelwieser & Klaus, 2021a). Individuals perceive time as limited or expansive, irrespective of their CA (Kooij *et al.,* 2018). Prior studies (Kuppelwieser & Sarstedt, 2014; Wei, *et al.*, 2013) found that FTP (for older and younger consumers especially) can explain motivations, emotions and consumer behavior more accurately than CA. Women over 30 develop a stronger sense of self with age, shifting towards self-acceptance; with positive views of a future self-associated with a younger cognitive age (Kozar & Damhorst, 2009; Hess *et al.,* 2017). Moschis (2012) advocates including life events *and* the perception of time when researching age identity. Yannopoulou *et al.,* (2023) highlight that generational cohort, gender, social roles and transition events influence consumers' perspective of time, calling for consideration of time perspective in consumer studies. Few studies have considered both FTP and cognitive age (Kuppelwieser, 2016). The aim of our study is to evaluate how FTP influences self-identity, focusing on midlife women, GenX, in the UK, a high-spending group which has grown up with consumer culture (Jung & Siedlecki, 2018; Eger *et al.,* 2021). A self-complete online survey was distributed to 500 women self-identifying as GenX (CA = 39-57years). Findings were evaluated and a Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between FTP and self-perceived age. The findings revealed no correlation between FTP and cognitive age nor CA, for this generational cohort. This discrepancy between CA, cognitive age and FTP cultivates a new life narrative (Kuppelwieser *et al.,* 2021b). The findings suggest GenX women predominantly hold positive perspectives of time, providing insights into their self-concept. Particularly, their motivation to behave in ways that are self-congruent. They view their future as an opportunity for renewal and reinvention (Kuppelwieser & Sarsedt, 2014; Cook 2018, Marshall 2018). The implications are that midlife should be viewed by consumer organizations as a 'field of aspiration', shifting the framing of ageing from negative to positive, full of possibilities. This 'sandwich generation' (Miller 1981) is perhaps the first generational cohort of women with the time, resources and motivation to exercise agency and actively shape their possible - encompassing the ideal selves they aspire to become and the selves they could potentially become in the future.

Raoul Graf

UQAM
School of Management
Montréal (Québec) H2X 1L7
Canada

✉ graf.raoul@uqam.ca

When Street Art Gets Inside –
A Persuasive Strategy For Retail Spaces

As urban environments experience transformation, retailers are increasingly recognizing the potential of street art to convert shopping venues into alluring, visually stimulating environments that attract and retain customers. This trend not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of retail spaces but also fosters a sense of community and cultural identity, as local artists often reflect regional narratives through their work. By incorporating street art into commercial environments, retailers can create unique experiences that resonate with consumers on an emotional level. Consequently, this paper investigates the multifaceted ways in which street art can influence consumer purchasing behaviors. Street art significantly contributes to the visual allure of retail environments, which is essential in the contemporary context of heightened aesthetic awareness. Consumers are progressively valuing the aesthetic dimension of their shopping experiences, which can catalyze purchase intentions and influence decision-making (Wang, 2024). Artistic components, such as street art, metamorphose retail spaces into distinctive environments that provide both hedonic and symbolic value, thereby enriching the overall shopping experience. This metamorphosis can elicit favorable responses from shoppers, including increased satisfaction and enhanced behavioral intentions (Vukadin *et al.*, 2018). Street art cultivates emotional and symbolic associations between consumers and brands. It can imprint an impression of uniqueness and trendiness on a brand, fostering social interconnectivity and community cohesion. These emotional benefits are especially accentuated by consumers and urban artists (Cardenas *et al.*, 2022). The existence of art within retail environments can evoke positive emotions among customers, subsequently enhancing their satisfaction with the store. This emotional significance is particularly pronounced for consumers with a high appreciation for art, as it can magnify their favorable reactions to the retail environment (Kim & Choo, 2016). The incorporation of street art within retail environments functions as a differentiation strategy, distinguishing the store from its competitors by providing a distinctive shopping experience. This approach not only maximizes hedonic pleasure but also confers symbolic value to the commercial offering, thereby stimulating both store traffic and sales (Vukadin *et al.*, 2016). Street art can effectively convey a brand's identity and message, rendering it memorable and visually engaging to consumers. This visual influence is critical as it shapes consumer purchasing decisions by establishing a robust brand image (Piko *et al.*, 2017). The presence of street art may also exert an economic influence, as evidenced by prewar commercial structures where street art contributes to a premium in pricing. This suggests that street art not only augments the cultural and social significance of a space but can also elevate its economic value (Cheng *et al.*, 2023). The amalgamation of traditional cultural elements, including street art, within commercial thoroughfares can markedly affect consumer perceived value and intentions to repurchase. This underscores the significance of cultural identity in shaping consumer behavior (Chen & Yu, 2014).

Raoul Graf

UQAM
School of Management
Montréal (Québec) H2X 1L7
Canada

✉ graf.raoul@uqam.ca

Fabien Durif

UQAM
School of Management
Montréal (Québec) H2X 1L7
Canada

Street Art: A Powerful Catalyst for Local Business Growth

Street art installations have emerged as a significant tool for urban development, with the potential to increase foot traffic and boost local businesses on commercial streets. This phenomenon is supported by various studies that highlight the economic, social, and cultural impacts of street art. The following paper explores these aspects, drawing insights from current research and initiatives implemented in various urban centers across the globe. Street art can serve as a catalyst for urban renewal and economic development. Cities like Atlanta, Reno, Philadelphia, and Seattle have successfully used arts and culture to revitalize downtown areas, attract tourists, and stimulate private investment (Kemp, 2004). The economic value of street art is evident in its ability to enhance property markets and contribute to neighborhood regeneration. In Naples, for example, street art has been linked to increased property values and economic revitalization (Forte & Paola, 2019). Street art initiatives, such as mural festivals, have been shown to foster local development and tourism, contributing to the economic growth of cities like Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Miami (Strom & Kusenbach, 2020). Street art promotes social connectedness and community engagement. It serves as a medium for cultural expression and social inclusion, particularly among young people, as seen in cities like Lisbon, Heerlen, and Toronto (Silva, 2021). The institutionalization of street art, as in the case of Lisbon's Galeria de Arte Urbana, has led to territorial and social impacts, enhancing urban marketing and cultural identity (Grondeau & Pondaven, 2018). Street art also plays a role in shaping urban culture and identity, transforming perceptions of urban spaces and fostering a sense of community (Gallou, 2018). Public art and street furniture contribute to the aesthetic appeal of urban areas, making them more attractive to residents and visitors. This aligns with the concept of the "3 T's" of growth - technology, tolerance, and talent - by creating vibrant and desirable urban environments (Friedman, 2020). The creative and avant-garde nature of street art can enhance the visual landscape of cities, making them more appealing to tourists and potential investors (Goncalves & Milani, 2022). While street art can drive economic and social benefits, it also poses challenges related to gentrification and cultural displacement. The appropriation of street art for real estate development can lead to the cultural obliteration and physical displacement of current residents (Strom & Kusenbach, 2020). The process of institutionalizing street art can be complex, involving decisions about which artworks and artists are recognized and supported. This can lead to debates about the authenticity and commercialization of street art (Gallou, 2018). In conclusion, street art installations have the potential to significantly increase foot traffic and boost local businesses on commercial streets by enhancing urban aesthetics, fostering community engagement, and driving economic development. However, the integration of street art into urban planning must be carefully managed to balance economic benefits with social and cultural considerations. The diverse impacts of street art underscore its role as a multifaceted tool for urban development, capable of transforming cities into vibrant cultural hubs.

Marko Grünhagen

Eastern Illinois University
Lumpkin College of Business
& Technology
Charleston, IL 61920
U.S.A.

☎ +1 217 581 6906
✉ mgrunhagen@eiu.edu

'Ghost Franchises' in the Post-Pandemic Service Space: Is the Separation of Food Production and Consumption Sustainable?

Many brands are created today based *solely* on online presence, from *Amazon* to *Zappos*. Yet, *eating establishments* that are built on an *exclusive* online presence are a new phenomenon. Traditionally, both out-of-home food *creation* and *consumption* has occurred at restaurants with a brick-and-mortar presence. Even delivery services in the past have relied on walk-in establishments from which food is ordered. Yet, during the recent pandemic, restauranteurs have been looking into ways to achieve cost savings and to minimize their dependence on customers who dine-in. As a result, 'ghost kitchens' (also called 'cloud kitchens' or 'dark kitchens') (Cai *et al.*, 2022; Reiley, 2020), and among franchised food operators 'ghost franchises' (Conrad, 2021), have become a new trend. In general, ghost eateries rely only on a food preparation location without any walk-in customer traffic and even without identifiable locations, from which delivery drivers, either their own or third-party services like *Doordash*, pick up food orders. In the franchise space, some established franchised brands have begun to operate separately-branded ghost franchises (Conrad, 2021), whereas other ghost franchises have opened entirely without any existing brick-and-mortar concept as a "chaperone". In this novel context of ghost franchises, an important issue is how the brand, as one of the most critical assets of a franchise (Paswan *et al.*, 2016), may be affected when the product itself emerges as the only true customer 'touchpoint.' The franchise concept rests on uniform visibility through its brand and related attributes, which appears to get lost in a 'ghost' existence. In light of recent consumer trends in favor of local/regional food and buying straight from producers (e.g., Cappelli, 2022), the sustainability of ghost franchises has to be examined as their food preparation sites are elusive. With few physical interaction opportunities for consumers, a 'slimmed down' franchise version that is supported by only very few touchpoints may risk losing consumers' trust. While the trend toward the creation of ghost franchises has ebbed post-pandemic in the US, globally the development continues to make inroads (Fantozzi, 2023). Ghost eateries had sprung out of a health crisis which left consumers afraid and forced to stay in shelter, which necessitated a *separation* of production and consumption. Restaurants in general, and franchise brands in particular, struggled during the pandemic and filled this niche eagerly. Since then, however, consumers have reoriented themselves, with a reinvigorated emphasis on their health and a reconnection with their food sources – in other words, a *re-connection* of food production and consumption. Relatedly, there is a social element to food consumption, as it is often not simply an 'intake of nutrition' (e.g., Absolom & Roberts, 2011; Macht *et al.*, 2005). This study attempts to shed light on the question whether ghost franchises have taken the reduction to the fewest touchpoints too far and, in the process, have disenfranchised the very customers they were targeting in the first place. In other words, is the crisis through which ghost eateries have been created ultimately also spelling their demise? A synthesis of the literatures on branding, customer 'touchpoints' as they relate to the creation of trust and loyalty in a food service context, and sustainability in regards to recent trends on the connection of food production and consumption, is conducted as a starting point to address this question.

Thorhallur Gudlaugsson

Banks, Trust and Loyalty

University of Iceland
School of Business
Reykjavik, 102
Iceland

☏ +354 8983540
✉ th@hi.is

In business, trust between parties is important. Each party must be able to trust the other: without it, business relationships are likely to suffer. The main goal of this study is to explore the current state of trust towards Icelandic banks, the impact of the 2008 banking collapse, and how changes in trust have affected customer loyalty to banks. The research is based on 16 quantitative surveys that evaluate a bank's image, with trust being one of the key image attributes assessed. These surveys were conducted annually from 2006 to 2019, and then again in 2021 and 2023. In total, there were 10,245 responses, with an average of 640 responses per year. The results show that, before the banking collapse in the fall of 2008, banks were closely associated with positive attributes such as trust and social responsibility; there was a weak association between banks and negative attributes such as corruption. However, after the collapse, this trend shifted. Banks became more closely associated with corruption, and the association with trust weakened. The findings also indicate a strong relationship between trust and loyalty. From these findings, it can be concluded that trust is a complex phenomenon and that rebuilding lost trust takes time.

Iris Hagemans
Jacqueline Arnoldy
Stephanie van de
Sanden
Tibert Verhagen

Amsterdam University of
Applied Sciences
Amsterdam, 1102 CV
The Netherlands

☎ +31 0647050092
✉ i.w.hagemans@hva.nl

Hein Roelfsema
Lisanne Bouten

Saxion University of Applied
Sciences
Enschede, 7513 AB
The Netherlands

Eleonora Pantano
Nikolaos Stylos

University of Bristol
Bristol, BS8 1SD
United Kingdom

Eleonora Bilotta
Alessandro Soranzo

University of Calabria
Rende, 87036
Italy

Martina Čaić

Aalto University
Espoo, 02150
Finland

Age-Inclusive Retail: Leveraging In-Store Technologies to Improve Shopping Experiences for Older Adults in Europe

As Europe's population ages, older adults represent a growing but underserved demographic segment in retail. Many older adults face significant barriers when interacting with emerging in-store technologies, such as interactive screens, social robots, and self-scanning checkouts. These technologies, designed to enhance the customer experience, are often more appealing to younger consumers, while older adults find them difficult to use due to limitations in sight, hearing, mobility, and digital literacy (Pantano *et al.*, 2022, Barnard *et al.*, 2013). This neglect of older consumers is detrimental to retailers, since older adults form an increasing consumer segment with considerable purchasing power (Tak *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, reduced access to retail businesses can cause social exclusion for older adults, as shopping is a critical activity that promotes their independence and social well-being (Pantano *et al.*, 2022). The proposed research aims to explore how in-store technologies can be used to better meet the needs of older consumers, enhancing their shopping experience and alleviating cognitive and physical challenges, such as sensory impairments and slower information processing (Čaić *et al.*, 2020). In this way, technology could contribute to a more inclusive retail environment The first phase of the research consists of an international transdisciplinary expert study, building on insights from retailers, technology providers and retail trade associations from four European countries—The Netherlands, England, Italy, and Finland. It aims to explore the main barriers faced by older consumers while shopping in-store and the role technology could play in removing these barriers. The exploratory findings following from the expert interviews will be shared at the conference. This research project aligns with European initiatives such as the Digital Europe Programme and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, which emphasize the need for digital inclusion and accessibility for all age groups (European Commission, 2023). By identifying and addressing the specific needs of older consumers, this research aims to provide actionable insights for retailers, helping them create age-friendly digital solutions that promote inclusivity while tapping into a valuable market segment. The study is supported by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, University of Bristol, the University of Calabria and Aalto University. The consortium is actively expanding its network and is open to collaboration with new partners interested in contributing to these goals.

Daphne Hagen
Iris Hagemans
Tibert Verhagen
Mirjam Vosmeer
Selmar Meents

Amsterdam University of
Applied Sciences
Amsterdam, 1102 CVS
The Netherlands

☎ +31 0647050092
✉ d.hagen@hva.nl

Ellen van Kleef
Laura Winkens
Caspar Krampe

Wageningen University &
Research
Wageningen, 6706 KN
The Netherlands

☎ +31 317482205
✉ ellen.vankleef@wur.nl

Enabling Healthier Food Choices in Supermarkets Using Web-Based Augmented Reality

Supermarkets are increasingly tasked with supporting healthier food choices in response to growing consumer health awareness and public health initiatives. This research explores the potential of Web-Based Augmented Reality (WebAR) as an innovative tool to provide personalized, real-time information to customers, enabling them to make healthier decisions at the point of sale. By utilizing WebAR, supermarkets can overcome traditional barriers such as information overload, lack of transparency, and time constraints, making healthier options more accessible and engaging for customers. Building on previous research, including Javornik's (2016) study on AR's role in enhancing customer engagement and Ahn *et al.*'s (2015) work demonstrating AR's ability to reduce decision-making complexity, this study examines the effectiveness of three WebAR-based strategies. Each strategy is designed to progressively provide more detailed nutritional information to improve customer decision-making. The first strategy, Health Filter on the Shelf, highlights products based on general health criteria, such as Nutri-Scores, allowing customers to quickly identify healthier options within a choice range. The second, Product Exploration in Detail, offers more in-depth nutritional information, such as ingredients and nutritional value. The third strategy, Compare and Choose Consciously, provides the most comprehensive information by enabling customers to compare up to three products simultaneously based on various health-related attributes, facilitating well-informed decision-making. The research is guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where these WebAR strategies act as stimuli that influence customer reactions (organism), such as engagement, understanding of nutritional information, and motivation. These internal responses ultimately lead to behavioral outcomes (response), including empowerment, healthier product choices and increased customer satisfaction. The study, to be conducted over two years across nine SME-supermarkets in Amsterdam, uses a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the long-term effects of these WebAR interventions on customer behavior. By testing each strategy over three months in different supermarkets, the research aims to capture variations in customer responses and assess the sustained impact of WebAR, which facilitates healthy food choices, on supermarket performance. The insights generated from this study will help supermarket entrepreneurs leverage emerging technologies to meet both public health goals and business objectives, providing a scalable solution for promoting health-conscious behaviors while enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. During the presentation at the conference, we will report on the findings of a systematic literature review, introduce and elaborate upon our conceptual model, and share first research findings.

Wibke Heidig

Albstadt-Sigmaringen
University
Department of Business
Science and Management
Sigmaringen, 72488
Germany

✉ heidig@hs-albsig.de

Stefanie W. Kühn

Stellenbosch University
Department of Business
Management
Stellenbosch, 7600
South Africa

✉ skuhn@sun.ac.za

Thomas Dobbelstein

Durban University of
Technology & Baden-
Württemberg Cooperative
State University
Durban, 4000
South Africa / Germany

☎ +49 751 18999 2107
✉ dobbelstein@dhbw-
   ravensburg.de

The Human vs AI Dilemma: Impact of Chatbot Identity on Customer Aggression and Retention during Service Failures

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in service encounters has led to an increasing use of virtual assistants such as chatbots designed to assist customers throughout various stages of the service delivery process. However, anecdotal evidence, such as the findings by The Guardian (2022), suggest that many virtual assistants are still operated by humans rather than AI algorithms. This trend may be attributed to the limitations of current chatbot technologies in handling complex customer queries (Schuetzler *et al.*, 2021), as well as the significant time and financial resources required for AI implementation. As a result, companies are increasingly adopting hybrid service agents, wherein either human representatives or AI-driven chatbots interact with customers through a unified interface (Gnewuch *et al.*, 2023). As customers frequently struggle to distinguish a chatbot's identity in hybrid service settings, there is increasing political pressure on service providers to disclose the identity of chatbots during service encounters (Robinson *et al.*, 2020). The literature on chatbot services identifies disclosure as a critical factor that influences customer responses, particularly when service failures occur (Gnewuch *et al.*, 2023; Huang & Dootson, 2022). Service failures can significantly undermine customer trust and satisfaction (Weun *et al.*, 2004), often triggering negative responses such as increased aggression and a decline in customer retention (Huang & Dootson, 2022) making the timing and method of disclosure particularly crucial in managing these outcomes effectively. Against this background, two significant questions remain unanswered. First, when service failures occur, should a chatbot's identity be disclosed earlier or later to minimize negative responses, like customer aggression? Second, how do varying disclosure strategies affect customer coping mechanisms and subsequent retention for service providers? Drawing on attribution theory, this study examines the interaction effect of disclosure timing (early vs late) and service agent identity (human vs AI) on customer aggression, coping mechanisms and subsequent retention following a service failure. Data (*n* = 600) will be collected from USA respondents using a panel provider. To enhance validity, the 2x2 between-subject experimental design will also include a control condition wherein the chatbot's identity is not disclosed. Moreover, scenario realism will be enhanced using videos that depict the interaction between a service agent (human vs AI) and the customer during a simulated service failure. Data will be analyzed using factorial structural equations models (FAC-SEM) in SmartPLS. Our findings will help scholars and practitioners to understand the broader implications of chatbot transparency on customer service experience.

Thomas M. Hickman

Washburn University
School of Business
Topeka, KS 66610
USA

☏ +1 785 670 1601
✉ tom.hickman@
   washburn.edu

Michael Stoica

Washburn University
School of Business
Topeka, KS 66610
USA

☏ +1 785 670 1308
✉ michael.stoica@
   washburn.edu

Consumer Experiences and Perceptions: Catalysts for Positive Word-of-Mouth and Spending at Regional Malls

This study explores how interaction effects among consumer perceptions and experiences drive key outcomes such as positive word of mouth (PWOM) and spending at a regional mall, offering unique insights into how malls can better position themselves in the face of growing e-commerce competition. The sample is derived from two sources: 303 respondents from the mall's customer database and 884 respondents from a representative convenience sampling across the city. This approach enables a comparison between loyal mall customers and broader city residents, offering a more nuanced understanding of consumer behaviors. It also highlights the strategic value of building a customer database, which enhances the mall's ability to engage and communicate with its patrons effectively. A series of novel findings includes the interaction between consumers' perception that stores are locally owned and their belief in the mall's importance to the city's economy, which significantly boosts both engagement and spending. Additionally, the interaction between utilitarian shopping outcomes and hedonistic enjoyment significantly enhances PWOM and spending. Managerial implications include the importance of leveraging local ownership of the individuals stores that comprise the mall by promoting it as a hub for local businesses. Likewise, brick-and-mortar malls can create sustainable competitive advantages versus e-commerce by delivering pleasurable and immersive shopping experiences since shoppers who accomplish their goals while also finding joy in their trips report both more advocacy for the mall and spend a greater share of their wallet at the mall. Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding of how emotional and practical drivers, such as hedonism and utility, interact to influence consumer behavior.

Harald Hruschka

University of Regensburg
Faculty of Business
Regensburg, 93053
Germany

☏ +43 1 4785896
✉ harald.hruschka@ur.de

Multicategory Choice Modeling by Recurrent Neural Nets

In multicategory choice a customer may purchase multiple products or product categories at the same time. We focus on recurrent neural nets that can reproduce dynamic effects in a flexible way. Hidden variables of recurrent nets depend on current input variables and on hidden variables of the previous period. We investigate three main variants, simple recurrent nets (SRNNs), long-short time memory (LSTM) nets and gated recurrent units (GRU) nets. We also compare these recurrent nets to non-recurrent neural nets, multilayer perceptrons (MLPs), and to multivariate logit (MVL) models. The latter are popular (non-recurrent) econometric multicategory choice models. We evaluate all models by binary cross-entropies for a holdout sample of households. A six hidden variable MLP turns out as best non-recurrent model. Overall, a LSTM net with six hidden variables outperforms all the other investigated models. This result implies that long term dependences are important to reproduce purchase event feedback. We restrict further analyses to the six hidden variables MLP and LSTM net including category-specific features (i.e., advertising in local newspapers or flyers) as input variables. We interpret both hidden variables and features by average marginal effects. We determine optimal weekly category-specific features by an evolutionary algorithm using average revenue per basket as objective. Optimal features based on the LSTM net increase expected average basket revenue by about 27% over observed features. Optimal features for the LSTM net are significantly lower (higher) for 16 (14) categories than optimal features implied by the MLP. As a rule, optimal category-specific features change considerably across weeks. Finally, we discuss limitations of our approach and opportunities for future research.

Tseng-Lung Huang

National Taipei University of
Technology, Taiwan
Department of Business
Management
Taipei 106
Taiwan

☎ +886 2 2771 2171 ext.3421
✉ blessing@ntut.edu.tw

Yi-Mu Chen

Department of Marketing and
Distribution Management,
National Pingtung University
Pintung, 900
Taiwan

☎ +886 8 7663800 ext. 31636
✉ ymchen@ mail.nptu.edu.tw

Carsten D. Schultz

University of Hagen
58097 Hagen
Germany

☎ +49 2331 987 2617
✉ carsten.schultz@fernuni-
hagen.de

The Role of Digital Twin Experience in Retail and Brands

Digital twins shaped by digital technology (e.g., augmented reality/virtual reality) can accurately simulate the physical interactive experience (including products, consumers, and product trial processes) (Premier Retail, 2021). Especially in the digital twin experience, retailers and brands can simulate the effect of high environmental fidelity, and consumers can also have avatar identification that is similar or identical to their own, thereby improving consumers' engagement and authentic try-on or try-out experience benefits (Huang, 2021). Research shows that over 60% of consumers feel more excited and willing to interact with products and retailers when shopping under the digital twin experience (Matterport research, 2021). However, even the digital twin experience has a very forward-looking influence on retailers and brands in shaping physical or digital shopping experiences. Current digital twin research is limited to manufacturing rather than retail and services (Deng *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, research has not yet clarified the essence and features of the digital twin experience. More importantly, the impact of the digital twin experience on physical retail services and online website shopping behavior needs further exploration. This study adopted laboratory and field survey methods (two studies) to verify the research structure and fill these gaps. The study findings provide valuable theoretical implications for the role of the digital twin experience in retail and brands such as cosmetics or essential oils. Our studies found the digital twin experience elements (e.g., avatar identification, visual fidelity of destination, and perceived synchronicity) allow consumers to experience virtual shopping services from a first-person perspective, which can effectively enhance the time consumers spend exploring physical retail stores and online websites. Studies have found that consumers interact more frequently with products and service personnel. The findings of our study unlock the role of digital twin experience in AR-mediated service experiences, enriching the extant literature on the topic and providing valuable theoretical and practical implications. In particular, retail and brands can take advantage of the authenticity of consumers' appearance images (visual fidelity) and allow consumers to simulate the body movements of trying products (synchronicity) and other digital twin experience elements to successfully trigger consumers to increase the frequency and time of interaction, which in turn results in purchasing amount and quantity.

Tseng-Lung Huang

National Taipei University of Technology
Department of Business Management
Taipei 106
Taiwan

☏ +886 2 2771 2171 ext.3421
✉ blessing@ntut.edu.tw

Yi-Mu Chen

National Pingtung University
Department of Marketing and Distribution Management,
Pintung 900
Taiwan

☏ +886 8 7663800 ext. 31636
✉ ymchen@ mail.nptu.edu.tw

Carsten D. Schultz

University of Hagen
58097 Hagen
Germany

☏ +49 2331 987 2617
✉ carsten.schultz@fernuni-hagen.de

The Impact of AI-based Service Robots on Immersive Service Encounters

Artificial intelligence (AI)-based service robots are applied in more and more contexts of service encounters and specifically influence consumer behavior and experience (de Kervenoael, 2024). For example, a restaurant robot can take orders and serve food, thereby attracting customers' attention and creating an interesting experience (https://pos.chowbus.com/blog/article/robots-in-restaurants). However, according to Mariani *et al.,* (2022), in a review of the AI research stream in recent years, we found that most research topics are still limited to why consumers adopt AI and the impact of AI on consumers' cognitive decision-making. Few studies have explored the impact of AI-based service robots on consumer emotions and experiences (such as immersive experiences). In particular, during the service encounter with AI-based service robots, which AI-based service robot elements can shape consumers' immersive service experience and thus inspire more exploratory behavior? At the same time, in digital interaction research, most immersion research is limited to try-on or try-out retail service contexts rather than service encounter contexts shaped by service robots (such as the restaurant ordering process) (Nhan *et al.*, 2022). This study adopted field survey methods to examine the research framework and fill these gaps. This study found that algorithm responsiveness, algorithm insensitivity, and tactile feelings positively affect consumers' immersive experiences in service encounters. Such insights extend the previous two major research streams, AI and immersion, to the service encounter shaped by service robots More importantly, such findings can also help retailers and brands successfully utilize elements of AI-based service robots to create highly immersive consumer experiences. For example, unlike traditional service encounters, retailers and brands should regard the precise algorithm function as an essential element in creating service encounters.

Tseng-Lung Huang

National Taipei University of Technology
Department of Business Management
Taipei 106
Taiwan

☏ +886 2 2771 2171 ext.3421
✉ blessing@ntut.edu.tw

Ben S. Liu

Quinnipiac University
Lender School of Business Center
Hamden, CT 06518
USA

☏ +1 (203) 582 3772
✉ bsliu@qu.edu

The Impact of AR Touch Experience on Impulse Behavior

Drawing on concrete and abstract affect theory (Loewenstein, 1996), this study uses augmented-reality (AR) to examine the haptic factors that induce impulse purchase intentions and willingness to pay price premiums. According to a task-based laboratory study, AR haptic fidelity can positively trigger the influence of concrete affect on impulse purchase intentions and willingness to pay price premiums in digital tourism services. Furthermore, parasocial presence negatively moderates the influence of concrete affect on willingness to pay price premiums. These findings imply that the concrete effect is a crucial psychological mechanism that dominates digital tourism services for consumers using AR haptic fidelity. Furthermore, simply improving AR technology so that the audiovisual, haptic, and self-location sensory aspects of products are accurately reflected is insufficient for inducing concrete affect to influence impulse spending. The findings of this study may serve as a reference for designing and employing multisensory AR haptic fidelity to drive online impulse spending in digital tourism services.

Ying Cheng Huang

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Social Sciences & Solvay
Business School
Dept. Applied Economics
1050 Brussels
Belgium

☏ +32 2 614 84 47
✉ ying-cheng.huang@vub.be

Ellen Van
Droogenbroeck

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Social Sciences & Solvay
Business School
Dept. Applied Economics
1050 Brussels
Belgium

☏ +32 2 614 84 47
✉ ellen.van.droogenbroeck
@vub.be

Retailer Strategies and Suboptimal Food: A Systematic Literature Review on the Impact of Food Waste Reduction

Worldwide, approximately one-third of the food produced for human consumption is wasted every year, while hundreds of millions of people are chronically undernourished and food insecure. In 2022, a total of 1.05 billion metric tons of food available to consumers was wasted, with 60% of the waste occurring in households (United Nations Statistics Division, 2024). Although reducing this unnecessary waste of food represents a crucial step towards overcoming global issues of food waste, hunger, and climate change, academic and societal awareness of the problem has only developed during the last years. Despite generating only a small fraction of total food waste, retailers are in a strong position to influence food waste management across the entire supply chain. A recent study by Huang *et al.,* (2021) reveals that most reported food waste management practices used by food retailers focus on the 'reuse' level. Food unsold in store is reused in a variety of ways, including donating to charities, resell through specialist platforms or stores, and reusing for staff. In the present paper, we focus on one particular approach, that is, the commercialization of suboptimal food (SF). Suboptimal food (SF) refers to products with cosmetic defects or those near/past expiration but still safe to consume (Ascheman-Witzel *et al.*, 2015). Next to several strategies in-store (such as selling products close to the expiry date with a discount), online options to reposition the product offering and achieve true sustainable value are gaining traction, including food waste-reducing platforms such as Too Good To Go, click-and-collect services selling SF gathered from supermarkets (such as Happy Hours Market in Belgium) and subscription box services (such as No Waste Army in the Netherlands). Although these initiatives constitute a promising lever to tackle food waste, more research is needed to understand the main barriers and challenges to their adoption and implementation, and – most importantly – the actual effects they exert on the reduction of food waste. Therefore, this study proposes employing a systematic review of the literature to answer the following questions: (1) What are the main strategies of retailers to deal with suboptimal food, both offline *and* online?, (2) what are consumers' responses to these initiatives?, and (3) how do these approaches impact the amount of food waste in households? The guidelines proposed by Tranfield *et al.,* (2003) will be followed. The academic articles will be analyzed descriptively by publication information (authors, journal, year of publication), geographical scope, and data collection methods. Thematic analysis will be applied to answer the research questions.

Pat Huddleston
Saleem Alhabash
Anastasia Kononova
Moldir Moldagaliyeva
Heijin Lee
Zheran Liu

Michigan State University
Dept. of Advertising and
Public Relations
East Lansing, MI, 48824
USA

☏ +1 517 353 9907
☏ +1 517 432 5129
☏ +1-517 432 2178
☏ +1 517 914 0652
☏ +1 517 944 5127
☏ +1 517 303 8413

✉ huddles2@msu.edu
✉ kononova@msu.edu
✉ sa@msu.edu
✉ moldagal@msu.edu
✉ leeheiji@msu.edu
✉ liuzhera@msu.edu

Counterfeit Threat by Retail Channel: A Global Study

E-commerce and the COVID-19 pandemic have dramatically increased the availability and purchase of counterfeit products. Counterfeit goods accounted for nearly 3% of the global trade in 2019 and could reach $3 trillion soon. Our study aims to identify the retail channels where consumers purchase counterfeit products (e-commerce, social media, physical marketplace), whether their motivation to protect themselves from risk varies by retail channel, and whether protection motivation varies by buyers or non-buyers of counterfeits. We use Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) to frame our study. PMT explains how individuals respond to and protect themselves from fear-inducing events, particularly within health and risk management scenarios (Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, 1997). Our study aims to determine whether protection motivation constructs of threat severity, threat susceptibility, self-efficacy, e-tail response efficacy, and social media response efficacy vary by channel (e-commerce vs. social media vs. physical). We conducted a 17-country online survey (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, India, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, South Korea, Spain, UAE, UK, and the USA) survey ($N = 13{,}053$) to explore consumers' purchase of counterfeit products. All PMT constructs were measured using validated scales on a 7-point scale (1=strongly disagree). The most frequent purchase channels were social media (39%), e-commerce platforms (39%), and physical marketplaces (e.g., bazaars, 28%). We submitted PMT variables of threat severity (TS), threat susceptibility (TSC), self-efficacy (SE), e-retail response efficacy (ERE), and social media response efficacy (SMRE) to independent samples t-tests. We compared buyers (vs. nonbuyers) of counterfeit products from e-commerce and physical marketplaces. Independent-samples t-test comparing buyers and non-buyers across the three channels showed a similar pattern of differences among counterfeit buyers who used e-commerce and social media platforms. *E-commerce* buyers consistently reported higher threat appraisal and coping perceptions. TS for buyers (vs. non-buyers) (4.78_{buyers} vs. $4.71_{\text{nonbuyers}}$ $p=.03$), TSC (5.00_{buyers} vs. $4.27_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$), SE (4.53_{buyers} vs. $4.18_{\text{nonbuyers}}$; $p<.001$), ERE (5.65_{buyers} vs. $5.56_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$, SMRE (5.07_{buyers} vs. $4.94_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$). *Social commerce* buyers were very similar to e-commerce. TS for buyers (4.95_{buyers} vs. $5.03_{\text{nonbuyers}}$ $p=.001$), TSC (5.03_{buyers} vs. $4.25_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$), SE (4.63_{buyers} vs. $4.13_{\text{nonbuyers}}$; $p<.001$), ERE (5.63_{buyers} vs. $5.57_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.01$, SMRE (5.02_{buyers} vs. $4.96_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.01$). *Physical market place* buyers had significant differences only for TS (4.86 vs. 4.39, $p<.001$), ERE (5.77_{buyers} vs. $5.53_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$), and SMRE (4.85_{buyers} vs. $5.01_{\text{nonbuyers}}$, $p<.001$). Specifically, physical marketplace counterfeit buyers believed they were more susceptible to counterfeit risks and expressed higher e-retail response efficacy than non-buyers. Yet, non-buyers reported higher social media response efficacy than buyers from physical marketplaces, indicating confidence in protecting themselves from buying counterfeits on social media.

Hyowon Hyun

Hanyang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Korea

☏ +82 2220 1065
✉ hyony326@hanyang.ac.kr

Suhyoung Ahn

Hanyang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Korea

☏ + 82 2220 2691
✉ sahn.phd@gmail.com

When AI Feels Too Human: Emotional Shutdown and its Effects on User Experience

As AI technologies continue to proliferate across various service industries, especially in retail, the interaction between humans and AI is becoming increasingly sophisticated. AI systems are now capable of mimicking human behaviors, such as greeting customers, recommending products based on preferences, or even responding empathetically to customer concerns, raising the question: does this enhance the user experience, or could it lead to discomfort? This study investigates the potential negative consequences of AI anthropomorphism—when AI behaves too much like a human—and emotional dissonance, which arises when AI's behavior creates emotional discomfort due to unfamiliarity. Drawing from the uncanny valley theory, which suggests that users may feel unease when AI appears too human-like (Mori *et al.*, 2012), this study explores how these dynamics can lead to emotional shutdown. Emotional shutdown refers to a disengagement from the interaction, where users feel disconnected from the AI and are less likely to emotionally invest in the interaction. This disconnection results in lower satisfaction with the service and a reduced intention to use AI technologies in the future. The results of this study show that when AI crosses the threshold of human-likeness or triggers emotional dissonance, users are more likely to experience emotional shutdown. This emotional disengagement directly impacts key outcomes such as service satisfaction and intention to adopt AI technologies. Users who experience emotional shutdown report lower satisfaction with AI-mediated services and exhibit a reluctance to rely on AI for future interactions. These findings suggest that when AI behavior becomes overly human-like or emotionally unfamiliar, it risks alienating users rather than enhancing their experience. Additionally, this study explores the moderating role of performance reliability. The research shows that AI systems that deliver consistent and reliable performance can mitigate the negative effects of anthropomorphism and emotional dissonance. Reliable AI performance helps to maintain user trust and satisfaction, even when AI behavior triggers discomfort. As a result, users remain more engaged and willing to adopt AI technologies, despite their emotional reactions to the AI's human-like behavior. These findings underscore the need to carefully balance human-like AI traits with reliable performance to prevent emotional shutdown. Ensuring consistent performance is essential for fostering positive user experiences and supporting the broader adoption of AI in services.

Kim Janssens

Open Universiteit
Faculty of Management
Science
Heerlen, 6401 DL
The Netherlands

✉ kim.janssens@ou.nl

Wim Lambrechts
Marjolein Caniëls

Open Universiteit
Faculty of Management
Science
Heerlen, 6401 DL
The Netherlands

✉ wim.lambrechts@ou.nl

Insects on the Menu: How Changing Food Consumption Behavior Can Enhance Sustainability

Sustainability is increasingly becoming a core principle in consumer behavior, deeply influencing decision-making processes across various aspects of daily life (Chen, 2024). As environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and the ecological impact of conventional production processes grow, consumers are adopting sustainable practices in response to the ecological limits of traditional consumption patterns (Gil *et al.*, 2024). As a result, consumers are seeking healthier, more sustainable alternatives and are becoming more mindful of their food consumption (Ahn *et al.*, 2022). This shift is especially noticeable in the food sector, where the traditional meat industry is a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and water use (Poore *et al.*, 2018). When considering global health and sustainable food intake, Onwezen *et al.*,(2021) state that one of the solutions lies in replacing daily meat consumption pattern by alternatives, such as insect-based foods. Insects have a low environmental footprint, are rich in protein, and require significantly less land, water, and feed compared to conventional livestock (van Huis, 2020). This makes them a viable option for reducing environmental pressure while addressing global food security challenges (van Huis *et al.*, 2023). Although insect-based foods are a highly nutritious food source, are sustainable and their consumption benefits the environment (Cunha *et al.*, 2022) in Western countries this solution encounters reluctancy and prejudice preventing it from being part of consumers' diet (Moruzzo *et al.*, 2021). Since food supply, food security and sustainable consumption and production patterns are key issue in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs, 2022), the acceptance and adoption of alternative food sources can contribute to food diversity and make for a sustainable transition in supply chains, production patterns, and consumption behavior (Cunha *et al.*, 2022), ultimately contributing to other SDGs such as zero hunger, ending poverty, and good health and well-being. Previous studies have investigated the impact of values and ethics, of environmental concerns and beliefs, of product-related aspects such as price and purchase convenience, of perceived behavioral control, and consumer effectiveness on sustainable consumer behavior (for an extensive literature review, see Sharma *et al.*, 2022). However, many of these studies lack consistent findings and hold conflicting results on how these constructs are intertwined or connected. To address these gaps, a large-scale survey of 1,000 Western respondents has been conducted in September 2024, exploring the values, attitudes, and motivations behind sustainable food consumption. Results of the survey shed light on the relationship between food neophobia and entomophagy, exploring how individuals' reluctance to try new foods affects their willingness to consume insects as a protein source. Additionally, this study investigates the influence of consumer values and green purchase intention on the acceptance of entomophagy, highlighting the potential for environmentally sustainable food choices.

Kishokanth
Jeganathan

Poznan University of
Economics
Department of Commerce and
Marketing
Poznan, 61-875
Poland

☎ +48 608656232
✉ kishokanth.jeganathan@
phd.ue.poznan.pl

Andrzej Szymkowiak

Poznan University of
Economics
Department of Commerce and
Marketing
Poznan, 61-875
Poland

☎ + 48 618569445
✉ andrzej.szymkowiak@
ue.poznan.pl

Enhancing Service Advertising: The Role of WebAR Agents in Driving Personalized Consumer Communication

This study examines the integration of web augmented reality (WebAR) agents in outdoor advertising, focusing on its potential to enhance consumer engagement in the context of professional services. Unlike traditional applications, WebAR removes the need for additional software installations, facilitating immediate interactive experiences directly within a consumer's mobile browser. This accessibility makes it an ideal tool for outdoor advertising campaigns, where instant interaction is crucial for capturing consumer attention and engagement. Leveraging the foundational theories from virtual agent and digital marketing literature, this research aims to explore how WebAR can improve personalized communication and influence consumer behavior more effectively than conventional methods. Specifically, the study will assess the impact of WebAR virtual agents on enhancing consumer trust, engagement, and decision-making efficacy, with a focus on advertising for professional services that benefit from higher levels of direct consumer interaction. Through empirical analysis, the project will investigate how the immediacy and accessibility of WebAR contribute to creating engaging, persuasive service-based advertising campaigns that simulate face-to-face interactions. Expected outcomes will demonstrate the effectiveness of WebAR in increasing the immediacy and relevance of marketing messages, thereby reshaping consumer perceptions and actions in outdoor advertising environments. The implications of this research are significant for the retail and consumer services sector, offering insights into how businesses can deploy WebAR technologies to revolutionize their consumer interactions and service delivery models. By bridging the gap between digital communication and physical presence, WebAR promises to enhance the strategic impact of outdoor advertising campaigns, providing a more dynamic, engaging, and effective way to reach and influence today's tech-savvy consumers. This study contributes to the academic discourse by detailing practical and theoretical advancements in consumer service technologies facilitated by WebAR.

Hye Seung Jeong

University of Georgia
Department of Textiles,
Merchandising, and Interiors
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
United States`

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ hyeseung.jeong@uga.edu

Yoo-Kyoung Seock

University of Georgia
Department of Textiles,
Merchandising, and Interiors
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
United States

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ yseock@uga.edu

Exploring Supply Chain Transparency in Fiber-Textile-Apparel-Retail (FTAR) Companies

The Fiber-Textile-Apparel-Retail (FTAR) industry is labor-intensive and predominantly located in dispersed areas of developing countries, leading to complex supply chains and unsustainable social, environmental, and economic practices (Bentahar & Benzidia, 2018; Choi *et al.*, 2019; Choi & Cai, 2020). Therefore, Supply Chain Transparency (SCT) is acknowledged as a crucial step to ensure legitimacy for every activity within the supply chain of FTAR companies and SCT is an indispensable facet of fostering sustainability therein (Jia *et al.*, 2024; Morgan *et al.*, 2023). While various dimensions of SCT have been developed, its essence lies in information disclosure about the supply chain, including sources, manufacturing, costs, and logistics (Jia *et al.*, 2024; Schäfer *et al.*, 2023). Increasing consumer demand for supply chain transparency has made SCT an increasingly important strategy for FTAR companies (Fraser & Van der Ven, 2022; Schäfer *et al.*, 2023; Schüler *et al.*, 2016; Sovacool *et al.*, 2016). However, not all FTAR companies demonstrate their commitment to SCT (Jestratijevic *et al.*, 2020; McKendrick, 2024). Financial constraints, a lack of knowledge, and organizational barriers are reasons why some companies cannot or are unwilling to implement SCT (Jestratijevic *et al.*, 2020; Jia *et al.*, 2024; McKendrick, 2024). Previous studies have attempted to identify gaps in existing literature since significant discrepancies persist in understanding and committing to SCT (Hazen *et al.*, 2021; Jia *et al.*, 2024; Schäfer *et al.*, 2023). Yet, a significant lack of research remains concerning the practical assessment of SCT initiatives and practices by FTAR companies. Addressing this gap will offer richer narratives, helping FTAR companies identify where and why they fail to implement SCT. It will also enable them to strategize their SCT efforts in business operations, aligning with consumer demands. Ultimately, this approach will promote long-term sustainability by evaluating FTAR companies' sustainability practices. Accordingly, this research analyzes how FTAR companies engage in information disclosure efforts related to SCT, guided by two key frameworks, Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and the U.N.'s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its deep examination of the information disclosed on FTAR companies' websites, this research identifies areas of improvement, illuminating the impact of different SCT practices used by FTAR companies on sustainability. Thus, the main research questions for this study are proposed as follows. How do FTAR companies disclose their supply chain information on their websites? What are prevailing themes related to SCT practices communicated through these website disclosures? To what extent SCT practices are implemented by FTAR companies varies? Websites serve as a vital medium for interaction between companies and consumers (Hasley & Gregg, 2010; Ospital et al., 2023). SCT information on company websites play a key role in communicating a company's sustainability efforts and corporate responsibility (Hasley & Gregg, 2010; Huynh et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023). Website contents, thus, provide valuable data for empirical analysis of current business practices. Content analysis is an effective methodology for systematically identifying emerging themes and other aspects of communication content (Berelson, 1952; Dongo *et al.*, 2021; Drisko & Maschi, 2015). Accordingly, this study will collect website information from FTAR companies and employ a four-step contents analysis approach: material collection, data processing, data analysis, and reporting, following established procedures from previous studies.

Stephanie Jordan[1;4]
Maike Netscher[1]
Diana[2]
Latifa Mednini[3]
Alexander H. Kracklauer[1],
Claas Christian Germelmann[4]

[1] Neu-Ulm University of Applied Sciences, Germany

☎ +49 (0)731 9762 1445
✉ stephanie.jordan@hnu.de
✉ maike.netscher@hnu.de
✉ alexander.kracklauer @hnu.de

[2] Universidad de Chile, Chile
✉ dsanchezr@fen.uchile.cl

[3] University of Sfax, Tunisia
✉ latifamednini @yahoo.com

[4] University of Bayreuth Germany
✉ c.c.germelmann @uni-bayreuth.de

Navigating Ethical, Legal and Cultural Challenges in AI-Supported Retail Promotions: A Cross-Continents' Research

The integration of AI in retail promotions presents both opportunities and challenges. While AI can enhance customer engagement and drive sales (Erevelles *et al.*, 2016; Letheren *et al.*, 2020), it also raises significant ethical and legal concerns (Ciuchita *et al.*, 2023; Jordan *et al.*, 2024). These concerns vary across continents, influenced by differing legal frameworks and cultural perceptions (Edgington & Kasztelnik, 2024), data privacy concerns, as well as avoiding brand hate (Nassar & Kamal, 2021; Mednini & Damak Turki, 2024). This paper aims to explore these challenges through the lens of institutional theory, identifying institutional voids and proposing solutions to address them. The cultural and ethical challenges associated with AI in retail promotions are crucial for understanding consumer behavior and trust across different regions (Jordan *et al.,* 2024; Corrêa *et al.,* 2024; Dielemann *et al.*, 2022). According to institutional theory, organizations operate in a social environment that changes due to new laws, the emergence of new standards, rules or norms, new patterns of behavior, and new participants (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2010; Bruton *et al.*, 2023). Our research builds on previous studies and focuses on both ethical and non-ethical factors associated with activities such as web scraping, growth hacking or generative AI (Quach, 2022; Ochang *et al.*, 2024) to guide retailers in safeguarding data privacy, advocating ethical values, and cultivating customer loyalty and trust within promotional activities. Our study aims to answer several research questions: How do legal frameworks for collecting and deploying customer data through AI promotions vary across countries in South America, Europe, and North Africa? What ethical and non-ethical issues (including potential bias) must retailers consider when deploying AI-generated promotions? Additionally, how do these considerations differ between academic researchers and practitioners? Our methodology encompassed a comprehensive literature review on "ethical" and "legal" frameworks within retail promotions. Based on this review, we developed a semi-structured interview guideline comprising 11 questions. This guideline was pre-tested through an in-person interview in Chile to ensure its validity. Subsequently, the guideline was adopted for interviews with practitioners and academics. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA, employing a deductive-inductive alternating system (Braun & Clarce 2006). An initial framework utilizing institutional theory was developed based on the works of Quach *et al.,* (2022) and Dilling *et al.,* (2013). By applying institutional theory, we provide insights into how retailers can navigate these challenges and adapt to new standards, rules and norms. Our findings highlight significant gaps in ethical practices, particularly in handling potential bias and discriminatory policies. We also identified the absence of an ethics index for countries, which influences ethical practices and consumer perceptions. To succeed in the global retail landscape, organizations must balance legal, ethical, and consumer aspects when implementing AI promotions. This research contributes to the understanding of these challenges and offers practical implications for retailers in safeguarding data privacy and cultivating customer trust.

Sojin Jung

Kyung Hee University
Department of Clothing &
Textiles
Seoul, 02447
South Korea

☎ +82 2 961 9519
✉ sjjung@khu.ac.kr

Stacy H. Lee

Texas Tech University
College of Human Science
Lubbock, TX, 79409
USA

☎ +1 806 834 0091
✉ stacy.h.lee@ttu.edu

Xiaoyong Wei

BNU-HKBU United
International College
Faculty of Business and
Management
Zhuhai City, 519087
China

☎ +86 0756 362 0988
✉ felixxywei@uic.edu.cn

Support for Working Conditions: A Corporation's Perfect Obligation That Remains Unchanged Over Time

Sustainability has emerged as a critical imperative for contemporary organizations. The proliferation of corporate moral hazards has led to direct and indirect threats to countless individuals. Building upon Friedman's (1970) concept of corporate responsibility, Hess (2013) proposed corporate personhood, asserting that corporations possess moral obligations towards society and the environment akin to those of individuals. Intentional actions grounded in a corporation's morality shape its commitments to social and environmental sustainability goals. Ha-Brookshire (2017) argued that the extent of corporate commitment and action towards social and environmental objectives is contingent upon how corporations perceive sustainability regarding their moral responsibilities. Perfect duty, a fundamental and universal obligation, should be fulfilled under any circumstances. Jung & Ha-Brookshire (2017) investigated U.S. consumers' perceptions of various corporate moral responsibility activities conducted by consumer product companies. Their findings identified four major areas of moral responsibility (i.e., working conditions, community, environment, transparency support), with support for working conditions being the closest approximation to perfect duty—a responsibility that consumer product firms must uphold at all costs. Jung *et al.* (2018a) conducted surveys across Norway, Canada, the USA, Hong Kong, and China to validate the universality of working condition support as a perfect duty. They found that consumers in these countries consistently view this support as a universal obligation. Additionally, Jung *et al.* (2018b) confirmed that working condition support was perceived as the most fundamental and universal responsibility among four major consumer product categories: fashion, food, home appliances, and personal care. Extending the existing literature, this study explores the universality of working condition support with temporal considerations by comparing U.S. consumers' perceptions in 2017 and 2024. Following IRB approval, an online survey was administered to general U.S. consumers aged 18 and over. A professional research firm recruited the participants, resulting in 313 responses that were analyzed. After ensuring configural, metric, and scalar invariance between the two samples, we compared the four-factor scores from the 2017 and 2024 samples using MANOVA. A small but significant difference ($d = .23$) was found in support for working conditions ($M_{2017} = 5.81$, $M_{2024} = 6.01$; $F(1,613) = 8.01$, $p < .01$, $\eta p^2 = 0.01$), indicating that respondents in the 2024 survey had slightly higher expectations regarding working condition support. Paired t-tests demonstrated that working condition support ($M = 6.01$) was significantly rated higher than other responsibilities ($p < .001$), suggesting that it is perceived as a perfect duty and remains constant over time. The firm's obligation to support working conditions has been established as universal, irrespective of *who* perceives it (Jung *et al.*, 2018a) and *what* is produced (Jung *et al.*, 2018b). This study further provides empirical evidence to confirm the obligation remains consistent regardless of *when* it is perceived. The findings suggest that companies must clearly identify and prioritize fundamental responsibilities to address them effectively before setting additional goals and planning other responsibilities. Adequate support for working condition is more imperative for fashion firms considering its labor-intensive characteristics, and the firms must scrutinize their labor policies, working environment, workers' welfare etc.

Ulrich Jürgens

University of Kiel
Department of Geography
Kiel, 24118
Germany

☎ +49 4318803427
✉ ngg02@rz.uni-kiel.de

Food Banks, Food Waste and Retail: Food Disposal Systems Using Germany as an Example

At the heart of the "rescue" of food are so-called food banks, which have developed into an indispensable addition to social security with their nationwide distribution points for needy households. In fact, the food banks are not the end of the food chain. Not only do they have to deal with various sources of donations from retailers and wholesalers, product peculiarities and the acceptance of product issues by their "customers", but also with food that is no longer suitable for human consumption. Food banks are part of a complex network consisting of donors and incoming food as well as food bank users and outgoing food. Food bank users act not only as recipients of donations within the food bank complex, but also as private households that can demonstrate a conspicuous approach to food in the form of purchasing behavior, attitudes, expertise, interest and practices in the use and preparation of food. What sources of donors and users are associated with food banks in a network, and what are the consequences of this? What structural problems from food production and marketing are reflected in these donations? What problems do food banks themselves and their customers have in using donated goods? What solutions do donors pursue in order to minimize their own write-offs and their donations? Expert interviews, the evaluation of video transcripts on the topic of "retail - food waste - food donations" and standardized surveys with food bank users serve to analyze the "dark side" of food waste, its causes, solutions and consequences. The article not only expands the system of relevant stakeholders who influence the (grocery) retail trade and its self-portrayal, but also questions when and for whom food becomes food waste. The conflict between acquiring food donations for socially disadvantaged people on the one hand and minimizing food waste through innovative marketing and sustainable production on the other becomes clear.

Ji Hye Kang

University of Rhode Island
College of Business
Dept. of Textiles, Fashion
Merchandising & Design
Kingston, 02852
USA

☎ +1 401 874 2881
✉ jhkang@uri.edu

Sungha Jang

San Francisco State University
Lam Family College of
Business
San Francisco, 94132
USA

☎ +1 415 338 1325
✉ shjang@sfsu.edu

The Impact of Social Media Promotions on a Small-Sized Online Start-Up

Social media has emerged as an essential marketing platform, particularly for digitally native online start-up retailers targeting Generation Z (Kastenholz, 2022). Despite its growing popularity for marketing purposes, research in this area has been somewhat limited. Specifically, two significant gaps exist: 1) there is a scarcity of empirical studies analyzing social media using actual transaction data from firms, and 2) most existing research focuses on the general effects of social media on shopping behavior within segmented markets or consumer groups (e.g., Casey, 2017; Kong *et al.*, 2021; Shaw, 2022). In this study, we aim to examine the effectiveness of social media promotions on the performance of a small online fashion start-up, utilizing its transaction data and specifically targeting young female customers. The primary goals of these promotions are to maintain customer loyalty, encourage sales, and reach new audiences (Promotional Goals, 2022). We collected data on a total of 6,074 transactions along with promotion data from Instagram and TikTok over a six-month period, from an online fashion start-up. Our analysis employed the following model, which distinguishes between new customer data and repeat customer data to assess the impact of promotions on retail performance:

$$Customer_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SumPromotion + \beta_2 Promotion_{t-1} + \beta_3 Promotion_{t-2} + \cdots + \beta_8 Promotion_{t-7} + \varepsilon_t$$
$$Order_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SumPromotion + \beta_2 Promotion_{t-1} + \beta_3 Promotion_{t-2} + \cdots + \beta_8 Promotion_{t-7} + \varepsilon_t$$

In this model, "Customers" represents the number of new or repeat customers on day t, while "Order" indicates the total order amount from new or repeat customers in the current month t. "Promotion" denotes the number of promotions conducted on the previous days $t-1$, $t-2$, $t-3$, $t-4$, $t-5$, $t-6$, and $t-7$, and "SumPromotion" is the total number of promotions over the preceding week. The analysis revealed that promotions on social media platforms positively influenced the number of new customers ($\widehat{\beta_2}$=13.96, p<.05) and the purchase amounts from new customers on the subsequent day ($\widehat{\beta_2}$=576.43, p<.05). However, the promotional effects were not statistically significant in terms of attracting new customers or influencing purchase amounts two and seven days post-promotion. Unexpectedly, the promotion did not significantly encourage existing customers to make repeat purchases or spend more on the site, which contradicts the intended purpose of maintaining customer loyalty (Promotional Goals, 2022). Our findings indicate that social media promotions tend to yield short-term effects. Specifically, promotions from the previous day positively impact sales the following day, but this effect diminishes rapidly and tends to disappear within a week. Furthermore, these short-term promotions do not significantly influence the purchasing behavior of existing customers. The short-term effect may be attributed to the limited breadth of fashion items available on the start-up's website. Further confirmation should be sought with other online retailers that offer a broader assortment. A wider selection can encourage existing customers to purchase additional items. In contrast, a fashion firm with a narrow assortment needs to focus more on attracting new customers to enhance revenue.

Ji Hye Kang

University of Rhode Island
College of Business
Dept. of Textiles, Fashion
Merchandising & Design
Kingston, 02852
USA

☎ +1 401 874 2881
✉ jhkang@uri.edu

Haewon Ju

Framingham State University
College of Arts & Humanities
Fashion Design & Retailing
Department
Framingham, 01701
USA

☎ +1 508 626 4929
✉ hju@framingham.edu

Exploring Fashion Market Segments for the Aging Population

Introduction: Despite the growing aging population in the U.S., the fashion industry has largely failed to cater to this demographic (Tayper, 2021). While some brands, like Gap Inc. and J. Crew, have started using older models (Wilson, 2005), there is still a lack of fundamental understanding about older consumers, leaving them underserved. Most research treats this demographic as a monolith, focusing on topics like shopping criteria (Hervé *et al.*, 2009), TV shopping habits (Lim & Kim, 2016), and store loyalty (Kohijoki & Marjanen, 2013). However, few studies have examined whether distinct segments exist within this group that require tailored marketing strategies. This study aims to explore whether segmented markets exist and if differentiated market approaches are needed. Method: We conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with participants (14 females and five males) from the Northeastern U.S., recruited via snowball sampling. Each interview lasted 40 minutes to an hour. Using Atlas.ti and a constant comparison analysis approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), we identified key themes related to social activities, lifestyle changes, and fashion shopping. Results: Our research reveals a significant disconnect between the fashion industry and the aging population. A majority (68%) of participants felt that the industry fails to meet their needs, while only 32% viewed it positively. Both dissatisfied and satisfied groups showed a diminished desire for fashion with age (54% and 50%, respectively), which correlated with lifestyle changes (54% and 53%), and expressed strong brand/store loyalty (69% and 67%). Concerns about apparel fit due to physical changes and issues were also common in both groups (46% and 50%). Key differences emerged regarding lifestyle, perception of aging, and shopping behavior. The dissatisfied group (200%, multiple responses) was less engaged in social activities like volunteering and travel, while the satisfied group showed higher participation (267%). Health-related concerns were more prevalent in the dissatisfied group (62% vs. 17%), as were financial worries (23% vs. 0%). Although both groups accepted aging without a desire to look younger (62% and 67%), a negative perception of aging was more common in the dissatisfied group (31% vs. 17%). Shopping behaviors also varied: the dissatisfied group was less socially influenced (46% vs. 83%) and more concerned about online shopping uncertainty, including fit and size (69% vs. 17%). The dissatisfied group criticized the industry's focus on younger demographics (62%) and the lack of brands targeting older consumers (69%), compared to only 17% of the satisfied group on both. Interestingly, more dissatisfied respondents emphasized fashion's role in enhancing life (62%) and the importance of functionality (23%) than their satisfied counterparts (17% and 0%). Conclusion: Our findings suggest that the aging fashion market is segmented, not homogeneous. One group is highly dissatisfied, expressing a strong demand for age-appropriate, functional fashion, which presents a niche opportunity for retailers to offer adaptive designs at affordable prices. Enhanced customer service and support, especially in online shopping, could reduce uncertainty for this group. A smaller portion of the aging population remains satisfied with existing brands. For this group, creating shopping environments that emphasize social interaction and encourage shopping with family and friends may be effective. Future research should explore the specific needs of these segments, as there is a significant opportunity for the fashion industry to better serve this demographic and build brand loyalty.

Andreas Karasenko

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business and
Economics
Bayreuth, 95447
Germany

☏ +49 (0)921 / 55 4343
✉ andreas.karasenko@uni-
bayreuth.de

Stella Franca Rösch

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business and
Economics
Bayreuth, 95447
Germany

☏ +49 (0)921 / 55 4345
✉ stella.roesch@uni-
bayreuth.de

Are Human Participants Still Needed Today? The Potential of Large Language Models in Consumer Survey Research

Generative AI (GenAI) has transformed the marketing research landscape. Researchers have used tools like ChatGPT to classify text sentiments, validate item scales, and more recently replicate quantitative and qualitative marketing survey studies. However, results on the efficacy of GenAI for survey-based research are mixed. Bouschery *et al.* (2023) have shown that GenAI tools like ChatGPT can help with scale development. Arora *et al.* (2024) have shown that ChatGPT can even be used in a AI-human hybrid fashion to replicate both qualitative and quantitative surveys with deep and rich responses. On the other hand, Viglia *et al.* (2024) and Sarstedt *et al.* (2024) find that quantitative surveys conducted with GenAI tools only seldomly replicate their human counterparts, limiting their usefulness to survey design rather than survey implementation. Similarly, guidance on how to employ GenAI for marketing research is still fragmented, often lacking publicly available tools for replication or comparisons. Against this background, this paper aims to make two main contributions. First, we used the design science research approach to develop a framework, accompanied by an open-source Python package, to unify the GenAI quantitative survey research approach. Based on this, a comprehensive validation of this framework is conducted in the second part of the paper. For this purpose, the authors use data sets from previously published surveys to create synthetic respondents based on the real demographic characteristics of human respondents. To gain insights into the possibilities of synthetically generated survey data, different question types of qualitative and quantitative research are considered and juxtaposed. The synthetic data is evaluated using qualitative assessments and quantitative metrics (e.g. F1-score). These findings are then used to further develop and refine the framework where appropriate. Subsequently we develop a practitioner's guide to the capabilities and limitations of integrating GenAI into survey-based marketing research.

Elena E. Karpova

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Business and Economics
Greensboro, NC 27412
USA

☏ +1 336 334 5250
✉ karpova@uncg.edu

Nancy J. Hodges

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Business and Economics
Greensboro, NC 27412
USA

☏ +1 336 334 5250
✉ njnelson@uncg.edu

Haeun Bang

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Business and Economics
Greensboro, NC 27412
USA

☏ +1 336 334 5250
✉ h_bang2@uncg.edu

Hadal Hammour

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
School of Business and Economics
Greensboro, NC 27412
USA

☏ +1 336 334 5250
✉ hihammour@uncg.edu

Is AI a Friend or Foe?
A Critical Perspective on the Opportunities and Risks for the Fashion Industry of the Future

Fashion retailers face unique challenges in meeting consumer demand, which is notoriously unpredictable due to rapidly shifting fashion trends. Companies are under intense pressure to compete with the new generation of instant fashion retailers to quickly deliver products at competitive prices. The application of artificial intelligence (AI) tools promises to ease these issues—from real-time trend forecasting to stock level optimization for balancing the complexities of sizing and style variations while reducing excess inventory and markdowns (Coffee, 2023). Yet, the implications of a wide integration of this technology in the business of retail from supply chain management to marketing are not yet understood. The aim of this research was to critically examine the opportunities and risks of the rapidly growing integration of AI in the business operations of the fashion retail industry. In this study, we triangulated two types of data for a holistic understanding of the topic. First, we analyzed the contemporary strategies used by fashion retailers to integrate AI in business operations. The data was collected through a comprehensive search of business and academic articles focused on the use of AI in the fashion industry and published during the 2023-2024 period. A total of 42 articles from popular press, trade press, and academic sources were included in the final data set. We used a generative AI tool (ChatGPT 4o) to assist with the data analysis to understand the contemporary benefits as well as failures of using AI by fashion retailers. Next, we interviewed 24 top retail executives of major fashion brands in the United States to explore their viewpoints on the role of AI in shaping the future of the industry. The data were content analyzed collaboratively by the authors. Finally, we triangulated the emergent results from the two types of data to make sense and develop a critical perspective on the opportunities and risks AI poses for the future of the sector. The results show that the opportunities of AI applications in fashion retail can be categorized into two groups across all stages of the value chain (forecasting and inventory planning, design, supply chain and production management, and marketing): (1) personalization and augmented customer engagement; and (2) increasing efficiencies to reduce cost and waste. Along with great promise, there are significant risks of deep AI integration across business practices. Three types of risks emerged from the data analysis: (1) consumer resistance; (2) ethical and legal issues; and (3) financial losses. Consumer resistance or backlash might be a result of job cuts due to AI automation; lack of authenticity when brands rely on AI to connect with customers; homogenization of fashion and reduced artistic diversity. An array of ethical and legal issues might include intellectual property and design plagiarism as well as replacing people with energy-intensive AI systems that undermine any sustainability gains due to increased efficiencies. Financial losses can result from inaccurate demand and trend predictions leading to poor design choices, wasted resources, overproduction, and missed opportunities. Based on the findings, we offer practical implications for fashion retail companies as well as for educators who are preparing future professionals for this unique, dynamic, and truly global industry. The paper outlines future research directions for retail scholars.

Changju Kim

Ritsumeikan University
College of Business
Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 72 665 2382
✉ cjkim777@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Sangmin Kang

Aomori Chuo Gakuin
University
Faculty of Management and
Law
Aomori, 030-0132
Japan

☎ +81 17 757 8436
✉ sangmin0009@gmail.com

Jiaqi Xie

Ritsumeikan University
Postgraduate School of
Business Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 702 219 3837
✉ gr0673fr@ed.ritsumei.ac.jp

Shinya Nakami

Kanagawa University
Faculty of Business
Administration
Kanagawa, 220-8739
Japan

☎ +81 72 665 2090
✉ ft102115hs@kanagawa-
u.ac.jp

Does Goal Congruence Enhance Commitment to Joint Activities Within Retail Buying Groups?

Enhancing member retailers' commitment to joint purchases within retail buying groups is crucial; however, it remains a challenging practical task. This study defines and characterizes retail buying groups as organizations that act as extensions of member firms, aiming to maximize shared benefits under a unified group identity (Park & Kim, 2023). The importance of commitment to joint purchases by member retailers from headquarters is twofold. First, the achievement of economies of scale is a prerequisite. Second, it enables a range of innovative, collaborative activities. However, the practical realization of this goal is complex. Interviews with several headquarters managers in Japan reveal that member retailers operate as independent owners within a social contract, showing varying reasons, objectives, and interests among members. Thus, decisions regarding product selection and purchase quantities ultimately lie with individual owners, making it challenging for the headquarters to strongly influence these choices without risking or disengagement. Therefore, establishing common goals and objectives and fostering effective relationships through frequent communication and strong bonds are necessary to enhance group identification. Against this background, this research underscores the significance of commitment to joint purchases and aims to investigate the conditions necessary to enhance such commitment among member retailers from the standpoint of goal congruence among member retailers. In addition, we consider whether and how relationship-specific investment and relationship continuity by member retailers affect the baseline relationship between goal congruence and commitment to joint purchases. To test our hypotheses, we use data from 163 small retailers with membership in the Zennisshoku Chain and employ the PROCESS macro. Our main results suggest that, in contrast to our prediction in H1, goal congruence among member retailers does not directly affect their commitment to joint purchase; relationship-specific investment by member retailers positively mediates the impact of goal congruence on commitment to joint purchase (H2). In addition, country to our prediction in H3, we find that member retailers' relationship continuity weakens the positive indirect effect of goal congruence on commitment to joint purchases through relationship-specific investment. Our study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, we highlight the pivotal role of relationship-specific assets invested by member retailers in retail buying groups because they fully mediate the relationship between goal congruence and commitment to joint purchases. In addition, given that prior research emphasizes relationship continuity in business-to-business transactions, we raise the question of how different member retailers' relationship continuity affects their commitment to joint activities in a horizontally and loosely tied retail network organization.

Haejung Maria Kim

University of North Texas
College of Merchandising,
Hospitality & Tourism
Denton, 76203-517
USA

☎ +1 940 369 6624
✉ haejung.kim@unt.edu

Collaborative Innovation and Digital Identity of Social Influencers: The Case of the "#metawear" Twitter Network

Social influencers play key roles in shaping consumer collaboration and communication on brand perception, product buying, and innovation diffusion (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). Research has expanded to identify social influencers' roles using the concepts of brand ambassadors, celebrity endorsers, product reviewers, trendsetters, content creators, micro-influencers, and market mavens, especially with the rise of social media in shopping and communicating. Despite much research using advanced inferential multivariate statistical tools, gaps remain in testing hypothetical relationships between social entities. Key social influencer roles include 'opinion leaders' facilitating social commerce on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, 'innovators' and 'early adopters' who drive excitement around new products, and 'peer influencers' whose personal recommendations build trust through word-of-mouth. 'Collaborators' work with brands to co-create new products, while 'cause-driven influencers' promote ethical causes alongside retail products. These diverse roles drive awareness and consumer engagement (Venciute *et al.*, 2023), but the how and who leads these influences remains understudied. Social Network Analysis (SNA) is used to examine critical graph metrics to profile, visualize, and cluster unstructured network data. Using the NodeXL program, a network of 2,134 Twitter users whose tweets contained '#metawear', and 10,028 relationships that were replied to or mentioned in those tweets, was extracted from Twitter API data. Cluster, semantic, and time series analyzes were performed to visualize communication and collaboration in the information diffusion of a metaverse-related fashion. Results revealed that (1) social communication between individuals and the public network exhibited a 'broadcast' network to the timeline's audience; and (2) collaboration between two influencers in the "#metawear" network, '#metaweartoken' and 'trustpad' linked the broadcast relationship within this network. Metawear®, a leading metaverse fashion company, has implemented innovative practices in strategic purchasing, design, production, marketing, and sales (www.Metaversewear.io). In 2022, '#metawear' and 'trustpad' collaborated on NFT competitions to promote their metaverse fashion business and raise consumers' awareness. Time series analysis confirmed how the competition increased consumer traffic during that period. The '#metawear' network connects brand and consumer identity with digital ownership through innovative NFT competitions. Salient social influencers within the network collaborated, communicated about digital identities, and socialized in different scenarios. Indeed, social influencers in retail can leverage these roles to drive awareness, shape trends, and engage consumers, offering unique benefits based on the brand's goals and audiences.

Haejung Maria Kim

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 369 6624
✉ haejung.kim@unt.edu

Christy Crutsinger

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 2436
✉ christy.crutsinger@
  unt.edu

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 2439
✉ sanjukta.pookulangara@
  unt.edu

Bridging the Skills-Transfer Gap: The Role of Edu-Influencers in Leadership Development and Mentorship within Twitter Community Dialogue

While many retail programs offer leadership development and mentorship, a 'skills-transfer gap' challenges academic programs to stay relevant and connected to industry trends. Recently, transformational leadership (TFL) programs like those offered by the National Retail Federation (NRF) and Harvard Business School (HBS), provide students with opportunities to improve leadership skills, gain industry insights, and connect with retail professionals through various initiatives. Although some studies have explored the TFL's impact on job outcomes (e.g., Buil *et al.*, 2019; Kement *et al.*, 2024; Yang *et al.*, 2024), little research has examined who shapes TFL and how it operates. Social Network Analysis is ideal for probing (1) who leads TFL communication and (2) how it spreads through meaningful patterns on social media. Network visualization using NodeXL identified top influencers and how communication diffused within networks. By importing Twitter API data between April 2023 to April 2024 using the keywords search of 'Leadership Development OR Career Mentorship OR HBS (LDCMH),' 1,186 Twitter users and their 1,362 relationships were examined. Cluster analysis revealed multiple smaller groups within a 'Community Cluster,' centered around influencers, dedicated audiences, and prominent hashtags (Smith *et al.*, 2014). This thematic focus ranged from politics and media to health, entrepreneurships, and education. Top influencers drove dialogue within clusters, such as G1 and G14 (focused on politics and media), G2 (health and advocacy), and G5 and G8 (technology, venture capital and education). Despite interaction between groups, clusters often remained disconnected, signaling a potential 'skill-transfer gaps' in leadership development and mentorship. The study highlights that influencers drive localized conversations within their community clusters, but a lack of cross-cluster cohesion suggests opportunities for more integrated discussions to improve the flow of information and collaboration across sectors. As 'edu-influencers,' educators have the potential to bridge the skill-transfer gap, positioning leadership development and mentorship at the forefront of community dialogue. By fostering stronger connections across clusters, they can ensure academic program stay relevant to industry trend. Media-based conferences can further promote collaboration, providing platforms for cross-sector dialogue that enhance the integration of TFL initiatives.

Min Jung Kim

Texas Tech University
College of Health and Human
Science
Lubbock, TX, 79409
USA

☎ +1 806 758 2062
✉ minjung.kim@ttu.edu

Stacy H. Lee

Texas Tech University
College of Health and Human
Science
Lubbock, TX, 79409
USA

☎ +1 806 834 0091
✉ stacy.h.lee@ttu.edu

Hyo Jung (Julie) Chang

Texas Tech University
College of Health and Human
Science
Lubbock, TX, 79409
USA

☎ +1 806 834 5521
✉ julie.chang@ttu.edu

Generation Z's Perception of ESG Retail Company's Cross-Functionality

As consumers demand sustainable and ethical practices, retail companies are expanding their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices (Vertex, 2022). Generation Z (Gen Z, born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s) is particularly attuned to environmental and social responsibility and wants to make a positive impact on social issues (Richmond, 2024). Consequently, forty percent of Gen Z reject their work and companies that do not align with their values (Deloitte, 2023). In addition, Gen Z values opportunities to perform diverse roles and tasks within a company. They view teamwork as a means of innovation and seek efficient solutions (Tank, 2024). Thus, the cross-functionality of companies provides opportunities for employees to collaborate across departments with teamwork (Organ, 2024). This collaborative approach is especially vital for implementing ESG initiatives, as effective ESG practices require integration across various aspects of corporate operations (Coffin, 2020). Signaling theory is applied to offer a framework for systematically analyzing and interpreting these research objectives. Signaling provides a framework explaining information flow between signal senders (e.g., companies) and receivers (e.g., job seekers) under information asymmetry situations (Spence, 1973). This theory helps to understand how companies can signal their ESG practices as effective signals to Gen Z job seekers and how they interpret these signals to perceive a company's cross-functionality and job pursuit. Despite various efforts by companies to improve sustainability through ESG practices, Gen Z job seekers often remain in these efforts or face difficulties obtaining the information they want about companies during job-seeking. Therefore, this study aims to investigate 1) the differences in the three aspects of ESG that Gen Z job seekers have in evaluating the cross-functionality of companies and 2) the impact of their perceptions of cross-functionality on their job pursuit. We manipulated retail companies' ESG practices, thereby developing three aspects of stimuli. The online survey involved manipulation checks, demographics, cross-functionality (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018), and job pursuit (Chapman et al., 2005). A total of 309 valid samples of Gen Z participants in the United States were used for one-way analysis of variance and regression analysis. There is a significant main effect of ESG practice types on cross-functionality ($F = 3.15$, $p < .05$), indicating Gen Z's perception of companies' cross-functionality varies depending on ESG practice types. When retail companies emphasized environmental ($t = 3.44$, $p < .001$) and social ($t = 4.28$, $p < .001$) practices, Gen Z's perception of companies' cross functionality positively influenced Gen Z's job pursuit. However, governance practices ($t = 1.21$, $p > .05$) did not influence Gen Z's perceptions of companies' cross-functionality leading to their job pursuit. This study found that Gen Z is particularly interested in environmental and social issues. This stresses the importance of companies investing in efficient resource use and environmental protection regulations as well as demonstrating social efforts such as fair and ethical work environments. The most important takeaway is that retail companies can effectively attract Gen Z job seekers by emphasizing successful environmental and social sustainability achievements made through companies' cross-functionality (e.g., collaboration across departments and professionals). This finding provides insight into job decision-making process of Gen Z. Job seekers' ESG awareness may stem from generational differences and national education levels. Therefore, future studies are needed to compare with other generations and cross-culturally to extend the insight from the study.

Arno Kinzinger

Salzburg University of
Applied Sciences
Department of Marketing
and Relationship Management
Puch/Salzburg, 5412
Austria

☎ +43 50 2211 1115
✉ arno.kinzinger@
   fh-salzburg.ac.at

Winfried J. Steiner

Clausthal University of
Technology
Department of Marketing
Clausthal-Zellerfeld, 38678
Germany

☎ +49 5323 72 7650
✉ winfried.steiner@tu-
   clausthal.de

The Role of AI-Generated Avatars in Online Product Presentations

In recent years, consumer demand for online shopping has increased significantly. This shift in purchasing behavior indicates a long-term development rather than a short-term trend. The inability to physically examine products is an inherent characteristic of online retail. Thus, the quality of online product presentations is highly essential, as it enables online retailers to considerably influence consumers' purchase decision-making processes by stimulating affective and cognitive responses. Although a multitude of possible combinations of visual and audio elements exist, the use of product videos showcasing functionality and attributes prevails. This is because a video allows for a more realistic display of the product than a still picture, as well as being supported by the optimal combination of elements such as text, product images, speech, and background music, which consumers show the greatest preference for. Thus, it can be stated that the use of product presentation videos has considerable implications for companies' general product presentation strategy due to its effect on consumers' purchase decisions. Within this marketing context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers significant potential for application. Tools such as Synthesia or HeyGen enable video creation that is comparatively inexpensive in terms of cost and favorable regarding the complexity of creation, while also being customizable and adaptable. Furthermore, AI allows for the creation and use of humanlike avatars in various languages. Scientists have found that humanlike avatars receive a higher level of preference among consumers compared to 3D and 2D animations. However, many questions are still open, such as what language the avatar should use, whether the avatar should be male or female, or which ethnic background the avatar should have. In this contribution, we compare different avatar versions using the program HeyGen, based on experimental designs, to analyze the influence of these factors along validated scales in the field of consumer behavior.

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Melinda Knuth

NC State University
Dept. of Horticulture
Raleigh, NC, 27695
USA

☎ +1 605 759 4628
✉ mjknuth@ncsu.edu

Pat Huddleston

Michigan State University
Dept. of Ad. and PR
East Lansing, MI, 48824
USA

☎ +1 517 353 9907
✉ huddles2@msu.edu

Alicia Rihn

University of Tennessee
Dept. of Ag and Res.
Economics
Knoxville, TN 37996
USA

☎ +1 865 974 7472
✉ arihn@utk.edu

Bridget Behe

Michigan State University
Dept. of Horticulture
East Lansing, MI, 48824
USA

☎ +1 517 881 0876
✉ behe@msu.edu

It's Not Them, It's the Product: Bottom-Up Factors Influence Haters' Likelihood to Buy

When shopping, top-down and bottom-up factors influence purchase decisions. Internal personal characteristics, such as individual traits, are top-down factors. Characteristics of the stimulus, such as the shopping environment or product, under the retailer's control are bottom-up factors (Wedel & Pieters, 2008). Top-down and bottom-up factors determine and influence the decision-making process. Yet, little is known about what leads to a strong or weak future purchase intention (PI). The purpose of our study was to pinpoint top-down and/or bottom-up factors for haters (low PI). That is, what factors deter consumers from a future purchase? For this study, the top-down factors included six demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, income). In contrast, bottom-up factors included eleven bottom-up factors (e.g., product quality, brand, recommendations). We hypothesized that bottom-up would be stronger predictors of future product purchase intention LTB. Reichheld's (2003) ten-point Net Promoter Scale was widely adopted by many companies to indicate their growth potential, identifying "Haters" at the low end and "Net Promoters" at the high end. An online survey of $n = 130$ flower/plant purchasers were identified as Haters, scoring a 0-4 on the Net Promoter Scale for the question, "How likely are you to recommend this product to a friend?". Logit analysis showed that the model was significant ($X^2 = 447.45$, $p = 0.001$, Pseudo $R^2 = 0.5126$) in predicting a subsequent flower/plant purchase. As hypothesized, none of the demographic characteristics had a significant effect on product LTB. However, the LTB from the seller again (-0.59, $p = 0.000$) and willingness to write a positive online review (-0.31, $p = 0.0000$) negatively influenced their product LTB. Furthermore, plant quality judgment (-0.39, $p = 0.000$) and recommendations from friends (-0.39, $p = 0.000$) negatively influenced LTB. First-time buying was not a predictor of LTB ($p = 0.4810$). Thus, it was bottom-up factors that influenced LTB, not top-down factors. This puts marketers in the driver's seat since they can influence, if not control, many bottom-up factors.

Volker Kuppelwieser

NEOMA Business School
Mont-Saint-Aignan, 76825
France

✉ volker.kuppelwieser@
neoma-bs.fr

Martin Wetzels

EDHEC Business School
Roubaix Cedex 1, 59057
France

✉ martin.wetzels@edhec.edu

Benedikt Schnurr

Technical University of
Munich
Munich, 80333
Germany

The Perspective of Non-Impaired Customers on Adapted Services

An estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide live with some form of impairment (a problem or loss in body structure and function eventually resulting in a disability), making people with disabilities the world's largest minority. Service companies, in return, increasingly put effort into making their services accessible; designing their services "so that they can be used by people of all abilities." Planet Fitness includes equipment for people with disabilities in their gyms, and Airbnb updates its accessibility search filters to make it easier for consumers with disabilities to find accessible accommodation. Existing literature on accessible services is predominantly rooted in a supply side perspective and elaborates on (i) how services can be designed to include the needs of consumers with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, and (ii) how consumers react to service employees with disabilities. We take a demand-side perspective by asking how non-impaired consumers react to services accessible to people with disabilities. Building on the literature on prosocial behavior and scarce resource distribution, six studies covering a broad range of services and applying various study designs (field survey, between-subjects experiments, direct-comparison experiments, incentive-compatible choice experiments) demonstrated that prosocial intentions—intentions to engage in behavior that benefits others—drive non-impaired consumer preference for and against accessible services. On one hand, non-impaired consumers believe that using accessible services contributes to the inclusion of people with disabilities in society, which drives their preference for accessible services. On the other hand, non-impaired consumers believe that using accessible services limits available options for consumers with disabilities, which drives their preference for such services. In return, non-impaired consumers are more likely to use accessible services when the available service capacity is higher and when non-impaired consumers and consumers with disabilities do not simultaneously use the same service. Thus, our work introduces a far-overlooked perspective of prosocial behavior. While existing research conceptualizes prosocial behavior as several acts of giving (e.g., advice, comfort, money, and time), we highlight that not giving can also constitute prosocial behavior: by not using accessible services, non-impaired consumers feel that they are leaving more options for consumers with disabilities who deserve to benefit from the service's accessibility. On a substantive level, we highlight the conditions under which non-impaired consumers prefer to use accessible services, thus providing important insights that pave the way for service companies to effectively design inclusive services that address the needs of both consumers with and without disabilities. More broadly, we demonstrate that, under certain conditions, designing services such that they are accessible to consumers with disabilities not only contributes to a more inclusive society but also attracts non-impaired consumers. Finally, we add to the ongoing discourse within the discipline of marketing's focus, purpose, and impact on both academia and the public press by providing a systematic investigation of the demand effects of services accessible to people with disabilities. Service companies' accessibility efforts not only address the needs of consumers with disabilities but also of non-impaired consumers under certain conditions.

Laurin Krempel

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 2574
✉ laurin.krempel@
uni-saarland.de

Bastian Popp

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 4475
✉ bastian.popp@
uni-saarland.de

Re-Commerce – Drivers for Second-Hand Purchases in the Online Environment

With the rise of the awareness that human consumption is one of the biggest drivers of carbon emissions (Taneja *et al.*, 2021), new business models have evolved and existing ones have changed dramatically (Adıgüzel *et al.*, 2021). One sector that is particularly affected by these changes is the second-hand retail business, also referred to as re-commerce (Arman et al., 2021). Whereas it was still considered dingy and unchic a few years ago, its reputation has recently increased dramatically (Koay *et al.*, 2022). However, these changes have not only taken place in the image of second-hand purchases but also in the business models and channels used for distribution. While business used to take place mostly in brick-and-mortar shops, a large proportion is now online (Charnley *et al.*, 2022). Notably, the academic literature which deals with the motives to buy pre-owned products largely ignores the switch from the offline to the online environment. In fact, most empirical research refers to the offline sector. With the trend towards more sustainability as a macroenvironmental driver of purchase behavior and differences between perceived environmental friendliness between the online and the offline channel (Klein *et al.*, 2023), it is therefore essential to study changes in second-hand purchasing behavior and specifically identify motives for online second-hand purchases (Padmavathy *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, empirical contributions are limited to a generalization of product categories (Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2023; Tang *et al.*, 2020), or, if categories are mentioned in the studies, primarily focus on apparel (Koay *et al.*, 2022; Lu *et al.*, 2022), and thus do not reflect the prevailing trend towards an extension of second-hand purchases to a variety of product categories. Our research overcomes these limitations by both focusing on the online sector and covering several different product categories. In particular, we extend Guiot *et al.*'s (2010) work, which contains not merely hedonic but also critical and economic motives by factors like quality and functional value. Furthermore, we included perceived risk as a barrier to second-hand online shopping, which can discourage the online purchase of second-hand goods. By also including the motive green value as an indicator of ecological sustainability, our study includes a comprehensive set of motives for second-hand purchases. With books, consumer electronics, and apparel we include and differentiate the three currently most popular product categories in the second-hand sector. Our findings for the two categories books and apparel substantiate previous research (Amin *et al.*, 2021; Baek *et al.*, 2021), which found that hedonic motivation is a paramount driver for second-hand purchases and additionally shows that hedonic motives are neglectable for the consumer electronics category. Furthermore, functional value and product quality are important aspects when it comes to second-hand consumer electronics and books but do not influence the purchasing behavior in the apparel group. The economic dimension, in our study represented by perceived price fairness, for all three product categories plays an important role and demonstrates significant positive effects on purchase intention. Interestingly, green value only influences the purchase intention of second-hand books. Our results show that a dedicated analysis of different product categories is essential for a better understanding of consumer behavior in the online second-hand goods market. Retailers are advised to specifically address the above-identified, product category-specific motives. Moreover, there is a need to address sustainability to meet the general trend.

Magnum M.L. Lam

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Fashion and Textiles
Hong Kong
China

☎ +852 2766 6844
✉ magnumml.lam@
   polyu.edu.hk

Zeyu Liu

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Fashion and Textiles
Hong Kong
China

✉ camille123.liu@
   polyu.edu.hk

Fenfang Qiu

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Fashion and Textiles
Hong Kong
China

✉ fenfang.qiu@polyu.edu.hk

Brand Evolutionary Dynamics: A Darwinian Perspective on Brand Identity in Fashion Retail

Brand identity is a critical element in fashion retail, serving as the basis through which consumers perceive and differentiate brands from competitors (Aaker, 1996). Traditionally viewed as a static construct, brand identity emphasizes consistency to facilitate easier consumer recognition (Ghodeswar, 2008). However, the fashion market is rapidly evolving, with crossover collaborations—such as Gucci with Doraemon, Louis Vuitton with Supreme, and Dior with Air Jordan—challenging these traditional notions. These trends indicate a need for a more dynamic understanding of brand identity that can adapt to shifting consumer preferences and market demands (da Silveira *et al.*, 2013). While existing research stresses the consistent characteristics that uphold brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2008; Collins & Porras, 1994), it has overlooked the dynamic factors that drive brand evolution in today's fashion landscape. This raises important questions about the relevance of traditional brand identity frameworks in a market characterized by constant change. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamic factors driving brand identity evolution in fashion retail amidst rapid market changes. This study employs Darwin's theory of evolution as a theoretical framework for understanding brand identity in the dynamic fashion ecosystem, emphasizing the need for brands to adapt to competitive market conditions, similar to species evolving in response to environmental pressures (Ruse, 1975). Previous research shows that evolutionary concepts apply to branding; for example, Hirschman (2010) likens brand identity to genetic markers, suggesting brands construct narratives about their origins. Ballantyne *et al.* (2006) argue that brand survival mirrors natural selection, where emotional and symbolic connections with consumers are crucial for success. However, while fluid aspects of brand identity have been explored, there is a significant gap in understanding the dynamic factors driving brand evolution in changing markets. Further studies compare brands to living organisms, emphasizing their evolution in response to internal and external pressures (Wu & Ardley, 2007). Kwon (2024) introduces co-evolution, noting that fashion brands thrive through continuous interaction and knowledge exchange with partners. This study leverages concepts of co-origination, natural selection, adaptation, and co-evolution to explore the dynamic evolution of fashion retail brand identity, addressing this critical research gap. This study employs a qualitative methodology, conducting in-depth interviews with founders and brand directors of 20 international street fashion brands to explore the dynamic factors driving brand evolution. Thematic analysis identifies four key evolutionary stages: 1. Common Origins: cultural heritage, community influence, and founder experience; 2. Natural Selection: consumer preferences, emerging trends, and engagement; 3. Adaptation: responses to market shifts; and 4. Co-evolution: strategic collaborations with partners and competitors. This research contributes a dynamic framework for understanding how international fashion brands develop, adapt, and co-evolve in response to internal and external pressures, addressing a critical gap in the literature.

Camila Lee Park

EDC Paris Business School
OCRE Research Laboratory
Paris La Défense
Puteaux, 92800
France

☏ +33 01 46 93 02 70
✉ camilapark@gmail.com

Mauro Fracarolli Nunes

EDC Paris Business School
OCRE Research Laboratory
Paris La Défense
Puteaux, 92800
France

☏ +33 01 46 93 02 70
✉ m.fracarollinunes@
    gmail.com

Hyunju Shin

Kennesaw State University
Coles College of Business
Kennesaw, 30144
USA

☏ +1 470 578 6425
✉ hshin13@kennesaw.edu

Jose A.D. Machuca

Universidad de Sevilla
GIDEAO-Departamento
Economía Financiera y
Dirección de Operaciones
Sevilla, 41018
Spain

☏ +34 95 455 76 24
✉ jmachuca@us.es

Luxury Management and Circular Business Models

Although under pressure to improve its environmental performance, the luxury industry does not seem to have evolved in the same way as most other economic activities. While a kind of eco-consciousness seems to be taking hold among consumers, practices such as the burning of unsold stock and the production of large quantities of waste material are still relatively common in this sector. Seeking to minimize the reputational impact of these practices, companies such as Burberry have announced that they will no longer destroy items in perfect condition, thus avoiding the waste of a number of resources, including the materials themselves and all the energy dedicated to their manufacture. Similarly, companies such as Hermès have been developing ways of reusing the industrial waste produced in the manufacture of their parts. In this sense, the company has created a second product line called Petit H, whose focus is precisely to create new products that can reuse what was previously discarded by the main brand. From a circular economy perspective, the idea is to increase the company's environmental performance by introducing recycling. Despite the apparent good reception of the initiative by the public, the effects of these measures on consumer perception are not yet clear. It is possible, for example, that the association of recycling with a loss of quality or value will jeopardize the way luxury products are perceived. Seeking to understand the real impacts of these measures and their potential for replication by the luxury industry, this study evaluates how such measures affect different aspects of the reputation of the companies that practice them. More specifically, through two factorial vignette-based experiments applied to a total sample of 736 participants, we evaluated how the use of recycled materials in the luxury industry affects consumer perceptions in terms of corporate credibility and attitude towards the firm. Based on theory of planned behavior, we aim to understand how the introduction of recycling affects the perception of luxury brands consumers. Results suggest that the introduction of recycling may be beneficial in the eyes of consumers from a sustainability standpoint, attenuating eventual perceptions of quality or value loss for the products. Our findings contribute to the literature on sustainable luxury, engaging in a dialogue with studies that assess how companies' reputations can be affected by initiatives in this direction. From a theoretical point of view, the study supports the application of theory of planned behavior in contexts other than those for which it is normally used, extending its potential to explain and anticipate consumer response.

JungKun Park

Hanyang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Korea

☎ +82 2220 2691
✉ viroid2007@gmail.com

Suhyoung Ahn

Hanyang University
School of Business
Seoul, 04763
Korea

☎ +82 2220 2691
✉ sahn.phd@gmail.com

Empathic AI or Rational AI: Which Better Supports Employees in High-Stress Service Environments?

As AI technologies continue to advance across service industries, particularly in high-stress environments like retail, their ability to perform both emotional and rational tasks is transforming the way businesses interact with customers. In emotionally taxing situations—service failures where employees must handle frustrated or dissatisfied customers—AI has the potential to alleviate some of the emotional burden. This study focuses on whether AI's empathic abilities, which provide emotional support, or its rational problem-solving capabilities, which deliver accurate solutions, are more effective in reducing employee emotional exhaustion. Grounded in affective events theory, which posits that workplace events influence employees' emotional reactions and subsequent behaviors (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), this research examines how AI's role in service failure scenarios can alleviate the emotional burden on employees. For instance, AI could offer an empathetic response to a customer's frustration or efficiently resolve a complaint. While AI's rational problem-solving capabilities—providing fast, accurate resolutions to customer issues—are essential for maintaining service efficiency, the findings suggest that these cognitive functions alone are insufficient to reduce emotional exhaustion among employees. Although problem-solving AI can lessen employees' workload, it does not address the emotional toll employees experience when managing frustrated customers. Instead, it is AI's emotional capabilities, particularly the ability to provide empathic responses, that play a more significant role in reducing emotional exhaustion. In service failure scenarios, AI's empathic engagement helps employees feel supported emotionally, reducing the emotional burden and fostering a renewed sense of work meaning. Employees who experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion report higher job satisfaction. However, the positive effects of AI empathy are moderated by the emotional authenticity of the AI's responses—when AI's emotional support feels authentic and genuinely human-like, the benefits are amplified. Without authenticity, even emotionally supportive AI interactions may fail to alleviate employee exhaustion fully. These findings suggest that AI, when designed to balance effective problem-solving with emotionally authentic interactions, has the potential to reduce the emotional burden on employees in high-stress situations like service failures, foster a greater sense of purpose in their work, and improve overall job satisfaction.

Garim Lee

Indiana University
Merchandising, Eskenazi
School of Art, Architecture +
Design
Bloomington, 47405
USA

☎ +1 612 323 9833
✉ garilee@iu.edu

Do Consumers Rely on AI-Generated Review Summary?

Generative AI is undeniably transforming how content is generated, leading to a significant impact on retail. A notable emerging use case is AI-generated customer review summaries (AI review summaries, hereafter). AI review summaries are brief, integrated information on customer reviews summarized by AI. AI review summaries mainly synthesize the key, major points that appear in customer feedback and often convey common sentiments and opinions about the product based on a large set of customer reviews (Kastrenakes, 2023). While big retailers (e.g. Amazon) are utilizing AI review summaries, few studies investigated this topic. Thus, this research aims to (a) investigate what specific beliefs consumers shape about AI review summaries and (b) examine what characteristics of AI review summaries affect the effectiveness. The hypotheses were developed based on the literature on data-driven retail strategies, online customer reviews, and Information Seeking Theory (Atkin, 1973). Specifically, this research hypothesized that consumers are likely to follow AI review summary the most when the summary shows both positive and negative feedback (two-sided), followed by when the summary shows only negative feedback and only positive feedback. Such effect of summary valence was hypothesized to be explained by the perceptions of summary (i.e. accuracy, completeness, objectivity, information adequacy) and need for information. Search versus experience product type, low- versus high-involvement products, and consumers' need for cognitive closure were posited as boundary conditions. Among multiple studies planned, Study 1 was conducted as a 1-factor 3-level (valence: positive vs. negative vs. two-sided) between-subject online experiment using Prolific ($n = 201$; Age: $M = 35.45$ (10.90)). Study 2 and Study 3 are planned as online experiments, and Study 4 is planned as a field study. Study 1 aimed to test the main effects of summary valence and the mediations. Controlling for the effect of general attitudes toward AI, MANCOVA confirmed the main effect of summary valence ($\lambda = .84$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.83$). Subsequent univariate test showed that the summary valence has significant effects on completeness ($F = 3.91$, $p = .022$, $\eta^2_p = .04$), objectivity ($F = 5.48$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2_p = .06$), information adequacy ($F = 3.40$, $p = .036$, $\eta^2_p = .04$), need for information ($F = 5.80$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2_p = .06$), and intention to follow ($F = 4.64$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2_p = .05$), but not on accuracy ($p = .561$). Pairwise comparison and estimated marginal means revealed interesting findings. The intention to follow the AI review summary was the highest for the negative summary ($M_n = 4.70$), which was higher than for the positive one ($M_p = 4.04$; $p = .011$) and similar to the two-sided one ($M_t = 4.51$; $p = .100$). Similar patterns were shown for objectivity and information adequacy. Completeness was similar for negative and two-sided summary ($M_n = 4.83$, $M_t = 4.83$), which were higher than for the positive summary ($M_p = 4.26$; $p = .051$, .049). Need for information was highest for the positive summary ($M_p = 5.71$), (marginally) higher than for negative one ($M_n = 4.97$; $p = .003$) and two-sided one ($M_t = 5.20$; $p = .064$). PROCESS Model 6 showed that completeness, objectivity, and information adequacy have slightly different patterns of mediating effects on the relationship between summary valence and intention to follow, providing a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms. In sum, participants were most receptive to negative AI review summaries. This was because they believed negative summaries were the most objective, provided adequate information, and would not require further information search. As one of the earliest works exploring AI review summaries, this research advances theoretical knowledge of their effectiveness and will provide actionable insights for retailers.

Heeran Lee

Kumoh National Institute
of Technology
Department of Materials
Design Engineering
Gumi, 39177
Republic of Korea

☎ +82 54 478 7717
✉ heeran@kumoh.ac.kr

Soyoung Kim

Kumoh National Institute of
Technology
Advanced Material Research
Center
Gumi, 39177
Republic of Korea

☎ +82 54 478 7717
✉ soykim@cnu.ac.kr

Assessment of Consumer Comfort, Wearability, and Design of 3D-Printed Back Braces by EEG-Based Neurophysiological and Subjective measures

Back braces are commonly employed to alleviate lower back pain (LBP) by providing stable support for the spine and surrounding muscles, limiting excessive movement, preventing injury, and enhancing functional performance in daily activities. Developing an effective back brace requires materials capable of maintaining the brace's external structure while delivering the necessary internal pressure. The "bone" component embedded within the brace is critical for achieving this function. 3D printing technology offers notable advantages in this context, enabling rapid prototyping and customized products such as protective gear. Also, in the product development process, wearability evaluations play a crucial role, providing essential feedback for improving prototype performance. These evaluations incorporate both subjective assessments of sensory perception and objective measurements, including electromyography (EMG) and electroencephalography (EEG). Prior research suggests that EEG is a valuable tool for objectively assessing wearability, as differences in relative EEG indicators have been observed in evaluating clothing and textile products. This study aims to investigate the differences in the wearability of posture-correcting back braces, focusing on the characteristics of the 3D-printed bones used in their construction. The bones were produced using two different materials: medium-strength shape memory thermoplastic polyurethane (SMTPU) and soft-strength thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU). Ten female participants in their 20s were evaluated through both EEG measurements for objective indicators and subjective assessments of wearability. EEG measurements were conducted using a commercial EEG system, following the Jasper protocol, with 8-channel recordings. Data were collected for one minute during a resting state, both with and without the back brace. Sixteen EEG indicators were analyzed through analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine differences between the no-brace condition and the two materials used in the braces. Additionally, subjective evaluations were conducted on 17 items related to wearability, experience, and design, and the results were analyzed using paired t-tests. The findings revealed that TPU exhibited higher scores for the RA indicator, which denotes stable rest, and the RAHB indicator, which reflects calmness and comfort, while showing lower levels of the SEF50 stress indicator. Conversely, SMTPU showed higher scores in the RMT and RSMT indicators, which are associated with concentration, as well as higher SEF50 stress levels compared to TPU. In subjective evaluations, TPU was rated as less constrictive, more comfortable, and more effective in maintaining proper posture than SMTPU. Overall, both objective EEG measurements and subjective assessments demonstrated a preference for soft-strength TPU. These results suggest that integrating subjective and objective evaluations can enhance the reliability of wearability assessments. The application of 3D printing technology, combined with EEG-based neurophysiological testing and panel evaluations, not only improves the wearability of back braces but also increases consumer trust. Moreover, data-driven marketing strategies can offer personalized solutions, potentially enhancing product adoption rates and overall consumer satisfaction.

Heeran Lee

Kumoh National Institute
of Technology
Department of Materials
Design Engineering
Gumi, 39177
Republic of Korea

☎ +82 54 478 7717
✉ heeran@kumoh.ac.kr

Okkyung Lee

Kyungpook National
University Department of
Clothing and Textiles
Daegu
Republic of Korea

☎ +82 42 821 7804
✉ grape-ok@hanmail.net

Smart Workwear: Evaluating Material Performance and Cooling Devices for Thermal Comfort and Efficiency

During the hot summer months, outdoor workers face the risk of heat stress, which can significantly reduce work efficiency. This study aims to understand how different materials and cooling devices impact comfort and efficiency, influencing consumer choices. The study evaluated the effectiveness of two short-sleeve shirt materials (100% cotton and Coolmax) and a cooling device (Keion cooling fan) in reducing body temperature and humidity inside workwear. Four experimental conditions were tested: 100% Cotton, 100% Cotton + Cooling fan, Coolmax, and Coolmas + Cooling fan. Seven women in their twenties participated, wearing each combination with temperature and humidity sensors attached to their upper abdomen, upper arms, and upper back. The cooling device was placed on the lower back. In the 1st step, the subjects entered a climate chamber set to 33.0±2.0°C and 59.0±10.0%RH, activated the sensors, and ran on a treadmill at 6 km/h until the humidity of the back reached 80%RH. The time to reach this humidity level was recorded. In the 2nd step, after the back humidity reached 80%RH, they continued running at the same speed for four minutes, then sat and rested for 10 minutes. During this time (running and resting), temperature and humidity changes inside the clothing were recorded every two minutes, totaling 14 minutes. In the 3rd step, a subjective evaluation of dryness, weight, cooling sensation, and overall comfort was conducted using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree). The results showed that the time to reach 80%RH humidity at the back was longest for Coolmax + Cooling fan (11.2 min.), followed by Coolmax (8.3 min.), Cotton + Cooling fan (6.6 min.), and Cotton (3.2 min.). There was little difference in temperature and humidity changes during the four minutes of running after the humidity reached 80%RH. However, during the rest period, wearing Coolmax + Cooling fan experienced the greatest reduction in both temperature and humidity, with the temperature at the back dropping by an average of 0.9°C and humidity by 3.7%RH. In contrast, wearing only Cotton saw an increase in temperature and humidity, while little change was observed in those wearing Coolmax or Cotton + Cooling fan. Subjective evaluations also favored the Coolmax + Cooling fan combination, which scored the highest for dryness (4.8 point), cooling sensation (5.6 point), and overall comfort (6.0 point). However, the cooling fan was noted to add some weight (5.6 point). Meanwhile, when wearing only a cotton sleeve shirt, both the subjective comfort and temperature-humidity evaluations scored below the average of 4.0. Our study revealed that a combination of cooling materials and a cooling device significantly improved thermal comfort for workers by controlling temperature and humidity inside workwear. Study findings highlight the importance of personalized workwear solutions. Consumers may prefer products that can be tailored to their specific needs, such as choosing between different materials and cooling options based on their work conditions and personal comfort preferences. Using sensors to monitor temperature and humidity in real-time demonstrates the potential for integrating smart technologies into consumer products. This can open the door for developing smart workwear that automatically adjusts cooling mechanisms based on environmental conditions and user feedback. The superior performance of Coolmax and cooling fans may help companies differentiate their brands in a competitive market.

Juha Lee

University of Georgia
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
USA

☎ +1 (706) 542 847
✉ juha.lee@uga.edu

Dee Warmath

University of Georgia
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
us

☎ +1 (706) 542 4856
✉ warmath@uga.edu

Building Service Literacy to Promote Consumer Well-Being from New Technology-Driven Retail Services

With the increasing availability of technology-driven retail services, consumers use these services to find the right products, obtain special discounts, earn points, learn about events, gain product knowledge, and handle customer service issues, among others. Also, customers use services like Instacart and DoorDash to shop or subscriptions like StitchFix and BarkBox to select products. A number of these services are technology-driven, combining apps, robot-assisted retail, and VR/AR shopping channels. With so many options available to consumers, how do they choose the services best suited to their needs? While service quality scales have been actively studied, less attention has been given to the factors promoting a consumer's ability to select services. We introduce the concept of service literacy defined as *an individual's capacity to make decisions related to the application of another entity's competencies to their needs* and argue that higher levels of service literacy allow the consumer to realize greater well-being from their service experiences. Using data from 600 U.S. adults collected in October 2023, we developed a valid, reliable measure of service literacy and examined the association between service literacy and life satisfaction controlling for age, sex, income, race/ethnicity, and education. We further examined the presence of serial mediation through decision autonomy (i.e., choosing without undue external influence) and service adaptation (i.e., personalizing or switching services as needed). We found a direct effect of service literacy on life satisfaction ($\beta = .097$; $p < .001$). We also found an indirect association of service literacy and life satisfaction through service adaptation (Service Literacy -> Service Adaptation: $\beta = .059$; $p < .001$; Service Adaptation -> Life Satisfaction: $\beta = -.259$; $p = .011$). Our results also supported serial mediation with service literacy having a positive association with decision autonomy ($\beta = .100$; $p < .001$), decision autonomy with service adaptation ($\beta = .168$; $p < .001$), and service adaptation with life satisfaction. Decision autonomy was not directly related to life satisfaction ($\beta = .012$; $p = .900$). These findings suggest that the life satisfaction a consumer acquires from the services they use is based, in part, on their service literacy. Given that retailers rely on services to acquire and retain customers, our findings suggest that helping consumers understand how to choose and use services can enhance the retailer's efforts and establish the desired mutually beneficial relationships. The findings also suggest that the individual's ability to adapt services to their needs matters in this association. Interestingly, the association between service adaptation and life satisfaction was negative. This might be due to the presence of negative experiences that prompted an adaptive reaction rather than proactive tailoring of services. In future research, we plan to apply service literacy to examine differences in the consumer's decision-making process for retail services using technology. Our study suggests that consumers with higher levels of service literacy would make these decisions more rationally and intentionally, with a better understanding of their needs and greater confidence in their ability to navigate options. Retailers leveraging technology-based services have an opportunity to promote service literacy. By building this capacity, retailers can improve the predictability of consumer decision-making, enhancing mutually beneficial relationships with their customers.

Kyungwon Lee

Kean University
College of Business and
Public Management
Union, NJ
USA

☏ +1 908 737 4198
✉ kylee@kean.edu

Genevieve E.
O'Connor

Fordham University
Gabelli School of Business
New York, NY
USA

☏ +1 609 413 6742
✉ geoconnor@
fordham.edu

Aron Darmody

Carleton University
Sprott School of Business
Ottawa, ON
Canada

☏ +1 613 520 2600 ext. 2266
✉ arondarmody@
cunet.carleton.ca

Improving Service Delivery in the Sharing Economy

The emergence of the sharing economy has fundamentally changed how consumers interact with a host of service providers. Delivery consists of multiple actors, where service employees, platform providers (e.g., Uber, Airbnb), and customers interact in service ecosystems to attain desired outcomes (Danatziz *et al.*, 2022). The individuals who provide these services have been called various terms such as gig workers, independent contractors, or employees. Regardless of the nomenclature, the relationship these individuals have with the platform provider differs from a traditional worker-employer contractual relationship. Specifically, these relationships are unique in the sense that the "workers" are operating in self-adjusting systems of resource-integration connected by shared institutional arrangements (i.e., service ecosystems; Vargo & Lusch, 2016), in a growing economy with a high churn rate (Brown, 2019), where the "worker" has a vested interest in the "assets" (e.g., home, car) used in service delivery. Platform providers have embraced algorithmic management—a continuous, real-time control mechanism driven by technology (Cram *et al.*, 2022). For those subject to algorithmic management, there is often opaqueness (Burrell, 2016), including a lack of transparency about, and subsequent understanding of, evaluation criteria (Introna, 2016) and algorithmic outcomes (Burrell, 2016). In this paradigm, decisions are automated and based on data-driven metrics, resulting in what appears to be more transactional relationships between workers and platforms. Algorithmic management has led to a seemingly diminished emphasis on the development of mutual trust and commitment within these working relationships (Duggan *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the non-interpersonal and highly automated nature of algorithmic management offers limited opportunities for service provider workers to engage in formal procedures when they have queries or concerns. To date, there remains a lack of empirical research exploring the role of transparency of algorithms on workers' psychological needs, their relationship with the platform company (platform attachment), and the impact on their delivery of customer service (customizing attentive behaviors). Therefore, to better understand workers' service delivery (e.g., customer attentive behaviors, commitment to the service, engagement with the platform), our research focuses on the role of algorithm transparency, workers' psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence), as well as their relationship with the platform (platform attachment). We employ a mixed-method research approach using semi-structured interviews and surveys to explore the psychological needs of workers and how they perceive algorithmic management. We hypothesize that enhanced psychological needs among workers are positively associated with platform attachment, leading to the delivery of better customer service. Further, we propose that greater levels of perceived algorithmic control transparency strengthen the positive relationships between workers' psychological needs and their attachment to the platform. This research offers important insights into the shared economy by offering a framework that shows how platform companies can positively influence workers' engagement with the service platform and the effective service delivery outcomes that can result.

Maureen Lehto
Brewster

University of Maryland
Eastern Shore
Department of Human
Ecology
Princess Anne, MD 21853
USA

☎ +1 410 621 2962
✉ melehtobrewster@
   umes.edu

In Our Theme Dressing Era? An Analysis of Concert Dress Practices and Social Media

Recent music tours of artists such as Taylor Swift, Chappell Roan, Beyonce, and Charli XCX are not only notable for their massive crowds, but for what those crowds are wearing: impeccably coordinated outfits, styled to fit one or more "themes" of the album or tour. While some artists dictate a dress code—such as Beyonce, who instructed fans to wear silver for the final leg of her 2023 Renaissance World Tour (Nolfi, 2023)—often the theme appears to arise more organically, through fan interpretation and, increasingly, social media coordination. Most significantly, though their outfits might include or reference official merchandise, do-it-yourself (DIY) approaches are extremely common. Attendees of Taylor Swift's 2023-2024 Eras Tour, for example, made friendship bracelets and were encouraged to wear outfits inspired by Swift's titular musical eras (Newman, 2024). Dressing up for a concert has long been a means for music fans to express their fandom (e.g. Miller, 2011), negotiate their (sub)cultural identity (e.g. Luvaas, 2013), and participate in branded experiences (Strähle & Kriegle, 2017). Dressing to invoke the theme or spirit of festivals such as Burning Man has also been investigated in previous research (e.g. Austin & Fitzgerald, 2018; Lifter, 2020). However, the influence of social media platforms in the creation and mediation of concert dress themes has yet to be explored in depth. This work in progress study will use digital ethnography and interviews with concert attendees to explore how they use social media to plan, wear, and share their concert dress. I will use digital ethnography to collect and explore social media content on Instagram and TikTok related to the above tours. Inductive coding of content, including hashtags and comments, will offer greater insight into the dissemination of concert dress themes and styling information online. Interviews with attendees of the above tours will also be used to better understand concertgoers' dress practices, shopping behaviors, and use of social media as they prepare, wear, and share their concert outfits. The findings of this study are expected to extend current literature on music fandom and dress, while also providing new insights for fashion retailers and marketers seeking to participate in cultural trends.

Yubing Lei

University of Antwerp
Faculty of Business and
Economics
Antwerp, 2000
Belgium

☏ +32 489510390
✉ yubing.lei@ uantwerpen.be

Joris Beckers

University of Antwerp
Faculty of Business and
Economics
Antwerp, 2000
Belgium

☏ +32 32654158
✉ joris.beckers@
uantwerpen.be

The Role of Logistics Factors in Consumers' Shopping Channel Choices

Retail accessibility, the potential for reaching various retail activities, plays an important role in urban planning. Inequalities in physical retail accessibility have been identified in plenty of literature (Formánek & Sokol, 2022). The unprecedented growth of e-commerce may bridge the existing inequalities, as online activities are less constrained by physical distance (Shi *et al.*, 2020). In contrast, some research shows that disadvantaged individuals are less likely to use e-commerce effectively than socio-economically advantaged people, which causes e-retail inequality (Buhtz *et al.*, 2014). Also on the supply side inequalities have been identified, such as the availability of home delivery services (Newing *et al.*, 2022). However, the research on retail accessibility in the age of e-commerce is in its infancy: the dynamics between demand and supply for different channels are barely understood. Hence, to correctly assess contemporary retail accessibility, a better understanding of hybrid retail demand is necessary. Consumers' retail demand is diverse and changing in the omnichannel shopping environment. Traditional research on consumer behavior mainly focused on the relationships between socio-economic characteristics, types of products, subjective purchasing attitudes and online shopping frequencies. However, relatively little attention has been given to how logistics factors influence consumers' perception towards online shopping and their shopping channel decision-making process (Alrawad *et al.*, 2023). In this research, we aim to assess the impacts of various delivery characteristics on consumers' shopping channel choices from a consumer-centric perspective. Stated and revealed preferences data was collected to indicate consumers' attitudes towards purchasing and delivery. A higher-order structural equation model (SEM) will be applied due to its ability to simultaneously estimate complex relationships among shopping channel choices and consumers' multiple purchasing (perceived price, time, convenience, etc.) and delivery preferences (delivery time, cost, location, perceived risk, etc.). This research considers retail and logistics jointly to investigate consumer behavior and attempts to understand the drivers for consumers when deciding on a particular channel to purchase an item in the context of omnichannel shopping.

Xuanke Lin

Ritsumeikan University
Postgraduate School of
Business Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☏ +81 70 4741 0732
✉ gr0590hr@ed.ritsumei.ac.jp

Changju Kim

Ritsumeikan University
College of Business
Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☏ +81 72 665 2382
✉ cjkim777@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Jungkeun Kim

Auckland University of
Technology
Department of Marketing
Auckland, 1010
New Zealand

☏ +64 9 921 9999
✉ jkkim@aut.ac.nz

Hanxi Chen

University of Ritsumeikan
Postgraduate School of
Business Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☏ +81 80 3450 6301
✉ gr0671es@ed.ritsumei.ac.jp

Relationships Among Credibility, Technology Threat and Personality Traits in ChatGPT Use

Consumer responses to the use and recommendation of ChatGPT in the tourism industry have varied, and clarifying this has become a challenge for enterprises seeking to enhance the benefits of ChatGPT (Kim *et al.*, 2023). Existing research has explored issues such as consumer attitudes, intentions, and behaviors toward technology adoption from diverse perspectives with an accumulation of research on the role of reputed credibility (Zhu *et al.*, 2022). However, we address two key research limitations to the literature. First, reputed credibility can strengthen users' intention to use, but discussions on consumer technology threats in technology adoption are still limited under the premise of reputed credibility. Second, many studies have focused on factors that promote or hinder technological attitudes or concerns regarding the technology itself. Consumer personality traits also play an important role in the acceptance of technological innovations, but their practical implications have not been adequately explored. To address these research gaps, building on source credibility theory, this study aims to investigate interaction effects between reputed credibility, technology threats and sensational seeking on consumer intention to use and recommend ChatGPT in the tourism context. Using data from 600 US respondents, we employ hierarchical linear regression analysis to test our hypotheses. Our main findings suggest that reputed credibility increases consumers' intention to use and recommend ChatGPT (H1). Additionally, the technology threat attenuates the positive effect of reputed credibility on consumers' intention to recommend ChatGPT (H2). Finally, whereas consumers' sensational seeking weakens the negative interaction effect between reputed credibility and consumers' technology threat on their intention to use ChatGPT (H3a), contrary to our prediction in H3b, we find no significant effect on the intention to recommend ChatGPT. Our study has three implications for the tourism context. First, reputed credibility remains an important factor in ChatGPT technology adoption in terms of increasing new technological innovations, such as ChatGPT. Second, while technology threat does not directly affect consumers' intention to use ChatGPT on its own, in the presence of reputed credibility, consumers with a high technology threat hesitate to use and recommend ChatGPT to others. Finally, in addition to prior research largely focusing on consumer attitudes toward innovative technology, our study contributes to the literature by emphasizing the differential effect of consumers' personality traits, such as sensational seeking, which affects their intention to use and recommend ChatGPT to others differently.

Charlie Lindgren

Dalarna University
School of Technology and
Business Studies
Falun, 791 31
Sweden

☏ +46 70 579 73 98
✉ clg@du.se

Kenneth Carling

Dalarna University
School of Technology and
Business Studies
Falun, 791 31
Sweden

☏ +46 23 77 89 67
✉ kca@du.se

Niklas Rudholm

Institute of Retail Economics
Stockholm, 103 29
Sweden

☏ +46 70 625 46 27
✉ niklas.rudholm@
huiresearch.se

Ross May

Dalarna University
School of Technology and
Business Studies
Falun, 791 31
Sweden

☏ +46 73 989 13 49
✉ rom@du.se

Algorithmic Pricing and Collusion on a Price Comparison Website

The adoption of algorithmic pricing is growing globally, reshaping competitive dynamics, and drawing regulatory attention. In the US, about one-third of Amazon's top sellers use algorithmic pricing strategies (Chen *et al.*, 2016). In Europe, the European Commission reports that a majority of traders monitor competitors' prices using software, with two-thirds employing automated pricing (European Commission, 2017). Nordic countries also see widespread use, with 55% of audited firms in Norway using monitoring algorithms and 20% employing autonomous pricing adjustments (Norwegian Competition Authority, 2021). This trend is bolstered by firms offering algorithmic pricing solutions, prompting concerns among competition authorities worldwide. There are fears that these algorithms could facilitate price coordination among firms, potentially leading to anticompetitive outcomes. Studies by Harrington (2019), Calvano *et al.* (2020a), and others suggest that current competition laws may struggle to effectively address such coordination. Theoretical and experimental evidence supports these concerns, showing that algorithmic pricing can simplify coordination, particularly in e-commerce with frequent interactions between firms (Ezrachi & Stucke, 2015; Mehra, 2016). Empirical findings underscore these worries, with studies revealing increased trading margins in markets with algorithmic pricing (Assad *et al.*, 2020), cyclic price patterns on platforms like Amazon (Musloff, 2021), and concerns about tacit collusion in marketplaces like Bol.com (Wieting and Sapi, 2021). These developments highlight the complex regulatory challenges posed by the rise of algorithmic pricing in global markets. This opens several questions surrounding tacit collusion and its detrimental effects on competition and consequently consumers in the form of supracompetitive prices. As an initial step towards answering whether or not tacit collusion is happening among pricing algorithms, one needs to first identify which retailers are using such technology. We have defined two new statistical markers for identifying pricing algorithms in low-resolution data. One of the markers adapts counting the number of price changes by instead computing the average rate of price change per retailer over all its products both within and across countries. The other, novel, marker computes the persistence of a retailer in the marketplace. Using robust standardization of the two markers and applying a heuristic based on appropriate thresholds of these standardized markers, we have identified varying numbers of retailers within and between countries for the product categories employing algorithmic pricing. We have therefore created a new heuristic for identifying pricing algorithms in low-resolution data sets. Furthermore, this heuristic allows for further research in empirically identifying whether or not tacit collusion exists among algorithms and the effects such pricing has on the profitability of the retailers who employ such technology compared to those who do not.

Beatrice Luceri

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Business Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

☎ +39 0521 902479
✉ beatrice.luceri@unipr.it

Simone Aiolfi

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Business Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

☎ +39 0521 902479
✉ simone.aiolfi@unipr.it

Giovanni Romano

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Business Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

☎ +39 0521 902479
✉ giovanni.romano@unipr.it

From Pixels to Purchases: High-Involvement Shopping in the Metaverse

The advent of the Metaverse poses a novel challenge for brands and retailers thanks to the proliferation of new technologies such as Extended Reality and Artificial Intelligence (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2022). For instance, virtual replicas of products can enable companies to extend the purchasing process at novel touchpoints, providing an innovative and exclusive customer experience (Eggenschwiler *et al.*, 2024), thus representing a significant opportunity for growth and development within the retail sector – e.g., by assisting customers in acquiring more detailed information (Yoo *et al.*, 2023). Although scholars have begun to investigate Metaverse adoption (Kumari *et al.*, 2024), there is still a gap in knowledge regarding consumers' intentions to adopt the Metaverse during the purchasing process. The present study provides insights into the factors influencing consumers' intention to use Metaverse Technologies to support the purchasing process of high-involvement goods. A quantitative research approach tested a UTAUT-based theoretical framework and its related hypothesis using a PLS-SEM method. Data were collected through an online, structured questionnaire, with 101 responses from international lead buyers of a helicopter industry company. The findings reveal that performance expectancy and effort expectancy significantly impact usage intention. Similarly, a significant effect of perceived interaction quality on performance expectancy and effort expectancy was found. Additionally, perceived curiosity was observed to have an impact on effort expectancy. The outcomes contribute to the theoretical foundation of the ongoing research stream on consumers' usage intention of the Metaverse, elucidating the antecedents of the utilitarian dimension that may motivate them to consider this digital realm in supporting their purchasing process. Furthermore, practical implications for managers are outlined, including guidance for firms and retailers seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the marketing activities required to establish a presence in this emerging virtual domain, along with recommendations on how to deliver customer value that should be integrated into the concept design of a virtual experience. The study's limitations are discussed in order to suggest future research directions that may lead to a deeper understanding of consumer technology acceptance behavior and inform the development of retailing strategies, activities, and investments in the Metaverse.

Hikaru Makino

Kanazawa Seiryo University
Faculty of Economics
Kanazawa
Ishikawa, 920-8620
Japan

☎ +81 76 253 3979
✉ h-makino@seiryo-u.ac.jp

Kenji Sera

Kindai University
Faculty of Business
Administration
Osaka 577-8502
Japan

☎ +81 6 4307 3334
✉ sera@bus.kindai.ac.jp

An Exploratory Investigation into The Development of A Bodily Attitude Scale: Item Collection and Factor Analysis

This study focused on embodiment, collected data through a two-stage survey on common bodily reactions that occur when using good products and services, and conducted factor analysis to develop a scale for bodily attitudes. Embodiment refers to perception and interaction through the body and is an interpretation of human cognition from the perspective of embodied cognition. In this study, bodily reactions were defined as bodily changes and movements that occur unconsciously when consumers encounter a product or service. In studies using the concept of affordance, a measurement scale of perceived affordance has been developed by focusing on the relationship between consumer purchasing behavior and embodiment explained by the concept of affordance. However, the current literature has not yet sufficiently clarified consumers' bodily behavior when they perceive affordances. Perceived affordances focus on responses resulting directly from human interactions with stimuli from the environment, whereas sensory marketing research focuses on cognitive interpretations or evaluations (e.g., it is important) and subsequent psychological intentions (e.g., purchases and recommendations) to stimuli from the environment (e.g., it is heavy). Thus, sensory-marketing research can be understood as indirect perceptual cognitivism. In contrast, the direct bodily reactions and behaviors resulting from interactions between the body and products and services have not been clarified, indicating the need to analyze consumer reactions at a more "automatic" level. Therefore, this study attempts to measure bodily attitudes. Bodily attitude is defined in this study as "a bodily reaction that indicates a favorable or unfavorable bodily tendency toward a product or service during human interaction with the product or service." To develop a scale to measure bodily attitudes, a survey was conducted to extract item elements. An online survey was conducted in July 2024 using 1,470 monitors registered with a crowdsourcing company, in which rewarded tasks were presented. Survey participants were asked to recall the brand names of the best products or services they had used in the past. Next, they were asked to recall scenes in which they had used these products and write down their own bodily reactions and changes in a free-form response format. Forty items were extracted from the collected data; 40 items were also extracted to measure body attitudes. Thereafter, an online survey was conducted to develop a scale that captured common bodily responses across multiple products and services from the extracted items. The survey was performed in September 2024 using 929 monitors registered with a crowdsourcing company. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the collected data, and four factors ("stability," "good condition," "activation," and "integration") were extracted as bodily attitudes. This study contributes to the literature by adopting an approach that focuses on embodiment based on the perspective of design research to measure attitudes, and attempts to measure bodily attitudes. This study focused on the interaction between the body and products or services based on direct perception. A focus on embodiment is essential for understanding brand experiences; the results of this study are useful both theoretically and practically for understanding the relationship between consumers and brands.

Joséphine Mariquivoi

Vrije Universiteit Brussels
Mobilise Research Group
Department BUTO – Business
Technology and Operations
Brussels, 1050
Belgium

☎ +32 (0)2 614 83 76
✉ josephine.mariquivoi@
vub.be

Heleen Buldeo Rai

Vrije Universiteit Brussels
Mobilise Research Group
Department BUTO – Business
Technology and Operations
Brussels, 1050
Belgium

☎ +32 (0)2 614 83 76
✉ heleen.buldeorai@vub.be

Koen Mommens

Vrije Universiteit Brussels
Mobilise Research Group
Department BUTO – Business
Technology and Operations
Brussels, 1050
Belgium

☎ +32 (0)2 614 83 76
✉ koen.mommens@vub.be

Reducing The Environmental Impact of Parcel Freight: A Geographic Assessment from a Consumer Perspective

E-commerce is now widely adopted in the market, characterized by increased parcels volumes to be distributed into the city. This growth contributes to rising numbers of delivery vehicles, leading to higher levels of traffic congestion, air pollution, noise nuisances and contributes to climate change. As urban areas are a concentration pole of e-commerce deliveries, mitigating the deliveries' environmental impact is crucial. Consequently, cities landscapes are changed by the development of numerous last-mile options to achieve zero-emission deliveries. Among these solutions, the development of collection points appears to be an effective alternative to home delivery. This network of collection points is composed by automatic lockers, postal offices, and traditional stores. However, while research shows that such networks avoid travel distance by delivery's vehicles, some authors also say that the environmental impact depends on the consumer behavior, which is determined in part by the built environment and the geographical context. Several studies have documented consumer's role and behavior into last mile logistics described with the concept of consumer logistics. However, the impact of consumer logistics and the interaction with logistics infrastructure such as collection points has yet to be understood. The latter, there is still a lack of accurate and scientific knowledge about the different environmental impact at a metropolitan scale while this context can be very contrasted due to the variation of population. How does the spatial distribution of socio-economic characteristics influence the environmental impact of using collection points? First, we assess with an external costs' method the environmental impact of each consumers trips. This analysis is based on a 1,300 respondents survey launched in Brussels Region (Belgium) in November 2022. Then, we analyze potential correlations with spatial consumers logistics infrastructures based on a postal code scale and open socio-economic and ethnic characteristics data. Finally, we define profiles based on this spatialization to propose recommendations for an efficient collection points network at a metropolitan scale.

Ammarah Marjan

London South Bank
University
Business School
London SE1 0AA
United Kingdom

☏ +44 755 325 0897
✉ marjana2@lsbu.ac.uk

Charles Graham

London South Bank
University
Business School
London SE1 0AA
United Kingdom

☏ +44 781 063 7244
✉ grahamca@lsbu.ac.uk

Do Channel Reward Programs Build Partner Loyalty? An Investigation Using the NBD Model

Investments in channel reward programs can lead to significant outcomes, with 69% of B2B firms reporting revenue growth and a 15% increase in average order value (Eser, 2024). While manufacturers increasingly adopt such programs, research in this area is limited. This study aims to fill the gap by examining whether loyalty initiatives influence B2B partner loyalty. Channel reward programs, especially in their digital format, are particularly interesting as they bypass distributors to engage directly with retailers, building closer relationships and increasing transparency in the value chain, benefiting all parties involved. While such programs are well-established in consumer markets, they often fail to influence loyalty significantly, as they tend to attract existing heavy buyers. In contrast, B2B channels—where direct sales, negotiation, and reciprocity are central—offer different dynamics. Channel reward programs may outperform traditional promotions by providing superior value and surpassing rivals. Despite their widespread use, the long-term impact of these programs on behavioral loyalty remains unclear, and there is a lack of established benchmarks for measuring their success. The Negative Binomial Distribution (NBD) model, widely used in marketing, serves as a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of reward programs in driving behavioral loyalty (repeat buying). The model accounts for variations in customer buying patterns over time and predicts the expected distribution of both lighter and heavier buyers, including any "excess loyalty" beyond these norms (Sharp & Sharp, 1997). By applying the NBD model across cross-sectional periods of the program rollout, we could detect shifts in loyalty patterns and compare these to the baseline loyalty levels predicted by the model. This research extended existing knowledge of repeat buying to the B2B context, addressing two key questions: Do channel reward programs drive partner loyalty, and can the NBD model predict their impact on B2B channel loyalty? To answer these questions, we analyzed 18 months of sales data from an international metal-cutting tools firm covering 90 distributors. The rewards program was gradually rolled out in three stages, expanding from 10 to 263 retailers. This staggered rollout enabled a natural experiment to compare buying frequencies between early and late adopters, testing the idea that heavy buyers sign up first (Sharp & Sharp, 1997). Our results showed that contrary to marketers' assumptions, reward programs may not enhance loyalty in the channel. We found that 1) the channel partner membership grew as the program expanded, but loyalty declined as more lighter buyers joined; 2) the NBD model accurately predicted buying behavior across all rollout stages in successive periods; and 3) channel buying behavior remained *normal*, with no signs of excess loyalty development. This suggests that although reward programs may not create a loyalty effect, the scheme's value lies in its digital structure, which could become the basis for channel relationships between manufacturers and retailers, especially when one did not exist before. These findings offer insights for firms aiming to build loyalty in their supply chains through reward programs, contributing to channel marketing theory and practice.

Elisa Martinelli

University of Modena and
Reggio Emilia
Department of Economics
Modena, 41121
Italy

☎ +39 592056858
✉ elisa.martinelli@unimore.it

Francesca De Canio

University of Modena and
Reggio Emilia
Department of Life Science
Reggio Emilia, 42122
Italy

☎ +39 522522044
✉ francesca.decanio@
   unimore.it

Elena Sarti

University of Modena and
Reggio Emilia
Department of Economics
Modena, 41121
Italy

☎ +39 592056858
✉ elena.sarti@unimore.it

Giulia Tagliazucchi

University of Modena and
Reggio Emilia
Department of Economics
Modena, 41121
Italy

☎ +39 592056808
✉ giulia.tagliazucchi@
   unimore.it

Boosting Retailers' Resilience to Natural Disasters: The Role of Hazard Experience Learning in a Dynamic Capability Perspective

Natural disasters - such as floods, earthquakes, but also biological pandemics - are increasingly hitting the world, seriously affecting people, destroying territories, and damaging businesses. Focusing on the latter, extant literature advises on the importance of developing enterprises' resilience, conceived as the "ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival" (Lengnick-Hall *et al.,* 2011, p. 244). Literature in the field demonstrated that retailers, especially the small ones, are among the most affected enterprises by the occurrence of a natural disaster (*e.g.,* Chang & Falit-Baltimonte 2002; Dietch & Corey 2011; Kroll *et al.,* 1990). In addition, retailing is a key sector in terms of economic and societal effects: it displays the highest number of enterprises and employees (Eurocommerce, 2023) and it has proven to strongly contribute to the building of a new normality in a hazard's aftermath, providing the affected community with crucial goods and services (Peterson *et al.,* 2010; Liu *et al.,* 2012). This key role is especially performed by micro and small retail enterprises (Ballantine *et al.,* 2014), who usually are highly responsive during the emergency phase of a natural disaster (Pearson *et al.,* 2011), but show difficulties in surviving in the long run. To make retailers to be prepared in advance to face the impact of threats, it is paramount to develop their dynamic capabilities (DCs) (Teece *et al.,* 1997) so that allowing adaptive strategies and reconfiguration of existing resources and capabilities to recover and continue to generate revenues. Nevertheless, is there also a hazard experience learning effect that can play a role? Our study intends to shed light on the dynamic capabilities that retailers should develop and/or enhance when being exposed to different natural disasters (first an earthquake and then the COVID-19 pandemic) to reduce the side-effects of external shocks and develop resilience (Tagliazucchi *et al.,* 2023). Even if some studies explored the effects of DCs on enterprises' resilience (Martinelli *et al.,* 2019; Tagliazucchi *et al.,* 2024), the role of the experience matured in facing a previous natural disaster remains unclear. Therefore, our research questions are the following: which kind of DCs impact retailer's resilience? Having been affected by an earthquake enables retailers to develop stronger DCs able to better prepare them for facing another kind of natural disaster, such as a biological pandemic? To respond to these enquiries, we performed a survey based on a structured questionnaire which was administered to a sample of more than 250 retailers who experienced both natural disasters. The survey took place in the period Winter 2023-Spring 2024. The work is in process and the analysis will be performed using PLS-SEM. The study aims at contributing to the literature on retailing and organizational resilience, by improving the scientific understanding of retailer's resilience determinants and their effects. We expect interesting results that can advise not only managerial strategies to be adopted by retailers but also public policies.

Huda K. Maulana

Reykjavik University
Center for Research in
Marketing and Consumer
Psychology
Reykjavik, 102
Iceland

Universitas Muhammadiyah
Surakarta
Management Dept.
Surakarta, 57162
Indonesia

☏ +354 599 6200
✉ huda23@ru.is

Valdimar Sigurdsson

Reykjavik University
Center for Research in
Marketing and Consumer
Psychology
Reykjavik, 102
Iceland

✉ valdimars@ru.is

Nils Magne Larsen

UiT- The Arctic University
of Norway
School of Business and
Economics
Harstad, 9404
Norway

✉ nils.magne.larsen@
uit.no

Michał Folwarczny

University of Galway
J.E. Cairnes School of
Business & Economics
Ireland

✉ michal.folwarczny@
universityofgalway.ie

Retail Brand in Driving Sustainable Shopping Behavior: A Signaling Perspective

The hyperconnected retail environment has significantly reduced information-search barriers, leading consumers to perceive lower information asymmetry and reduced risk (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, retail brands may become weaker signal sources compared to other sources (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kostyra *et al.*, 2016; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). This study builds on the information economics perspective of retail brand equity (RBE), where RBE is seen as a process through which brand credibility is established (Erdem *et al.*, 1999; Erdem & Swait, 1998). The primary aim of this research is to understand the attributes that signal the credibility of a retail brand's positioning and how this affects shopper choice. This research addresses three key questions. First, how do consumer signals (customer reviews) and authority signals (certification / retailer's claim) influence the choice of sustainable grocery stores? Second, what is the relative importance of convenience factors (e.g., price, delivery options and assortment) in sustainable grocery shopping decisions? Finally, how do different consumer groups respond to varying brand signals and convenience factors? Three studies will be conducted to address these questions. The first study involves online shopper interviews aimed at identifying relevant attributes across different shopping motivations. Studies 2 and 3 will use choice-based experiments to simulate store choice in two contexts: hedonic and utilitarian shopping. These studies seek to understand how retailer brand equity signals influence consumer choices and how convenience factors shape preferences. Additionally, they will identify consumer segments and explore how these attributes influence their decisions. A particular strength of the presented study lies in its application of CBC analysis to explore how brand equity signals (consumer and authority signals) serve as credibility cues for retail brand positioning. By forcing participants to trade off these signals against other attributes, CBC mimics real-world decision-making. From an information economics perspective of brand equity, CBC helps analyze how these signals create perceived brand value, allowing to model not just static brand preferences but dynamic consumer choice processes driven by the retail brand equity. Additionally, CBC will identify how each consumer segment prioritizes different factors through utility estimation using hierarchical Bayes estimation, providing more granular analysis into segment-specific trade-offs.

Valentina Mazzoli

University of Verona
Department of Management
Verona, 37129
Italy

✉ valentina.mazzoli@univr.it

Ilenia Confente

University of Verona
Department of Management
Verona, 37129
Italy

☎ +39 045 802 8174
✉ ilenia.confente@univr.it

Benedetta Baldi

University of Verona
Department of Management
Verona, 37129
Italy

✉ benedetta.baldi@univr.it

Ivan Russo

University of Verona
Department of Management
Verona, 37129
Italy

☎ +39 045 802 8161
✉ ivan.russo@univr.it

Bring It Back: Factors Influencing Participation in Retailer Take-Back Programs

In Europe, each individual throws away around 12 kilograms of textiles each year, contributing to roughly 5.8 million tons of textile waste. While some used clothing is exported outside the EU, an impressive 87% is either incinerated or ends up in landfills (European Commission, 2023). In response, a growing number of fashion retailers are implementing circular practices (Srivastava *et al.,* 2024) and closed-loop supply chain strategies (Denizel & Schumm, 2023), such as take-back programs to prevent used clothing from ending up in landfills (McKinsey, 2022). These initiatives are designed to handle the disposal or repurposing of products. Customers participate in these initiatives by returning items to retailers, often in exchange for incentives. Retailers may manage the returned goods in-house or collaborate with partner organizations (Tari & Trudel, 2024). Despite the progressive implementation of these practices, consumers' return rates continue to be low (Future Vvorld, 2022). Less than half of used garments are collected for reuse or recycling, and a mere 1% are recycled into new textiles (European Commission, 2023). Limited consumer engagement hinders the effectiveness of take-back programs. Furthermore, low participation leads to reduced collection volumes, which exacerbates diseconomies of scale in reverse logistics (Agrawal *et al.,* 2019). To increase participation, retailers should manage different factors simultaneously (Simpson *et al.,* 2019), such as the type of information about the program (e.g., the purpose of take-back programs), the number of incentives, and the channel available to customers to return their products (McKie *et al.,* 2023). Recent research by McKie *et al.,*(2023) investigated the effect of incentives and information about circular economy practices on consumer behavior. They found that generic information compared to no information leads to a higher likelihood of returning used clothes, which is further enhanced by offering financial incentives. However, it remains unclear under what conditions specific information about the purpose of take-back programs (e.g., resale, donations, recycling) increases products' return rate. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, little research has explored the effect of channel convenience (e.g., having to go to a physical store vs. using a return mailer) on consumer engagement (Esenduran *et al.,* 2020). This ongoing project addresses this gap by focusing on the type of information and channel used for product returns as potential drivers of consumer engagement in take-back programs. To test these relationships, we will use a series of online experiments in which a clothing take-back program varying the type of information regarding the purpose of take back (generic information vs resale vs recycling vs donation) and channel used for product return (in-store vs online return) is presented to consumers that will express their willingness to participate to the take-back initiative. Based on social judgment theory (Sherif *et al.,*1965), we expect that in the case of recycling and donations, the intention to participate in product returns will be higher compared to resale and generic information as the former ones activate respectively competence and warmth mechanisms that lead to higher consumer engagement. As the convenience of product returns is higher for the online return mailer compared to going to the physical store, we expect that the online return mailer used for product returns will magnify the positive effect of the type of information on consumer engagement. This research aims at contributing to the literature on retailers' circular practices and closed-loop supply chain programs. It offers practical guidance to retailers that want to implement take-back programs.

Ana Rita Medina

Instituto Universitário de
Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL)
Lisbon, 1649-026
Portugal

☎ +351 938909010
✉ ana_rita_medina@ iscte-
iul.pt

Margarida G. M. S.
Cardoso

Instituto Universitário de
Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Business
Research Unit (BRU-IUL)
Lisbon, 1649-026
Portugal

☎ +351 217650306
✉ margarida.cardoso@iscte-
iul.pt

Cruise Passenger Satisfaction and the Role of Past Experience: Analysis of User-Generated Content

This study examines cruise passengers' satisfaction based on user-generated content (i.e., quantitative ratings and narratives shared online). 416 text reviews and the corresponding ratings of quality attributes were collected from the Cruise Critic website for the cruise company with the highest market value and largest fleet worldwide, Royal Caribbean International. Within the used sample, 16 reviews were collected for each of Royal Caribbean's 26 ships. The relationships between cruisers' Overall Satisfaction and quality attributes grounded in literature were investigated. Eight quality dimensions - 'Entertainment', 'Dining', 'Fitness and Recreation', 'Cabins', 'Public Rooms', 'Value for Money', 'Embarkation', and 'Service' - were tested and proved to positively affect overall satisfaction. 'Value for Money' stands out as having the most impact on Overall Satisfaction. Past Cruising Experience (scale: 1- first-time cruisers, 2-two to five previous cruises, 3- six to ten previous cruises, 4- more than ten cruises) was proved to negatively affect guests' Overall Satisfaction, meaning that the higher the level of cruising experience, the lower the Overall Satisfaction tends to be, reflecting the high standards and expectations of the most experienced cruisers. Moderated Linear Regressions were used to analyze the moderator role of Past Experience on the relationships between each quality attribute and Overall Satisfaction. The moderating effects were found significant when regarding satisfaction with 'Cabins', 'Public Rooms', the 'Embarkation' process, and the 'Service' quality. The latter relationship was found to be the most sensitive to the moderating role of Past Experience. In general, the moderator effect tended to strengthen the direct relationship between the predictor and the Overall Satisfaction, as the level of experience decreased.

Stephanie Meek

Edith Cowan University
School of Business and Law
Joondalup, WA, 6027
Australia

☎ +61 08 6304 2509
✉ s.meek@ecu.edu.au

Jing Ren

Singapore University of Social
Sciences
School of Business
Singapore, 599494

☎ +65 6240 8796
✉ jingren@suss.edu.sg

Lester Johnson

Swinburne University of
Technology
School of Business, Law and
Entrepreneurship
Hawthorne, Victoria, 3122
Australia

☎ +61 03 9214 3880
✉ lwjohnson@swin.edu.au

Member Perceptions of Chatbot Integration in Online Brand Communities

The proposed research aims to provide a novel and interesting contribution to understanding technology acceptance within online brand communities (OBCs), focusing specifically on chatbot integration. By investigating individual member attitudes towards chatbots, this study will offer actionable insights for brands and community managers on effectively introducing chatbots in a way that aligns with member expectations and enhances the user experience. Additionally, the research will demonstrate the effectiveness of survey-based methods in capturing valuable feedback for digital innovation strategies. The findings will guide marketing managers in leveraging chatbots to improve community engagement and support, ultimately enabling more informed decision-making in digital community management. This research addresses the critical question: How do members of OBCs perceive the introduction of chatbots, and what factors influence their acceptance or resistance? This question is of paramount importance to marketing professionals as it explores the intersection of technology and community engagement—a vital component in modern digital marketing strategies. Understanding member attitudes toward chatbot integration can reveal insights into enhancing customer experience, fostering loyalty, and driving the community's long-term value creation and sustainable development. By identifying chatbots' perceived benefits and drawbacks, brands can tailor their strategies to meet member expectations, thereby improving the efficacy of their digital interactions and engagement efforts. This study will employ a survey-based research design to assess the attitudes of OBC members towards chatbot integration. The survey will be developed based on a thorough literature review and will be distributed to a representative sample of community members. First, we will extensively review existing research on OBCs, chatbots, user acceptance of technology, and digital community dynamics to inform the survey design. Second, from the theory perspective, we will leverage the Innovation Resistance Theory and Technology Acceptance Theory to examine the potential drivers of acceptance and the barriers to adopting chatbots in the brand community context. Then, we will create a comprehensive survey instrument including questions on perceived usefulness and risk, ease of use, trust in technology, potential concerns, and overall sentiment towards chatbots. A professional panel will distribute the survey to a diverse and representative sample of OBC members, ensuring it reaches different demographic segments and gathers a broad range of perspectives. This approach will address any potential concerns regarding external validity.

Selmar Meents

Amsterdam University
of Applied Sciences
1102 CV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

✉ s.meents@hva.nl

Tibert Verhagen

Amsterdam University
of Applied Sciences
1102 CV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

✉ t.verhagen @hva.nl

Stephanie
van de Sanden

Amsterdam University
of Applied Sciences
1102 CV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

✉ s.van.de.sanden@hva.nl

Kim Willems

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
1050 Brussel
Belgium

✉ kim.willems@vub.be

Malaika Brengman

Vrije Universiteit Brussel
1050 Brussel
Belgium

✉ malaika.brengman@
   vub.be

How In-Store Technology Complements the Store: A Niche Gratification Study of Interactive Kiosks

In today's retail landscape, in-store technology is rapidly transforming how consumers interact with physical stores (Grewal *et al.*, 2023). One such innovation is the interactive kiosk, which is an in-store, digital, self-service system employing hardware such as a computer, tablet or larger touch-based display to allow two-way communication with customers (cf. Inman & Nikolova, 2017; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). Such technology provides multiple functions such as information provision, advertising and promotion, and transaction services. This study specifically focuses on interactive kiosks that offer more basic and common, information provisioning functionality. Interactive kiosks are more than just digital interfaces; they represent a distinct retail service delivery channel within the physical retail channel, integrating the convenience of online shopping with physical store interactions (Schweitzer & Simon, 2021). By doing so, they play an important role in facilitating omnichannel retail by complementing physical stores (e.g., Fang *et al.*, 2021; Wagner *et al.*, 2020). Despite the recognized importance of combining the particular beneficial features of individual channels in order to create synergy between those channels (e.g., Gao *et al.*, 2021; Riegger *et al.*, 2021), few, if any, empirical studies offer further insight into how interactive kiosk features can create such synergy with a physical store. This study adopts and validates a novel conceptual approach to establishing the complementarity between retail channels drawing on three major theoretical frameworks: channel complementarity theory (e.g., Dutta-Bergman, 2004), media niche theory (e.g., Dimmick *et al.*, 2011), and the uses and gratifications perspective (e.g., Rubin, 2008). Specifically, this study explores how particular beneficial features, termed *niche gratifications* (cf. Ramirez *et al.*, 2008), of interactive kiosks complement the physical retail environment. We empirically study the relationships between the (1) interactive kiosks' complementarity, conceptualized as four particular niche gratifications (access to large assortment, rich product information, ease of browsing and entertainment), (2) two shopping benefits (shopping effectiveness and positive affect) and (3) individual store visitors' attitude towards using the interactive kiosk for shopping. A sample of 360 actual store visitors that used an interactive kiosk was employed to validate the research model. The results indicate that two niche gratifications, ease of browsing and entertainment, have a positive effect on shopping effectiveness and positive affect. Additionally, the niche gratification 'access to a large assortment' enhances positive affect, but no effect was found on shopping effectiveness. Also, no significant effect was found for the niche gratification of rich product information on the shopping benefits.

Anastasia Mirow

Clausthal University of Technology
Department of Marketing
Clausthal-Zellerfeld, 38678
Germany

☏ +49 5323 72 7658
✉ anastasia.mirow@tu-clausthal.de

Peter Kurz

BMS Marketing Research & Strategy
Munich, 81241
Germany

☏ +49 89 88969442
✉ p.kurz@bms-net.de

Winfried J. Steiner

Clausthal University of Technology
Department of Marketing
Clausthal-Zellerfeld, 38678
Germany

☏ +49 5323 72 7650
✉ winfried.steiner@tu-clausthal.de

On the Use of Alternative-Specific Designs in Choice-Based Conjoint Analysis – An Illustration for Measuring Preferences for Electric Vehicles in the UK

Consumer preferences are typically measured via conjoint analysis, with choice-based conjoint representing the dominant approach nowadays. In this contribution, we'd like to draw the attention to the use of alternative-specific designs (ASD) for choice-based conjoint studies. As opposed to transportation research, where the ASD approach originated from and is still widely used in discrete choice experiments, this design method is totally underrepresented in marketing research, despite its obvious superiority for generating much more realistic choice situations for respondents. Instead, generic main-effects designs are typically used in the retailing and consumer science field. We show why and when it is recommendable to use an ASD in choice-based conjoint studies and work out the particularities of interpreting the estimation results of an ASD-CBC model and calculating related willingness-to-pay quantities. For illustration, we present an empirical example based on an ASD-CBC study on consumer preferences for electric vehicles in the UK. We also provide an overview of possible remedies to prevent an ASD-CBC model from overfitting due to too many parameters, which include different options to estimate price effects, imposing monotonicity constraints on the price estimates, or recoding the ASD after the data have been collected into a generic main-effects design for subsequent model estimation. We further propose a typology for characterizing different types of ASD structures.

Sarah Montano

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ s.e.montano@bham.ac.uk

Inci Toral

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ i.n.toral.1@bham.ac.uk

Experiential Learning and Authentic Assessment: Future Proofing Graduate Employability

We as HEI's we are constantly critiqued for not delivering graduates with employability skills (Baska, 2019). In addition, within the retail sector, low skilled tasks will be the job of digital technology and the jobs our graduates will seek require skills such as creativity and critical thinking capabilities, often known as the "so-called human skills" (Montano & Toral Manson 2024). In the light of these discussions, we respond to Barber *et al.* (2013) invitation to universities, to take advantage of technological opportunities by not only allowing our students to develop stronger skills that incorporate innovation, technology, and creativity, to enable retail graduate success but also develop an understanding of sustainable and responsible retail formats. Yet, how to offer deliver an experiential learning and authentic assessment can be a challenge for HEI's. We present a solution to skill development for the 4th Industrial Revolution. To achieve this, we introduce the Experiential Learning Authentic Assessment (ELAAD) framework, which is designed to foster employability skills in marketing careers and environmental consciousness among students. This framework is grounded in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and enhanced by authentic assessments that simulate real-world tasks and conditions (McArthur, 2023). Authentic assessments are defined as outcome focused and aimed at engaging students with real-world tasks through creative thinking and problem-solving exercises (Moon *et al.*, 2005). The ELAAD framework is exemplified through its application in a postgraduate Retail Marketing module, where students create a video showcasing their dream retailer, thereby integrating sustainable marketing theories with industry relevant skills (Montano & Toral Manson, 2024). We will also outline a four-step roadmap for retail educators to embed authentic assessments into their curricula. Through this conceptualization, we will demonstrate how a pedagogic challenge can be used as an opportunity through innovative and creative thinking and contribute to student experience. We believe teaching retailing is an innovative and creative subject and through this a holistic learning experience happens among the students and faculty that feed forward the experiential retail education. Our paper adds to the conversation on sustainable retail education by offering a practical framework and roadmap for educators. It highlights the necessity for a paradigm shift in retail education towards a more responsible and sustainable approach, in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The study's findings and recommendations are particularly pertinent to the development of marketing and retailing curricula, providing insights on how retail and marketing educators can effectively equip students for the changing demands of the marketplace and society at large.

Abhilash Sugunan Nair

Queen Margaret University
Queen Margaret Business
School
Edinburgh, EH21 6UU
United Kingdom

☎ +44 7954952968
✉ ASugunanNair@qmu.ac.uk

Jennifer Murray

Glasgow Caledonian
University
Glasgow School for Business
and Society
Glasgow, G4 0BA
United Kingdom

☎ +44 1413318010
✉ jennifer.murray@gcu.ac.uk

Destigmatising Sex: The Role of "Sexfluencers" in Deconstructing Sex Positivity Through Digital Advocacy on Social Media

This research investigates the role of "sexfluencers" - social media influencers committed to normalizing and destigmatising discussions surrounding sex and sexual health - in deconstructing societal taboos through digital advocacy. As cultural attitudes towards sexual expression evolve, shaped by historical contexts and societal norms (Foucault, 1990; Alderson, 2016), social media has emerged as a crucial platform for disseminating information and influencing perceptions regarding sexual wellbeing. This study critically examines how sexfluencers contribute to the discourse of sex positivity by promoting open communication, challenging stereotypes and advocating for body acceptance. Employing a thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we initially identified 30 sexfluencers, ultimately refining our focus to four diverse individuals representing a spectrum of identities and perspectives: a female doctor of Asian descent, a middle-aged lifestyle coach, an LGBTQ+ community member and a heterosexual male advocate. Data collection utilized the paid version of exportcomments.com, yielding a dataset of 3,158 text-based posts from Instagram, which was subsequently refined to 1,238 relevant items for analysis. The thematic analysis revealed ten core themes that encapsulate the sexfluencers' advocacy efforts: Open Communication and Authenticity, Body Positivity and Self-Acceptance, Challenging Stereotypes and Breaking Norms, Sexual Health and Wellbeing, Empowerment and Individuality, Sex Positivity and Pleasure, Consent and Boundaries, Diverse Relationship Styles, Advocacy and Awareness and Challenging Societal Constructs. Our findings indicate that sexfluencers play a pivotal role in reshaping the dialogue surrounding sexual health, ultimately fostering a more inclusive understanding of sexuality within contemporary society. This research contributes to the discourse on digital activism in the realm of sexual health and underscores the significance of social media in advocating for sex positivity and dismantling entrenched stereotypes.

Maike Netscher

Neu-Ulm University of
Applied Sciences
Wileystraße 1
89231 Neu-Ulm
Germany

☎ +49 731 9762 1454
✉ maike.netscher@hnu.de

Alexander Kracklauer

Neu-Ulm University of
Applied Sciences
Wileystraße 1
89231 Neu-Ulm
Germany

☎ +49 731 9762 1416
✉ alexander.kracklauer
@hnu.de

Christian Schieder

Amberg-Weiden University of
Applied Sciences
Hetzenrichter Weg 15
92637 Weiden
Germany

☎ +49 961 382 1321
✉ c.schieder@oth-aw.de

Understanding Service Quality in Smart Stores: Do Retailers' Perceptions Match Customers' Expectations?

Smart stores are physical retail environments that integrate smart technologies and services to create a connected and predominantly unstaffed service landscape (Chang *et al.*, 2023). These stores enable a seamless shopping experience to increase customer satisfaction, address skilled labor shortages, and ensure local supply (Chen & Chang, 2023). New customer expectations and regulatory conditions pose structural and qualitative challenges for service portfolios in smart stores, leading to constant revisions and hesitant implementation (Benoit *et al.*, 2024; Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, it is imperative to examine customer expectations of smart stores and align the service portfolio accordingly. While the existing literature mainly focuses on the benefits (e.g., Denuwara *et al.*, 2021), technical solutions (e.g., Budakova & Dakovski, 2019), and empirical effects on customers such as acceptance (e.g., Netscher *et al.*, 2024), there is a lack of research examining the qualitative requirements of smart stores as a prerequisite for service quality and store retention (Quinones *et al.*, 2023; Staab *et al.*, 2023). Our study addresses this need by pursuing two objectives: First, to identify the dimensions of service quality as expected by customers, and second, to compare these dimensions with customer expectations as perceived by retailers to reveal gaps in service quality. Based on the 'knowledge gap' of the gap model of service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), we address three research questions: (1) What do customers expect from smart stores? (2) Which expectations do retailers perceive from the customer's perspective? (3) What are the gaps between customer expectations and retailer perceptions of service quality in smart stores? The authors conducted two thematic analyzes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), one for customer expectations and one for retailer perceptions, to identify themes in the data. The themes were differentiated into antecedents, dimensions, and outcomes to illustrate interrelationships (Morris & Feldman, 1996). The Smart Stores Service Quality (S3Q) framework was developed by the authors based on customer expectations. In addition, the themes identified by S3Q are contrasted with those of retailers in a comparative analysis (Ragin & Zaret, 1983) to identify gaps in service quality and to address the research questions. Initial results suggest that from the customer's perspective, five antecedents influence ten quality dimensions. These dimensions influence customer satisfaction and further usage intention as output. Furthermore, a divergence in the perception of retailers was discerned, suggesting deficiencies in service quality. For instance, customers expect technical and human assistance, e.g., by visualizations in the customer app or personal contact, while experts do not consider assistance important. Furthermore, the experts did not perceive dimensions such as autonomy or customization as relevant. The study contributes to issues in practice by identifying gaps in service quality and deriving strategies to increase customer satisfaction and the intention to use smart stores. Furthermore, the study contributes to research by building on existing service quality research and identifying key service quality dimensions in smart stores. Additionally, it extends theory by providing a framework for analyzing quality gaps, exploring their causes, and developing potential solution.

Tim Nicolas Nierobisch Digital Signage and Price Tags: Driving or Diluting Sales?

Hochschule Hannover
University of Applied Sciences
and Arts
Industrial Marketing & Sales
Hannover
Germany

☎ +49 174 3030 285
✉ tim-nicolas.nierobisch@
hs-hannover.de

Jonas Alexander

Duale Hochschule Schleswig-
Holstein (DHSH)
Cooperative University of
Applied Sciences
Flensburg
Germany

☎ +49 461 807101548
✉ jonas.alexander@team.de

Volker Behn

Team Energie GmbH & Co.
KG
Flensburg
Germany

☎ +49 461 80710 1210
✉ volker.behn@team.de

Physical stores continually face the challenge of coping with digital sales channels in modern retailing. To make physical stores more attractive to consumers, the incorporation of increasingly more elements of the digital channel into the physical world is pivotal. With the integration of advanced digital signage and digital price tags into stores, namely on shelf facings, advantages such as dynamic pricing (Kopalle *et al.*, 2023; Syed *et al.*, 2024) or enhanced [digital] store atmosphere (Garaus & Wagner, 2019) are introduced into the physical retailing world, shaping phygital retailing (Banik & Gao, 2023). It is unsurprising that the body of knowledge on digital signage and digital price tags, which can be interpreted as mini digital signage applications, is expanding. From a resource-based perspective, digital signage and digital price tags enable the quick adaptation of prices and advertising in response to demand. Moreover, the need to change paper-based ads or price tags has become obsolete, as the displayed message can be changed at the push of a button or even by automated applications hosted on a server. This development allows the salesforce and store management to focus on more important store tasks, such as ordering products, stocking the shelves, or improving store hygiene. While extensive research has focused on consumer perception and behavioral intentions (e.g., Dennis *et al.*, 2010, 2014; Szocs *et al.*, 2023), the economic impact of introducing digital signage and, in particular, digital price tags that utilize the vibrant and engaging display capability of digital signage screens at the shelf front, remains less understood. However, understanding the economic benefit is crucial, as new technology implementations require substantial investments in hardware, software, and integration with ERP systems. Nanni & Ordanini (2024) were at the forefront of investigating the economic benefits of digital signage and price display by designing field experiments in a supermarket. Their focus was mainly on large screens and their positioning within various store sections. However, digital signage is evolving rapidly. Presently, digital signage is integrated into shelf facings, enabling digital price tag displays and advertising directly at the product's location on the shelves. This progress raises the research question of whether digital signage drives sales and even accelerates its potential by displaying price promotions at the shelf front. To seek an answer, the authors use a mixed-methods approach: In Study 1, transaction scanner data is analyzed from two identical convenience stores of a gas station chain in Northern Germany. One store displays prices and promotions on traditional paper-based solutions, while the other employs digital signage and digital price tags on the shelf facings. The results suggest a diluting effect initially but a promising increase in sales over time. In Study 2, the authors aim to explain the results of the transaction scanner data by analyzing responses from a questionnaire distributed among potential customers.

Genevieve O'Connor

Fordham University
Gabelli School of Business
New York, NY 10023
USA

☏ +1 6094137642
✉ geoconnor@
   fordham.edu

Hoori Rafieian

Fordham University
Gabelli School of Business
New York, NY 10023
USA

☏ +1 2126366296
✉ hrafieiankoopaei@
   fordham.edu

Nancy Wong

University of Wisconsin-
Madison
School of Human Ecology
Madison, WI 53706
USA

☏ +1 6082655954
✉ nywong@wisc.edu

Uncovering Drivers of Vaccination Compliance

In the US and in other economically developed western countries, vaccine resistance persists across different segments of the population. Given vaccines significant protective benefits to the self and others, public policy cannot wait to manage the uncertainties surrounding vaccines and hence, may adopt vaccine mandates in the context of an outbreak. However, before such mandates are followed or even created, it is essential to understand the underlying drivers and motivators for individuals to follow such mandates. Drawing on models of moral decision making (e.g., Graham *et al.*, 2009; Jost *et al.*, 2008), we propose that people's fundamental moral values, as evinced through political orientation (e.g., liberals and conservatives), shape perceptions of vaccination mandates' ethicality, and will lead them to have materially different vaccination behaviors. We further posit that power distance belief, an individual characteristic which taps the extent to which one accepts power in society (Hofstede 2001), interacts with conservatism-liberalism ideologies to affect ethicality perceptions of vaccine mandates as well as complying with them. We reason that because power distance belief is aligned with authority, one of the main unique moral foundations that conservatives rely on to make ethical judgments, it can serve as a potential buffer against the negative effects of conservatism on one's compliance of mandates. In other words, while conservatism tends to have a negative effect on complying with vaccine mandates and the intention to get vaccinated, this effect will be mitigated to the extent that they (conservative individuals) hold power distance belief. Across three studies, we show that power distance belief interacts with political ideologies to mitigate the negative effect of conservative political orientation on vaccination attitudes and behaviors. Further, we test a communication strategy that implies power distance and show that such strategy can help to improve vaccine intention among conservatives. ur findings shed light on a key underlying mechanism for lower vaccine mandate compliance among conservatives by demonstrating that the differing moral value systems within which conservatives and liberals operate will lead to materially different perceptions of ethicality of vaccine mandates. These findings are especially important in an age of political polarization and anti-vaccination sentiment.

Gunnar Oskarsson

University of Iceland
School of Business
Reykjavik, 101
Iceland

☎ +354 525 5107
✉ gunnaros@hi.is

Gudjon H. Egilsson

University of Iceland
School of Business
Reykjavik, 101
Iceland

☎ +354 773 4050
✉ ghe@hi.is

Turning Point in E-Business:
The Continuation of the Use of E-Commerce Post Covid

During Covid and various related restrictions, many consumers were forced to use e-commerce to cope with living conditions. Results of a survey conducted in Iceland at the beginning of the Covid period showed that 40% who were not used to shop much on the Internet tried it during Covid. The objective of this research is to investigate to what extent the change of shopping habits of individuals on the internet prevailed after the Covid period restrictions had stopped. Furthermore, this research investigates the different impact these changes have on the shopping habits of different product categories, age groups and other variables of interest. The research furthermore analyses important factors that have an impact on the continuation of buying behavior. A quantitative approach using on-line survey conducted approximately two years after the Covid restrictions were released, based on a convenience sample from selected Facebook groups of participants 18 years or older. The total number of participants were 414, whereof 17.4% were men, 82.1% women and 0.5% other. Most of the respondents were at the age of 21-50 years, 32.37% were between 21-35 years and 32.85% between 36 and 50 years. 23.19% of respondents were 51-65 years and 7.73% 66 years or older. Although this profile does not reflect the population, it is a known bias in surveys based on Facebook samples and will be corrected in the analysis to reflect the population. The results show that Covid triggered a moment of change, however, most of the respondents were already used to shopping on the Internet, as only 26% began to use e-commerce due to Covid. However, the shopping habits of new e-commerce users after Covid seemed to be affected quite reasonably, as they used the Internet for shopping to a greater extent than the other group, who had used e-commerce before for most product categories. The respondents were asked questions on to what extent they used the Internet to buy a variety of product groups using a 5-point Likert scale, asking which product categories they shopped on the Internet, with lowest ranging (1) from "not at all" to (5) "a very great extent". It is interesting to note that the new users shopped all product categories to a greater extent than those who had shopped on the Internet prior to Covid, with the greatest difference in groceries, where the average for new users was 2.36, , but 1.79 for previous users. The difference for other product categories, which included clothing, shoes, furniture, electronics, entertainment and others was somewhat less. This research demonstrates that a moment of change like Covid can speed up the use of e-commerce, but the sustainable impact is somewhat different by product categories. It is therefore important for businesses to utilize these changes, build up good relationships with their new e-commerce users and take good care of the infrastructure to make the shopping experience as enjoyable as possible. The research contributes to further understanding on this interesting topic for practitioners as academics.

Friederike Paetz

Anhalt University of Applied
Sciences
06406 Bernburg
Germany

☎ +49 3471 355 1115
✉ friederike.paetz
   @hs-anhalt.de

Mahmood Pedram

Grenoble Ecole de
Management
F-38000 Grenoble
France

☎ +33 4 5680 6876
✉ mahmood.pedram
   @grenoble-em.com

A Comparison of E-Sports Tournament Organizers' Reward Structures: Which One to Favor to Attract Audience and Sponsors?

Video gaming, and in particular, competitive video gaming is a relatively new phenomenon that has grown rapidly in the past few years (Digital Media 2023). Today, video gaming is a $180 billion industry. However, video gaming, although expanding rapidly, encompasses many aspects, including sales of video game titles, but also of video gaming hardware including its many platforms (PC, console games, as well as purpose-built mobile devices). However, the most rapidly growing aspect of the video gaming industry is esports (competitive gaming). Although today it is valued at only $1.1 billion, it is growing at an exponential rate. Spending on esports covers many areas, from advertising and sponsorships to media rights, ticket sales and merchandising. Since there is no central authority that manages the yearly tournaments, one of the main challenges for event organizers is competition for audiences. Naturally, the easiest way to attract a large audience is by expanding the prize pool. Buzz around the winnings of players playing video games permeates the gaming community and attracts more views to these events. It's an amiable cycle: more prize money attracts more audience, which attracts more sponsorships, which increases the prize pool, which attracts more audience. The effect is strengthened when we consider the fact that larger prize pool attracts the best players in the game, which in turn attracts viewers that want to watch these players compete in their favorite game. In order to attract (top) players in a most efficient way, the reward structure is key. Hence, tournament organizers have to determine how the prize pool is split up to the best players in the tournament. We analyze the optimality of differing reward structures of two competing tournaments in the presence of a heterogeneous pool of players in terms of playing skill. In particular, we scrutinize four different reward structures, i.e., winner-takes-it-all, exponential design, linear design and logarithmic design. Using a game-theoretic model, we show that the existence of a clear best player that is significantly better than the rest of the player pool results in a more exponential design of the reward structure at the optimum. In the absence of such a player, a more linear design is better. Furthermore, we conducted a simulation-based framework, that relies on random utility theory (Train, 2009). We show that smaller tournaments also favor exponential reward structures while larger tournaments favor more linear designs. We conclude that tournament organizers should reconsider the most common practice to use exponential reward structures. In particular, several factors should be taken into account, e.g., number of contestants, distribution of player skill levels (in particular at the top), general level of uncertainty in the outcome. By diligently choosing the most appropriate reward structure, both the number of viewers, and by extension. the amount of sponsorship can be increased, which is key for e-sport tournament organizers.

Anders Parment

Stockholm University
Stockholm Business School
Stockholm, S-106 91
Sweden

☏ +46 705 130363
✉ anp@sbs.su.se

Carvana's Comeback: From Bold Disruption to Near Collapse and Profitable Revival

Carvana, a US online car dealer that promised to revolutionize the used car market by offering superior efficiency and prepare used vehicles at a fraction of the cost at traditional dealerships, faced a turbulent journey. Founded in 2012, Carvana introduced a convenient, digital approach to buying cars, eliminating the need for physical showrooms and salespeople. The company's bold promises and aggressive growth strategy, however, came at a steep price. Rapid expansion and the logistical challenges of managing inventory, delivery, and financing stretched the company's resources. By 2022, Carvana was grappling with high debt, operational inefficiencies, and a plummeting stock price, down 98% from ATH, raising serious concerns about its solvency. Contrary to the bold statements on its efficiency, Carvana had lost more than USD 5 billion on the first million cars sold, a remarkable loss in an industry known for thin margins, but with few companies losing large amounts of money. This in-depth case study explores how Carvana, during a period when many traditional car dealerships struggled with high inflation, rising interest rates, and slow sales, managed to achieve profitability, contrary to other e-commerce projects. Facing near-bankruptcy, Carvana undertook drastic restructuring efforts, including cost-cutting measures, optimizing its logistics network, and refining its inventory management. The company also restructured its debt, gained new investors, and began focusing on profitability rather than pure growth. By 2024, these efforts paid off, and Carvana reached profitability for the first time, demonstrating resilience in an intensely competitive market. The case study demonstrates how corporate agility, the ability to adapt to challenges, and a solid understanding of profitable retailing, combined with a commitment to customer service and satisfaction, ultimately enabled the successful fusion of industry transformation and profitability. Carvana's turnaround offers valuable lessons on managing growth, adapting to market realities, recovering from near-failure, and achieving customer satisfaction and approval without solely focusing on high CSI scores. Based on a thorough investigation of Carvana's history and its bumpy road to where the company is today, this extensive case study provides key insights into how retailers facing tough times could identify challenges, solve emerging issues and become leaders in the transition towards profitable e-commerce solutions.

Megan Phillips

Auckland University of Technology
School of Business, Economics & Law
Auckland, 1010
New Zealand

☎ +64 9 921 9999 ext 5428
✉ mphillip@aut.ac.nz

Alexandra Hess

Massy University
School of Business, Economics & Law
Auckland, 1010
New Zealand

✉ a.hess@massey.ac.nz

Euejung Hwang

The University of Edinburgh
Business School
Edinburgh, EH8 9JS
The United Kingdom

☎ +44 7428 918 611
✉ euejung.hwang@ed.ac.uk

Green Shelves, Poor Choices: The Unintended Consequences of Colour on Wholesome Choices

Retailers frequently use green in their store environments to evoke a sense of freshness, health, naturalness, and sustainability, reinforcing their brand values (Supermarket News, 2022). However, this colour choice might have unintended consequences on consumer health. This research explores whether store environmental colour influence consumer preference for wholesome foods and seeks to understand the underlying mechanism behind this effect. Consumer purchasing decisions are often influenced by the store's atmosphere. Research shows that certain environmental colours, like blue, can induce relaxation and stimulate purchases (Babin *et al.*, 2003; Bellizzi *et al.*, 1983; Bellizi & Hite, 1992). Yet, how these colours affect food choices remains underexplored. Two theoretical perspectives offer competing predictions. Licensing theory posits that individuals justify indulgent or less virtuous behavior after making decisions aligned with their goals or values (Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015; Khan & Dhar, 2006). In the context of food purchasing, situational cues that support long-term goals like eating healthy (Wilcox *et al.*, 2009), can create a sense of progress. This perceived progress allows individuals to feel as though they have earned the right to indulge afterward (Prinsen *et al.*, 2019; Salerno *et al.*, 2015; Wilcox *et al.*, 2009). When exposed to a color like green– associated with health, nature and sustainability (Hallez *et al.*, 2023; Herbes *et al.*, 2020) – consumers might subconsciously interpret the environment as being healthy or promoting well-being. This could trigger a licensing effect, where they feel justified in choosing less wholesome foods due to the store's perceived healthiness. In contrast, contrast theory suggests that the visibility and appeal of products are shaped by background colors. High-contrast backgrounds, such as grey, can enhance the attractiveness of fresh produce (Howell & Schifferstein, 2019) while low-contrast colors, like green shelving against colorful fruits and vegetables, could make items appear less vivid (Brown & MacLeod, 1997). This diminished contrast could reduce the appeal of healthy options. Studies show that color contrast can influence not only the amount eaten (Van Ittersum & Wansink, 2012), but also the attractiveness of the food (Piqueras-Fiszmann *et al.*, 2012), and quantity consumed (Dunne *et al.*, 2004). In the current research, we propose that, based on contrast theory, shelving with grey (vs. green) may highlight wholesome foods more clearly, making them stand out and reinforcing health goals. This increased visibility may encourage consumers to make wholesome choices. Across two experimental studies, we demonstrate that green decreases shoppers' likelihood of selecting wholesome baskets of foods and increases choice of less wholesome food compared to a grey. This effect is driven by a contrast mechanism: green shelves make wholesome items less visually prominent, thereby reducing their appeal and sense of progress towards health goals. Consequently, shoppers are more likely to make less healthy choices when exposed to green compared to grey. Our findings reject the hypothesis that licensing theory explains these outcomes. Instead, we highlight the role of visual contrast in food selection and health goal adherence. By showing how environmental colours impact food choices, we contribute to the literature on store atmospherics and caution retailers and brand managers to consider the use of green in their store environments.

Doreén Pick

Merseburg University of
Applied Sciences
Merseburg, 06217
Germany

☏ +49 3461 463408
✉ doreen.pick@hs-
   merseburg.de

The "Purpose Marketing" Myth – Effect of "True Price" Campaigns on Emotions and Intentions in Food Retail

Under the term "purpose marketing", several brand companies and retailers began to address environmental protection issues and social issues such as gender equality (e.g. Bud Light with transgender influencer Mulvaney). Companies highlight their positive effects on environment and society. There are numerous studies on such Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that showed positive effects such as higher willingness to pay (e.g., Campbell, 2007; Koschate-Fischer *et al.,* 2016) and higher purchase intentions from the company (e.g., Bianchi, Bruno and Sarabia-Sanchez, 2019). However, other research provide evidence for negative consequences (e.g., Habel *et al.,* 2016; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013; Wang *et al.,* 2018) or show no effect on willingness to pay (for environmental CSR campaigns, see Gálvez-Sánchez *et al.,* 2024). But, purpose marketing campaigns can also have a negative impact on sales partners and employees, as the example of EDEKA showed with the anti-AfD campaign in August 2024 (no date, 2024). Similar, several studies showed how perceptions of greenwashing negatively influence consumer attitudes and intentions (e.g. Sajid *et al.,* 2024; Szabo & Webster, 2021). In recent years, companies have also started to take up such environmental and social issues to justify higher prices for their products, in particular for food items. This phenomenon has become known as "true prices" or "true costing" (e.g., Goldman & Weltevreden, 2024; Wilken *et al.,* 2024) or "true value" (Unnikrishnanm 2021). A recent example is the German discounter Penny (part of the REWE Group). In August 2023, the company sold nine conventionally and organically produced private label products for a week at the true price. This true price considered environmental costs, including CO_2 emissions and water and resource consumption. The prices of the private label items varied by up to 100 percent above the regular retail price. According to Penny's own statement, the target was to "create a basis for broadening the discussion about food prices" (Penny, 2023). Penny may also have hoped that such a field experiment would have positive effects on customer numbers and sales. Nonetheless, to our perspective, the discounter took a certain risk. Therefore, the aim of our study is to investigate perceptions and intentions of consumers and thus provide an unbiased picture of such "true price" CSR campaign. Previous studies have either interviewed people or created fictitious situations in scenario experiments. Our study focuses on unobserved people in order to capture true assessments and intentions and thus achieve higher external validity. For our study, we evaluated over *500 consumer comments* on the "True Price" promotion of Penny. We collected these comments from the website of a nationally distributed daily newspaper that reported about the Penny campaign and evaluated them by conducting a content analysis. Our approach is to record not only the types of emotions (e.g. mistrust) and attitudes but also the users' intentions regarding the products and the company itself. We therefore identify the general effect of "True price" campaigns. Our first results show that negative emotions clearly predominate and users are even willing to boycott the company after such campaign. It also becomes evident that "True Price" campaigns are also assessed from a socio-political perspective. Consumers feel that their lifestyle is patronized and they generally express negative comments about similar campaigns. The work is in progress. Final results will be presented at the conference.

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 3263
✉ sanjukta.pookulangara@
unt.edu

Christy Crutsinger

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 369 6620
✉ christyc@unt.edu

Kelcie Slaton

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 2436
✉ kelcie.slaton@unt.edu

Technology and AI Readiness of the Retail Workforce: Understanding Creativity, Innovativeness and Optimism

Innovative technologies are driving the retail industry and elevating the consumer experience at every level. The rapid pace of these changes is astounding. From interactive Artificial Intelligence (AI) smart displays that can detect customer facial expressions to intelligent tags that provide real-time product tracking, retailers are innovating daily to remain viable and profitable (Deloitte, 2024). Universities, however, are challenged to keep up with the emerging technologies. Inadequate resources, bureaucratic processes, general mistrust, lack of knowledge, and limited access to industry software and hardware are just a few of the barriers to curricular integration. There is strong evidence to suggest that 'tech savvy' retail employees are, and will continue to be, in high demand (McKinsey & Company, 2023). However, retailers also are seeking employees who have a deep understanding of consumer preferences and are able to manage and interpret big data. According to Woods *et al.* (2021), a multi-disciplinary approach is warranted whereby retail training emphasizes the development of both technical and soft skills, with increasingly greater emphasis on creativity and problem-solving abilities. The proposed study will use the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) to investigate U.S. retail employees' technology and AI readiness. Our purpose is to determine the impact of creativity, innovativeness, and optimism on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes and behavioral intention regarding technology and AI readiness. Categories of technology, specific to retail tasks, will be conceptualized from existing literature (Kelly *et al.,* 2023). Data will be collected from a panel of retail employees and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. The digital disruption in retail calls for educators to fundamentally change the way that curriculum is developed, content is delivered, and programs are assessed if they are to remain relevant in the 21st century. Institutions must teach transferable skills that prepare students for the emerging roles and technologies in the retail sector. This study will provide insight into the types of activities and best practices that foster creativity and innovation. Without question, the future of retail relies on employees who continuously upskill and think outside the box.

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☏ +1 940 565 2439
✉ sanjukta.pookulangara@
  unt.edu

Alicia Langlais

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

✉ alicialanglais@my.unt.edu

Macro vs. Micro-Influencers:
Shaping Consumer Behavior in a Changing Landscape

The global influencer marketing market reached $21.1 billion in 2023, more than tripling since 2019, with 85% of consumers finding it more effective than traditional digital marketing due to its stronger brand-audience connection (Dencheva, 2023; The State of Influencer, 2024). As consumers grow weary of traditional influencer marketing, brands are moving from expensive macro-influencers to micro and nano-influencers, whose smaller, more engaged audiences offer better value and reduce risks to trust and authenticity (Wiley, 2023). Understanding consumer engagement with both types is crucial, especially as marketing dollars shift toward micro-influencers to meet demands for authentic, resonant content. The DIY sector, growing at a 6.4% CAGR, is rapidly expanding as homeowners take on projects like painting and gardening to save on labor costs (Sabanoglu, 2023). Millennial and Gen Z DIYers frequently use social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram for inspiration, where influencers share their projects and trends (Singh, 2023; Ramaswamy, 2023). While previous studies have explored macro and micro influencers in other industries (Kay *et al.*, 2020; Lv *et al.*, 2023), none have focused on the DIY sector. This study will examine how influencer size (macro vs. micro) impacts consumer purchase intention in the DIY category, using the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and Source Credibility Theory (Hovland *et al.*, 1953). It will explore (1) the effects of information quality, brand coherence, likeability, and authenticity on consumer engagement; (2) how engagement influences attitudes toward the influencer; and (3) how these attitudes affect purchase intention. The data will be collected from the followers of two influencers, one macro and one micro, both focused on DIY content. Researchers have contacted these influencers to gain access to their followers. An online survey will be used, and the data will be analyzed with Structural Equation Modeling. The goal is to better understand how influencer size affects followers' purchase intentions.

Ann-Catrin Pristl

University of Kassel
Faculty of Economics and
Management
Department of Marketing
Kassel, 34109
Germany

☏ +49 561 804 3945
✉ pristl@wirtschaft.uni-
kassel.de

Andreas Mann

University of Kassel
Faculty of Economics and
Management
Department of Marketing
Kassel, 34109
Germany

☏ +49 561 804 3215
✉ mann@wirtschaft.uni-
kassel.de

Management of Product Expectations in Electronic Retailing: A Mental Imagery Approach

The use of digital retail channels enjoys great popularity. Although digital purchasing has several advantages for consumers, there are also serious disadvantages. Above all, the spatial distance between consumers and the products offered causes significant problems, since consumers place their orders based on their expectations, i.e., their idea of what the product will be like, arising from the offered product information in the online shop, as they are unable to inspect the product directly. Particularly for products that require a high level of inspection due to properties that can only be determined through direct contact with the product, as haptic product properties do, the physical distance represents a major obstacle (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). This often leads to product returns caused by expectations regarding the product and its properties that do not match the actual product impression (Oliver, 1980). The high number of product returns, in turn, represent one of the biggest problems in online retailing for consumers, suppliers and the environment. Therefore, this research addresses the question of how information about haptic product properties offered in online shops can be conveyed in such a way that consumers get a more realistic impression of the product and its properties. To examine this, we draw on mental imagery theory (Kosslyn *et al.*, 1995) which states that people are able to experience a sensation, such as a haptic one, without the associated sensory stimulus, such as touching a product. The sensory perception is generated by the fact that the arrival of information in a different sensory modality, such as visually transmitted information about the haptic properties of a product, triggers a recall of memory content about haptic impressions, which in turn evokes a kind of mediated haptic perception, i.e., a haptic imagery (Klatzky *et al.*, 1991; Peck *et al.*, 2013). We therefore assume that the communication of corresponding haptic properties in visual form, through pictorial and/or verbal processing of haptic product information, can trigger an equivalent haptic imagery, which in turn should lead to a more realistic expectation of the haptic product properties. To test these hypotheses, we conducted three consecutive studies. The first study, an online survey ($N = 73$), aimed to examine which types of product information presentation consumers generally use to get an idea of a product's haptic properties. For the presentation types identified as potentially suitable, corresponding stimuli were created for a scarf as an example product for the two experiments. The second study, an online experiment ($N = 347$), aimed at investigating whether the selected product presentation formats can lead to an improvement in the imaginability of haptic product characteristics. The results show that for each of the haptic properties analyzed, an improvement in imaginability can be achieved through the targeted communication of imagery-generating haptic information. The third study, a lab experiment ($N = 292$), aimed to investigate whether the superior imaginability generated also translates into the hypothesized improved expectation-experience fit. To investigate this, the experiment conducted in Study 2 was extended to include the real product inspection of the product shown in the experiment, which was carried out following the assessment of the imaginability of the haptic properties. The results reveal an improvement in the expectation-experience fit for a couple of haptic properties investigated. Depending on which property is considered, different product presentation formats lead to an improved expectation-experience fit.

Brandon Reich

Portland State University
School of Business
Portland, 97201
USA

☏ +1 503 725 3000
✉ breich@psu.edu

Hong Yuan

Florida Atlantic University
College of Business
Boca Raton, 33431
USA

☏ +1 561 297 3036
✉ yuanh@fau.edu

Lamberto Zollo

University of Milan
School
Milan, 20122
Italy

☏ +39 2503 21472
✉ lamberto.zollo@unimi.it

Riccardo Rialti

University of Siena
Siena, 53100
Italy

☏ +39 577 235555
✉ riccardo.rialti@unisi.it

Implicit Ethical Consumerism: Measure Development and Cross-National Validation

The literature has documented a pervasive attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumption, whereby consumers' self-reported favorable attitudes toward ethical products and brands do not readily translate into ethical consumption behavior. For marketers investing in social responsibility initiatives, this suggests that more accurate segmentation and demand forecasting may require an implicit measure of ethical consumerism. This research draws from literatures in ethical consumption and the psychology of attitudes to develop and validate such a measurement tool. Across two pretests and two studies, findings show that our implicit measure (based in the Affect Misattribution Procedure) is cross-culturally robust in predicting ethical consumption behavior beyond effects of explicit attitudes. Implications for theory and practitioners are discussed.

Alexandra Rese

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business
and Economics
95447 Bayreuth
Germany

☎ +49 921 554346
✉ alexandra.rese@
   uni-bayreuth.de

Daniela Weber

University of Bayreuth
Faculty of Law, Business
and Economics
95447 Bayreuth
Germany

☎ +49 921 554346
✉ daniela.weber@
   uni-bayreuth.de

Secondhand Fashion Subscription Boxes:
A Necessary Condition Analysis

With a market value of 1.5 trillion USD, the clothing sector is one of the largest industries worldwide (Ikram 2022). The strong and continuous growth of this industry is related to severe environmental consequences in terms of emissions, pollution, waste production, and resource consumption (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Thus, scholars and policymakers are advocating for a paradigm shift. Research indicates that the fashion industry can be made more environmentally friendly through the introduction of a closed-loop economy - also known as a circular economy - and the implementation of sustainable business models in areas such as clothing resale, rental, repair and remake (Vhemas et al., 2018). In terms of introducing new sustainable business models that also meet consumer expectations, research attributes the greatest potential for success to business models related to secondhand clothing (Dahlbo et al., 2017; Levänen et al., 2021; Vhemas et al., 2018). In connection with the distributional design by means of curated subscription boxes as "one of the innovative evolutions of online shopping" (Tao, 2019, p. 2), this study examines the secondhand subscription box as a sustainable business model within the circular economy. By addressing marketing research, potential or existing providers of secondhand subscription boxes, as well as policymakers, the present research aims to identify the necessary but not sufficient conditions for forming a purchase intention for secondhand subscription boxes. Using Necessary Condition Analysis (Dul, 2016) and a sample of (N = 215) German participants, economic motivation, convenience, personalized service, perceived quality, experiential value, awareness about the environmental consequences and trust in their presence, as well as perceived risk in its absence are confirmed as necessary but not sufficient conditions. Identified bottlenecks in meeting these conditions provide implications for both academia and practice.

Alicia Rihn

University of Tennessee
Dept. of Ag and Res.
Economics
Knoxville, TN 37996
USA

☏ +1 865 974 7472
✉ arihn@utk.edu

Melinda Knuth

NC State University
Dept. of Horticulture
Raleigh, NC, 27695
USA

☏ +1 605 759 4628
✉ mjknuth@ncsu.edu

Patricia Huddleston

Michigan State University
Dept. of Ad. and PR
East Lansing, MI, 48824
USA

☏ +1 517 353 9907
✉ huddles2@msu.edu

Bridget Behe

Michigan State University
Dept. of Horticulture
East Lansing, MI, 48824
USA

☏ +1 517 881 0876
✉ behe@msu.edu

Repurchase Intent – Online vs. Instore Satisfaction for Live Goods

Technological advances and the COVID-19 pandemic shifted retail channels towards more online (vs. in-store) product options than ever before (e.g., plants, cut flowers) (Campbell *et al.*, 2021). For instance, in 2017, only 5% of horticultural sales were online (Cohen & Baldwin, 2018), which increased to 17.5% in 2021 (Whitinger & Cohen, 2021). Consumers perceive specialty garden center stores as credible sources of information for unique products that require additional care to survive (Campbell & Campbell, 2019). Source credibility theory states that sources of information gain persuasiveness if they are perceived as credible (Giffin, 1967). The study assesses the relationship between online plant/cut flower retailer use, review use, satisfaction, and repurchase intent. That is, do consumers use reviews when determining online plant/cut flower purchasing channels, and how does this influence their product satisfaction and repurchase intent? For this study, we measured trust, reliance, filtering, and quantity to assess participants' perceptions of online reviews when purchasing plants/cut flowers. We assessed satisfaction and delight with their online plant/cut flower purchase and repurchase intention. We hypothesize that I) online plant/cut flower purchasers rely more heavily on reviews when making purchasing decisions than instore purchasers, II) online purchasers will be less satisfied with their purchases, and III) online retailer type will impact customer repurchase decisions with specialist stores having higher repurchase likelihood. A total of 1,387 US consumers completed the online survey. Nearly 76% of the sample (N = 1054) had purchased plants/flowers online vs. 24% purchased in-store. Pairwise t-tests indicate that online purchasers had a greater review index ratings (mean = 4.22; s.d. = 0.66) relative to in-store purchasers (mean = 3.74; s.d. = 0.71; t = 11.32, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis I. Online purchasers had higher product satisfaction (e.g., quality, undamaged, expected form/size; mean = 6.24; s.d. = 0.78) and performance satisfaction and delight (mean = 6.44; s.d. = 0.78) relative to instore purchasers (product satisfaction = 5.28; s.d. = 1.29; performance satisfaction and delight = 6.05; s.d. = 1.15), refuting hypothesis II. Probit models estimated the relationship between repurchasing behavior, online retailer, reviews, satisfaction, recommendations, and demographics and were significant (χ^2 = 304.4, p < 0.001, Pseudo R^2 = 0.341) at predicting repurchase intent. Farm-direct online retailers positively impacted the probability of repurchasing the plant/cut flower (25.1%; s.d. = 9.0), supporting hypothesis III. Performance satisfaction and delight positively impacted repurchase intent (47.8%; s.d. = 7.7) as did recommending the product to others (37.8%; s.d. = 2.7) and higher household income (0.2%; s.d. = 0.1). Buying plants, in-store also improved repurchase intent (49.4%; s.d. = 13.2).

Simoni F. Rohden

NOVA Information
Management School
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
Lisbon, 1070-312
Portugal

☎ +351 913 587 416
✉ srohden@novaims.unl.pt

Lélis B. Espartel

Universidade Europeia
CETRAD-Europeia
Lisbon, 1200-649
Portugal

☎ +351910 894 249
✉ lelis.espartel@
     universidadeeuropeia.pt

Understanding the Impact of Technology Interaction on Dysfunctional Consumer Behavior in Smart Retailing

There is extensive literature addressing undesirable customer behaviors, commonly referred to as dysfunctional customer behaviors, often described as immoral, unethical, dishonest, or aberrant (Winterich, 2018). These behaviors can range from minor transgressions, such as lying, to more serious issues, including abusive communication and theft. Such actions typically have adverse effects on companies, resulting in financial losses, physical and psychological harm to frontline employees, or triggering a "domino effect" (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). As a psychological and social phenomenon with significant economic implications, efforts have been made to understand the drivers, psychological triggers, contexts, consequences, and processes involved (Ellemers *et al.*, 2019). These drivers include a variety of factors, such as the pursuit for emotions, lack of moral constraints, characteristics of the servicescape, or the nature of the customer-retailer relationship, in addition to psychographic variables (Li *et al.*, 2024; Harris, 2009; Xie *et al.*, 2014). In the context of services and retail, many dysfunctional behaviors occur during direct interaction between companies and customers, whether in online, offline or smart retail settings. However, research on the impact of new technologies on consumer dysfunctional behaviors remains scarce. Existing literature suggests that interactions with Artificial intelligence (AI) increase the likelihood of dysfunctional behavior due to the absence of selfish intentions (Garvey et al 2023), and reduced guilt feelings when interacting with non-human agents (Giroux *et al.*, 2022; Kim *et al.*, 2023), and greater moral disengagement (Lei *et al.*, 2024). Our research seeks to further explain the heightened propensity for unethical behaviors when interacting with AI compared to human employees. Moreover, we aim to explore boundary conditions that could assist companies in maintaining a smart retailing experience while reducing potential dysfunctional responses. One such mechanism could be the perception of power in human-computer interaction. Power perception enhances self-focus, leading to feelings of superiority, increased selfishness, and reduced empathy (Lammers *et al.*, 2015). Although individuals may ascribe a certain level of mind to non-human entities such as AI agents and robots, this is generally perceived to be significantly lower than human cognition (Pitardi *et al.*, 2022). Previous research suggests that deviant and unethical behaviors are more likely to happen when consumers are in a position of power (Rucker & Galinsky, 2016); however, this research has not yet considered AI agents. A quantitative approach based on an experimental design will be employed to examine how interacting with technology amplifies or diminishes consumers' perceived power over the other party and what strategies can be implemented to empower technology as a means to mitigate dysfunctional behaviors. These research findings are relevant not only to scholars in marketing and psychology but also to retailers aiming at curbing unethical consumer responses and policymakers concerned with the potential negative societal impacts of AI interaction.

Robér Rollin

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 3647
✉ rollin@marketing.
uni-siege.de

Hanna Schramm-Klein

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 4281
✉ schramm-klein@
marketing.uni-siege.de

Eric Schell

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 5019
✉ eric.schell@marketing.
uni-siege.de

Julian Schmitz

Universität Siegen
Siegen, 57072
Germany

☎ +49 271 740 2739
✉ julian.schmitz@
marketing.uni-siege.de

Mitigating Cognitive Overload Through Harmonious Visual Design

The overabundance of information in online marketplaces can lead to cognitive overload, resulting in stress, anxiety, and impaired decision-making. While the increased availability of information usually empowers consumers by helping them make more informed decisions, it can also lead to confusion and dissatisfaction. To address this challenge, we propose the concept of cognitive unburdening. This approach emphasizes the importance of harmonious visual design as a strategic tool for reducing perceived cognitive overload. The underlying premise is that a well-structured, aesthetically pleasing presentation of information can enhance decision-making by improving cognitive processing fluency—how easily the brain can absorb and process information. This concept contrasts with traditional approaches in marketing research, which mostly focus on reducing or filtering the quantity of information provided to consumers. In contrast, cognitive unburdening offers a more nuanced solution that addresses not only the amount of information but also its visual arrangement and design. Our research is grounded in established theories, including Cognitive Limitation Theory and Processing Fluency Theory. Cognitive Limitation Theory suggests that consumers experience cognitive overload when faced with excessive or complex information. However, we extend this perspective by connecting the premise with the ideas from Processing Fluency Theory to explore how the visual arrangement of information can mitigate cognitive overload. By enhancing the aesthetic and structural presentation of information, it might become easier for consumers to process even large volumes of information without feeling overwhelmed. To empirically test our assumptions, we conducted four studies within a marketplace context, systematically manipulating both the complexity of the information and its visual presentation across a range of products. We varied several factors related to information complexity. Across all four studies, we were able to analyze a comprehensive sample of 836 participants. The findings consistently showed an improvement in decision-making and consumer satisfaction when information was presented in a more aesthetically pleasing and organized manner, even when the information volume remained unchanged. This supports our premise regarding cognitive unburdening. Therefore, our concept of cognitive unburdening offers a proactive and effective approach to managing cognitive load. Rather than focusing solely on reducing the amount of information to prevent overload, cognitive unburdening encourages businesses to prioritize clarity, structure, and visual appeal in their information design. By doing so, harmonious visual design can serve as a buffer against cognitive overload, making large assortments of options appear less overwhelming and more manageable for consumers.

Mark S. Rosenbaum

CITADEL
Baker School of Business
Charleston, 29409
USA

☎ +1 6304146989
✉ mrosenba@citadel.edu

Germán Contreras
Ramírez

Universidad Externado de
Colombia
Facultad de Administración de
Empresas
Bogota, Calle 12 #1-17
Colombia

☎ +57 (1) 341 99 00
✉ german.contreras
@uexternado.edu.co

Mario Eduardo Giraldo
Oliveros
Universidad del Norte
School of Business
Barranquilla
Colombia

☎ +57 (5) 3509509
✉ mgiraldo@uninorte.edu.co

Introducing the Dark Servicescape: Exploring Consumer Well-Being in the Age of Ghost Kitchens

In recent years, the rise of delivery-based food services has redefined the restaurant landscape, giving birth to a new operational model known as the dark kitchen—also referred to as "ghost kitchens" or "cloud kitchens." These commercial cooking spaces are designed exclusively for delivery, takeaway, and, to a lesser extent, pick-up, without allocating space for physical seating or dining areas for customers. Dark kitchens emerged as a business concept in the early 2010s, fueled primarily by the expansion of global meal delivery apps such as Uber Eats, Deliveroo, and Thuisbezorgd. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of dark kitchens as lockdowns and social distancing measures forced many restaurants to close their dining rooms. Consequently, restaurants utilized the dark kitchen concept to sustain their operations during the pandemic by employing delivery services. The dark kitchen model has continued to thrive post-COVID, owing to sustained consumer demand for delivery—particularly among people working from home—realized cost efficiencies among restaurant operators, collaboration with delivery platforms, and positive consumer responses. As such, this paper introduces the concept of a "dark servicescape," expanding servicescape theory to account for settings where physical customer interaction is absent. The goal of this paper is to conceptualize a "dark servicescape" framework by defining the environmental stimuli that comprises a dark kitchen, including physical, social, symbolic, and natural stimuli. The framework emerges from in-depth interviews with customers of a restaurant that recently shifted its business model from a traditional dine-in establishment to a dark kitchen. This research not only defines and develops the components of a dark servicescape but also highlights the advantages and disadvantages experienced by customers from a servicescape perspective after the restaurant transitioned to a dark kitchen. Commercial venues such as restaurants, cafes, and pubs have served as third places, where social interactions are as integral to the experience (Richardson, 2018; Rosenbaum, 2006). As retailers "go dark," they forgo opportunities for both employees and customers to engage in the rich social interactions that often occur in third places, thus diminishing the exchange of therapeutic social support that naturally arises from pleasant banter in these environments (Finlay et al., 2019; Rosenbaum, 2009; Song et al., 2018). As logistical efficiencies drive increased investment in dark operations across not only dining but also grocery, retail, and other sectors (Shapiro, 2022), consumers may increasingly lose sources of social support that were once readily accessible in physical commercial spaces. This article links the dark kitchen concept to the transformative service research (TSR) paradigm (Anderson et al., 2013) by demonstrating how customers of a dine-in restaurant, which transitions to a dark kitchen model, are acutely aware of losing the ability to socialize, gather with friends and family, and momentarily escape from their routine lives by patronizing the restaurant. Given that TSR emphasizes creating uplifting changes and improvements in consumer well-being, dark kitchens appear to act contrary to enhancing consumer well-being, as restaurants—including diners and neighborhood bars—often hold a unique place in consumers' lives by hosting their social networks.

Ruggero Sainaghi

University of IULM
Milan, 20147
Italy

☎ +39 2891412748
✉ ruggero.sainaghi@iulm.it

Marketing Capabilities for Short-Term Rentals

This study explores the role of marketing capabilities for value creation in the short-term rental sector, also in light of the degree of professionalization of hosts. The study integrates secondary quantitative and qualitative data generated from a set of 55 interviews. The results show strong differences between individual and professional hosts, identifying the development of marketing capabilities as the reason behind the latter's better performance. They include skills related to (i) data analysis; (ii) pricing policies; (iii) customer relationship management; and (iv) revenue management tools. In terms of academic implications, this article is in line with recent emerging evidence on the role of professionalization in short-term rentals and has a trait of originality in both method and content. Previous studies on Airbnb are in fact purely quantitative in nature, with a focus on identifying the determinants of the ability of professional hosts to outperform individual hosts. However, these studies do not explain why, which this is precisely the focus of this article. The strong rise of Airbnb has attracted attention to the listing concentration, exploring the professionalization degree, usually defined according to the number of listings managed. Some studies have considered other variables, such as experience (years of activity in the business), type of listings (professional hosts usually avoid renting shared rooms), year-round availability (longer for professional), "Superhost" status, or number of reviews (Deboosere *et al.*, 2019). Only a few studies have introduced the idea of professionalization processes or degrees (Bosma, 2021). The theoretical background of this study is the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) and the capability approach (Teece, 2007). Previous studies have identified some promising capabilities that a host can develop, ranging from the listing preparation to commercialization (Cocola-Gant *et al.*, 2021). In this article, the focus is on revenue management capabilities (RMC) and in particular the ability of the professionalization degree to positively influence the creation of RMC. Two research questions are explored: i) What are the main determinants of RMC regarding short-term rentals (STR)? Second, why are professional hosts more efficient at creating RMC than single-listing hosts? Based on previous studies in the hospitality domain, the revenue management (RM) process can be segmented into four major components: i) identifying the required information to establish the RM strategy, ii) making strategic and then tactical pricing and RM decisions, iii) managing communication with the guests, and iv) making available software dedicated to RM.

Nadine Schröder

Vienna University of
Economics and Business
1020 Vienna
Austria

☏ +43 1 31336 6326
✉ nadine.schroeder@
   wu.ac.at

Carsten D. Schultz

University of Hagen
58097 Hagen
Germany

☏ +49 2331 987 2617
✉ carsten.schultz@fernuni-
   hagen.de

Friederike Paetz

Anhalt University of Applied
Sciences
06406 Bernburg
Germany

☏ +49 3471 355 1115
✉ friederike.paetz@
   hs-anhalt.de

The Role of Cues in Healthy and Sustainable Food Choices: A Comparative Study of Online and Offline Grocery Shopping

With increasing health concerns and the environmental impact of meat production, understanding the decision-making process behind healthy and sustainable food purchases is critical for retailers aiming to meet customers' evolving preferences. Additionally, the surge in grocery e-commerce, particularly post-pandemic, makes it necessary to investigate whether the factors that guide consumer decisions vary between online and offline environments. Previous research suggests that shopping behavior to some extent follows similar patterns in online and offline grocery settings. Time spent and effort expended during the shopping trip tend to be comparable across channels (Anesbury et al., 2016). However, some behaviors tend to differ when examining consumer behavior in online versus offline grocery shopping environments. In terms of information processing, research shows controversial findings. Degeratu et al. (2000) indicate that information, such as ingredients or nutritional content, has more considerable relevance for online shoppers than for those shopping offline, and visual cues have a smaller effect in the online environment. This suggests a potential shift away from relying on heuristics (mental shortcuts) and a move towards a greater reliance on information when shopping online. In contrast, a survey by the International Food Council suggests that a higher likelihood of reading nutritional information exists when shopping offline (Olzenak et al., 2020). Further, front-of-package (FOP) nutrition labels are more likely to catch consumers' attention compared to labels on the back or sides of packages (Al-Jawaldeh et al., 2020). FOP also aid in distinguishing between healthier and less healthy products more effectively (Dubois et al., 2020; Kelly & Jewell 2018), assisting consumers in making informed choices in a high-choice food environment. However, there is a significant gap in understanding their effectiveness in influencing choices across online and offline grocery shopping environments. This study aims to address this gap by testing how various cues influence healthy and sustainable food choices across both shopping platforms. Understanding what drives product decisions across the two platforms can help retailers to tailor marketing strategies to encourage healthier and more sustainable choices (e.g., through better product placement, pricing strategies, or visual emphasis). We run two conjoint studies (study 1: cereals, study 2: meat vs plant-based alternatives) and test how visual cues and other attributes impact the product choice. In the case of cereals, certain product attributes, such as nutritional labels, appear to play a significant role in influencing consumer decisions, alongside other factors like customer reviews and pricing strategies. Interestingly, the impact of these attributes does not seem to vary substantially between online and offline shopping environments. When it comes to sustainable product choices, pricing considerations tend to hold greater importance compared to health-related claims. Additionally, the retail platform may influence product preferences, with indications that consumer preferences for traditional options, such as meat, may be more pronounced in offline settings compared to online environments.

Tali Seger-Guttmann

Ruppin Academic Center
Faculty of Economics &
Business Administrative
Emek-Hefer 425000
Israel

☏ +972 9 8981357
✉ talis@ruppin.ac.il

Hana Medler-Liraz

The Academic College of
Tel-Aviv-Yaffo
School of Management
and Economics
Tel-Aviv, 6329302
Israel

☏ +972 52 3376376
✉ hanamedl@mta.ac.il

Building Relationships Through Flirting with Well-Acquainted Customers vs. Occasional Customers

The consequences of flirting in the workplace were recently exposed, specifically in the hospitality sector, where authentic flirting was found to be significantly related to positive service outcomes (e.g., loyalty, tip size; Medler-Liraz & Seger-Guttmann, 2021). However, flirting with customers in the absence of prior acquaintance may be harmful. Prior acquaintance includes duration, frequency of engagement, and self-disclosure (Bäckström *et al.*, 2009). The purpose of the current study is to investigate whether employees' prior acquaintance with customers, established through personal conversations over time, can reveal significant information that positively influences the way servers flirt and their emotional behavior. In a qualitative study, 40 hospitality service employees were interviewed about the meanings attributed to early acquaintance with a customer, including their flirting and emotional behaviors. The qualitative data and the thematic content analysis revealed that well-acquainted customers tend to share personal stories and information, exhibit patience, and engage in pleasant interpersonal communication. These behaviors help identify the customer's willingness to engage and therefore, adopt the appropriate flirting style. In addition, well-acquainted customers perceived the restaurant as their "home," felt comfortable expressing disproportionate demands (e.g., fixed sitting place, personal communication, employee's total time/attention) compared with occasional customers, who expressed low emotional expectations. Thus, employees reported their constant pressure to satisfy well-acquainted customers. Among recurring server gestures that facilitated friendships between service employees and well-acquainted customers were empathy, sensitivity, laughter, asking for advice, and giving authentic compliments on appearance. Service employees preferred not to engage in fake flirting because they felt this would harm their close relationships with those with whom they have established friendships. In contrast, for occasional customers, flirting was seen as an icebreaker that increased tips. Overall, the study provides a better understanding of how relationships are built through flirting dynamics with well-acquaintance vs. occasional customers. These dynamics were also found to affect service outcomes.

University of Georgia
Textiles, Merchandising and
Interiors
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
United States

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ yseock@uga.edu

Hye Seung Jeong

University of Georgia
Textiles, Merchandising and
Interiors
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, 30602
United States

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ hyeseung.jeong@uga.edu

Virtual Reality (VR) is a computer simulation technology that uses three-dimensional (3D) graphics and devices to provide a virtual environment and interactive experience (Huang *et al.*, 2020). As a portmanteau of meta, "beyond" in Greek, and universe, Metaverse means "beyond the universe" (Gauttier *et al.*, 2022). The Metaverse is actualized through VR technology and characterized by real-time interaction and a virtual presence, transcending traditional barriers of time and space (Gauttier *et al.*, 2022; Jaynes *et al.*, 2003). It has garnered increased attention, and Metaverse users are expected to exceed 1.4 billion by 2030 (Sukhanova, 2023). Also, as it became more accessible due to its intuitive use, affordability, and ease of use across various software, various daily activities and commercial operations are being carried out by avatars therein (Georgiou *et al.*, 2021). Due to the ubiquity that enables users to traverse physical and virtual boundaries, it creates diverse and dynamic experiences and yields various emotional or cognitive responses to its users based on its interactive technology (Alazmi & Alemtairy, 2024). Consequently, consumers opt to interact in the Metaverse through products and services (Solis, 2024). Efforts have been made to integrate the Metaverse into various commercial domains such as retail, tourism, healthcare, education, entertainment, etc. (Gauttier *et al.*, 2022; Gursoy *et al.*, 2022; Manocha, 2024; Mogaji *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2022; Yoo *et al.*, 2023). As the Metaverse is a crucial platform that enhances user experiences in various business areas, it is essential to understand consumers' responses and what motivates or challenges users to engage (Gauttier *et al.*, 2022; Xi *et al.*, 2023). While there has been increasing discourse on the advantages of the Metaverse, scant attention has been paid to users' psychological responses despite their importance as key drivers for adoption (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023; Gupta *et al.*, 2024). Researchers reported that multimodal presence (Liu *et al.*, 2022; Makransky *et al.*, 2017), cognitive load (Alazmi & Alemtairy, 2024), enjoyment, and engagement are critical components of adopting the Metaverse and improving user interaction. Identifying the factors that influence consumers' Metaverse experiences is crucial to fostering the growth and wide adoption of Metaverse. Therefore, this study explores the users' cognitive and affective responses in the fashion merchandising education setting, where the VR platform effectively supports a wide range of creative and visual activities. While the users are conducting a series of interactive activities in the Metaverse, such as creating avatars, project presentation, communication, and exploration, four key aspects of using the Metaverse platform were examined: multimodal presence, cognitive load, engagement and enjoyment. Participants rated their experience as "enjoyable" or "very enjoyable" (enjoyment). Overall, nearly half of the participants "somewhat agreed" or "agreed" with feeling present in a virtual environment (multimodal presence). However, there were also notable responses of "disagree" and "somewhat disagree," indicating varying levels of immersion across individuals. Most participants found the tasks "easy" or "moderately easy" when analyzing the cognitive load. Moreover, they reported that using the Metaverse required moderate to low mental effort (cognitive load). Lastly, the majority of participants rated engagement as either "slightly engaging" or "very engaging," indicating positive perceptions of interaction within the virtual environment. Our study suggests that using the Metaverse can provide richer, more engaging customer experiences, improve brand interaction, and build stronger relationships with customers.

Yoo-Kyoung Seock

The University of Georgia
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, GA 30602
USA

☏ +1 706 542 2891
✉ yseock@uga.edu

Heeran Lee

Kumoh National Institute
of Technology
Materials Design Engineering
Gumi, 39177
Republic of Korea

☏ +82 54 478 7717
✉ heeran@kumoh.ac.kr

Jeongah Shin

University of Cincinnati
Carl H. Lindner College of
Business
Cincinnati, OH 45221
USA

☏ +1 513 556 7101
✉ shin2jh@ucmail.uc.edu

Neurophysiological Insights into Online Shopping: Cognitive and Emotional Responses to Fashion Websites

This study examines changes in consumers' emotional states, such as interest, arousal, focus, comfort, and boredom, while watching the "Dresses" and "Shoes" video content for online shopping. The Electroencephalography (EEG) data were collected and analyzed while watching the video to measure changes in emotional state objectively. Previous studies in this field have relied on survey methods, which can introduce bias as participants are required to recall emotions after watching the stimuli, only capturing conscious responses. EEG data was used in this study to assess consumers' real-time, subconscious emotions during online shopping. Furthermore, the goal of this research is to identify how consumers' emotional responses evolve as they watch the content for each product, ultimately providing guidance that can be applied to product-specific advertising strategies. During the stimuli development, sneakers were chosen to represent utilitarian fashion items, while cocktail dresses were selected as hedonic fashion items. When participants were asked to provide examples of their favorite brands, Nike and Lulu emerged as the most frequently mentioned brands for sneakers and cocktail dresses. The study involved a total of 13 participants. The stimuli for EEG measurement consisted of two videos: one from the dress website and the other from the shoe website. Each video was 5 minutes long and was created through prior research and investigation. The study found that viewing the dress video elicited a more relaxed and focused state, with higher levels of comfort, calmness, and simple attention, particularly during the first minute of viewing. This was reflected in elevated RFA (Relative Fast Alpha Power) and RLB (Relative Low Beta Power) indicators, which are associated with relaxed awareness and basic attention, suggesting that the dress video helped maintain a calm yet focused state. Additionally, the RT (Relative Theta Power) and RA (Relative Alpha Power) indicators, representing meditation and a calm state, were also higher for the dress video after one minute, indicating that participants stayed relaxed and entered a pleasant, stable state of mind. In contrast, the shoe video led to higher cognitive processing and intense concentration, particularly after the first minute of viewing, when participants exhibited more engagement and tension. The RMB (Relative Mid Beta Power) indicator, which reflects problem-solving and active awareness, was significantly higher for the shoe video, showing that participants were mentally more engaged. Over time, the shoe video triggered more complex cognitive functions, as indicated by increased gamma wave activity, which is associated with deep cognitive integration and problem-solving. This increase in gamma waves, particularly in the frontal and temporal regions, suggests that participants made more complex interpretations of the stimuli, requiring higher cognitive effort. The RHB (Relative High Beta Power) indicator also pointed to heightened concentration with tension, further emphasizing that participants experienced a more active cognitive load while viewing the shoe video. In summary, the dress video promoted a relaxed focus, helping participants maintain comfort and attention without demanding high cognitive effort. In contrast, the shoe video required more mental effort and concentration, activating higher-order cognitive functions, particularly as time progressed. These findings suggest that the nature of the content, whether utilitarian or hedonic, plays a significant role in shaping consumer engagement and emotional response during online shopping experiences.

Yoo-Kyoung Seock

The University of Georgia
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, GA 30602
USA

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ yseock@uga.edu

Jeongah Shin

University of Cincinnati
Marketing
Carl H. Lindner College of
Business
Cincinnati, OH 45221
USA

☎ +1 513 556 7101
✉ shin2jh@ucmail.uc.edu

Leveraging Eye-Tracking Technology for User Interface Design in Mobile Applications

Mobile commerce has revolutionized the business environment, enabling people to engage and make purchases more easily. Due to smartphones being almost in everyone's hands daily, mobile platforms have become increasingly important for reaching out and serving customers anywhere. Furthermore, mobile platforms allow businesses to advertise their brands or stores and offer convenient shopping experiences beyond traditional channels. The user interface (UI) design quality of mobile applications has a significant impact on the usability of mobile shopping apps and users' intentions to use them (Jung, 2017). A recent UX4Sight report (2024) showed that UI design is now a key driver of success in a highly competitive market, indicating the significance of user experience (UX). The report highlighted that well-crafted UI shapes how users perceive and interact with websites and mobile applications. Khan (2023) further emphasized that fashion apps should have visually appealing user interfaces (UIs) to attract and retain more users over time. He also pointed out that an effective UI can create a good UX that keeps users engaged. The eye-tracking technique has recently gained popularity among UX researchers and UI designers as it relates to a user-centered focus on fine-tuning visual interface layouts (Macedo, 2021). It provides information on how people navigate a page and respond to visual elements (Moran, 2020). This technology visualizes a user's eye movement and interaction using gaze plots, heat maps, and gaze replays, which make it a powerful tool for analyzing user interactions with products and services and identifying usability issues (Novak *et al.*, 2023). This paper explores the application of eye-tracking technology to assess user interface design. Through student projects focused on designing mobile app pages for a local clothing store that does not have a mobile app, this study provides insight into the use of eye-tracking methodology and implications in the UI design process for businesses. The students were assigned to develop specific sections of a new mobile app for the local clothing store, including a landing page, menu tap, product information, product suggestions, Chabot service, push notifications, and rewards program. Students developed two unique designs for each mobile app page using Figma and tested these designs using the eye-tracking app. Participants were exposed to designs A and B for each app page, allowing the eye-tracking app to capture their eye movement data on gaze patterns, fixation durations, and interaction points. This eye-tracking data was supplemented with qualitative feedback from focus group interviews on design preferences and functionality identification. Analysis of eye-tracking data revealed distinct patterns of user engagement with the app designs. Heat maps indicated areas of intense focus and those overlooked, guiding layout and feature placement adjustments to enhance visibility and accessibility. For example, comparing horizontal and vertical layout preferences underscored the importance of aligning design with natural user behaviors. By analyzing where users focused their attention, students could identify which elements of their app designs were most engaging or potentially problematic. This direct response from the users' perspective enabled them to make data-driven adjustments to their designs, enhancing the user experience and effectiveness of mobile applications. This case study demonstrates how eye-tracking technology can be used effectively in designing user interfaces for businesses.

Neha Sharma

Birla Institute of Management Technology
Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201306
India

☎ +91-971112691
✉ neha.sharma1@ bimtech.ac.in

Emiliano Acquila-Natale

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Madrid, 28040
Spain

☎ +34 910672047
✉ emiliano.acquila@upm.es

Laura Del-Río-Carazo

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Madrid, 28040
Spain

☎ +34 910672048
✉ laura.delrio@upm.es

Ángel Hernández-García

Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Madrid, 28040
Spain

☎ +34 910672043
✉ angel.hernandez@upm.es

Consumer Psychographics, Product Category and Geographic Factors in Indian Showrooming and Webrooming: A Qualitative Approach

Omnichannel retailing has reshaped consumer decision-making, with shoppers fluidly navigating online and offline channels. While prior research has emphasized pricing and channel strategies, less attention has been paid to the psychological drivers of cross-channel behavior (Blömker & Albrecht, 2024). This study addresses that gap by examining the influence of psychographic traits, product type, and geographic context on showrooming and webrooming in India. Drawing on prior literature in consumer psychology and omnichannel behavior, the qualitative study focuses on psychographic traits—e.g., Nakano & Kondo (2018)—and analyzes data from semi-structured interviews to thirteen Indian consumers to identify patterns in decision-making, risk tolerance, and product evaluation. The study identifies four distinct consumer segments: Tactile Evaluators, Risk-Averse Rationalists, Deal-Seeking Navigators, and Situational Switchers. Tactile Evaluators exhibit showrooming behaviors driven by a need for sensory validation, primarily purchasing apparel, cosmetics, and footwear after evaluating fit, texture, or color accuracy in-store. Risk-Averse Rationalists, who prefer webrooming, conduct extensive online research but finalize purchases of electronics and appliances in physical stores to mitigate perceived risks related to authenticity and after-sales service. Deal-Seeking Navigators strategically showroom, focusing on price optimization through digital platforms after assessing products in-store, typically involving categories such as fashion and electronics. Situational Switchers demonstrate flexible shopping behaviors influenced by urgency, convenience, and social context, adapting between webrooming and showrooming accordingly. Product type significantly impacts channel preferences, with experience goods (apparel, cosmetics) prompting showrooming due to the necessity for tactile evaluation, while search goods (electronics) involve extensive online research before in-store verification. Geographic context also shapes consumer behavior, with metropolitan areas facilitating frequent showrooming due to better retail infrastructure, whereas consumers in tier-2 and semi-urban regions rely more heavily on local trust networks and offline purchase finalization. The findings underscore that omnichannel shopping is highly context-dependent and influenced by individual psychographics. Retailers should therefore tailor their strategies to address both intrinsic consumer traits and external situational factors, enhancing personalized customer journeys and optimizing engagement across online and offline channels.

Chih-Hui Shieh

National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology Department of Marketing and Distribution Management Kaohsiung City 824, Taiwan

☎ +886 7 6011000 # 34220
✉ chs102@nkust.edu.tw

The Impact of Smartphone Visibility and Digital Advertising on Impulsive Purchase Intention

This study explored the impact of smartphone use on consumer attention in high and low Location-Based Advertising (LBA) reception areas within a store, aiming to determine the existence of mobile blind spots and whether digital advertisements can mitigate these effects to enhance attention to products and impulsive purchase intentions. A preliminary test with 117 participants indicated higher ad attention in high-LBA areas, leading to the selection of the checkout area for further experiments. In Experiment 1, involving 112 participants, it was found that consumers with smartphones out of sight at checkout paid less attention to products compared to those with smartphones in sight. Experiment 2, with 141 participants, employed a 2 × 2 two-factor between-subjects design (smartphone visibility: within sight vs. out of sight; digital advertisement: with sound vs. without sound). The results showed that smartphone visibility increased attention to advertised products and impulsive purchase intentions, particularly when ads were without sound. Hayes's PROCESS Model 4 analysis confirmed that attention to ads mediated the relationship between smartphone visibility and impulsive purchase intentions. However, further analysis with PROCESS Model 8 found no interaction effects when digital ads included sound, but significant direct and indirect effects without sound. This indicates that the impact of smartphone visibility on impulsive purchase intentions is significant without sound of digital advertisement but diminishes when sound is added. In summary, smartphone visibility affects impulsive purchase intentions through attention to ads, particularly in the absence of sound. This study confirms that in-store smartphone use reduces consumer attention to products, validating the existence of mobile blind spots—a phenomenon not previously verified in the literature. Moreover, when digital ads were present, consumers with smartphones in sight exhibited higher attention to ads and greater impulsive purchase intentions. This suggests that smartphone visibility directs attention to advertised products, with the brain prioritizing stimuli similar to smartphone content. The study further contributes to the understanding of how smartphone visibility and sound in ads interact, underscoring the dominance of visual over auditory information. The results provide key marketing insights for retail managers, suggesting that smartphone visibility can be leveraged to enhance smart retail services through targeted digital advertising. Managers should also carefully manage in-store sound sources and create engaging digital ad content to optimize consumer engagement.

Jeongah Shin

University of Cincinnati
Marketing
Carl H. Lindner College of
Business
Cincinnati, OH 45221
USA

☎ +1 513556 7101
✉ shin2jh@ucmail.uc.edu

Yoo-Kyoung Seock

The University of Georgia
Textiles, Merchandising and
Interiors
College of Family and
Consumer Sciences
Athens, GA 30602
USA

☎ +1 706 542 4891
✉ yseock@uga.edu

Are Consumers Ready for Digital Twin Stores? Examining Virtual Reality Shopping Anxiety

The retail industry has been dramatically changed by combining many technological platforms. The emergence of digital twins in industry 4.0 highlights the development of digital copies, resembling physical stores, alongside advancements in virtual reality technology. This concept has attracted significant attention within the manufacturing sector, prompting ongoing discussions about its practical application. However, despite the extensive exploration of the digital twin concept in manufacturing and supply chain management, there has been a lack of research on its adoption as a shopping platform from the consumer's perspective. Unlike more established online or mobile shopping platforms, consumers remain hesitant to use virtual reality devices for shopping. Moreover, even young tech-savvy consumers are primarily using virtual reality for gaming, while using it little or no for shopping. The limited consumer acceptance of virtual reality as a shopping platform may be due to anxiety toward new technology, as well as a lack of opportunities to experience shopping in digital twin stores. According to previous studies, the high level of technology anxiety negatively affects consumers' attitudes and may prevent them from adopting new technologies (Kim & Forsythe, 2008; Li & Xu, 2020). However, such anxiety can be reduced through training or education opportunities. Therefore, this study aims to examine consumers' anxiety towards virtual reality shopping and determine whether it is reduced after a direct shopping experience at a digital twin store. Additionally, the study investigated which features of digital twin stores influence consumers' anxiety levels. In this study, the digital twin store was designed to closely replicate the layout and features of a physical store. Target was selected because of its widespread presence and strong popularity among American consumers. Participants aged 18 to 43 were recruited using a convenience sampling approach. All respondents were invited to the laboratory to participate in the study. A total of 103 participants indicated their levels of VRSA through six items in a pre-survey. After completing the pre-survey, they wore virtual reality headsets to enter the digital twin store. They explored the digital twin store and engaged in shopping activities for as long as they desired. Lastly, they responded to questions about the changes in their anxiety levels after shopping in a digital twin store. They also shared their experiences within the digital twin store through a structured questionnaire. A paired t-test was performed to assess changes in VRSA level before and after using the digital twin store. The results showed a significant reduction in participants' VRSA following the shopping experience in the digital twin store. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis revealed that perceived control in digital twin store was negatively related to the VRSA. Participants who found it easier to navigate and control their actions while shopping at the digital store exhibited lower levels of VRSA. The degree of freedom they experienced and the ease of performing shopping tasks played a key role in alleviating their anxiety. However, 3D authenticity and graphic vividness of digital twin store had no direct impact on consumers' VRSA. In conclusion, companies should regularly provide consumers opportunities to engage with and explore digital twin stores, helping to build confidence in virtual reality as a shopping platform. Furthermore, enabling a sense of control within the digital twin store environment is essential, as it can significantly mitigate potential consumer anxiety.

Valdimar Sigurdsson[1]

Anna Bower
Richardson[1]
Vishnu Menon[1,2]
Nils Magne Larsen[3]
Asle Fagerstrøm[4]
Huda Maulana[1]
Linda Hollebeek[5]

[1] Reykjavik University
Center for Research in
Marketing and Consumer
Psychology
Reykjavik, 102
Iceland

☎ +354 599 6200
✉ valdimars@ru.is
✉ Huda23@ru.is
✉ Anna23@ru.is
✉ rgvishnu@ru.is

[2] University of Southampton
Southampton Business
School
United Kingdom

[3] UiT- The Arctic University
of Norway
School of Business and
Economics

✉ nils.magne.larsen@uit.no

[4] Innovation and Technology
Kristania College
School of Economics,
Norway

✉
asle.fagerstrom@kristiania.no

[5] Sunway University
Department of Marketing
Strategy & Innovation
Malaysia

✉ lindah@sunway.edu.my

From Legacy Practices to Passenger-Centric Recovery: Understanding Preferences for Emerging Solutions in Passenger Disruption Management Using S-D Logic

The paper explores how Passenger Disruption Management (PDM) tools can enhance service recovery following flight disruptions, focusing on their potential to align recovery strategies with evolving passenger expectations while improving operational efficiency. Grounded in Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic), the research emphasizes understanding passengers' diverse preferences through a customer-centric approach, recognizing value as flowing multi-directionally rather than determined solely by the firm. Four studies were conducted to assess how PDM tools enhance recovery and to gain insights into passenger preferences and trade-offs between recovery attributes following disruptions such as delays and cancelations. The paper shows how PDM tools can facilitate airlines' departure from a traditional, one-size-fits-all approach, enabling the provision of personalized solutions that align with S-D Logic's emphasis on customer-centric strategies and the active role of passengers in the service recovery process. This contributes to the service recovery literature by exploring PDM tool-enabled recovery elements and analyzing the underdeveloped strategy of offering passengers choices over their recovery outcomes in the context of flight disruptions.

Greta Siracusa

LIUC - Università Cattaneo
School of Economics and
Management
Castellanza (VA)
Italy

✉ gsiracusa@liuc.it

Chiara Mauri

LIUC - Università Cattaneo
School of Economics and
Management
Castellanza (VA)
Italy

✉ cmauri@liuc.it

Fausto Pacicco

LIUC - Università Cattaneo
School of Economics and
Management
Castellanza (VA)
Italy

✉ fpacicco@liuc.it

.

Retail 5.0: Closer to Home, Smart and "Local"

The European retail grocery market is facing several challenges, including the aging of the population, a diminishing birth rate and increasingly discerning and less brand loyal consumers. Focusing on physical stores, these changes have led to a progressive abandonment of large surfaces in favor of smaller sizes, with a more capillary presence throughout the territory and with a focus on omnichannel opportunities to meet customers' needs. The new format of stores are smaller sales outlets of large retail chains with a reduced assortment and with an extensive use of up-front technology. Retailers such as Pam Panorama, Carrefour, Conad and Esselunga have recently opened new outlets in strategic locations in Milan to cater to their customers' daily shopping requirements while providing a wide range of products through e-commerce. The increasing convergence of retailer formats and product offerings, closer and closer to home and with similar reduced assortments may have led to a growing sense of indifference among consumers when making choices regarding their grocery purchases. In response to a mature market environment with limited population growth prospects, grocery retailers are exploring new strategies to expand their target market and attract new customers. They are actively stimulating consumer switching between different store formats, leading to the emergence of innovative "hybrid" formats that combine characteristics from different store formats (Cardinali & Bellini, 2014). Moreover, the issue of sustainability must be taken into account in the context of retail competition, because retail sustainability has become a significant driver of consumer store choice (Cervellon *et al.*, 2015; Angell *et al.*, 2012; Megicks *et al.*, 2008). The current study seeks to shed light on three topics: a) how close grocery stores are to consumers' home and, as a consequence, how many grocery stores of large chains compete for the same consumer in a properly defined attraction area; b) how fierce is the competitive pressure between them considering distance from consumers' homes and assortment size; c) the extent to which distance matters in consumers' store choice decisions. The first topic is analyzed through the data of NIQ Trade Dimensions (https://nielseniq.com/global/), using the centroids of the census zones as measure of consumers' homes and calculating the time distance between consumers' home and all the stores located in the attraction area. The second is analyzed through an index of retail store competition which integrates distance and store size. The third is investigated through qualitative research based on consumer diaries on weekly grocery shopping habits. The study field are the Italian municipalities, while the participants in the diary survey are all residents in Lombardy. The findings of this study will have important practical and managerial implications for retailers, as they will provide insights into the competitive landscape and identify opportunities for growth and differentiation. For instance, retailers can use these insights to develop location-based strategies that are tailored to the unique needs and preferences of local consumers. Moreover, the study highlights the increasing importance of convenience in modern retail and suggests that retailers must adapt to the ever-changing needs and expectations of consumers by embracing an omnichannel perspective. This requires not only investments in new technologies, but also a deep understanding of the preferences and behaviors of consumers.

Kelcie Slaton

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 2436
✉ kelcie.slaton@unt.edu

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas
Merchandising & Digital
Retailing
Denton, TX 76203
USA

☎ +1 940 565 3263
✉ sanjukta.pookulangara@
unt.edu

Do Consumers Trust the Use of AI in Luxury Marketing Communications?

AI technologies can allow luxury brands the ability to transform their business operations by being able to serve their current and potential target markets (Ransbotham *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, luxury brands can leverage AI technologies in creating innovative marketing strategies for both targeting and positioning their brand in a "smarter" way (Pantano *et al.*, 2018). However, the question remains if the consumer would even trust the information communicated by the luxury brand when they utilize AI in marketing communications. There is strong evidence that AI technologies can help luxury brands improve consumer engagement through marketing communications in an efficient way (Prentice and Nguyen, 2020). Current literature focusing on AI and luxury involves product development and online experience, however, there are no studies investigating the use of AI technologies for luxury brands' marketing strategy with emphasis on consumer trust. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of information conveyed by an AI generated luxury brand advertisement and consumers' behavior intention with the mediation of consumer trust. The researchers adopted the S-O-R framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to guide the study. Data was collected from a panel of consumers and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling. Participants were required to view an AI generated social media post from the luxury brand Gucci before responding to the survey items. Demographics, reliability, and validity measures were reported. The analysis showed a positive relationship between the independent variable, AI ad information, and dependent variable, consumer response. In addition, trust was a significant mediator in model, supporting all hypotheses. The emergence of AI enables the luxury industry to experiment with new strategies, but it is important to ensure positive responses from consumers before adopting. This study shows a positive response and overall consumer trust when AI was used to generate a luxury brand advertisement. This study provides empirical evidence that the use of AI technology by luxury brands for their marketing communications can have a positive impact on consumer response. It is worth noting the importance of the ad's design and presentation of information. Thus, it is recommended that the marketing team review all AI generated content before executing.

Mohamed Souka

Bielefeld University
Faculty of Business
Administration & Economics
Bielefeld, D-33615
Germany

☎ +49 521 106 3935
✉ mohamed.souka@uni-
   bielefeld.de

Reinhold Decker

Bielefeld University
Faculty of Business
Administration & Economics
Bielefeld, D-33615
 Germany

☎ +49 521 106 6913
✉ rdecker@uni-bielefeld.de

Consumer Reactions to AI vs. Human Agents in Advertising Videos: Does Disclosure Matter?

Artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly transformed advertising strategies (Ford *et al.*, 2023), offering benefits such as cost savings, faster production, and tailored content (Campbell *et al.*, 2022). A key development is the use of AI-generated avatars (agents or models) in commercial advertising (Lv *et al.*, 2023), which can appear indistinguishable from humans (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). Despite this, research on consumer responses to AI-generated avatars in media remains limited (Arango *et al.*, 2023), especially when their artificial nature is disclosed (Hermann & Puntoni, 2024). To ensure the comparability of AI and human agents, a pretest using a fictitious smartwatch video advertisement confirmed that there are no significant differences in perceived human-likeness, likeability, attractiveness, or friendliness between the custom AI avatar and the human agent. This validation allows us to accurately explore how agent type and identity disclosure in advertising videos influence consumer perceptions by comparing disclosed AI agents, disclosed human agents, and undisclosed AI agents. Previous research suggests that AI can negatively impact trust and authenticity (Amos & Zhang, 2024), as consumers may perceive AI agents as less knowledgeable (Luo *et al.*, 2019), leading to more negative brand attitudes (Arango *et al.*, 2023). However, some studies show no significant effect, with higher trust in AI in low-involvement contexts such as product advertisements (Wang & Qiu, 2023). To investigate these inconsistencies, we propose two hypotheses: (H1) AI agents will develop less favorable consumer perceptions than human agents; and (H2) AI agents with disclosed identities will receive lower evaluations compared to AI agents without disclosed identities. The results of an online experiment show that when agent identity is disclosed in the video, AI agents (vs. human agents) result in lower source credibility and brand authenticity, but not purchase intention. In addition, there are no significant differences between AI agents with and without disclosure. These findings suggest that while human agents are preferred, disclosing the identity of a highly human-like AI agents does not affect consumer perception compared to non-disclosure.

Rusty Stough

University of Maine
Maine Business School
Orono, 04469
United States

☎ +1 2075813671
✉ rusty.stough@maine.edu

Susan Myrden

University of Maine
Maine Business School
Orono, 04469
United States

☎ +1 2075814945
✉ susan.myrden@maine.edu

Ugliness is Only Skin Deep: The Effects of Green Consumption Value on Preference for Unattractive Products

Consumers, generally, prefer attractive products. However, recent research suggests that distinctiveness, be it attractive or unattractive, may influence product perceptions. Specifically, with respect to food, consumers may view distinctiveness as a sign of greenness, thus making it more of a feature than a deterrent (i.e., Cesaro *et al.,* 2019; Xu *et al.,* 2021, Kumar, 2023). This is particularly true when these products are environmentally friendly, through the concept of conspicuous conservation (Ivanova, 2019; Konuk & Otterbring, 2024). The extent to which consumers care about the environment can be an individual difference where people are intrinsically motivated, leading them to be more (or less) green in their consumption behavior (Haws *et al.,* 2014; Yadav *et al.,* 2024). Driven by two hypotheses, tested across 3 studies, this research advances our understanding of how green consumption value (GCV) influences preference for unattractive products. Study 1 explores the role of GCV on consumer preference for unattractive products. Participants responded to the GCV scale and then rated their preference for pretested products. Findings suggest that consumers who are high on GCV are more likely to prefer unattractive products than those who are low on GCV. In study 2, participants rated their preference, likelihood to purchase, and perceived greenness of these products. However, additional control measures were recorded, including the product's naturalness, healthiness, and quality. Results revealed that GCV only influenced preference for unattractive products when participants were high on GCV. There was no difference in preference for attractive products. Additionally, the findings suggest that participants who were high on GCV felt that the unattractive products were significantly more green than those who were lower on GCV. Finally, study 3 examined the potential role of explicit greenness. Explicit greenness was only influential to those who are high on GCV. Consistent with studies 1 and 2, when greenness was not made explicit, those who were high on GCV were more likely to perceive the unattractive products as green and had a higher preference for them. From a retail perspective, this research builds from recent research in green consumption and eco-labeling, pointing to the role that making greenness explicitly known plays in affecting consumer choice, clearly making the distinction between explicit green attributes that are known to everyone and implicit green attributes, which are assumed by consumers. We demonstrate that for consumers low on GCV, making the greenness of unattractive products salient by including green messaging on the product increases their preference for that product.

Stefan Stumpp

Anhalt University of
Applied Sciences
Bernburg, 06406
Germany

☏ +49 3471 3551358
✉ stefan.stumpp@hs-
anhalt.de

Tobias Knopf

Anhalt University of
Applied Sciences
Bernburg, 06406
Germany

☏ +49 3471 3551367
✉ tobias.knopf@hs-anhalt.de

Artificial Intelligence in Music Recommendation Systems: An Examination of User Perception and Satisfaction

As AI-driven music recommendation systems continue to transform how users engage with digital content, our study critically examines their impact on user satisfaction and behavioral intentions in German-speaking users. With the increasing reliance of streaming platforms on AI to curate personalized listening experiences, this research addresses key factors shaping user satisfaction, such as perceived usefulness (PU), perceived ease of use (PEOU), and the fulfillment of user expectations. This study contributes to the growing discourse by investigating how these variables collectively influence users' intentions to continue using AI-powered systems. We employed a quantitative research design, distributing an online survey to >110 active music streaming users. The survey captured user perceptions using established constructs from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM), operationalized through closed-ended Likert-scale questions. To ensure the robustness of the findings, we conducted multiple regression analysis and Pearson correlation, analyzing how PU, PEOU, and expectation fulfillment influence user satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Our findings demonstrate that perceived usefulness and ease of use significantly predict user satisfaction and the likelihood of continued service usage. Users who viewed the recommendation systems as both functional and intuitive reported higher satisfaction and stronger intentions to remain engaged. Moreover, expectation fulfillment acted as a moderator, amplifying the relationship between ease of use and satisfaction. Despite the general positivity, many users expressed concerns about the lack of diversity in recommendations, suggesting limitations in the algorithm's ability to accommodate niche musical preferences. Demographic analysis revealed that younger users exhibit a stronger preference for AI-driven recommendations, whereas differences in satisfaction across streaming platforms were minimal, indicating a consistent integration of AI technologies across services. Our study provides actionable insights for enhancing AI recommendation algorithms to improve user engagement and loyalty. Streaming platforms should not only refine their algorithms to better align with user expectations but also enhance transparency and offer greater user control over the recommendation process. We recommend that industry practitioners introduce more diverse and innovative recommendation strategies, paving the way for sustained user satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

Shoji Tanaka

Setsunan University
Faculty of Business
Administration
572-8508
Japan

☏ +81 72 839 9245
✉ tanakashojimail@
gmail.com

Hiroyuki Takahashi

Doshisha University
Faculty of Commerce
602-8580
Japan

☏ +81 75 251 2799
✉ hitakaha@
mail.doshisha.ac.jp

Changju Kim

Ritsumeikan University
College of Business
Administration
567-8570
Japan

☏ +81 72 665 2382
✉ cjkim777@
fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

The Influence of Aesthetics on Tourist Inspiration: Investigating Moderating Effects

In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in research on inspiration for tourism. This trend is attributed to changes in tourists' purchase decision-making processes. For instance, tourists may be inspired to discover new possibilities from photos of tourist destinations posted on Instagram. These experiences can motivate them to visit these destinations. Motivated consumers no longer cognitively evaluate alternatives as they did before but instead skip the evaluation process and decide to visit the destination they saw on Instagram. The concept of inspiration has gained attention in explaining tourist behavior. This study aims to identify the antecedents and conditions that influence tourist inspiration. Inspiration has been conceptualized in the field of social psychology (Thrash *et al.*, 2014) and introduced into the marketing domain (Böttger *et al.*, 2017). Customer inspiration from the marketing field has been applied to tourism as tourist inspiration. A systematic review of tourist inspiration revealed an accumulation of studies identifying the antecedents and consequences of tourist inspiration as well as scale development research to measure tourist inspiration. However, it also pointed out that the antecedents of tourist inspiration are still in an exploratory stage, and there is little research on the conditions under which these antecedents influence inspiration. To address this significant research gap, this study focuses on the antecedents and moderating variables of tourist inspiration based on the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory used in previous studies. This theory originally proposed that external stimuli in the environment directly affect cognitive and emotional psychological states, which in turn generate approach or avoidance behaviors. According to S-O-R theory, external information from social media influences tourist inspiration which represents a temporarily motivated state. Furthermore, tourist inspiration is expected to influence behavioral intentions, including booking intentions. In other words, S-O-R theory can explain the process by which tourist inspiration mediates between social media information and behavioral intentions. This study, which is currently in progress, plans to conduct a survey using social media at tourist destinations as a stimulus. Specifically, aesthetics will be set as the independent variable, familiarity as the moderating variable, booking intention as the dependent variable, and tourist inspiration as the mediating variable. There are two reasons for setting aesthetics as the independent variable. First, our preliminary survey confirmed that aesthetics influences inspiration. Second, little is known about the conditions that moderate the impact of aesthetics on tourist inspiration. Familiarity is set as the moderating variable because tourism is an experience goods, and it is assumed that the presence or absence of knowledge about a tourist destination moderates the effect of aesthetics on tourist inspiration. The specific results of the main survey will be presented at the conference.

Inci Toral

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ i.n.toral.1@bham.ac.uk

Fatos Ozkan Erciyas

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ f.ozkanerciyas@
bham.ac.

Kamilya Suleymanova

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ k.suleymenova@
bham.ac.uk

Mary Dawood

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ m.h.dawood@bham.ac.uk

Inclusive Retailing Through Innovative Technology: Overcoming Market Entry Barriers with Gen AI

This study explores how Gen AI can help ethnic minority women, particularly immigrant retail entrepreneurs, overcome market entry barriers. Using an intersectional theoretical lens (Bilge & Denis, 2010; Rosa-Salas & Sobande, 2022; Collins & Bilge, 2020), it examines Gen AI's potential to democratize access to essential support systems like legal, financial, and language resources, and aid in promoting their products and services in digital mediums. Grounded in market entry barrier theories (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019; Markman *et al.*, 2019), the research highlights how Gen AI facilitates personalized strategies, enabling these entrepreneurs to acquire crucial skills and knowledge (Yadav & Pavlou, 2020), thus fostering a more inclusive online retail sector (Srinivasan, 2021). The study employs Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009), integrating Gen AI-embedded retail training workshops that provide hands-on experiences and opportunities for reflection and application of new knowledge. Recognising the importance of innovation and creativity in retail (Cao, 2021), the workshops encourage participants to leverage Gen AI for innovative merchandising strategies, personalized customer experiences, and novel business models. This aligns with the concept of 'AI-powered creativity' (Magistretti *et al.*, 2023), where AI tools augment human creativity. In collaboration with a Birmingham-based charity, the research showcases Gen AI's transformative potential in retail. The workshops emphasize creative problem-solving, encouraging participants to leverage Gen AI for innovative strategies (Grewal *et al.*, 2020). By fostering an environment that values both technological proficiency and creative thinking, we aim to equip participants with the skills necessary to thrive in the digital and innovation-driven retail sector. This study contributes to retailing and retail education discussions, offering practical implementations to enhance the entrepreneurial landscape for marginalized groups. By integrating ELT with Gen AI, it demonstrates an innovative model for entrepreneurial education that addresses the unique needs of ethnic minority women in retail (Shabbir *et al.*, 2022; Neck & Greene, 2011). The research underscores Gen AI's role in democratizing innovation in retail, providing access to AI-driven analytics, market insights, and creative tools, thus fostering a more diverse and innovative retail ecosystem (Pantano & Dennis, 2019). This benefits the entrepreneurs and enhances the retail sector's resilience and adaptation.

Inci Toral

University of Birmingham
Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ i.n.toral.1@bham.ac.uk

Ronan De Kervenoael

Rennes School of Business
Rennes Cedex, 35065
France

✉ ronan.jouan-de-
kervenoael@rennes-sb.com

Jean-Paul de Cros
Peronard

Aarhus University
School of Business and Social
Sciences
Herning, 7400
Denmark

✉ jeanpaul@btech.au.dk

Navigating AI Integration in Service Industries: Employee Perspectives on their AI Co-Workers

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly becoming integral to service industries, promising enhanced efficiency and competitive advantage (Flavián & Casaló, 2021). However, the dynamics of AI integration within firms reveal a complex interplay between immediate operational needs and long-term strategic goals (Biloslavo *et al.*, 2024). Existing literature predominantly discusses about AIs integration in terms of customers, management and market capabilities (Akter *et al.*, 2023), employee skills (Morandini *et al.*, 2023) and change management for business transformation (George & Baskar, 2024). However, there is a noticeable gap in understanding how employees prioritize immediate operational consistency over innovation. Thus, this research provides new insights into the employee realities of AI integration, highlighting the socio-cultural and economic factors that shape strategic decisions in service industries. Initial findings 16 (ongoing) interviews (i.e. managers and shopfloor technicians) suggested three overarching themes: AI co-workers are not to be fully trusted as AI can cause failures and lead to machine injuries; human employees can be more beneficial in times of dire economic times. AI investments (maintenance and keeping up to date) are expensive and firms might need to revert to human employees; operational consistency can be challenging the innovativeness of the AI solution. Employees often prioritise AI applications that align with immediate operational needs over those that offer long-term innovative potential. This preference is influenced by broader socio-cultural and economic factors, suggesting a need to reassess the assumption that firms inherently benefit from innovation. This study contributes to the discussions of integrating AI solutions in service environments by offering an employee perspective. These findings bring new perspectives by offering a deeper discussion into Ais potentials, distancing itself from the AI-Job losses and AI dehumanisations arguments (Khogali & Mekid, 2023). By doing these it contributes to services, service HRM and organisational studies literatures.

Inci Toral

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

Sara Montano

University of Birmingham
Birmingham Business School
Birmingham, B15 2TT
United Kingdom

✉ s.e.montano@bham.ac.uk

Enhancing Student Job Confidence and Readiness Through Sense-Making and Experiential Learning: A Multi-Level Approach

Creativity has a high currency in retail practice, as creative innovation directly contributes to organisational value and success (Ma *et al.,* 2018). In an era characterized by rapid industry transformations and changing market dynamics, it is imperative to equip students with the capacity to adapt, think critically, and foster creativity (Burch *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, this study explores the dynamic interplay of sense-making and experiential learning in the context of retailing in Higher Education (HE) to foster creative and critical thinking in retail education. Innovative experiential learning is encouraged in business and management HE for better learning opportunities (Paul & Mukhopadhyay; 2005). However, it is difficult to measure how critical and creative thinking manifests through experiential learning as it focuses on the learning rather than the outcomes (Burch *et al.,* 2019). To address this issue, we developed a framework using sensemaking principles. The concept of sensemaking is the cognitive process of giving meanings to collective experiences (Weick, 1995). Our framework incorporates on the individual (noticing and bracketing), meso (transformation – articulating and elaboration) and group levels (metacognition and influence) (Stigliani & Ravasi (2012) through self-reporting, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding students' holistic development. As Weick (1995) suggested sensemaking is a collective process, and therefore we explore the metacognitive developments of students using an experiential learning groupwork (Gattringer *et al.,* 2021).

To understand the metacognitive development in this study we are collecting data from a group of 65 postgraduate retails students using a pre and post module survey questionnaire. The research aims at providing the significance of a multi-level approach to sense-making and experiential learning in postgraduate retail education. By equipping students to adapt at the individual level, transform at the meso-level, and engage in critical and creative thinking at the group level, educators can better prepare the next generation of marketing professionals to excel in a rapidly evolving industry. This study offers practical insights and pedagogical strategies for educators seeking to enhance the learning experience in postgraduate services and retail marketing courses.

Andreea Trifu

CUNEF University
Madrid, 28040
Spain

☎ + 34 914 44 51 61
✉ andreea.trifu@cunef.edu

Bianca Banica

University of Porto
Porto, 4200 - 465
Portugal

☎ + 35 1 222 094 000
✉ bianca.banica@inesctec.pt

Sandra Horvat

University of Zagreb
Zagreb, HR-10000
Croatia

☎ + 38 51 238 3333
✉ shorvat@efzg.hr

Lights, Camera, Chaos: The Dark Side of Media-Induced Tourism in Newly Famous vs. Established Destinations

In recent years, the rise of media-induced tourism meant that destinations gained prominence through their appearances in books, movies, or TV shows. Some locations have become tourist hotspots solely because of their portrayal in media, while others were already established and famous and have seen further increases in visitor numbers due to their media exposure. While media can boost tourism and benefit local economies, it can also create a range of negative consequences. This research seeks to compare the "dark side" of media-induced tourism by examining two categories of destinations: those that became famous because of media exposure and those that were already well-known but experienced a surge in tourism following their portrayal in pop culture. The aim of this research is to study the impact of media-induced tourism on newly famous destinations by analyzing how previously lesser-known locations have struggled to cope with sudden fame and the ensuing tourist boom due to media exposure. At the same time, we analyze the effects of media-induced tourism on established destinations. Already well-known destinations face unique challenges when media exposure brings even more tourists. We aim to determine how tourists perceive changes in the authenticity and quality of their experience, especially in light of increased commercialization and gentrification. To explore the dark side of media-induced tourism on tourist experiences, this study will compare two destinations: Madrid as an established tourist hub and Dubrovnik as a newly famous one. Madrid, already a globally recognized tourist destination, has seen further surges in visitor numbers due to its association with popular films and TV series, such as Almodóvar's movies and, more recently, "Money Heist" ("*La Casa de Papel*"). As an established destination, Madrid has a well-developed tourism infrastructure, yet media-induced tourism has introduced new challenges that affect the tourist experience. The city's extensive infrastructure allows it to better accommodate large numbers of visitors, but the downside is that the tourist experience becomes increasingly standardized and less unique. In contrast, Dubrovnik was thrust into the global spotlight almost overnight due to its role in HBO's "Game of Thrones." This newfound fame has attracted vast numbers of tourists, overwhelming the city's small size. Data collection and analysis include tourist comments and reviews from popular travel websites for both Madrid and Dubrovnik. This involves reviewing comments from periods both before and after the destinations became more prominent due to media exposure. Key themes are extracted from the reviews, focusing on tourists' experiences with overcrowding, authenticity, and how their expectations were met or distorted. The foreseeable contributions of this research will provide critical insights into the darker side of media-induced tourism, which is often overshadowed by the economic benefits it brings. We compare the challenges faced by newly famous and established destinations. This way, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of the pressures that tourism places on both local communities and environments. We seek to offer valuable recommendations for tourism boards, policymakers, and local authorities in developing sustainable tourism strategies that prioritize cultural preservation and authentic visitor experiences while managing the pressures brought by media exposure.

Khadija Ali Vakeel

DePaul University
College of Business
Chicago, 60608
USA

☎ +1 224 999 2901
✉ khadija.vakeel@depaul.edu

K. Sivakumar

Lehigh University
College of Business
Bethlehem, 18015
USA

☎ +1 610 758 3405
✉ kasg@lehigh.edu

Morana Fudurić

University of Zagreb
Faculty of Economics &
Business
Zagreb, 10000
Croatia

☎ +385 1 238 3333
✉ mfuduric2@net.efzg.hr

Asymmetric Network Effects on Multi-Sided Platforms

Multi-sided platforms (MSPs) are partnership networks that connect demand and supply sides. Examples include Amazon (which connects retailers to customers), Airbnb (which connects hosts to customers), etc. MSPs are a $57.6 billion economy, of which online marketplaces (e.g., Etsy, eBay) and transportation platforms (Uber, Lyft, etc.) are the most popular (Colby & Bill 2016). One widespread benefit of online platforms is network effects (NEs), where both parties benefit because of the direct and indirect NEs. Direct NEs occur when a party benefits because of increase in the number of participants on the same side of the network—for example, a greater number of auto-dealers on a platform benefits existing auto-dealers. Indirect NEs arise when one side of the platform benefits due to an increase in the number of participants on the other side. The NE gives rise to economies of scale benefitting the platform by reducing fixed costs. MSPs typically attract suppliers from different quality tiers to enable the offering of products with different quality levels. Since MSPs are a recent phenomenon, the potential differential impacts of varying quality products on direct and indirect NE need further research, as prior literature has shown positive network effects on MSP. This study explores how different quality tiers (high versus low) impact direct and indirect network effects in multi-sided platforms. Using data from two different kinds of MSPs – B2C, and P2P, the study demonstrates the differences and similarities in the presence of NEs for high- and low-quality tiers. Overall, this study explores the interface of NE and quality tiers for the first time in the literature. The study shows that NEs are context-specific. The finding has implications for service providers and platforms. This study will help service providers decide which MSPs to join to obtain greater profits and attract more customers. Further, MSPs can benefit by engaging specific service providers using a retailer recruitment strategy and working on platform positioning and branding. Knowing how NE impacts different quality tiers, MSPs can choose to have a diverse or focused group of service providers. They can also use the research findings to guide financial arrangements between them and service providers, especially in a commission-based model.

Thomas Van den
Bossche
Katja Verbeeck

Odisee University College
Uce Research Group
Brussel, 1000
Belgium

☎ +32 9 265 86 10
✉ thomas.vandenbossche@
odisee.be
✉ katja.verbeeck@odisee.be

Karel Deneckere
Saskia Vanden Eede

Odisee University College
CenSE Research Group
Brussels, 1000
Belgium

☎ +32 2 240 68 40
✉ karel.deneckere@ odisee.be
✉ saskia.vandeneede@
odisee.be

COntent: Personalized Content Creation by Marketer and AI

Content marketing has gained a central role in marketing and is no longer a side issue. Relevant and personalized content is crucial for reaching the target audience, with AI helping to improve efficiency by managing the increased workload. Generative AI (Gen AI) applications, such as ChatGPT, became immensely popular in a very short period of time. However, Gen AI also raises ethical and legal concerns, such as copyright issues and potential misuse. There is a need for more knowledge, greater awareness and critical reflection before Gen AI can be more widely implemented. The goal of the COntent project is to assist Flemish SMEs in automating and optimizing their content marketing using Gen AI technology. It will provide inspiration and technical guidance for creating personalized textual content by showcasing practical content generation cases. Additionally, the project aims to raise awareness about the legal and ethical implications of automated content creation. The main question in this project is: How can AI support marketers in creating relevant, personalized content? More concrete: How user-friendly, accessible, and cost-effective are AI content generation tools today? What ethical and legal challenges arise from using these AI tools, and how can they be addressed responsibly? What added value does co-created AI content offer? Together with Flemish SMEs, we work on the co-creation of SEO/SEA texts, social media posts, newsletter and website content. Each use case is approached from a strategic, technical, ethical and legal perspective (360-degree approach). We plan to set-up experiments to evaluate whether co-created AI content achieves the defined goals. A between-subjects design (A/B testing) will be used, where one group views human-written content and the other views co-created AI content. We will also gather qualitative feedback via our in-house UX lab, in collaboration with the involved SMEs. For each use case, we will report on the methodology followed and compile our findings into a digital sheet.

Sai Vattana

University of North Texas
School of Merchandising
Denton, TX 76203
USA

✉ psaivattana@gmail.com

Kiseol Yang

University of North Texas
School of Merchandising
Denton, TX 76203
USA

✉ kiseol.yang@unt.edu

HaeJung Maria Kim

University of North Texas
School of Merchandising
Denton, TX 76203
USA

✉ haejung.kim@unt.edu

#Deinfluencing: Source Credibility and Message Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers' Deinfluencing Activities

Deinfluencers advocate against buying into the trend or purchasing products or services due to the overwhelming surge in sales tactics and viral products. Although the commotion of convincing their audience to shift more sustainably has surfaced before, deinfluencing is now gaining significant traction, fueled by influence fatigue and the desire for authenticity. According to Kiran (2023), it has been found that deinfluencer content is more likely to be shared than traditional social media influencer (SMI) content and 66.5% of consumers express greater trust in brands that acknowledge deinfluencers. This highlights the growing consumer preference for authentic and transparent reviews over sponsored brands and products. With the deinfluencing trend and consumer expectation for authenticity of influencers' claims, this study aimed to examine the effect of social media influencers' credibility on persuasion effectiveness of deinfluencing claims and its consequence effect on consumer intention to follow the deinfluencing claims. The study hypotheses were developed grounded upon attribution theory to understand SMI's motivations for deinfluencing claims and persuasion effectiveness theory to understand the effect of source credibility of deinfluencing claims on consumer responses. The following hypotheses were examined. H1: Influencers' expertise of products/ topics associated with deinfluencing claim has a positive effect on persuasion effectiveness. H2: Influencers' sincerity relating to deinfluencing claim has a positive effect on persuasion effectiveness. H3: Influencers' trustworthiness relating to deinfluencing claim has a positive effect on persuasion effectiveness. H4a-c: Transparency of deinfluencing content (source transparency) will moderate the relationships between source credibility (a: expertise, b: sincerity, c: trustworthiness) and persuasion effectiveness. H5: Persuasion effectiveness will have a positive effect on consumer intention to follow deinfluencing claims. This study collected a total of 226 responses and data was analyzed using two steps of structural equation modeling. The results found that H1-3, H4b, and H5 are supported. H4a & c were not supported. The results explain how deinfluencing claims can be effective according to source (influencer) credibility. Influencers' expertise has the strongest effect on persuasion of effectiveness of deinfluencing claims and people show their intention to follow deinfluencing claims.

Donata Tania Vergura

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

✉ donatatania.vergura@
unipr.it

Cristina Zerbini

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

✉ cristina.zerbini@unipr.it

Settimio Ziccarelli

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

✉ settimio.ziccarelli@unipr.it

Guido Cristini

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

✉ guido.cristini@unipr.it

Upcycling Economy: Consumer Perceptions of Food Made From Surplus Food

Today, between 30-40% of the food we produce is wasted (Upcycled Food Association, 2024). Along the manufacturing, handling, storage, packaging, distribution, and consumption phases of the food supply chain, a considerable amount of food loss occurs. This results in a waste of natural and economic resources. We talk about "upcycled" when waste is used and reintroduced into the production chain, thus resulting in an increase in 'value' (Bridgens *et al.*, 2018; Forbes, 2021). Upcycled products prevent food waste by creating new, high quality products out of surplus food that are safe for human consumption. Finding a new use for food that would otherwise have ended up in a waste destination is a creative challenge that generates economic gain and environmental benefits (Bangar *et al.*, 2024; Bhatt *et al.*, 2021). Given the rising popularity of upcycling food as a trend inherent in sustainable consumption (Aschemann-Witzel *et al.*, 2023; BusinessWire, 2021; Peschel & Aschemann-Witzel, 2020), it appears essential to understand how consumers perceive these types of products and which are the drivers and barriers that favor/hinder the propensity towards their consumption. To this end, an empirical research was conducted to evaluate both positive and negative factors which could influence consumers' desire to eat upcycled food. The proposed conceptual model is based on three main focal areas of consumer perception of sustainable food: attitude toward the environment, food neophobia, and product perceived value. With reference to the first area, starting from the norm activation model (NAM; Schwartz, 1977), we hypothesize that environmental concern-related and consciousness-related variables impact the moral obligation towards the purchase of upcycled food, which in turn influences the desire to eat. Additionally, we expect that judgments of healthiness, taste and innovation may influence perceived product value and perceived risk of consumption. Finally, consumer discomfort with novel foods (food neophobia) is considered a deterrent to the desire to consume the upcycled food and responsible for the increase in risk attribution. However, transparency in the production process could moderate such relationships, thereby mitigating the potential negative role of food neophobia. Data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire designed around a set of psychometric measures aimed at measuring the identified latent variables. The analysis of the conceptual model was performed through structural equation modelling (SEM) using the LISREL software. This research aims to contribute to the existing literature on upcycled products from two different perspectives. Firstly, it aims to enhance the theoretical understanding of consumer acceptance of unconventional food products such as upcycled food. Secondly, from a practical point of view, the research intends to provide valuable insights to stakeholders in the food industry by identifying the factors that influence the perception of value or risk of food made from surplus food, as well as the moral obligation to buy and the desire to consume.

Iris Vilnai-Yavetz

Ruppin Academic Center
Faculty of Economics and
Business Administration
Emek Hefer, 4025000
Israel

☎ +972 98983033
✉ yavetzir@ruppin.ac.il

Shaked Gilboa

Ruppin Academic Center
Faculty of Economics and
Business Administration
Emek Hefer, 4025000
Israel

☎ +972 98983818
✉ shakedg@ruppin.ac.il

Vince Mitchell

University of Sydney
The University of Sydney
Business School
Sydney, 2006
Australia

☎ +61 8626458
✉ vince.mitchell@
    sydney.edu.au

Navigating by Retail Atmospherics: Identifying Attractive and Irritating Mall Atmospherics That Influence the Stay Decisions of Shoppers with Disabilities

Previous studies have examined the positive outcomes of retail atmospherics (Roggeveen *et al.*, 2020; Vilnai-Yavetz *et al.*, 2021), such as how pleasant music encourages longer store dwell times (Chebat *et al.,* 2001), while other research has explored the negative aspects, such as how bright lighting can shorten these times (d'Astous, 2000; Demoulin & Willems, 2019). A separate body of research has addressed services and sales for people with disabilities (Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017). Yet these research streams—retail atmospherics and shoppers with disabilities—have rarely converged (Edwards *et al.*, 2018; Baker *et al.*, 2007), although an estimated 1.3 billion people worldwide (16% of the global population) have at least one significant disability (WHO, 2023). A recent study (Vilnai-Yavetz *et al.*, 2024) bridged these gaps and found, as expected, that shoppers with disability experience stronger negative emotional responses to irritating atmospherics than their non-disabled counterparts. Surprisingly, despite negative emotions mediating the relationship between environmental irritants and mall avoidance, both groups exhibited similar avoidance behaviors. This unexpected result prompted the current study to delve deeper into this phenomenon by exploring two possible explanations: 1) Lack of Choice—limited alternatives compel shoppers with disabilities to utilize mall services, which offer a safer environment than city streets for shopping and leisure; 2) Preference for the Mall—the positive mall atmospherics outweigh the irritants, retaining shoppers with disabilities despite their discomfort. From existing scales for measuring store atmospherics and servicescape elements (e.g., Baker *et al.*, 2002; Steen *et al.*, 2024; Vilnai-Yavetz *et al.*, 2024), we developed an initial questionnaire with over 60 items detailing both well-researched (e.g., design, ambientes) and lesser-studied mall atmospherics, such as sustainability and accessibility. Using data from 301 UK mall visitors collected via the Prolific platform (https://prolific.ac/), we shortened the scale by EFA to create a shorter, validated, and reliable questionnaire. An online survey of 1,790 British mall visitors revealed that approx. 23% reported themselves as people with disability and 7% accompanying people with disability in their visit to the mall. Following El Hedhli *et al.,*(2013), we measured reactions to a variety of retail atmospherics using a bipolar semantic differential scale (-3 to +3), covering aspects like odors from harsh cleaning chemicals (-3) to pleasing perfume fragrances (+3). Initial findings confirm a solid basis for each of the two primary explanations. They corroborate Vilnai-Yavetz *et al.* (2024), showing shoppers with disabilities rate 8% of atmospherics like artificial lighting negatively (below 0), versus 6.5% by non-disabled shoppers. Both groups also assign high positive ratings (1.2+ on the bipolar scale), but shoppers with disabilities positively rate only 13% of atmospherics (e.g., employee cleanliness), compared to 27% by non-disabled shoppers. Identifying positive mall atmospherics that mitigate the effects of irritants is crucial for designing inclusive retail spaces that enable rather than restrict, fostering inclusion rather than exclusion. We offer recommendations for the design of retail spaces for the inclusion of shoppers with disability and discuss theoretical and practical implications and opportunities for future research.

Florian Weyerhäuser

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 4474
✉ florian.weyerhaeuser@
 uni-saarland.de

Bastian Popp

Saarland University
Department of Business
Administration
66123 Saarbruecken
Germany

☎ +49 681 302 4475
✉ bastian.popp@
 uni-saarland.de

A Dark Side of Online Marketplaces? Negative Effects of Sales via Online Marketplaces on the Brand of Brick-And-Mortar Retailers

The emergence of shopping platforms and mobile shopping has put physical retailers under enormous pressure (Verhoef *et al.*, 2015) which forced the companies to adapt their online strategies, for example, by joining online marketplaces (Lahuerta Otero *et al.*, 2014). Online marketplaces provide a basic framework for managing product distribution, supply chain, customer interaction, procurement and financial support (Misra *et al.*, 2022). The advantages here are easier access to global markets, improved communication, reduced transaction costs and stimulated competition (Stockdale *et al.*, 2004). However, selling via online marketplaces also harbors potential risks, particularly for a retailer's brand and customer relationships. Marketplace operators control and restrict the marketing opportunities of sellers (Li *et al.*, 2019) while ignoring their legitimate brand-building interests (Wichmann *et al.*, 2022). This not only makes it more difficult to differentiate from the strong competition (Yenipazarli, 2021), but also increases the risk of negative associations with the online marketplace spilling over to the retailer's brand (Bei *et al.*, 2023). Potential negative effects may especially be related to perceived sustainability, as consumers are increasingly critical of potentially environmentally harmful business practices in retail (e.g. harmful production conditions, large amounts of waste, pollution) (Wagner *et al.*, 2008) and generally believe that online retail is less environmentally friendly than brick-and-mortar retail (Klein *et al.*, 2023; Wiese *et al.*, 2012). Negative associations with large global online marketplaces thus may hurt the brand image of marketplace sellers, for instance, a brick-and-mortar retailer's perceived brand localness, a brand attribute that has been shown to influence brand attitude and translate into favorable consumer behavioral intentions such as purchase intention, price premium and word of mouth (Bourdin *et al.*, 2021; Halkias *et al.*, 2016; Safeer *et al.*, 2022; Winit *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, local brands, which benefit from higher levels of brand awareness, an image of trust and value, and a significantly stronger image of reliability (Schuiling *et al.*, 2004), may risk these advantages over global brands by selling on an online marketplace. In our experimental study (*n* = 216), we therefore investigate how selling over an online marketplace can alter the brand attitude towards a brick-and-mortar retailer. In particular, we study the mediating role of perceived sustainability, perceived brand localness and trust in the relationship between selling via an online marketplace and brand attitude towards a brick-and-mortar retailer. Results of a mediation analyzes using Hayes' Process Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) indicate that perceived sustainability and trust towards the retailer are negatively affected while there is no direct effect, supporting a full mediation. Regarding perceived brand localness, our results confirm that it influences the brand attitude towards the retailer while no effect of marketplace sales on perceived brand localness could be found. We show that brand attitudes toward a brick-and-mortar retailer can be negatively influenced by its association with an online marketplace. We thus recommend that brick-and-mortar retailers evaluate the brand positioning of their own retail brand before integrating an online marketplace channel. Even if joining an online marketplace is accompanied by numerous advantages, retailers need to ensure that the marketplace brand does not damage their own retail brand.

Hongjoo Woo

Yonsei University
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☏ +82 2 2123 3128
✉ h_woo@yonsei.ac.kr

Daeun Chloe Shin

University of Houston
Houston, TX 77004
USA

☏ +1 713 743 0873
✉ dshin5@central.uh.edu

Naeun Lauren Kim

University of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN 55455
USA

☏ +1 612 626 1942
✉ nlkim@umn.edu

Sumin Lee

Yonsei University
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☏ +82 2 2123 7523
✉ suminlee01@yonsei.ac.kr

Hyejin Chang

Yonsei University
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☏ +82 2 2123 7523
✉ chyejinny@yonsei.ac.kr

Fake Hunger: Who Consumes Fashion for Desired versus Actual Needs and What Are Their Characteristics?

Nutritionists say we should be careful of "fake hunger", which stimulates appetite even when we are biologically full. In fashion consumption, fake hunger also might exist in the form of psychological or emotional needs, provoking urges like impulsive buying or shopping addiction. Bruner's (1987) classic theory of consumer decision-making explains these psychological/emotional needs as "Desired needs," which are counterparts to the real needs, or "Actual needs" (Bruner, 1987). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1978) further posits that consumers desire to belong to society by following social norms (i.e., collectivism, social and fashion motivations for consumption), which often reflects consumption based on Desired needs. Based on these theories, this study investigated how consumer characteristics differ by the type of needs they rely on. For the research method, an online survey was conducted on 2,000 consumers in their 20s-40s in South Korea after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Following Bruner (1987), we classified consumers into two groups based on whether they are closer to Desired or Actual needs in the Problem Recognition scale (i.e., "I go out shopping for clothes long before what I have is worn out"; below mean = Actual State, above mean = Desired State). To compare group characteristics, collectivism (vertical and horizontal), fashion consumption motivations (social, fashion, and practical), decision-making styles, and demographic variables were also measured. The results revealed that the Actual State group (n=964) is predominantly male (57.9%) in their 40s (37.0%). In contrast, the Desired State group (n=1,036) was predominantly female (57.3%) in their 20s (36.2%). A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), controlling age, gender, and socially desirable responses, revealed that both vertical and horizontal collectivism is significantly higher (M = 4.65-4.69) in the Desired State group than the Actual State group (M = 4.31-4.32) ($F_{(4,1995)}$ = 22.73-39.38, $p < .001$). A MANOVA showed that the Desired State group also has higher social (M = 4.68) and fashion (M = 4.74) motivations than the Actual State group (M = 3.79-3.43) ($F_{(1,1999)}$ = 311.55-862.95, $p < .001$), while there was no difference in practical motivation. For decision-making style, a cross-tab analysis revealed that the Desired State group was more likely to follow habitual and limited decision-making, whereas the Actual State group was likely to engage in extended decision-making (χ^2=6.88). These results indicate that fashion consumption stems from not only practical (Actual State) but also from less practical (Desired State) needs, and fashion consumption driven by less practical needs (Desired State) is primarily for social acceptance (collectivism, social and fashion motivations). Furthermore, these consumers tend to follow simpler decision-making styles (habitual and limited), which are known to be correlated to overconsumption and shopping addiction.

Hanfei Xue
Jiayu Wang
Szeman Chong
Woojin Choi
Chung-Wha (Chloe) Ki
Christina Wong
Tsai-Chun Huang

Hong Kong Polytechnic University
School of Fashion and Textiles
Hong Kong

☏ +852 55314485
☏ +852 54651698
☏ +852 96820217
☏ +852 27666515
☏ +852 27666415
☏ +852 27665472

✉ hanfei.xue@
    connect.polyu.hk
✉ violet2jy.wang@
    connect.polyu.hk
✉ sman.chong@polyu.edu.hk
✉ woojin.choi@polyu.edu.hk
✉ chloe.ki@polyu.edu.hk
✉ christina.wy.wong@
    polyu.edu.hk
✉ tsai-chun.huang
    @polyu.edu.hk

The Influence of Virtual Avatar Assistants' (VAAs') Form on Consumer Fun and VAA Service Adoption in Online Retail: The Moderating Role of Shopping Motivation

Virtual assistants (VAs) have become essential in replacing human assistants and elevating customer service in online fashion shopping. With advancements in generative AI, VAs have transformed from text- or voice-based chatbots into visually distinct Virtual Avatar Assistants (VAAs), ranging from cartoonish to human-like figures. While previous research on VAs has primarily focused on their 'behavioral realism,' little is known about how their 'visual appearance' and 'form realism (FR)' influence consumers' sense of 'fun' and willingness to adopt virtual assistant services. This is especially important as many shoppers browse online not just for intentional purchases but also for entertainment. To address this gap, this study draws on Avatar Marketing Theory (Miao *et al.*, 2022) and Consumer Fun Theory (Oh & Pham, 2022) to examine whether and how VAAs' visual form—specifically its presence vs. absence (Study 1) and degree of FR (High vs. Low; Study 2)—affects consumers' perception of fun and their intent to adopt VAA services, and how their shopping motivation (purposeful vs. recreational) moderates this relation (Study 2). Based on the literature, we propose **H1**: (H1a) The presence (vs.absence) of a VAA's visual form and (H1b) high (vs. low) FR will have a greater impact on consumers' adoption of VAA services in online fashion shopping; **H2**: The effects stated in H1 are sequentially mediated by consumers' perceptions that engaging with the VAA is (a) more 'liberating' and (b) more 'hedonically engaging,' which ultimately enhances their sense of 'fun'; **H3**: Consumers with recreational (vs. purposeful) shopping motivation will amplify the serial mediation effects—both H2a and H2b. We tested the hypotheses by conducting two online experiments, targeting U.S. consumers. Study 1 employed a 2 between-subjects design (presence [*n*=81] vs. absence [*n*=100] of a VAA's visual form) to test H1a and H2. Study 2 used a 2x2 between-subjects design, manipulating both a VAA's FR (high [$n = 208$] vs. low [$n = 202$]) and consumers' shopping motivation orientation (purposeful [$n = 204$] vs. recreational [$n = 206$]) to test H1b, H2 (robustness test), and H3 (moderation test). We employed Hayes' PROCESS model macro (Model 80) to test H1 and H2, and manymome Package in *R* to test H3. Study 1 results revealed that the direct effect of VAA's visual form was insignificant, failing to support H1a (β = .004, 95% *CI* = [-.280, .215]). However, the serial mediation effects were found significant, supporting H2a (indirect effect = .068, 95% *CI* = [.008, .165]) and H2b (indirect effect = .063, 95% *CI* = [.008, .146]). Similarly, Study 2 results showed insignificant direct effect, failing to support H1b (β = .060, 95% *CI* = [-.012, .125]). Yet, the indirect effects of VAA's FR were significant, supporting H2a (indirect effect =.147, 95% *CI* = [.096, .209]) and H2b (indirect effect = .148, 95% CI = [.097, .210]). Study 2 results also revealed a positive moderation effect of consumers' shopping motivation, supporting H3a (moderated mediation index = .086, 95% *CI* = [.046, .141]) and H3b (moderated mediation index= .044, 95% *CI* = [.013, .082]). Our findings offer valuable insights to the literature by demonstrating that form—more specifically FR—play a pivotal role in determining the service effectiveness of VAs in online retail. While a VA's visual form and degree of FR do not directly drive consumers' adoption of VA services, they indirectly influence this by enhancing consumers' perceptions of liberation, engagement, and fun.

Jeong Eun Yoon

Yonsei University
Dept. of Clothing & Textiles
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☎ +82 10 4410 4702
✉ yje0105@yonsei.ac.kr

Chen Jinzhi

Yonsei University
Dept. of Clothing & Textiles
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☎ +82 10 6651 0221
✉ jzchen21@yonsei.ac.kr

Sumin Koo

Yonsei University
Dept. of Clothing & Textiles
Seoul, 03722
South Korea

☎ +82 10 5255 2577
✉ smkoo1@yonsei.ac.kr

Development and Evaluation of a Back Strength Aid for Reducing Musculoskeletal Disorders

Repetitive manual labor in industrial settings poses significant ergonomic risks to workers, primarily contributing to musculoskeletal disorders. These risks stem from repetitive motions, abnormal movements, and the frequent lifting of heavy objects, often resulting in back discomfort, absenteeism, and reduced productivity. Therefore, this study aims to develop and evaluate a prototype back strength aid designed to prevent musculoskeletal disorders and enhance occupational safety for industrial workers. The literature suggests that back-supportive apparel can reduce muscle strain and alleviate physical stress during labor-intensive tasks. With the global rise in musculoskeletal disorders, the importance of developing strength-assistive apparel cannot be overstated due to the associated financial and public health impacts (McConaghy *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, the commercialization of such apparel is expected to provide significant benefits across all sectors. To evaluate the performance of the developed prototype, electromyography (EMG) was measured on wearer's spinal erector spinae muscles while lifting and lowering of weights (15kg and 20 kg). Ten healthy adult males were also asked to respond to a 41-question satisfaction survey about the developed garment (Kang *et al.*, 2024). Three prototypes were developed in this study: design 1 has no waist strength support function; design 2 has an X-shaped elastic band extending from the shoulder to the thigh band for waist strength support; and design 3 has an X-shaped elastic band extending from the shoulder to the ankle for waist strength support. EMG results demonstrated a significant reduction in muscle force: The design 2 showed a 33.68% reduction at 15 kg and 17.73% at 20 kg, while design 3 exhibited a 37.01% reduction at 15 kg and 22.96% at 20 kg, compared to design 1. Satisfaction scores indicated that all three designs were rated highly in terms of safety, with Designs 2 and 3 scoring an average of 5.55 and 5.68, respectively, in the safety category. The findings suggest that the back strength support features in designs 2 and 3 effectively reduce muscle strain, potentially lowering the risk of musculoskeletal disorders in workers performing repetitive lifting tasks. The positive user feedback and substantial force reduction observed in these designs highlight their potential for commercialization to improve occupational health and safety across various sectors.

Hong Yu

Toronto Metropolitan
University
Ted Rogers School of Retail
Management
Toronto, M5B 2K3
Canada

☎ +1 647 407 7192
✉ hongyu@torontomu.ca

Osmud Rahman

Toronto Metropolitan
University
School of Fashion
Toronto, M5B 2K3
Canada

☎ +1 416 979 5000
✉ orahman@tornotmu.ca

Baby Boomers Shop as Caregivers: Implications for Apparel Designers, Retailers and Community Care Providers

Individuals aged 65 years or older, often referred to as "elderly" or "seniors," constitute 19% of Canada's total population. Among them, 43% have physical or mobility limitations, and over 8 million Canadians provide informal care to family or friends (Government of Canada, 2018). Caregivers, beyond assisting with tasks like cooking or bathing, often help with shopping. Shopping can serve multiple purposes—it can be a routine task, a social engagement, or even a leisure activity (Joung & Miller, 2006; Myers & Lumbers, 2008). Studies show that aging-related changes in shopping behavior—such as store preferences, product choices, and the overall shopping experience—are closely tied to older adults' sense of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Shopping for clothing as a caregiver can be particularly challenging, as fashion choices relate not only to the care receiver's personal preferences but also to their physical needs, psychological comfort, and perception of age-appropriate styles. Clothing, as an extension of self, reflects a wearer's identity (Belk, 1988). Supporting successful aging, therefore, includes addressing the shopping well-being of both Baby Boomers as consumers and caregivers. Understanding their needs and challenges is crucial in this context. This paper reports the 3rd phase of a project that aims to expand our understanding of Canadian Baby Boomers' fashion shopping experiences - both for themselves and as caregivers. In this phase, we engage various stakeholders (ie, fashion designers/manufacturers, retailers, professional caregiving practitioners and administrators, civic leaders, and policymakers) who support successful aging efforts to enrich our understanding, delve deeper into practice and policy implications, and expand the dissemination of our research findings within and beyond fashion and retail industries and caregiving community. We have completed an online survey with 300 Canadian Baby Boomer caregivers and 15 one-on-one interviews in Phases 1 and 2. The purpose of the Phase 3 focus group study is to solicit feedback and validate the findings from industry experts. We will run three focus groups: one with apparel designers/manufacturers, one with fashion retailers, and one with community healthcare professionals. Each focus group study will have 5-6 participants, about 1-1.5 hours long, and use a hybrid online/offline format. Data collection is expected to be completed by December 2024. Findings will raise awareness of meaningful and functional fashion possessions and shopping experiences in contributing to seniors' well-being and quality of life. They will also inform effective and actionable strategies for practitioners.

Gioele Zamparo

University of Udine
Department of Economics and
Statistics
Udine, 33100
Italy

☎ +39 0432 249262
✉ gioele.zamparo@uniud.it

Francesco Massara

IULM University
Department of Business, Law,
Economics and Consumer
Behavior
Milano, 20144
Italy

☎ +39 02 892412746
✉ francesco.massara@iulm.it

Michela Mason

University of Udine
Department of Economics and
Statistics
Udine, 33100
Italy

☎ +39 0432 249223
✉ michela.mason@uniud.it

Andrea Moretti

University of Udine
Department of Economics and
Statistics
Udine, 33100
Italy

☎ +39 0432 249237
✉ andrea.moretti@uniud.it

Explaining Employee Performance During Crisis Situations in the Retail Sector Through the AMO Framework

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic exposed retail front-line employees to unprecedented levels of stress, forcing organizations to rapidly adapt to a shifting landscape through accelerated digitalization and innovative practices. This study uses the Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) framework as a comprehensive theoretical lens to examine the experiences of retail front-line employees during times of crisis. This study utilizes fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis on a sample of 1,350 questionnaires completed by Italian retail employees to explore the influence of various factors on conditional performance. The results from the fsQCA (fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis) of the same data set reveal that none of the aforementioned factors (i.e., Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity) are sufficient on their own to determine employees' performance. Instead, combinations of these three factors are necessary. The current research offers new insights for retail literature by applying the AMO framework to retail HR processes. This framework is valuable for identifying key areas of retail people management. The study provides valuable insights for practitioners by identifying the factors that enabled employees to perform well under challenging conditions, highlighting the stressors and resources influencing job performance framed as ability, opportunity, and motivation. This research is the first to apply the AMO model in conjunction with the fsQCA approach to conditionally predict employee job performance in the retail sector.

Ping Zhong

Ritsumeikan University
Postgraduate School of
Business Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 80 8735 4157
✉ gr0563rp@ed.ritsumei.ac.jp

Changju Kim

Ritsumeikan University
College of Business
Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 72 665 2382
✉ cjkim777@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Zhihan Lyu

Ritsumeikan University
Postgraduate School of
Business Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 70 4553 8999
✉ gr0672hf@ed.ritsumei.ac.jp

Marina Kim

Ritsumeikan University
College of Business
Administration
Osaka, 567-8570
Japan

☎ +81 72 665 2090
✉ mir16089@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp

Does a Consumer Boycott Against Unethical Companies Affect Travel Intentions? The Role of Corporate Reputation and Corporate Brand Loyalty

Recently, traveling to the country to consume global products has become a new leisure option for travelers. Given a reverse country of origin from consumer perceptions of products that affect the destination (Liu *et al.*, 2023), a positive brand image can improve a country's image and increase the number of travelers. However, previous studies have shown that brand crises can negatively affect a product country's image and even influence attitudes toward unrelated categories (Aichner *et al.*, 2020). However, we claim that previous studies are still silent on whether and how socially irresponsible companies affect consumers' travel intentions to their country of origin. Reviewing the existing literature on our baseline relationship between corporate social irresponsibility and travel intentions, our study identifies two key limitations: 1) previous studies used consumer attitudes and beliefs to interpret the reverse effect of country of origin on tourism and have not explained the effect of consumer boycott behavior. 2) previous studies have neglected the moderating role of corporate reputation and corporate brand loyalty in explaining the baseline relationship. To fill this gap in the literature, building on attribution and social identity theories, this study aims to extend the direct relationship between corporate social irresponsibility and consumers' travel intentions to companies' countries of origin by considering consumer boycott behaviors while examining the moderating effect of corporate reputation and corporate brand loyalty. To test our hypotheses, we use data from 725 Chinese consumers and employ PROCESS macro (Model 9). Our results propose the following interesting findings: First, we found a negative and significant direct effect of the perceived severity of corporate social irresponsibility on travel intentions (H1). Second, boycott behavior negatively mediates the negative relationship between the perceived severity of corporate social irresponsibility and travel intention (H2). Third, while corporate brand loyalty significantly weakens the negative indirect effect of the perceived severity of corporate social irresponsibility and travel intention through boycott behavior (H3), in contrast to our prediction in H4, corporate reputation significantly strengthens the same indirect effect (H4). Our contribution is as follows: First, our study is novel in explaining travel intentions to the country of origin from the perspective of corporate unethical behavior and extends this baseline relationship by considering consumer boycotts. Second, we emphasize that corporate reputation and corporate brand loyalty have different impacts on the relationships between corporate social irresponsibility, consumer boycotts, and travel intention, which may contribute to the existing literature on marketing and international business.

Settimio Ziccarelli

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

✉ settimio.ziccarelli@unipr.it

Donata Tania Vergura

University of Parma
Department of Economics
and Management
Parma, 43125
Italy

☎ +39 0521 032461
✉
donatatania.vergura@unipr.it

Comparing Text- and Video-Based Interactions with Virtual Assistants in E-commerce

As technology integrates deeper into our routines, virtual assistants (VAs) are becoming more relevant in managing our daily tasks providing support across various platforms (Rawassizadeh *et al.*, 2019). Given the rising popularity of these systems (Gholami & Al Abdwani, 2024), it remains essential to understand how different VA communication styles drive users interaction and what contributes to their overall satisfaction especially considering the essential insights for companies employing such technologies. To address this issue, the current investigation aims to examine how VAs communication modalities (textual *vs* audio/video) and language styles (plain *vs* loaded), impact users intention to adopt these systems and their satisfaction while using them. Data was collected by asking participants to interact with different VAs, varying the modality and wording during the interactions. Different levels of these factors are expected to influence how users perceive the VA to be, a concept referred to as *perceived social presence* (Oh *et al.*, 2018). We hypothesize that audio/video modality and emotionally loaded language will result in higher levels of perceived social presence which would in turn trigger a chain of causal effects on users trust and engagement with the VA. These factors are then expected to impact on users' intention to adopt the VA and their overall satisfaction with the interaction. Additionally, we propose that users discomfort with technology, here referred to as *tech anxiety* (Cambre & Cook, 1985; Meuter *et al.*, 2003), may moderate the relationships of perceived social presence with both trust and engagement, dampening its potential positive effects. Specifically, users with higher tech anxiety may find more challenging to trust or engage with a human-like VA, likely due to feelings of uncertainty or apprehension when interacting with advanced technology. The proposed conceptual model provides a framework for understanding the critical role of VAs form of communication in users experience. By focusing on the key role of the interaction form between VA and users, this investigation highlights the importance of designing technology that aims at accommodating the psychological and emotional needs of the users themselves (Bickmore & Picard, 2005). In particular, companies relying on VAs can use these insights to fine tune their systems to suit different customers segments by modulating the emotional richness of the conversations while accounting for user-specific factors as tech anxiety. For instance, if a user exhibits hesitation or disengagement, the VA could adjust its communication style to be more straightforward, potentially easing tech anxiety effects. Conversely, other users may prefer a more conversational and interactive VA using more emotionally loaded language thus creating a stronger feeling of trust and engagement. This adaptive approach could increase user intention to interact with VA, thus streamlining processes that would otherwise require more resources, and ultimately enhancing customer satisfaction.