



2025 Atlantic Marketing Association Conference Proceedings



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Greetings from the 2025 Atlantic Marketing Association Program Chair

Welcome to the 2025 Atlantic Marketing Association (AtMA) conference!

This year marks the 50th anniversary of AtMA, a milestone that reflects our enduring commitment to providing a collegial, supportive space for sharing ideas, developing collaborations, and building friendships. As this year's Program Chair, I want to share a personal note. As an introvert, I've often found large conferences exhausting and impersonal. I was searching for a smaller, friendlier environment where I could engage with research-active peers and receive thoughtful, constructive feedback. I found that at AtMA, and I hope you'll experience the same sense of connection, collaboration, and purpose that I always find here.

Over the coming days, you'll find ample opportunities to explore a wide array of ideas presented across 20 unique sessions. I encourage you to attend and actively participate in as many as you can, growing your own research agenda and helping others further develop theirs.

As you plan your schedule, please know that we'll kick things off Thursday morning with a welcome breakfast designed for networking and connecting with fellow attendees—I hope to see you there. Each morning, coffee and pastries will be available at 7:30 AM. In the evenings, a hospitality suite will be open from 7:00 to 10:00 PM, offering a relaxed space to unwind and connect. On Friday, we'll celebrate award-winning research and honor the individuals who make this conference possible during our annual awards luncheon.

Heartfelt thanks to our track chairs, reviewers, session chairs, Brian Kinard and Terry Damron for their ongoing guidance, and to Kennesaw State University for their behind-the-scenes support.

May you find the coming days a source of inspiration and new connections.

*Kirsten Passyn
2025 AtMA Program Chair*

Thank you to all who submitted their research to the 2025 Atlantic Marketing Association Proceedings.

These Proceedings are organized into two sections: Faculty and Student Content. The Faculty Content is further organized by track with abstracts followed by papers. Faculty Winners for best abstract or paper are indicated in the track. Student Content is organized with the award-winning submissions followed by papers organized by ID#.

Submissions were only formatted to be consistent with the Proceedings format. This is a **DRAFT** Proceedings that will be updated once it has been fully proofread. Some submissions may not yet appear due to formatting issues. The authors have been notified.

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ADVERTISING, DIGITAL MARKETING & PROMOTION

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How Website Trust Develops Across Websites of Different Quality and How Product Involvement Affects That Development: A Visual Processing Perspective

BEST ABSTRACT IN TRACK

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Introduction

In controlled and uncontrolled ways, consumers allocate visual attention to websites as they search for product information, compare products and services, and complete purchases. Such a range of decision-making activities involves immediate impression formation, short and long-term goals, and expectations (Gold and Stocker, 2017). Marketers can increase the likelihood that visitors to their websites leave with positive impressions by ensuring high quality visual design standards (Ye et al., 2020) that may, in turn, instill greater trust during the visit.

These website quality-driven impressions may be reinforced or altered as site visitors continue to pursue their tasks after the first few seconds elapse. During this post-impression period consumers continue to process site content as their judgments continue to evolve. Cue utilization theory has been used to explore how consumers rely on online product-related attributes to evaluate product quality (Kakaria et al., 2024). However, there has been little research on how online product-related cues, or signals, may affect trust perceptions. Downstream metrics that are established less quickly and after initial impressions are likely to further influence important consumer behaviors like purchasing products and services, and sharing content. One such metric is trust, which is one of the biggest barriers to e-commerce engagement (Wang and Emurian, 2005).

Self-report data cannot fully capture how site behavior affects trust development. Compared to self-report data, the objectivity of neuromarketing research techniques is considered an important and more reliable alternative (Ford, 2019). This study relies on one particular kind of neuromarketing research, eye-tracking. Eye-tracking research assumes that what people are visually fixated on is closely related to what they are processing (Schindler and Lilienthal, 2019), and eye movement is typically an indication of a shift of attention and fixation duration is an indicator of the amount of attention being paid to an object (Pieters and Wedel, 2004). Thus, measuring eye movements is a powerful way for determining what people are likely to notice and look at when exposed to marketing materials. Eye-tracking data is highly suited to gathering evidence regarding the influence of website cues because it measures what consumers look at first as their impressions evolve into trust attitudes.

We conduct an experiment to evaluate our hypotheses and answer our research questions, including how trust formation develops and how it may be affected by websites of different levels of quality. We also consider the moderating effects of product involvement, the amount of effort a consumer spends in evaluating product quality (Ashokan, 2022). We focus on two types of website visual features, trust signals commonly used in websites to influence site trustworthiness and signals that contribute to perceptions of website quality. We gather eye tracking data to better understand how consumers visually process these features independently and together, and how product involvement affects this visual processing.

For the remainder of the extended abstract, we first review the literature relevant to our hypothesis development. Then the experimental design is described. We intend on gathering data in the Fall.

Literature review

How trust signals affect website visual processing

How website visitors perceive website visual design quality is considered to be a potentially important factor in how those visitors develop levels of trust in the companies and brands that are the focus of those sites (Faisal et al., 2016; Karimov et al., 2011; Pengnate and Sarathy, 2017). Survey research has found some website quality graphical dimensions like layout complexity increase website distrust (Seckler et al., 2015). Other elements, like organic food labeling, have been found to influence positive evaluation of foods (Linder et al., 2010). Using labels to communicate trustworthiness is commonly seen in e-commerce sites—such labels include seals of approval (e.g., BBB from the Better Business Bureau), customer feedback rating systems and statements of assurance, which often include information about returns, privacy and security (Casado-Aranda et al., 2019). Hu et al. (2010) find partial support for the notion that three different types of web assurance seals (privacy, security and transaction-integrity) act as cues to increase trust in an online vendor.

Our literature review revealed only one study that used neuroscience tools to gather data on consumer response to consumer trust signals. Using brain imaging, Casado-Aranda et al. (2019) found that seals of approval were associated with areas of the brain involved in value encoding and reward, while rating systems were linked to activation of areas of the brain associated with risky and negative tasks. In other words, some trust signals were cognitively processed in a way that suggests those signals were considered more helpful to consumers than other types. Eye-tracking should provide additional insight into how consumers behaviorally react to these different trust signal types by taking different information-gathering paths. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: Visual processing will vary depending on the type of trust signal present at a website.

How product involvement affects visual processing of websites with different types of trust signals

While website evaluations may be made immediately, it is important to consider that those formed after more deliberation are often driven by user goals (Thielsch and Hirschfeld, 2012). Thus, type of shopping goal is likely to affect the overall path that consumers take while navigating a site (Hui et al., 2009). In e-commerce research, two types of goal-directedness often considered are goal-directed shopping and experiential browsing; goal-directed behavior is

guided by a specific goal while the aim of experiential browsing is to pass time or enjoy hedonic benefits (Ko, 2020). Previous research on online trust signals has looked at their effects in low-involvement purchase environments, and it has been suggested that future research should replicate those findings in more high-involvement purchase environments to better understand how trust signals like seals increase online trust (Casado-Aranda et al., 2019). Cue utilization theory should help us understand how different site elements, including trust signals, are accessed depending on the consumer goal. Due to the lack of findings regarding trust signals in high-involvement purchase environments, we ask the following research question:

RQ1: How is visual processing of websites with different types of trust signals moderated by product involvement?

While much research has been conducted on how website quality affects initial website impressions, how website quality may predict online trust is not known and should be investigated (Casado-Aranda et al., 2019). Thus, we ask the following research question:

RQ2: How does website quality affect visual processing of websites with different types of trust signals?

Methodology

Participants

Subjects will be recruited through class announcements to undergraduate students at a large US University. Thirty subjects will be recruited. Samples of 20-30 participants in neuroscience research studies are considered acceptable (Xu et al., 2023).

Stimuli

We designed websites we considered to vary on website quality, and then conducted a pretest to identify two sites, one that scored high and one that scored low on website quality. Compared to participants who saw the low quality website ($M = 2.43$), participants who saw the high quality website ($M = 5.58$) demonstrated significantly higher perceptions of website quality, $t(18) = 8.6$, $p = .000$. Consistent with previous website quality manipulation (Pengnate and Sarathy, 2017), we manipulated four dimensions: color harmony, image resolution, number of images and overall design sophistication.

Based on previous e-commerce trust research (Casado-Aranda et al., 2019) we chose the most effective trust signal, seals of approval, and the least effective trust signal, rating systems, for our manipulation of trust signals.

Procedure

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (website quality: high vs. low) x 2 (trust cue quality: customer ratings, considered to be a low quality signal vs. seal of approval, considered to be a high quality signal) x 2 (website involvement: high vs. low) between-subjects design.

An especially effective way to manipulate advertising involvement is by encouraging, or not, some subjects to try to learn about the benefits of the advertised brand (Laczniak and Muehling,

1993). Thus in our high involvement condition we told subjects:

Many leading credit card companies differ on various important aspects. The website you will see promotes one credit card and contains claims made by the brand. View the site as if you were sitting with your laptop in your living room. Assume that you immediately need a new credit card. Your goal is to learn as much as you can about whether this credit card would be a good one for you to choose.

In our low involvement condition we told subjects:

Most leading credit card companies are very similar. The website you will see promotes one credit card. View the site as if you were sitting with your laptop in your living room. Assume that you already have a credit card and have no immediate plans to get a new credit card.

Eye tracking data will be captured using the Tobii Pro X2-30 eye tracker.

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Track: Advertising/Direct Marketing/Promotion

ID#: 1838

Translation Quality as a Cue: Effects on Fair Price Perceptions and the Moderating Role of Consumer Traits

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Abstract - This study investigates how translation quality in product descriptions influences consumers' perceptions of fair price. While prior work has examined linguistic framing, the strategic role of translation quality in product descriptions remains underexplored. Grounded in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, we argue that poor translation weakens argument clarity, increases cognitive effort, and shifts attention to peripheral cues—ultimately reducing fair price evaluations. Moreover, we examine how individual traits moderate this effect. Specifically, we argue buying impulsiveness and shopping procrastination shape whether consumers process product information through the central and peripheral processing routes. The results of an experiment conducted in offline and online shopping channels find support that poor translation leads to lower fair price perceptions, and this effect is weaker for impulsive consumers and stronger for procrastinators. The study underscores the importance of translation linguistic quality and tailored communication strategies for diverse consumer profiles in cross-border marketing.

Keywords - translation quality, fair price, Elaboration Likelihood Model, buying impulsiveness, shopping procrastination

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This study highlights translation quality as a strategic variable in shaping price perceptions across consumer segments. By building on the Elaboration Likelihood Model and considering consumer behavioral traits, it advances theory on information processing in global marketing contexts. The findings offer actionable insights for marketers on adapting communication strategies to diverse cognitive traits and suggest how even minor linguistic flaws can affect consumer product quality perceptions. This work is particularly relevant for scholars in international and strategic marketing, researchers in consumer decision-making and practitioners engaged in localization and cross-border ecommerce.

Introduction

Strategic marketing relies on effective communication. As digitalization and globalization expand consumer exposure to products from diverse cultural contexts, individuals increasingly encounter product descriptions originating outside their domestic markets (Messner, 2020). These descriptions translate technical attributes into consumer-relevant meaning. In e-commerce, they often represent the only verbal content available; in physical retail, they substitute direct interaction with sales staff (Jamal et al., 2012). Linguistic quality thus plays a central role in shaping consumer perceptions of product value. Despite the spread of automated translation tools, inadequately translated descriptions remain common. Many imported products—especially from lesser-known brands—exhibit awkward, ambiguous, or incoherent language that reduces message clarity and credibility (Forbes, 2024). These issues can diminish trust, raise perceived

risk, and lower consumers' fair price evaluations. Minor translation errors may therefore undermine broader marketing efforts, especially in crossborder contexts where textual information is often the first point of contact (Longa, 2004). Consumer responses to translation quality vary. Behavioral traits influence how product information is processed. Highly impulsive buyers—those prone to emotionally driven decisions (Rook, 1987; Rook & Fisher, 1995)—may overlook translation flaws, relying on visual or brand cues. Conversely, shopping procrastinators—who delay purchases to assess options—are more sensitive to textual content and reactive to linguistic inconsistencies (Azimi et al., 2020). These patterns suggest translation quality may influence different consumer segments in distinct ways. While prior studies examine linguistic framing and fluency (Gopinath & Glassman, 2008; Kim & Park, 2023; Packard & Berger, 2020; Pryzant et al., 2017), translation quality remains underexplored in marketing. This study addresses this gap by embedding translation quality in a consumer decision-making framework, focused on price perceptions. Building on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty et al., 1981), we develop hypotheses linking translation quality to perceived fair price, and test how this relationship is moderated by buying impulsiveness and shopping procrastination. A controlled experiment across online and offline shopping channels supports that poor translation of product descriptions reduces price evaluations, especially among procrastinators. This study identifies translation quality as a determinant of price perception, situates it within dualprocessing theory, and incorporates individual heterogeneity. The results inform strategies to improve product communication in linguistically diverse markets.

Literature Review

Product Translation Quality and Consumer Perceived Fair Price

In this section, we examine how low linguistic quality in translated product descriptions—defined as concise textual representations of a product's core attributes, functions, and benefits (Chen et al., 2024)—can interfere with consumers' cognitive processing. Specifically, we argue that when translation quality of product descriptions is low, the persuasive strength of the message deteriorates, hindering the effectiveness of the central route of information processing. This disruption elevates the cognitive load required to comprehend the message, introduces affective discomfort and ultimately diverts attention toward peripheral cues. In turn, consumers experience greater perceived risk and adjust their fair price evaluations downward. Our argument builds on the ELM, which identifies two principal pathways through which individuals process persuasive information: the central and peripheral routes of information processing (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty et al., 1981). The central route involves systematic assessment of message content and quality, requiring sufficient motivation and cognitive capacity. In contrast, the peripheral route depends on heuristic-based evaluations and emotional responses. Within this framework, the strength and clarity of the message, often referred to as argument quality, is critical in enabling central route processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). When translated product descriptions exhibit poor linguistic quality, including ambiguous phrasing or syntactic errors, the internal coherence of the message is compromised (Gao et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2019). As Morris et al. (2005, p. 80) emphasize, the central route "deals with the message content—text, words, written material used in the message—as opposed to the peripheral route." Impairments in linguistic clarity undermine consumers' ability or willingness to engage deeply with the text, limiting the likelihood that the message will be processed via the

central route. In such conditions, consumers face a higher cognitive burden in interpreting the message. When the effort required exceeds their available cognitive resources or motivation, they are more likely to disengage from systematic evaluation and instead rely on peripheral cues such as visual presentation, brand familiarity, or emotional reactions (Morris et al., 2005). Translation-induced comprehension difficulties can trigger immediate negative affect, which the ELM recognizes as a meaningful influence on evaluative judgments. This emotional discomfort amplifies perceptions of risk and reduces confidence in the product's value proposition. To mitigate perceived uncertainty, consumers may consequently lower their fair price estimations (Samson & Voyer, 2012). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Poor translation quality of product descriptions negatively influences consumers' perceptions of fair price.

The Moderation of Buying Impulsiveness

Buying impulsiveness describes a tendency to make unplanned purchases, typically without extensive cognitive deliberation (Rook, 1987; Rook & Fisher, 1995). It is characterized by a sudden and compelling urgency to buy, often motivated by affective impulses and a search for immediate gratification (Chang et al., 2020). We propose that individuals high in buying impulsiveness are more inclined to process product information via the peripheral route, emphasizing superficial cues over in-depth analysis of verbal content. As a result, they are less affected by issues in translation quality of product descriptions when forming price perceptions. In line with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1981), the route through which information is processed depends on both motivational and cognitive factors. Impulsiveness, as a stable behavioral trait, plays a role in shaping these processing tendencies. Previous work has shown that when impulsive purchases are followed by hedonic rewards, the behavior is repeated over time (Ramanathan & Menon, 2006). Impulsive buyers typically rely on intuitive decision making processes, often bypassing detailed scrutiny of product information (Strack et al., 2006). Their attention is guided more by peripheral elements—such as brand cues, promotional appeals, or visual design than by textual clarity or correct syntactic structure (Chang et al., 2020). Accordingly, when product descriptions are poorly translated, the resulting loss in argument quality exerts relatively less influence on these consumers' assessments of product value.

By contrast, individuals low in impulsiveness tend to adopt a more deliberative and reflective approach to purchase decisions. They are more likely to examine written descriptions closely and consider the linguistic quality of the message in their evaluation (Chang et al., 2020). Following the central processing route, these consumers are more attuned to coherence and fluency in language. As such, poorly translated content may heighten their sense of ambiguity or risk, leading to more substantial downward adjustments in fair price perceptions.

On these bases, we expect that buying impulsiveness positively moderates (i.e., softens) the relationship between product descriptions translation quality and fair price evaluations, as follows: Hypothesis 2. The negative effect of the poor translation quality of product descriptions on consumers' perceived fair price diminishes as buying impulsiveness increases.

Shopping Procrastination as A Moderator

Shopping procrastination refers to the intentional delay of purchase decisions, typically aimed at thoroughly evaluating available options and maximizing purchase utility (Azimi et al., 2020; Negra & Nabil Mzoughi, 2012). This behavioral trait reflects a deliberate and effortful cognitive strategy, marked by extended information processing and a preference for comprehensive decision-making.

Consumers with high levels of shopping procrastination tend to rely on the central route of information processing as conceptualized by the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These individuals allocate greater attention to the accuracy, completeness, and linguistic precision of product information (Chang et al., 2020), making them more responsive to the quality of translated descriptions. Linguistic issues—such as ambiguities in meaning or syntactic disruptions—are likely to trigger concerns about product trustworthiness and increase perceived uncertainty. For this consumer segment, such deficiencies may act as diagnostic cues that signal potential risks, prompting more negative evaluations and reductions in fair price perceptions. This pattern is consistent with prior research showing that central processing enhances consumers' sensitivity to message quality, including the clarity and coherence of verbal information (Morris et al., 2005).

Conversely, individuals low in shopping procrastination are less inclined to engage in extensive evaluative processing. They are more likely to base their judgments on heuristic or affective cues, thereby minimizing the influence of textual inconsistencies or linguistic imperfections in their assessments. These consumers are less invested in analytical scrutiny and more likely to tolerate—or even overlook—language-related flaws when forming product evaluations.

In line with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Tang et al., 2012), shopping procrastinators are expected to allocate increased cognitive resources toward evaluative tasks. Consequently, the negative emotional responses elicited by poor translation may have a more substantial and lasting influence on their perception of product value. Thus, the detrimental impact of low translation quality on fair price assessments should be amplified among consumers exhibiting higher levels of shopping procrastination.

Overall, grounding on this theoretical reasoning, we propose that shopping procrastination negatively moderates the main relationship between poorly translated product descriptions and perceived fair price:

Hypothesis 3. The negative effect of the poor translation quality of product descriptions on consumers' perceived fair price intensifies as shopping procrastination increases.

Methodology

To empirically test our hypotheses, we conducted an experiment using both in-person and online data collection between July 2023 and February 2024. The final sample included 700 participants, with 296 recruited offline in the North-East of Italy and 404 online via snowball sampling. Participants, regardless of mode, were exposed to the same experimental material: a Chinese checkers game, along with standardized product descriptions and survey instruments. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with data used solely for academic purposes and

analyzed in aggregate. All identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality and compliance with ethical research standards.

The dependent variable was perceived fair price, elicited by asking participants what they considered a fair price for the product. To minimize hypothetical bias, we implemented a random lottery scheme mechanism: participants were informed that a subset might be selected to purchase the product at their stated price (Schmidt & Bijmolt, 2020).

The independent variable, translation quality, was manipulated within the experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either a well-translated or a poorly translated version of the product description. The high-quality version was created by a Chinese-Italian professional translator. The low-quality version was generated by deliberately altering the accurate translation to introduce semantic and syntactic errors, under the same expert supervision. A dummy variable captured this manipulation (1 = poor translation; 0 = high quality).

We also examined two moderators: buying impulsiveness, measured using a six-item Likert scale (Rook & Fisher, 1995), and shopping procrastination, based on an adapted scale from Negra and Nabil Mzoughi (2012). Latent variables were estimated using the CLC Estimator with maximum likelihood (Marzi et al., 2023). Construct reliability and validity followed standards from Hair et al. (2010), and discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

To control for potential confounds, we included demographic variables (age, education, income, occupation), prior product knowledge, Italian language proficiency, household composition, time spent online, and shopping channel preferences. A dummy variable controlled for the experimental modality (offline vs. online).

A pre-test phase conducted in person allowed refinement of materials and procedures. In the main experiment, participants were randomly assigned to treatment or control conditions and viewed only one version of the product description. Surveys were completed either on paper (offline) or via an online platform. Data analysis relied on linear regression models developed incrementally, standardizing the variables introduced in the analysis (Aiken et al., 1991). Results are reported in the next section.

Findings

The final sample included 700 participants, balanced across offline (42.29%) and online (57.71%) experimental conditions. Participants were evenly distributed between experimental conditions, as 51.143% were exposed to poor translation quality, and 48.857% to the well-translated product description.

Participants were predominantly aged 18–30 (53.429%), with smaller shares in the 31–45 (17.714%) and 46–60 (18.143%) years old. In terms of gender, the sample comprised 56.286% females and 41.714% males. Educational attainment was relatively high; although 43.429% had completed high school, 37.714% possessed a bachelor's or master's degree. Regarding product familiarity, 45.286% had never heard of the Chinese checkers, 42.571% were aware but uncertain about the instructions, and only 12.143% were fully familiar with it. Concerning

shopping habits, most participants (69.286%) reported spending up to 30 minutes per day shopping online.

While several correlations between independent variables exceeded 0.50, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values across all regression models remained below the conventional threshold of 10, indicating a low likelihood of multicollinearity concerns (Gujarati, 2003).

The results of the linear regression models estimate the effects of translation quality and consumer traits on perceived fair price. The analysis follows a stepwise modeling strategy, where in a full model we incorporate the full set of predictors and interactions.

Hypotheses were evaluated based on the results from the full model. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, which predicted that low translation quality would negatively influence perceived fair price, the coefficient for poor translation is negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.148$; $p < .001$). Hypothesis 2 posited that the interaction between poor translation quality and buying impulsiveness would attenuate the negative effect on price perceptions. The interaction term is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.070$; $p < .05$), confirming the moderating role of impulsiveness. Last, Hypothesis 3 anticipated that the negative impact of poor translation would be more pronounced among consumers with higher levels of shopping procrastination. The interaction effect is negative and significant ($\beta = -0.071$; $p < .05$), providing support for this hypothesis.

Discussions Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study contributes to strategic marketing research by examining how translation quality in product descriptions affects perceived fair price, while accounting for individual processing styles and behavioral traits. First, it extends existing decision-making models by positioning translation quality as a substantive linguistic cue that shapes value judgments. Prior research has emphasized the role of verbal elements such as framing, fluency, and lexical choices (Gopinath & Glassman, 2008; Kim & Park, 2023; Pryzant et al., 2017). Building on this, we conceptualize poor translation as a peripheral cue within the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), offering a mechanism through which textual deficiencies distort price perceptions.

Second, the study highlights the importance of consumer heterogeneity in moderating the effects of translation quality. Buying impulsiveness and shopping procrastination emerge as relevant traits influencing the information processing route. Impulsive buyers, more prone to heuristic and affective judgments, show lower sensitivity to linguistic flaws. In contrast, shopping procrastinators are more analytical and exhibit stronger negative reactions to poor translation. Our findings underscore the value of integrating cognitive segmentation into communication strategies. Third, our results clarify how central and peripheral routes respond to linguistic translation asymmetries. Shopping procrastinators rely on central processing, showing heightened attention to coherence and syntactic quality. Impulsive consumers, though guided by peripheral cues such as brand or visuals, still show some sensitivity to poorly translated descriptions, though the effect is weaker. Thus, even for low-elaboration consumers, poor translation can reduce perceived value. From a managerial standpoint, these findings reinforce the need for high-quality translation in international marketing. Fair price perceptions are not shaped by product features alone but also by the clarity and credibility of accompanying

descriptions. Poor translation can lower trust and lead to immediate value discounting, especially in competitive settings where first impressions matter (Forbes, 2024).

Firms operating in multilingual markets should prioritize localized content strategies. This includes professional translation, AI-assisted tools with human oversight, and native-language copywriting. Leading platforms like Amazon and Alibaba already implement hybrid systems combining automation with expert review—a scalable model for smaller retailers using tools such as DeepL. Public policy can also support SMEs in adopting multilingual strategies through targeted incentives and programs.

Moreover, marketers may tailor communication strategies based on consumer profiles. Impulsive buyers may respond better to urgency cues and simplified navigation, whereas procrastinators require detailed and well-structured content. Tools such as AI chatbots, comparison functions, and enriched product pages can aid their decision processes and reduce fatigue. Finally, the findings suggest implications for policy and consumer protection. Regulators may consider establishing quality standards for translated content, especially in cross-border digital commerce. Clear and accurate descriptions can reduce perceived risk, improve comprehension, and strengthen trust in global marketplaces.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that translation quality is not merely a technical issue but a strategic lever in consumer value perception. Poorly translated product descriptions impede message processing, raise perceptions of uncertainty, and depress perceived fair price. However, this effect is not uniform across consumer segments. Cognitive traits such as buying impulsiveness and shopping procrastination shape how consumers engage with textual content, moderating the impact of translation quality. By embedding translation quality within the ELM framework, we recast product descriptions as active components of the pricing and value-construction process. In multilingual markets, linguistic clarity is a fundamental asset—one that directly influences consumer willingness to pay and long-term brand credibility.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study offers novel insights into the effects of translation quality on perceived fair price, several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reports may raise concerns about common method bias and causal inference. Longitudinal studies could explore the durability of these effects over time. Second, although the sample includes both online and offline contexts, generalizability may be constrained by cultural, linguistic, and product specific factors. Given the low involvement of the focal product, future research could assess whether similar patterns hold for high-involvement or high-stakes goods.

Third, while the translation manipulation was systematically designed and validated, real-world translation errors differ in type and severity. Future studies could isolate specific linguistic dimensions—such as lexical accuracy or idiomatic usage—and test their unique effects on consumer response. Fourth, the focus on buying impulsiveness and shopping procrastination

could be extended to include traits like risk aversion, regulatory focus, or ethnocentrism. Lastly, further research may benefit from behavioral tracking methods (e.g., eye-tracking or physiological measures) and explore how consumers perceive machine vs. human translations, particularly as AI tools become increasingly common in global marketing.

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The Role of Disclosure and Message Characteristics in Sponsored News Recognition, Attitude, and Click Intention: Research Questions and Methodological Approach

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Extended Abstract

Digital advertising now represents the largest category of advertising spending in the US, with spending projected to increase by nearly 50% between 2025 and 2029, growing from \$347 billion to \$493 billion (eMarketer, 2025). While banners and paid search dominated digital advertising initially, paid messaging that blends more seamlessly into publisher content, a category broadly referred to as native advertising, has driven its growth in recent years. Native advertising now represents over half of digital display advertising in the US (King, 2024).

There are many different forms of native advertising, from sponsored social media posts to digital advertorials, but one that has attracted considerable attention, both from publishers and consumer advocates, is sponsored news. This type of native advertising is present on a variety of sites, from “hard” news sites such as CNN and NYTimes, to weather and celebrity news sites. Spending on sponsored news from the top two providers, Taboola and Outbrain, was estimated at \$2.4 billion in 2022 (Schreurs, 2023).

In addition to mimicking publisher content in layout and design, sponsored news often uses sensationalized headlines designed to generate curiosity and entice users to click on a link, a tactic commonly known as clickbait. Although not unique to sponsored news, clickbait headlines are particularly problematic in sponsored news because consumers often do not recognize it as advertising (An, Kerr, & Jin, 2019; Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016), and the headlines can be misleading, leading to disappointing links to product promotions or “made for advertising” (MFA) sites, which are sites created to sell yet more native advertising.

Much of the research addressing the issue of deception in sponsored news has been focused on the presence, prominence, and language of the advertising disclosure (Boerman, Willemsen & Aa, 2017; Wojdyski, 2016; Wojdyski & Evans, 2019), while less attention has been paid to other message characteristics that might trigger ad recognition, such as the presence of a sponsor/brand name and the type of headline. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend the research on sponsored news by examining the role of other message characteristics, such as the headline and sponsor, in addition to advertising disclosure, on ad recognition, ad attitude, and click intention. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

R1: What is the relative impact of a disclosure heading versus a sponsorship disclosure within the post on ad recognition?

R2: What is the effect of headline type (news versus clickbait) on ad recognition, ad attitude, and click intention?

R3: What are the causal relationships among ad disclosure, ad recognition, ad

attitude, and click intention?

In order to address these questions, subjects will be presented with one of eight different mock web pages. Each web page image will have four news posts and eight native advertising posts. The posts will vary in a 2x2x2 design: disclosure headings present/absent; clickbait/traditional news headline; sponsor/no sponsor presented. Subjects will be asked to evaluate two of the news posts and three of the sponsored news posts on semantic differential measures of attitude and credibility, and Likert scales measures of source (advertising/journalism staff), purpose (persuasion/education), curiosity and click intention. Data collection will take place online using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to collect responses to the survey from 250 US adults, 18-65 years of age.

Using the research materials and design described above, the study will add to the growing body of knowledge on native advertising disclosure by directly comparing the effectiveness of section heading disclosures such as Sponsored News to in-post brand disclosures while also shedding light on the role of more subtle message characteristics that might also serve as a signal of advertising.

Keywords: native advertising, sponsored news, advertising disclosure, advertising recognition, clickbait headlines

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This paper is of relevance to educators teaching current practices in digital marketing, to researchers studying clickbait and native advertising, to practitioners interested in sponsored news, and to public policy advocates interested in advertising disclosure and recognition.

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LGBTQ-Inclusive Tourism Advertising and Purchase Intention

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Abstract: During the past decade, researchers have become increasingly interested in contributing to understanding demographic, motivational, and behavioral characteristics of LGBTQ tourists (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy, 2016). This consumer market has experienced rapid expansion due to international corporate facilitation (Burchiellaro 2024) and has global purchasing power estimated at US\$3.9 trillion (Ceron 2023). As companies integrate more inclusiveness into advertising efforts (Cheng, Zhou, & Yao, 2022), LGBTQ-friendly branding of destinations positively influences tourism offerings by projecting a modern image (Valcuende, Blanco-López, and Pichardo, 2023). The wellbeing of LGBTQ populations can be enhanced by tourism (Prayag, Lewis, and Pour, 2024) and it is probable that tourism advertisements featuring inclusivity would resonate with LGBTQ individuals. This research investigates the effectiveness of tourism advertising that is inclusive of LGBTQ populations in order to provide insights into consumer characteristics that may influence perceptions of outcome variables related to advertising intentions.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) is a useful foundation for investigating intra-group differences that can aid in the formation and maintenance of social hierarchies (Sidanius et al., 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). The theory implies that people can be classified as either supporting or opposing social hierarchies based on their Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius et al., 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) such that higher levels of SDO lead to greater internalization of social hierarchies (Deng et al., 2023). Prior research has applied SDO in the context of LGBTQ consumers, suggesting that due to the discrimination they encounter, homosexual men experience greater empathy towards other subordinate groups such as due to their status. This can be explained by their lower levels of SDO compared to heterosexuals (Dickins and Sergeant 2008; Ong, Vorobjovas-Pinta, and Lewis, 2022).

When it comes to LGBTQ consumers, high SDO can be detrimental, beneficial, or both to social hierarchy positioning that can determine social LGBTQ group inclusivity permissiveness in certain contexts and settings such as gathering places or events (Hartless, 2019; Lewis, Ong and Prayag 2025). In a beneficial example, LGBTQ people's sexual orientation may cause them to feel stigmatized (Jaspal and Breakwell, 2022) as they tend to internalize social hierarchies (Goffman, 2009; Lewis, Ong and Prayag, 2025), while in a detrimental case, some LGBTQ consumers may find themselves atop of the social hierarchy that can emerge within the LGBTQ community (Collins et al. 2009; Lewis, Ong and Prayag 2025).

Our research builds on previous travel and tourism literature, incorporating independent variables such as demographics, self-identity, degree of disclosure of personal sexuality to others, and level of disposable income (Wong and Tolkach, 2017). As we seek to identify factors that may be pertinent in evaluating the effectiveness of LGBTQ-inclusive advertisements among the general population, our methodology includes an experimental stimulus that features an indicator of inclusiveness to differentiate an LGBTQ-inclusive tourism advertisement from one that is not inclusive. Implications for advertisers and suggestions for future research will be

discussed.

Keywords: LGBTQ, purchase intentions, tourism marketing

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: Although SDT has been previously employed to assess inclusivity for LGBTQ persons in the context of events (Ong et al., 2022; Lewis, Ong and Prayag 2025), our study is the first to our knowledge to apply SDT to the study of LGBTQ tourism.

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The Past, Present, And Future of Managing Seafood Supply Chain for Life Below Water (Un Sdg 14)

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Abstract

Life below water is one of the important goals for sustainability at the intersection of seafood supply chain management and marketing. Despite this importance, little research has been dedicated to synthesizing existing literature and providing research directions. This paper conducts systematic literature review research on the seafood supply chain to advance our understanding of the seafood supply chain and marketing. The evolving scholarship is examined to represent the dynamic with micro (e.g., local), meso (e.g., regional), and macro (e.g., international) global stakeholders of the seafood supply chain. One hundred thirty-four papers from the Scopus database covering more than two decades were analyzed at the publication and interrelationship levels. The results revealed that the growing scholarly interests from cross-disciplinary perspectives were observed with strong concerns on resilience (e.g., illegal seafood and disruption in the global value chain) and innovation adoption (e.g., blockchain and life cycle assessment). To address research limitations, the future research directions were drawn from the Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methodology (TCCM) framework, advancing the scholarship on the seafood supply chain for practice-informed research and research-informed practice.

Keywords: Seafood, supply chain, marketing, consumption, innovation, nonprofit organizations

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners

This paper gives insights into tackling the wicked problems in the seafood supply chain and consumption. The rise of nontraditional, nonprofit organizations is playing an increased role in shaping seafood supply chains, which drives innovations in seafood supply chain management and marketing.

Introduction

Seafood supply chain and consumption is a global venture, which requires evolving coordination of micro (e.g., local), meso (e.g., regional), and macro (e.g., international) global stakeholders for sustainability (e.g., Life Below Water (UN SDG 14)). Seafood, aquatic products, is a nutrition-rich commodity which is crucial in the global supply chain for international trade. Cojocarú et al. (2022) have conceptualized the seafood industry with three categories: wild-caught commercial capture, farmed seafood, and recreational/subsistence fisheries.

The authors underscore the importance of seafood in the Global South due to its nutritional value for food security and economic value by exporting the commodity to high-demand countries. Whereas wealthy, industrialized countries, such as the E.U., U.S., and Japan, account for almost 40% of the total imports for domestic seafood consumption, developing countries, top worldwide seafood exporters include many developing countries, such as

Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, China, Ecuador, and Chile in 2020 (Seafood Source, 2022; Statista, 2022).

This paper will investigate the research themes in existing research by using network analysis and the Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methodology (TCCM) framework.

Literature Review

The systemic literature review helps examine the scholarship on the seafood supply chain, as it includes qualitative and quantitative methods in various studies for theory building and testing. Donthu et al. (2021) document the principles for maintaining the empirical rigor of systematic literature reviews based on bibliometric analysis and framework-based reviews.

The bibliometric method is commonly used for systematic literature review, quantifying productivity, influence, and interrelationships across the literature associated with keywords. The framework-based review allows for reviewing domain-specific literature with important attributes, such as theory, context, characteristics, and research method, revealing future research directions.

This paper used the bibliometric method and framework-based review to investigate the evolving scholarship on the seafood supply chain.

Methodology

One hundred thirty-four papers (2007-2025) were retrieved from the Scopus database with TITLE-ABS-KEY ("seafood" and "supply chain"). The analysis was conducted at the publication level and its interrelationship level, guided by Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) (Paul et al., 2021) and 3-Rs (Retrieve, Review, and Report) protocols (Coombes, 2023).

Findings

The findings were organized at the publication level (Level 1) and its interrelationship level (Level 2). Level 1 analysis includes chronological trend analysis and the most influential papers and journals based on publication and citation counts. Level 2 conducts keyword co-occurrence analysis, co-citation analysis, and thematic analysis by recognizing similarities and differences of research clusters. This two-level approach helps identify and summarize the evolving scholarship. This method helps differentiate the research clusters to underscore their contributions to advocating and refuting the evolving scholarship, which is aligned with MacInnis's (2011) guidance to understanding theoretical advances.

Discussions

Scholars may advance the growing interests from cross-disciplinary perspectives as legal and technological perspectives are helpful in investigating resilience (e.g., illegal seafood and disruption in the global value chain) and innovation adoption (e.g., blockchain and life cycle assessment). Practitioners may gain insights from the increasing role of non-traditional, nonprofit actors (e.g., the Marine Stewardship Council), driving innovations for sustainable seafood supply

chain management and consumption.

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Track: Business to Business, Supply Chain & Logistics
ID#: 1811

Optimizing Project Management Workflows with AI-Driven Task Automation

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence and task automation is significantly redefining project management practices by streamlining operations, decreasing human intervention, and enhancing accuracy in execution. AI-driven automation now takes over project-based routine jobs like scheduling, updating timelines, or setting reminders (Nasr et al., 2024). This development also creates a dynamic, intelligent project management system by ensuring better decision-making, resource allocation, cost efficiency, team collaboration, and risk management (Kerzner, 2022). The actual power of AI-driven tools lies in transforming data into insightful knowledge that makes teamwork safer, more efficient, and more intelligent than ever (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).

Though the numerous advantages of AI-driven task automation seem clear, its actual implementation raises several challenges, including ethical issues, integration problems, and resistance to change (Nieto-Rodriguez, 2021). Ensuring AI complements rather than replaces human expertise largely depends on the perfect balance between automation and strategic human decision-making (Savio & Ali, 2023). This study offers a conceptual framework by investigating how AI-driven task automation enhances operational efficiency in project management. It also explores a set of propositions with the implications of AI on workforce dynamic decision-making processes. The paper focuses on current academic and industry literature to highlight the role of AI adoption in the project environment.

To guide the inquiry, the following research questions (RQs) have been formulated:

RQ₁: *How does AI-driven automation impact routine task execution and project-level decision-making?*

RQ₂: *In what ways does AI improve task allocation and optimize resource distribution in project environments?*

RQ₃: *How do AI-enabled workflows influence team collaboration, communication efficiency, and progress tracking?*

RQ₄: *Can intelligent project automation proactively identify inefficiencies and improve risk management?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Artificial intelligence has been transforming project management by turning tedious work into automated workflows and improving the decision-making process day by day (Taheri Khosroshahi, 2024). The contribution of Machine learning algorithms in predicting roadblocks

and refining timelines is acting like a GPS for project risk by analyzing historical data. AI chatbots work as 24/7 assistants and instantly answer questions (Nirala et al., 2022; Taheri Khosroshahi, 2024). This shift is not actually the replacement of human but rather strengthens their activities through task automation. Project managers can focus on strategic decision-making, innovating, building collaboration, and improving the accuracy of estimation and risk assessment, making projects smoother and easier to run (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018; Kim et al., 2016).

Regarding task allocation and resource optimization in project management, AI plays a crucial role. This allows the consideration of some critical factors in project management, like team members' workloads, individual skills, and project requirements. This leads teams to work efficiently and smarter in decision-making and distributing resources throughout the project lifecycle using real-time data and predictive analytics (Kehinde, 2025). By considering some crucial factors like team members' workloads, individual skills, and project requirements, AI-driven task automation improves the utilization of resources (Celestin & Vanitha, 2017). When allocating resources, these technologies also assist project managers in predictive insights to minimize waste and reduce redundancy errors (Chui et al., 2020). These systems improve future and more efficient project processes over time by analyzing records accurately (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

Integrating AI helps teams stay on track through better collaboration and monitoring progress with smart workflow systems. It also involves improving team performance by ensuring transparency and accountability at every project stage (Somanathan, 2023). Offering the visibility of project progress increases collaboration among team members (Taheri Khosroshahi, 2024). With automated tracking systems, team members can get updates instantly, improving collaboration and accountability (Khalef & El-adaway, 2021; Reznikov, 2025). AI-driven sentiment analysis enhances team dynamics and gives managers insights into morale. So that managers can identify potential issues early and respond effectively, leading to team productivity and motivation (Zhai et al., 2024).

Early identification and resolution of inefficiencies within project workflows can be facilitated by AI. With the advanced analytics and automation of AI, organizations anticipate challenges and implement effective, data-informed solutions (Somanathan, 2023). Continuous analysis of the performance metrics and historical trends offers strategic recommendations to refine processes and enhance overall productivity (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Intelligent project automation refines work processes regularly, further improving operational efficiency and project outcomes by learning from historical data (Almosawi et al., 2024).

Interactions Between AI and Project Management Practices

Artificial intelligence is reshaping project management by increasing productivity, facilitating strategic planning, and improving decision-making (Dagou et al., 2024). Project managers can focus more on strategic oversight, proactive risk mitigation, and stakeholder engagement. Automation also effectively handles repetitive tasks like scheduling, status tracking, and resource allocation (Davenport, 2018). Project teams can flexibly prioritize tasks. Organizations can react instantly, being agile to shift any requirement changes accordingly by incorporating AI-driven task automation (Kerzner, 2022).

AI's ability to process a large amount of data insights is greatly supported and improves project decision-making. Achieving better-informed and successful project outcomes depends on past data; machine learning algorithms find trends, forecast risks, and allocate resources optimally (Jarrahi, 2018). Data-driven projections guide budget planning and scheduling, and predictive analytics further aid in strategic decision-making (Celestin & Vanitha, 2017). This incorporation not only speeds up decision-making but also ensures consistency, certainty, and the ability to react more quickly in any changing circumstances. These capabilities contribute to an organized and proactive approach to project management (Davenport, 2018).

Concerns for transparency on data privacy and significant biases are raised for AI-driven project management (Gafni & Levy, 2024). Due to unclear governance, AI systems fall into unintentional prejudices or a lack of clear accountability. Ensuring transparency in data sources, decision-making processes, and model training can heighten the trust in AI-driven project recommendations (Savio & Ali, 2023; Taboada et al., 2023). The careful and responsible use of AI can combine automation with sound and ethical practices of project management within a business (Gafni & Levy, 2024).

The connection between artificial intelligence and project management is increasing day by day. This combination balances intelligent automation and human knowledge (Savio & Ali, 2023). It is also a potential medium to enrich project efficiency and enable project managers to become more insightful, flexible, and adaptable (PMI, 2021; Wilson & Daugherty, 2018). To cultivate forward-thinking and human-centered project environments, organizations can carefully consider the ethical issues using AI's analytical capabilities (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS

Business enterprises are integrating Artificial Intelligence-based automation of tasks to achieve more resourceful management, cheaper operations, and higher output. To begin with, the automation capabilities of the AI will allow project managers to reallocate their attention to strategic priorities and make decisions, as it will enable the project manager to become more productive, burnout-resistant, and satisfied with their job (Almosawi et al., 2024). Secondly, through the optimization of task distribution and resource usage, AI will result in improving the use of resources and save considerable amounts of money due to the possibility of AI to analyze the capacity of the team and the necessary resources of the projects in real-time (Taheri Khosroshahi, 2024). Thirdly, the utilization of AI in workflows facilitates smooth communication and tracking of progress, which allows organizations to achieve deadlines and match their operational activities with their strategic plans (Reznikov, 2025). Finally, intelligent project automation can detect potential inefficiencies earlier and provide a predictive view on such potential inefficiencies to take proactive action, in real-time, and provide informed decision-making. Along with these benefits, organizations need to consider some of the main obstacles to obtaining optimal outcomes of AI adoption, such as resistance of people working in the organization, technical problems of integration, and ethical issues surrounding the use of data and the possible burden of automation (Rane, 2023; Gafni & Levy, 2024).

There is also much potential in this side of research, specifically, its use in measuring the long-term influence of AI on project performance, labor structure, and strategy. The way adaptive

learning can enhance AI decisions in managerial services in complex and dynamically changing environments (health, construction, aerospace, etc.) should be stated in future studies (Hussain et al., 2024). The effect of AI on leadership style, team communication, and culture needs to be studied further (Goncharenko, 2024) by comparing the accuracy between applications of human judgment and AI-based forecasting, as well as the objective of utilizing AI in predictive asset management; little comparative research has been done (Herath et al., 2025). It is also worth investigating the introduction of AI tools like chatbots and virtual assistants into team environments to see how they influence work productivity and teamwork (Nirala et al., 2022). These guidelines will enhance knowledge and influence an effective, responsible creation of AI in project management.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Task Automation, Workflows, Project Management, Intelligent Project Automation, Proactive Resolution, Operational Efficiency*

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Track: Business to Business, Supply Chain & Logistics

ID#: 1842

The Impact of Big Data Analytics Powered by Artificial Intelligence on Supply Chain Resilience and Corporate Social Responsibility

John Dickens, Hasan Uvet, Antonina Bauman & Sally Hiott

Abstract –

As businesses navigate an era of unprecedented data influx, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered big data analytics has become a strategic imperative for gaining competitive advantage. Concurrently, supply chain disruptions have intensified the need for resilience, while evolving consumer expectations regarding sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) add further complexity to decision-making. Despite the growing relevance of these interconnected domains, existing literature remains scarce in exploring their relationships.

This study empirically examines the influence of AI propensity to trust on big data analytics, as well as the impact of AI-driven analytics on both supply chain resilience and CSR. CSR is conceptualized as a second-order construct encompassing three key dimensions: supplier-oriented, environmental-oriented, and community-oriented CSR. Grounded in organizational information processing theory, we propose and test four hypotheses.

Utilizing survey data collected via the Prolific platform, we employ a rigorous two-phase analytical approach. First, we conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model. Next, we apply structural equation modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS to assess the hypothesized relationships. Our findings indicate statistically significant results for all proposed hypotheses, highlighting the transformative role of AI-powered big data analytics in fostering supply chain resilience and advancing CSR initiatives.

Keywords - *propensity to artificial intelligence trust, supply chain resilience, big data analytics, corporate social responsibility.*

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Track: Business to Business, Supply Chain & Logistics
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CASE STUDIES

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From Local Innovation To Global Impact: The nCino Story

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Abstract – nCino is a pioneering cloud-based bank operating software company headquartered in the southeastern United States. Founded by Pierre Naude, nCino has undergone significant global expansion, transforming the banking industry through its innovative technology. This case study explores the remarkable journey of nCino, its founder Pierre Naude, the birth of the company at Live Oak Bank, its competitive advantage, cultural and technological changes in banking, and its evolution into a global player in the cloud banking industry. nCino is on a constant mission to sign foreign clients and set up offices abroad so that the company can reach more clients while also continuing to provide the same excellent service.

This case documents how an innovative services solution can navigate in multiple international environments and explores how to maintain competitive advantage when faced with changing industry regulation, increasing competition and technological innovation all while coupled with an exploration of rapid growth from a small, local company to a firm with a large, multinational presence.

Keywords - International Marketing, Global Expansion, Software as a Service (SaaS)

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This case is based on an actual company and uses publicly available information. It was designed to provide several current, unique, and relevant topics of discussion for students. The banking software industry is not one overly covered in modern cases designed for discussion. Combining the timely topic of cloud-based software storing consumers' personal financial information (consumer data protection) with global expansion and cultural differences in values offers readers several perspectives on this relatively unexplored crossroad. By showcasing the nCino software's development and expansion in a relatively short time period, students will vicariously experience some of the stresses involved with their rapid growth and cross-cultural issues. The case also provides information on several environmental variables which can be compared across various countries, namely the infrastructure, competitive, and cultural landscapes. The intended audience includes Undergraduate and Graduate Students studying Business Administration, Marketing, International Business, or Global Marketing.

Track: Case Studies
ID#: 1861

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Emotion is Dead, but Can Persuasion Survive the Effect of AI-Generated Reviews on Consumer Trust and Decision-Making

Best Paper In Track

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Abstract - The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital marketing has reshaped consumer engagement, particularly through online AI overviews and personalized recommendations. While human generated reviews traditionally build trust through personal testimonies and shared experience, it remains unclear whether AI-generated reviews can achieve the same effect without genuine human emotion. This study investigates how AI-generated reviews influence consumer trust and decision-making across high- and low-involvement products. Grounded in the theory of Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the research uses a mixed method approach, combining neuroscience lab experiments and surveys, to examine differences of AI-Generated review and Human review in consumer trust and purchase intention.

Keywords - AI Generated Review, Emotion, Neuroscience, Human Review, Consumer, Trust

Statement of Key Contributions- consumer trust and purchasing behavior remains underexplored. This research will contribute to understanding how AI-generated reviews function as persuasive tools and whether they align with consumer expectations. From a scholarly perspective, this study builds on existing theories of persuasion and credibility to assess AI's role in marketing communication. Additionally, the study provides insights that applicable to marketing education and industry practices.

Track: Consumer Behavior
ID#: 1824

Consumer Entitlement and Consumer Expectations

Best Abstract in Track

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Consumer entitlement has been empirically demonstrated to influence customer satisfaction directly (e.g., Melancom, Gardner, & Dalakas, 2021). Nevertheless, how consumer entitlement influences customer satisfaction through customer expectations remains unknown. Given evaluations of customer satisfaction or quality result from a comparison of customer expectations of product performance with customer perceptions of product performance (e.g., Oliver 1981), it is pertinent to understanding how consumer entitlement, as an individual characteristic and an antecedent, influences customer expectations. Specifically, this study aims to address how consumer entitlement shifts the levels of normative and predictive expectations (Boyd & Helms, 2005), and, subsequently, the zone of tolerance (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993). It is the understanding of these shifts that helps organizations design proper marketing communications to “manage” their customers’ expectations.

Although consumer entitlement is still a relatively new construct (Melancom, Gardner, & Dalakas, 2021), the heightened level of consumer entitlement, especially the ones caused by applications of social media, has become a concern for many organizations across different countries (Worth, Frankland, & Bernoff, 2018). For instance, Gesenhues (2013) indicates that social media has raised the service expectation of consumers who post complaints on Twitter and believe they are entitled to receive a response within an hour. Additionally, Boyd & Helms (2005) posit that “consumer entitlement influences the customer’s assessment of predictive and normative expectations” (p. 283).

From the perspective of personality traits, consumer entitlement “pertains to the extent to which the buyer perceives himself or herself to be a special customer of the firm” (Boyd & Helms, 2005, p. 273). As a result of this trait, an entitled consumer believes “that ‘the customer is always right’” (Shepherd, Athar, & Sahel Zaboli, 2023, p. 84) and “expects special treatment and automatic compliance with his or her expectations” (Boyd & Helms, 2005, p. 274). Additionally, because of the attributes of this trait, an entitled consumer presumes “the pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004, p. 30-31), and wants “special treatment” and has “exaggerated expectations” (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). Thus, it is proposed that:

***PI:** There is a positive relationship between the level of customer entitlement and the level of customer expectations.*

Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) proposed that expectations component in customer assessment of product performance is based on: (1) desired/normative expectations (i.e., what customers desire/want) (Swan & Trawick, 1980; Prakash, 1984), and (2) adequate expectations (i.e., what customers consider minimally acceptable) (Woodruff, Cadotte & Jenkins 1987). Additionally, customer expectations are characterized by a range of levels between desired and adequate expectations (i.e., the zone of tolerance) (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman, 1993). Thus, it is proposed that:

P2: There is a positive relationship between the level of customer entitlement and the level of desired expectations.

P3: There is a positive relationship between the level of customer entitlement and the level of adequate expectations.

P4: There is a positive relationship between the level of customer entitlement and the zone of tolerance.

Conceptually, Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) proposed that “[t]he desired [performance] level is less subject to change than the adequate [performance] level” (p. 6). Furthermore, entitled consumers believe that “customer is always right” (Shepherd, Athar, & Sahel Zaboli, 2023), and they “expects special treatment and automatic compliance with [their] expectations” (Boyd & Helms, 2005, p. 274). Thus, it is proposed that:

P5: The level of customer entitlement elevates the level of adequate expectations.

P6: The level of customer entitlement contracts the zone of tolerance due to the elevation of the level of adequate expectations.

To empirically examine the propositions, a retail setting will be used as the context, because it consists of both physical goods and services and, thus, provides broad range of “products” (Nguyen & Vo, 2021). In addition, the expectations section of SERQUAL will be used to measure customer expectations (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml 1992), while the Customer Entitlement Inventory (CEI), consisting of nine 7-point Likert-scale items, will be used to measure customer entitlement (Boyd and Helms 2005). Finally, since there are no existing measures for Desired Expectations and Adequate Expectations, new instruments will be developed.

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Track: Consumer Behavior

Blue Mind: Can Experiences Near the Ocean Inspire Transcendent Emotions that Lead to Consumer Creativity?

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Abstract – The extended abstract proposes a framework for exploring how emotional responses to ocean proximity shape consumer creativity. Consumer creativity has potential value for marketers who aim to foster co-creation, experiential engagement, and innovation, as well as for consumers, who can gain value and satisfaction via their participation in creative problem-solving in the context of consumption. The abstract bridges the stream of existing research that suggests nature-based experiences can foster transcendent emotional states and the research stream that suggests transcendent emotions can generate responses that enhance consumer creativity and stimulate innovation. Studying the link between ocean proximity and consumer creativity may yield valuable insights for understanding and influencing consumer behavior.

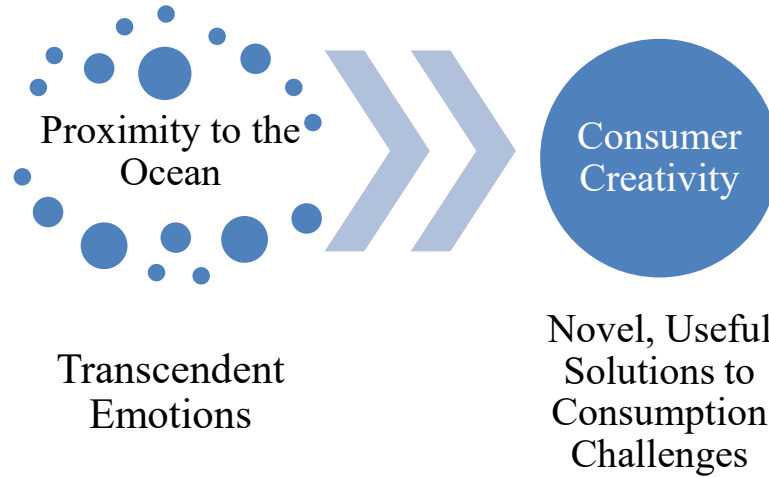
Keywords - Transcendent emotions, Consumer Creativity, Oceans

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners - This research highlights how proximity to the ocean may evoke transcendent emotional states that enhance consumer creativity. For marketing educators and researchers, this offers a novel lens to examine how emotional and environmental triggers can support consumer co-creation, innovation, and engagement. For practitioners, it offers insights into designing experiences, environments, and campaigns that inspire consumers not just to consume, but to participate, imagine, and create.

Introduction

Dr. Wallace J. Nichols best-selling 2014 book entitled *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On, Or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do* and his subsequent outreach efforts inspired millions to examine their connection to the water, and to connect with each other via the Blue Mind Movement. It also inspired the focus of this extended abstract: the introduction of a framework for exploring how proximity to the ocean impacts transcendent emotions (awe, joy, gratitude) that can lead to consumer open-mindedness, curiosity, and consumer creativity. Briefly, proximity to the ocean can trigger emotions like awe, joy, and gratitude. These emotions can lead to more open-mindedness, curiosity, and imaginative thinking. As a result, consumers are more likely to show creative problem solving in areas like product use, content creation, or customization.

Figure 1: Research Framework, Ocean Proximity to Consumer Creativity



Why Consumer Creativity?

Consumer creativity is the study of consumer problem solving and creativity traits that may be applied to consumption-related problems (Burroughs et al., 2018). Like creativity in other contexts (e.g. Amabile, 1997), consumer creativity includes two dimensions: novelty and usefulness (Burroughs and Mick, 2004; Moreau and Dahl, 2005). Consumer creativity is relevant to marketers who want consumers to interact with their brands or to take an active role in the production, creation, or customization of the products (Burroughs et al, 2018; Zhu & Mehta, 2017). Consumers may apply creativity when they prepare food, design their own apparel, or participate in crowdsourcing efforts (Rosa et all, 2014; Roster, 2024). Consumer creativity is also an important part of promotional activities and social media engagement (Wu et al., 2015).

Existing research identified situational and individual difference factors that affect consumer creativity (Burroughs & Mick, 2004; Moureau & Dahl, 2005). For example, Moreau and Dahl (2005) examined how different restrictions and constraints impacted consumer creativity and the way they processed information. we recognize that both marketers and consumers benefit from consumer creativity. Marketers gain valuable insights into unmet needs, potential product or service improvements, and new product directions. Consumers gain solutions that are better suited to their needs and wants, which increases their satisfaction and value perceptions (Oppert et al., 2023). Although a comprehensive review of the antecedents and consequences of consumer creativity is beyond the scope of this extended abstract (please see Burroughs et al., 2018), our framework focuses on the relationship between transcendent emotions and consumer creativity.

Consumer Creativity and Transcendent Emotions

Marketers are interested in transcendent emotions because they can inspire a deeper connection with a brand's message or cause (e.g. Errmann, 2025). Transcendent emotions like awe, gratitude, joy, and inspiration, can connect individuals to a greater purpose and can stimulate curiosity and the desire for new knowledge and experiences (Averill & Thomas-Knowles, 2005).

Also known as self-transcendent emotions because they take the focus off of the self, transcendent emotions have been viewed through an evolutionary lens, where researchers suggest these emotions helped humans survive by serving a social function that connects us to others (Grossman, 1994) and increases pro-social behavior (Jacobs & McConnell, 2022; Stellar et al., 2017).

One transcendent emotion, awe, is of particular interest to marketers because it has been related to consumer creativity. Awe can reduce the focus on the self (see Chen et al., 2021) and has been linked to greater perspective-taking and openness to alternative viewpoints, which are essential for creative exploration, experimentation, and playful invention (Chen & Mongrain, 2021). Awe is characterized by feelings of vastness and a need for accommodation that disrupts habits and opens paths to new ways of thinking (Rudd et al., 2018). This state leads to greater openness to new ideas, less reliance on rigid schemas, and more exploratory thinking (Rudd et al., 2018).

Perhaps as a result, awe has been associated with key creative thinking components, including fluency, flexibility and elaboration (Chirico et al., 2018). Awe has been associated with creativity outside of consumer contexts (Zhang et al., 2024), including creative personality, convergent creativity, and everyday creativity. Activation of creative thinking can quiet the ego and lead to active engagement, experiential consumption, and greater receptiveness to novel product experiences or creative problem-solving tasks (Ermann, 2025; Jiang, & Sedikides, 2022).

Hagtvedt (2025) notes that marketers often miss opportunities to leverage the power of awe in product development, branding, promotions, and retail environments. On the other hand, natural environments often evoke awe (Berman et al., 2008), which, along with sensory experiences, can make nature-based experiences a catalyst for consumer creativity (Zhu & Mehta, 2017).

Consumer Creativity and Nature-Based Experiences

Extant research provides evidence that nature (spaces with living plants and animals, including greenspaces and bluespaces) can induce powerful, transcendent emotions that can enhance creativity (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2024). For example, there is evidence that natural environments can boost thinking. The degree of closeness to nature, such as nearness to water, plants, and other natural elements, increases access to information in nature that stimulates ideas (Yeh et al. 2022). Wonder that takes place in the natural environment can improve creativity, in general, and a natural setting with fascination stimulates ideas and mind-wandering, which influences creative ability (Yeh et al., 2022). Bethamy and Corraliza (2019) created an instrument to capture these sublime emotions, which allowed them to connect awe and inspiring energy to experiences in the wilderness.

Natural environments also attract involuntary attention, which allows the mind to roam freely (Berman et al., 2008). When natural environments lower cognitive load and attentional fatigue, it makes space for insight generation. Perhaps as a result, nature has been associated with inspiration, problem-solving, new ideas, flexible thinking, and there is evidence that creativity improves in the presence of nature (e.g. Vella-Brodrick et al., 2024). Research suggests that natural environments support associative thinking, or the loose, intuitive, and exploratory

cognitive style linked with creativity and problem-solving (Berman et al., 2008). This phenomenon has been linked to organizational creativity. People who work in places with natural amenities, like water, spend and enjoy more time outside, which is associated with greater creativity at work (Broisset et al., 2024), and suggests greater contact with nature at work can restore employees' potential. Fascination in nature allows space for reflection and incubation of creative ideas, where research suggests mind-wandering and present-moment attention interact to enhance creativity (Berman et al., 2008). Less is known about nature's impact on consumer creativity and, more specifically, the impact of proximity to an ocean.

Although natural elements are often treated like they are monolithic in research on nature's impact on creativity, there is some research that focuses on water. According to Wallace J. Nichols' *Blue Mind* (2014), a book that aggregated research from many fields, being near, in, on, or underwater reliably evokes: calm (reduced stress), clarity (mental spaciousness), openness to creativity, and openness to connection. These outcomes can be cognitively and behaviorally impactful, and can alter how people think and feel, often leading to deeper reflection, more expansive thinking, and increased receptivity to change.

Just as there is value in studying consumer creativity (Burroughs & Mick, 2004) as a distinct construct from organizational creativity (e.g. Amabile, 1997), we propose that there is value in studying the independent effects of proximity to the ocean, as a distinct natural element and type of water. Lay theories suggest proximity to the ocean elicits a unique response and spectrum of emotions, ranging from awe and wonder to fear and tranquility. A multifaceted emotional response to ocean proximity could provide unique sensations of self-boundary dissolution and a profound sense of unity with the environment. Research can examine whether the environment near oceans has a distinctive power to evoke awe and heighten emotional responses that are associated with consumer creativity. Further, following the theory related to awe and the small self, when people feel small relative to the vastness of the ocean, they should become more open to novel experiences and ways of thinking. If oceans, as unique type of water, result in appreciation for beauty and power, but also evoke mysteriousness and fear of the threat they pose, proximity to oceans could offer unique experiences that lead to heightened states of creativity and openness that catalyze imaginative, meaningful consumer engagement (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019), relative to other natural elements.

Conclusion

Research should explore whether ocean proximity emotionally activates consumer creativity. While much research focuses on the benefits of nature in general, it's crucial to recognize the ocean's unique contributions to transcendent emotions and consumer creativity. Its ability to evoke a complex array of emotions and stimulate creative thought underscores the importance of studying the ocean as a distinct entity within environmental psychology and marketing research.

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Track: Consumer Behavior
ID#: 1839

Sustainable or Stylish? Exploring the EV Adoption Gap in Marginalized Markets

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Extended Abstract - Electric vehicle (EV) adoption is widely promoted as a cornerstone of global sustainability, yet uptake remains concentrated among affluent, White, male early adopters. Despite policy incentives and technological advances, underserved consumers, particularly African American, female, younger, and lower-income buyers, remain underrepresented. This study explores whether traditional demographic and psychographic predictors of EV intent generalize to these groups and examines how perceptions of vehicle attributes, such as style, safety, and resale value, shape purchase interest.

Survey data were collected from 166 minority respondents recruited through a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The sample was 84% African American, 58% female, and predominantly under 40, with most earning under \$100,000. Respondents evaluated electric versus gasoline vehicles on seven key purchase criteria and completed measures of environmental orientation. EV purchase intention was dichotomized into high (likely/very likely) versus low intent. Analyses included nonparametric correlations, chi-square tests, and logistic regression to assess both traditional and perceptual predictors of adoption.

Results reveal that demographic variables, income, education, age, and gender did not significantly predict EV intent, contradicting patterns found in prior literature. Only environmental orientation emerged as a significant positive predictor ($r = .27, p < .001$), doubling the odds of purchase intent with each unit increase. However, descriptive trends showed younger respondents were more open to EVs than older ones, suggesting an emerging shift in the adoption curve.

Perceptual data identified a critical misalignment between consumer priorities and EV performance perceptions. Respondents rated resale value, safety, and style as their top vehicle criteria, dimensions where EVs were perceived to underperform relative to gasoline cars (all $p < .001$). Conversely, EVs were rated higher on maintenance, reliability, and price, attributes viewed as less important overall. Logistic regression confirmed that style and safety gaps significantly reduced purchase likelihood, while positive perceptions of safety and maintenance increased it. These results underscore that underserved consumers evaluate EVs pragmatically, not ideologically: alignment with identity, value, and lived experience outweighs broad environmental messaging.

The study extends sustainability marketing by highlighting perceptual and cultural barriers to inclusive electrification. Findings suggest that expanding EV adoption among marginalized consumers requires more than affordability or infrastructure, it demands identity-aware marketing emphasizing safety, resale stability, and relatable style. Culturally resonant campaigns like Hyundai's "OKAY Hyundai" and "Choose Yours" illustrate emerging best practices. For policymakers and marketers alike, the path to equitable EV adoption depends on designing

products and messages specifically targeting these underserved consumers.

Keywords - electric vehicles, sustainability marketing, African American consumers, underserved markets, environmental orientation

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This study highlights the importance of aligning EV marketing with the values and identities of underserved consumers. It underscores the need for culturally resonant messaging and suggests that perceptual and symbolic fit matter more than traditional demographic predictors. For practitioners, the findings inform strategies for reaching underrepresented buyers. For researchers, the study offers a framework for exploring how identity and perceived value shape sustainable product adoption.

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Track: Consumer Behavior

ID#: 1843

Defying Conventions: The Marketing Alchemy of Transforming 'Ugly' into Iconic

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Abstract – This study analyzes the growing trend of ugly fashion from the standpoint of comfort, hedonism, and a rejection of traditional fashion. Applying a framework of theories drawn from marketing and classical psychology, we find that cutting-edge fashion trends are driven by countercultural signaling and a desire for both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous comfort.

Keywords - Ugly fashion, symbolic consumption, identity signaling, Red Sneakers Effect, classical conditioning, embodied cognition, authenticity, postmodern consumer, ABC model, nonconformity marketing, cultural capital, behavioral learning theory.

Introduction

The transformation of UGG from a utilitarian footwear label into a global fashion phenomenon presents a compelling case of cultural repositioning, symbolic consumption, and brand-led aesthetic disruption. Once derided as “ugly” for its bulky, fleece-lined silhouettes, UGG has transcended the limits of conventional beauty standards to become an emblem of comfort, identity signaling, and postmodern authenticity. This study examines how UGG has strategically redefined consumer expectations by drawing on cultural capital, behavioral conditioning, and symbolic rebellion, thereby positioning itself at the intersection of style, identity, and aesthetic imperfection.

Purpose of Study

This study explores how UGG's marketing strategy aligns with emergent consumer values—namely authenticity, comfort, inclusivity, and countercultural signaling—to reposition “ugly fashion” as aspirational. It further analyzes how shifts in consumer psychology during the COVID-19 pandemic—driven by remote work, wellness lifestyles, and aesthetic liberalization—accelerated a comfort-first fashion revolution. Drawing from Pavlov's Classical Conditioning theory, the authors evaluate how UGG effectively transferred meaning from unconditioned stimuli (warmth, relaxation) to a conditioned brand image that commands loyalty and prestige. The study contributes to marketing theory by explaining how consistent positive reinforcement, in the form of embodied comfort and inclusive narratives, fosters consumer acceptance of nonconforming aesthetics (Verywell Mind 2023a, 2023b).

Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design supported by secondary data sources, including

brand case studies, industry analyses, campaign reviews, and academic theory. The analytical framework integrates established theories in consumer behavior:

- **The Red Sneakers Effect** (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014): signaling autonomy through aesthetic deviance. The brand's ability to partner with influencers such as Kendall Jenner and gender-fluid icon Alok Vaid-Menon has been instrumental in aligning itself with Gen Z and Millennial values of inclusivity, authenticity, and self-expression (Williams & Haslam, 2022).
- **Self-Concept and Extended Self** (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988): exploring the brand as identity symbol.
- **Embodied Cognition** (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014): understanding physical comfort as psychological stimulus.

In sum, this framework suggests brands position themselves as a blend of conspicuous and hedonic consumption, while also rejecting traditional aesthetics. This is further contextualized through comparative brand analysis of other footwear brands such as Crocs, Birkenstock, Dr. Martens, and Hush Puppies to assess how comfort-led “ugly” fashion gained symbolic and market value. These brands have similarly repositioned their identities by embracing nonconformity and functionality—signaling a growing consumer appetite for authenticity, comfort, and cultural irony (Crane, 2012; Gladwell, 2000).

Results

UGG’s brand evolution illustrates a paradigm shift in fashion leadership—from elite aesthetics to experiential authenticity. By embracing the very attributes that once marginalized it, UGG successfully rebranded “ugliness” into a desirable aesthetic. The brand’s collaborations with gender-fluid influencers (e.g., Alok Vaid-Menon) and avant-garde designers (e.g., Telfar, Molly Goddard) amplified its resonance with Gen Z and Millennial consumers who value nonbinary identity expression, inclusivity, and cultural defiance.

Repeated exposure to UGG’s core associations—comfort, relaxation, warmth—has conditioned consumers to attach aspirational value to the product. Over time, these positive stimuli fostered brand loyalty and redefined symbolic fashion capital. This aligns with Pavlovian conditioning, wherein once-unfashionable stimuli gain value through emotional reinforcement and contextual storytelling.

Using the BCG Matrix, UGG’s product portfolio reveals a strategic positioning of cash cows in the western market to Stars in the Asia-pacific (see Figure 1). This typology reveals a brand that is not only culturally adaptive but also analytically disciplined in resource allocation and market segmentation.

Discussion and Conclusion

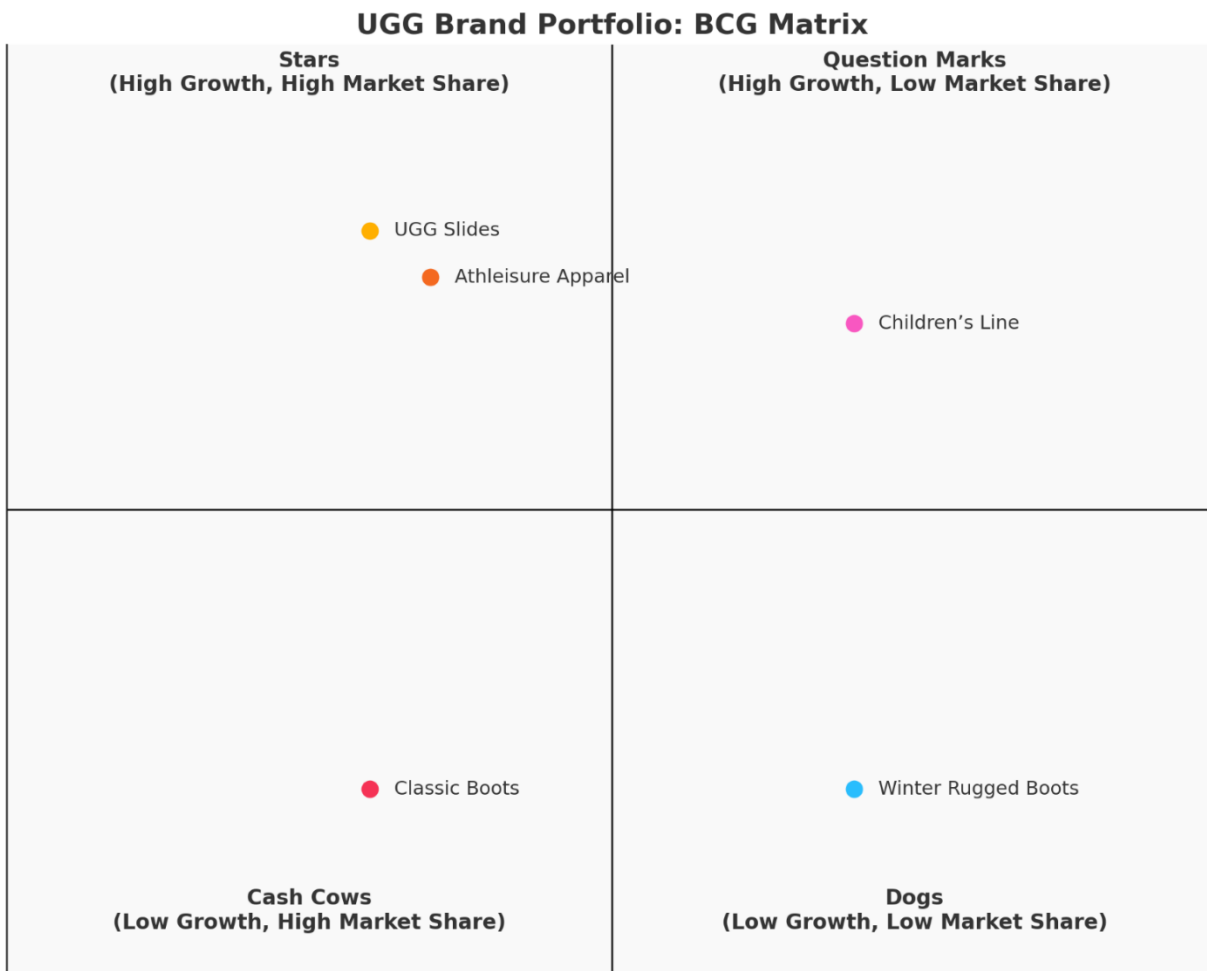
UGG’s marketing alchemy—transforming functional footwear into cultural capital—exemplifies a broader shift in postmodern consumerism. No longer bound by traditional beauty norms, today’s consumers seek products that resonate with their inner narratives and embodied values. As aesthetic deviance becomes a form of status signaling, brands that embrace symbolic nonconformity stand to gain both cultural legitimacy and market share.

UGG’s brand leadership is particularly salient in a post-pandemic economy, where emotional well-being, authenticity, and comfort have become cornerstones of consumer identity. By

normalizing formerly stigmatized forms (e.g., distressed jeans, hoodies, fleece boots), UGG affirms that rebellion itself is a form of emotional and social truth. The once-dismissed “ugly” is now not only accepted but celebrated as a signifier of individuality and liberation.

This study concludes that symbolic consumption is no longer merely about luxury or aesthetics—it is increasingly about identity affirmation through comfort and imperfection. UGG’s journey offers a marketing blueprint: challenge the status quo, leverage cultural insight, and deliver embodied emotional value. In doing so, brands can transform pejorative labels into powerful icons of authenticity and redefine the aesthetics of aspiration for the next generation of consumers.

Figure 1.



Source: <https://dcfmodeling.com/products/deck-bcg-matrix>. Accessed June 3, 2025.

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Track: Consumer Behavior
ID#: 1863

ENTERTAINMENT: MUSIC, ARTS & SPORTS

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Tuning Up the Brand: Thematic Music and Consumer Perceptions in Online Retail

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Abstract - This study explores the role of thematically congruent background music in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors in online retail environments. Building on sensory marketing and mood-congruent processing theory, the research investigates whether patriotic music, when aligned with the values of a veteran-owned apparel brand, can positively influence mood, perceived product quality, price fairness, brand perception, and purchase intent in a digital context.

A between-subjects experiment was conducted with undergraduate marketing students (N = 54), who were randomly assigned to browse the Freedom Fatigues website with either a curated patriotic music playlist or no music. Pre- and post-browsing surveys captured changes in mood, perceptions, and behavioral intentions. The patriotic playlist was intentionally sequenced to begin with high-arousal tracks promoting browsing (e.g., Toby Keith's *Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue*) and transition to emotionally resonant slower songs (e.g., Lee Greenwood's *God Bless the USA*) to support evaluative engagement.

Initial t-tests revealed no significant differences in purchase intent or brand perception across conditions. However, participants in the music condition reported significantly higher mood, greater perceived product quality, and improved perceptions of price fairness. When controlling for baseline patriotic sentiment through ANCOVA, patriotic music had a significant positive effect on all key outcomes, including purchase intent and brand evaluation.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses enriched the analysis. Participants exposed to music expressed more favorable evaluations, especially regarding product quality and website design. In contrast, those in the no-music condition provided more mixed or critical feedback, particularly regarding brand symbolism and patriotism.

Together, these findings suggest that background music functions not only as a mood enhancer but also as an interpretive frame, guiding consumer responses to value-laden branding. Especially in online settings, where sensory input is limited, carefully curated music aligned with brand identity can enhance consumer engagement and shape perceptions. This study contributes to digital sensory marketing literature and provides actionable insight for online retailers seeking to strengthen emotional resonance and brand coherence through non-visual design elements.

Keywords - *sensory marketing, background music, online shopping behavior, mood, thematic congruence*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This study expands sensory marketing research into the digital domain, demonstrating how thematically congruent background music can shape consumer perceptions in online retail environments. It offers actionable insights for e-retailers seeking to build and/or reinforce brand identity and improve customer mood, brand value, and purchase intent.

Author Information

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Track: Entertainment: Music, Arts, & Sports
ID#: 1840

Understanding Drivers of FOMO for a Sports Event: Correlational Evidence

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Recent research (Rafkin, Chan & Kahn, 2025, p. 300) suggests a key aspect to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is “triggered by the perception of missed bonding among a valued social group.” Widely used as a marketing and advertising appeal, FOMO has been explored as a personality trait (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan and Gladwell 2013) that more recently has been conceptualized as also having a social dimension (Zhang, Jiménez and Cicala 2020). Rafkin, Chan & Kahn (2025, p. 300) contend that the social dimension of FOMO can be so strong that “ FOMO occurs even for unenjoyable missed social events, is stronger for people with chronic anxiety about social-group belonging, and is attenuated when people reaffirm their sense of social belonging.”

In the current study, we examine FOMO social effects for a sports event with an online ad produced and disseminated in coordination with the event’s producer.

Methodology

The focal event for the current study was an annual, televised college sports tournament organized by one of the premiere, nationally-recognized sports entertainment companies in the U.S. Data for the analysis provided here was collected as part of a broader study conducted to test the effectiveness of promotions inviting study participants to attend the sports event which held in the fall of 2024. Subjects were asked to review an online advertisement promoting the event and then asked to complete a Qualtrics survey.

Participants indicated on 7-point Likert scales the extent to which they would be interested in learning more about the event and the extent to which they would be interested in attending the event. They also rated how much they might like to invite friends to attend with them. In addition to these key outcome variables of interest, two different measures of FOMO were collected. The first measured the extent to which each individual tends to experience FOMO, in general, as captured with Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan and Gladwell’s (2013) ten-item scale. FOMO for the sports event itself was also measured with three, additional items asking subjects to “Imagine for a moment that you do NOT attend the event.” Subjects indicated the extent to which they will feel a fear of missing out (FOMO), feel sad, and feel anxious. A total of 626 subjects participated.

Findings

To gain a better understanding of the nature of the fear of missing out that subjects anticipated experiencing for the event if they did not attend, each of the FOMO items for the specific event (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) were correlated with the three outcome measures

capturing participant interest in the event. In addition, these event-specific FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) were also correlated with each of the general tendency FOMO items in the Przybylski, et al (2013) scale. Tables 1 and 2 display these results.

Table 1
Event Interest x Event-Specific FOMO Items
(correlation (significance))

	<i>Miss Event - FOMO</i>	<i>Miss Event - Sad</i>	<i>Miss Event - Anxious</i>
Learn Interest	.37 (<.001)	.33 (<.001)	.29 (<.001)
Attend Interest	.42 (<.001)	.35 (<.001)	.33 (<.001)
Invite Interest	.44 (<.001)	.39 (<.001)	.35 (<.001)

Table 2
General Tendency FOMO x Event-Specific FOMO Items
(correlation (significance))

	<i>Miss Event - FOMO</i>	<i>Miss Event - Sad</i>	<i>Miss Event - Anxious</i>
I fear others have more rewarding experiences than me	.32 (<.001)	.28 (<.001)	.36 (<.001)
I fear my friends have more rewarding experiences than me	.36 (<.001)	.30 (<.001)	.36 (<.001)
I get worried when I find out my friends are having fun without me	.50 (<.001)	.44 (<.001)	.48 (<.001)
I get anxious when I don't know what my friends are up to	.52 (<.001)	.49 (<.001)	.52 (<.001)
It is important that I understand my friends "in" jokes	.38 (<.001)	.33 (<.001)	.38 (<.001)
Sometimes wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is going on	.45 (<.001)	.44 (<.001)	.46 (<.001)
It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to meet up with	.43 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)	.41 (<.001)

friends			
When I have a good time, it is important for me to share the details online	.46 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)	.47 (<.001)
When I miss out on a planned get together, it bothers me	.40 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)	.39 (<.001)
When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing	.43 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)	.42 (<.001)

Table 1 indicates all three of the event-specific FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) are positively correlated with each of the event interest measures elicited in the study. Interestingly, for these key, interest outcome variables, all three of the event-specific FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) are most highly correlated with the third interest outcome measured, the extent to which subjects might like to invite friends to attend the event with them. Further, the results in Table 2 indicate all three of these event-specific FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) were also consistently, most highly correlated with the general FOMO item “I get anxious when I don’t know what my friends are up to”. More specifically, the three, event FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) are all moderately correlated (Hair, 2024) with this more general FOMO item with values of .52, .49 and .52, respectively.

Discussion

Previous research indicates that motivations for attending sports events vary widely from showing support for a favorite team to seeing a particular player compete (Fullerton, 2021). However, the correlational evidence above suggests the social aspect of a sports event is likely a key element explaining the extent to which a potential attendee will experience fear of missing out on the event. Notably, expected event-specific FOMO and interest in inviting friends to the event appear to be more closely linked than event-specific FOMO and interest in simply attending the event oneself. While this is not a particularly surprising finding, it is in contrast to other aspects of the sports event that could be of possible value to the attendee, such as witnessing skilled performances, which one might also miss out on.

This finding has important implications for advertisers who aim to incorporate FOMO-strategies in promotional messages designed to draw attendees to sporting events. While a variety of images and messaging may be used to attract sports fans to an event, those specifically highlighting the opportunity one has to experience the event with friends may be particularly effective in FOMO-themed communications. In other words, commonly employed methods such as incorporating logos of participating teams, including images of popular athletes or even featuring the brand of the media company broadcasting the event, may be less effective tactics for this type of advertising than, for example, displaying a group of friends enjoying the event together. Further, the consistent correlation between the event-specific FOMO items (feel FOMO, feel sad and feel anxious) with the general tendency for FOMO item reflecting the desire to know what friends are doing suggests another key element of being “in the know”, a motivation similar to that of the knowledge function of consumer attitude formation (Solomon,

2019).

Keywords: FOMO, sports event, promotional message

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Track: Entertainment: Music, Arts, & Sports

ID#: 1822

From Mercedes Benz Stadium to the Staples Center: A Cross-League Analysis of Stadium Naming Rights Brand Affinity in Professional Sports

By: Darin W. White, Ph.D.

Abstract

From Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta to the iconic Staples Center in Los Angeles, corporate naming rights partnerships have become ubiquitous across America's professional sports landscape. These multi-million dollar investments represent significant corporate commitments to enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement through sports venues. However, limited research exists examining the actual effectiveness of these partnerships across different professional sports leagues. This exploratory study investigates patterns of brand affinity between stadium naming rights sponsors and team followers across major North American professional sports leagues.

Using Zoomph's advanced social media analytics platform, this research analyzes follower overlap and brand affinity data for all teams in the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, and MLS during the current season. The methodology examines the proportion of team followers who also follow the stadium naming rights sponsor compared to follower overlap between the same sponsor and all other teams within the league that lack naming rights partnerships with that sponsor. For example, the study compares Mercedes-Benz's follower overlap with Atlanta Falcons fans versus their overlap with all other NFL team followers, providing quantitative measures of partnership effectiveness. Data collection focuses on current social media follower counts and brand affinity metrics to identify patterns within and across leagues.

The study categorizes naming rights sponsors by industry sector (financial services, automotive, technology, retail, etc.) to explore whether certain business categories demonstrate stronger fan engagement patterns. Additionally, the research examines cross-league variations to understand how different sports audiences respond to corporate partnerships.

Preliminary findings suggest significant variation in partnership effectiveness both within leagues and across sponsor categories. This exploratory analysis aims to identify meaningful patterns that warrant deeper investigation, contributing to academic literature on sports sponsorship effectiveness while providing practical insights for rights holders and corporate sponsors. The research builds upon established scholarship examining naming rights valuation (Leeds et al., 2007; Gerrard & Parent, 2007), sponsorship effectiveness (Becker-Olsen, 2003), and fan attitudes toward commercialization (Bourdeau et al., 2020), offering a novel data-driven approach to measuring stadium naming rights partnership success in the digital age.

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Track: Entertainment: Music, Arts, & Sports

ID#: 1855

GEOMARKETING

Track Chair

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Geofencing in Action

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Abstract – This study examines the application of geofencing technology in the recreational and tourism sectors, focusing on its role in tracking visitor behavior, enhancing marketing effectiveness, and identifying consumer patterns. By leveraging location-based data, we propose geofencing offers new opportunities for capturing accurate and contextually rich insights into user behavior. Our findings demonstrate that geofencing complements traditional methods such as trail counters and intercept surveys and significantly enriches the data by providing a deeper contextual understanding. The results suggest that geofencing technology has the potential to transform marketing research and data collection practices, offering enhanced precision and actionable insights for destination managers and marketers.

Keywords - Geofencing, Marketing, Consumer Behavior

Track: Geomarketing

ID#: 1823

Crime, Consumers, and Clustering: A Geomarketing Analysis of Retail Behavior Across Urban Markets

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Abstract – Exploring how consumer segments respond to varying levels of public safety is increasingly essential for businesses seeking to optimize retail strategy and location-based marketing. This study applies GeoAI methods to investigate the relationship between crime exposure and consumer behavior across different demographic and psychographic groups. The research examines foot traffic patterns to retail locations in three Southeastern U.S. cities—Birmingham, Atlanta, and Memphis—focusing on the interplay between crime indices and the Tapestry Segmentation framework. Using Placer.ai data, ZIP code-level visitor origins were linked to ESRI’s lifestyle segments to model behavioral changes in response to local crime scores. K-means clustering and spatial analysis techniques revealed that high-income and suburban segments exhibited greater sensitivity to crime-adjacent areas, while younger urban segments remained relatively stable in visitation behavior. The study provides actionable insights for retail marketers, developers, and urban planners, demonstrating that public safety considerations intersect with market segmentation in spatial and behavioral ways. Geomarketing is a powerful lens to assess retail resilience and inform ethically aware place-based marketing strategies.

Keywords - *geomarketing, GeoAI, segmentation, consumer behavior, crime, Placer.ai.*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and/or Practitioners: This research contributes to the growing field of geomarketing by linking public safety and consumer segmentation through spatial analytics. For educators, it offers a replicable model that can be used to teach applied GIS and marketing integration. For researchers, it demonstrates how commercially available platforms like ESRI and Placer.ai can support ethical and innovative spatial analyses of consumer behavior. Practitioners benefit from a deeper understanding of how market segments respond to crime in their environments, improving campaign targeting, location strategies, and community engagement approaches.

Track: Geomarketing
ID#: 1841

HEALTH CARE MARKETING

Track Chair

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Maladaptive Influences of Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertising on Preventive Health Care Engagement: The Moderating Role of Age, Loneliness, and Health Anxiety

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Terry Damron

Extended Abstract

Direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical advertising (DTCPA) remains one of the most controversial marketing practices in healthcare. While regulations in the U.S. continue to emphasize message accuracy and balance, there has been little attention to the psychological consequences of such advertising. This research uncovers a maladaptive outcome that has remained unexplored in marketing literature: the erosion of health optimism (HO)—a critical internal orientation predictive of positive health behavior, proactive care, and reduced mortality. Across two experiments, we demonstrate that DTCPA significantly reduces HO, especially among vulnerable populations including older adults, lonely individuals, and those with high health anxiety. A third proposed study utilizes structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore causal relationships between HO and preventive health care engagement, offering deeper theoretical and practical insights for healthcare marketers and policymakers.

Introduction and Background

Since the FDA's 1997 relaxation of DTCPA rules, regulation in the U.S. has focused on ensuring that ads are truthful, balanced, and non-deceptive (Fain & Alexander, 2014). However, such regulations ignore broader impacts—specifically, how DTCPA affects consumer psychology and the patient-provider relationship (Ju et al., 2022; Parekh & Shrank, 2018). Concerns include inappropriate prescription practices, erosion of limited consultation time, and a shift from healthy lifestyle behaviors toward pharmaceutical reliance (Brownfield et al., 2004; Parekh & Shrank, 2018).

The present research introduces health optimism (HO) as a central variable affected by DTCPA. HO, a forward-looking belief in one's health potential, is linked to preventive health behaviors, decreased mortality, and improved long-term outcomes (Chopik et al., 2015; Yue et al., 2022). Yet, the way DTCPA frames health risks may undermine this optimism, particularly among older and socially isolated individuals for whom HO is especially consequential. To show the importance of HO, we specifically explore the relationship between HO and preventive health behaviors.

Empirical Findings: Studies 1 and 2

Two experimental studies examined how DTCPA affects HO. Study 1 (N = 156) manipulated ad type (DTCPA vs. control) and age group. Results showed that DTCPA significantly reduced HO, especially for older adults. Study 2 (N = 126) introduced loneliness and health anxiety as moderators. Lonely participants who viewed the DTCPA exhibited a significantly greater decline in HO. While health anxiety did not directly moderate the DTCPA-HO link, it did amplify HO decline among older participants. These findings suggest that affect and availability heuristics lower HO by increasing perceived health vulnerability. This is especially true for groups already

facing greater health burdens or social disconnect.

Proposed study 3: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Preventive behaviors refer to steps individuals take to avoid illness, detect conditions early, or promote long-term well-being. Examples include exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, getting flu shots, using sunscreen, avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol, and attending annual checkups. These behaviors are broadly categorized into primary prevention (e.g., vaccinations, exercise, healthy eating), secondary prevention (e.g., regular screenings like mammograms or blood pressure checks), and tertiary prevention (e.g., medication adherence and chronic condition management). Prior research shows that such actions are increased by health optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), and social connection (Cohen, 2004). Conversely, loneliness (Teo et al., 2018) and excessive fear-based messaging may suppress engagement in preventive behaviors. To investigate the relationship between HO and preventive health behavior, we propose a third study using Structural Equation Modeling, integrating the Health Optimism (HO) scale with the Preventive Health Care Information (PHCI) inventory. The Preventive Health Care Information (PHCI) inventory is a validated multidimensional scale that captures individuals' engagement with health information, attitudes toward personal health responsibility, and preventive behaviors.

Two competing models will be tested:

- Model 1 (HO as Driver): HO → PHCI Engagement → Preventive behaviors
- Model 2 (HO as Outcome): PHCI Engagement → Preventive behaviors → HO

Latent constructs will include Health Optimism, PHCI Engagement, and Preventive behaviors. A hybrid item selection strategy—anchored in theory but open to exploratory insights—will ensure both rigor and flexibility. Key SEM fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI, SRMR) and model comparisons (AIC, BIC) will help determine the best-fitting model.

The integration of HO and PHCI expands the theoretical scope of DTCPA research and introduces a multidimensional understanding of how consumer psychology interacts with health marketing, offering stronger practical insights for policy and practice.

Theoretical and Managerial Contributions

This research contributes to both marketing and public health literature by:

1. Identifying health optimism as a psychological casualty of DTCPA.
2. Demonstrating that older, lonely, and health-anxious consumers are especially vulnerable to HO erosion.
3. Proposing a theoretically rich and methodologically robust SEM framework to model the influence of health optimism on preventive health behavior.

From a managerial perspective, these findings highlight the ethical tension between persuasive advertising and consumer well-being. Given that DTCPA often targets vulnerable groups with emotionally resonant content, the findings raise concerns about long-term health engagement and

self-efficacy subsequent to chronic exposure to such DTCPA. Regulators and marketers alike must consider these unintended consequences when designing or approving pharmaceutical campaigns.

Limitations and Future Research

While this research offers novel insights into the psychological consequences of DTCPA, several limitations merit attention. The first two studies focused on the immediate effects of a single DTCPA exposure using disease-awareness ads; future research should examine the cumulative impact of repeated exposure over time. Additionally, loneliness and health anxiety were studied separately; future work should explore their potential interactive effects, particularly among older consumers who may be doubly vulnerable.

The proposed third study introduces a structural equation modeling approach to integrate HO with PHCI behaviors, offering a multidimensional perspective. However, careful construct differentiation is essential to avoid redundancy and ensure model validity. Future research should also examine the effects of ad type (e.g., product-claim ads), message framing (gain vs. loss), and cross-cultural regulatory differences to better understand how DTCPA affects diverse consumer segments and inform public health policy more holistically.

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Track: Health Care Marketing
ID#: 1816

Healthcare Facility Distribution and Utilization of Tertiary Services: The Case of Korea

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Abstract - The location of healthcare facilities in conjunction with population needs and the efficient use of healthcare resources are prevalent public policy priorities. In Korea, where Universal Health Care has been instituted since the 1970s, two healthcare distribution related problems have persisted. First, many basic and specialized healthcare facilities are concentrated in larger cities resulting in geographical disparities in access to basic healthcare. Second, the overuse of specialized (tertiary) healthcare facilities by patients with less severe illnesses is highly prevalent, though the conditions can be treated in primary and secondary healthcare facilities. This study examined the association between patient access to primary and secondary healthcare facilities and patient use of tertiary healthcare facilities for less severe health conditions using South Korean patient data available through the National Health Insurance Sharing Service. The results indicate that patients with greater access to primary and secondary healthcare facilities are less likely to seek healthcare at tertiary healthcare facilities to treat less severe illnesses.

Keywords - *Utilization, Universal health coverage, Central place theory*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This study identifies an association between patient access to primary and secondary healthcare facilities and their use of tertiary healthcare facilities for easily treatable conditions. By exploring the impact of healthcare facility distribution this research can provide valuable policy insights into unintended utilization of more specialized healthcare resources.

Track: Health Care Marketing
ID#: 1820

Generational Differences in Smartphone Health App Use

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Abstract

The near ubiquitous adoption of smartphones has placed in the hands of 91% of American adults (Mobile Fact Sheet, 2024) a core component of mobile health (mHealth): smartphone health apps. Smartphones and health apps have the potential to support health behavior changes and transform health promotion interventions in healthcare, consumer health, and education (Kratzke & Cox, 2012). A critical component of mHealth, smartphone health apps have demonstrated potential to positively impact health behaviors (Han & Lee, 2018), chronic disease management (Scott et al., 2018), public health awareness (Multazam et al., 2024), mental health support (Donker et al., 2013), preventive health behaviors (Ribiero et al., 2017), and patient engagement/decision making (Omaghomi, 2024). Accordingly, these digital health tools represent an important health-enhancing opportunity in a country with the poorest overall health outcomes of any high-income nation (Tikkanen & Abrams, 2020), including the highest death rate for preventable/treatable conditions despite spending approximately 18 percent of GDP on health care (Gunja, Gumas, & Williams, 2023).

A review of the research indicates significant generational differences in the use of smartphone and health apps for health management. Though older generations lag in their engagement with digital health tools, younger generations – specifically Millennials – have a higher rate of adoption and are more likely to use not only health apps but also wearable devices and social media for health information (Gallagher et al., 2024). Overall, smartphone and health app users are younger, more educated, and more health literate (Ernsting et al., 2017). User experience with digital health technologies varies across generational cohorts based on age, socioeconomic status, health literacy, and chronic conditions (Ernsting et al., 2017) and as a function of perceived ease of use and usefulness (Alkire et al., 2020).

The most common use cases for smartphone health apps include self-monitoring and managing health behaviors. Commonly, consumers use these apps for fitness tracking, nutrition, weight loss, and chronic condition management (Krebs & Duncan, 2015; Anderson et al., 2016). In terms of features, users appreciate planning, reminders, motivation prompts, information provision and other such utilities (Anderson et al., 2016; Ernsting et al., 2017). As usage and use cases increase, clinical research, patient care, and service delivery are transformed (Seçkin & Kahana, 2015). Still, barriers to use remain as data entry burden, privacy concerns, and hidden costs (Krebs & Duncan, 2015) negatively impact use. Despite widespread adoption, there remain opportunities to improve app design and functionality to address user concerns and broaden appeal across diverse populations (Krebs & Duncan, 2015; Ernsting et al., 2017).

Given the socioeconomic cost of chronic illness among American consumers, there is great potential benefit in increasing and improving consumer use of smartphone health apps and, with that, overall preventive health behaviors. Through analysis of 800 user responses to a 2022

questionnaire, this research aims to provide marketers with generational insights meant to inform the development and promotion of user-centered smartphone health apps.

Research Questions

Two research questions were addressed:

RQ1: Between generational cohorts, how does smartphone health application use vary?

RQ2: Between generational cohorts, how do consumer attitudes vary concerning the importance of smartphone health apps for specific health concerns?

Methods

This research utilizes consumer responses to a 2022 questionnaire issued via Luth Research, a paid/online panel of more than two million potential respondents. The study sample (n = 800) conforms to national demographic norms for generational cohorts and ethnicity.

Measures

Demographic Characteristics

The questionnaire collected each user's generational cohort group, gender, household income, and health insurance coverage status.

Psychographic Characteristics

The questionnaire asked each user:

At present, how would you describe your overall health?
*Extremely Good Health, Very Good Health, Somewhat Good Health,
Somewhat Poor Health, Very Poor Health, Extremely Poor Health*

Smartphone Health App Use

Researchers examined user responses to the following questionnaire item:

I routinely review and/or update my personal health information using a smartphone APP (e.g. FitBit, MyFitnessPal, Apple Health).
Definitely Agree Generally Agree Agree Slightly Disagree Slightly Generally Disagree Definitely Disagree

Smartphone Health App Use Cases

Researchers examined user responses to the following questionnaire item:

Concerning the overall management of your health, how important are Smartphone Health Tracking APPS (e.g. Apple Health, MyFitnessPal, FitBit, MediSafe Pill Minder, etc.) for each of the following?

- a. As a tool to remind you to take your medications
- b. To help you collect Preventive Health Care Information
- c. To help you track your physical activity
- d. To help you track food/nutrition
- e. To track your sleep habits/quality
- f. To reduce stress

- g. To meditate
- h. To practice sleep hygiene for good sleep (nighttime routine, elimination of electronics in the bedroom, etc.)
- i. To manage your sexual and reproductive health
Very Important, Important, Slightly Important, Slightly Unimportant, Unimportant, Very Unimportant

Implications

This research aims to provide marketers and app developers with generational insights meant to inform the development and promotion of user-centered smartphone health apps. With improved product development and promotion decisions, firms may improve consumer access to – and awareness of – apps suited to their specific needs. For example, findings concerning the app utilities Baby Boomers find most important would inform promotional strategy emphasizing those existing (or new) capabilities within a given app. Alternatively, findings indicating Baby Boomers do not find important a key capability of the app could inform a decision to design educational and persuasive promotions meant to shift consumer attitudes about the specific function as it pertains to investing in personal wellbeing.

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Keywords: healthcare marketing, digital health, preventive health care information, mHealth, consumer behavior, innovation, health data, mobile health metrics

Relevance: Digital health tools such as smartphone health apps represent an important health-enhancing opportunity in the US, a nation suffering poor health outcomes and high death rates due to preventable/treatable conditions. Given the socioeconomic cost of chronic illness among American consumers, there is great potential benefit in increasing and improving consumer use of smartphone health apps and, with that, overall preventive health behaviors. This research aims to provide marketers with generation-specific insights concerning smartphone health app use and use cases, allowing for better informed product design and promotions.

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Preventive Health Care Information Acquisition via Social Media: A Generational Cohort Analysis

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Abstract

Preventive health care information (PHCI), which includes health-related messages meant to initiate behaviors that prevent illness or detect it early (Jayanti & Burns 1998) offers a low-cost pathway toward life-preserving and enhancing behaviors (Tacco, 2018). The socioeconomic benefit of PHCI is particularly important in the U.S., where a country with the poorest overall health outcomes of any high-income nation (Tikkanen & Abrams, 2020) and the highest death rate for preventable/treatable conditions (Gunja, Gumas, & Williams, 2023).

Alongside increases in preventable illness, U.S. adult adoption of social media and networks has grown in recent years for platforms such as YouTube (83%), Facebook (68%), Instagram (47%), and TikTok (33%) (Gottfried, 2024). Given the average American spends more than two hours on social media each day (Statista, 2024), these platforms are positioned to serve as powerful tools for disseminating PHCI. However, the utility for dissemination of PHCI varies by platform and generational cohort, as do perceptions of source credibility, and preferences for one-way or two-way health communication (Cangelosi et al., 2021).

Generational cohort analysis offers a valuable framework for understanding variations in how different age-based segments access, interpret, and act upon health information delivered through social media channels (Damron et al., 2024). Consumers from Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers exhibit distinct digital behaviors, values, and communication preferences shaped by shared sociocultural experiences and technological exposure. These differences influence both the platforms each cohort uses for health information acquisition and the communication styles they prefer. For instance, while younger consumers may engage more with interactive, two-way PHCI content on TikTok or Instagram, older cohorts may prefer more passive, one-way formats on Facebook or YouTube (Blandi et al., 2022; Pew Research Center, 2024).

This study replicates a 2019 investigation examining how consumers across generational cohorts acquire and evaluate preventive health care information (PHCI) via social media (Cangelosi et al., 2021.) The 2019 questionnaire contained a series of 29 items designed to collect information on nine demographic characteristics (cohort, age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational attainment, occupational status, insurance status, and household income) and attitudes toward acquisition of PHCI. Disseminated in 2019 via Luth Research, which maintains an online panel of over two million potential respondents, the sample conformed to national demographic norms of Cohort Generational Groups and Ethnicity. Respondents were selected at random, then usable responses were controlled to achieve the desired demographic balance.

While maintaining the original study's conceptual and methodological framework, the present research introduces a new sample of consumers surveyed in 2022, providing an opportunity to

explore how generational differences in digital health behavior may have evolved in the context of significant sociocultural and technological change – particularly the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting infodemic of misinformation and disinformation that politicized efforts to curb transmission and led more consumers to distrust medical professionals and public health responders, put stock in false cures, and lose their lives (Bruns et al., 2023).

Since 2019, the digital ecosystem has shifted markedly. TikTok emerged as a dominant platform, health misinformation proliferated online, and public trust in institutions fluctuated (Bruns et al., 2023; Pew Research Center, 2024). These environmental factors likely influenced how Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers use social media to find and trust PHCI. While generational differences in digital media preferences have been previously documented (Damron et al., 2024; Blandi et al., 2022), few studies have replicated baseline measures over time using different consumer samples to identify trends or inflection points in health communication behavior.

By using a different 2022 sample and holding key measurement constructs constant, this study provides a quasi-longitudinal snapshot of shifts in consumer behavior, communication preferences, and perceived source credibility across generational lines. Findings will help public health agencies, health care organizations, and digital marketers tailor platform-specific, generationally appropriate PHCI strategies to increase engagement, trust, and ultimately, preventive health action.

Research Questions

RQ1 How important are YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter in the acquisition of PHCI?

RQ2 What type of PHCI delivery system communication do consumers prefer: one-way or two-way?

RQ3 What sources of PHCI do consumers consider most credible?

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Keywords: healthcare marketing, social media marketing, preventive health care information, consumer behavior, advertising and promotional strategy

Relevance: This study explores how U.S. consumers in different generations use social media to find preventive health care information (PHCI), a low-cost tool for the prevention and early identification of illness. A replication of a 2019 study using a new 2022 sample, this research is intended to identify how consumer attitudes and behaviors may have shifted from 2019 to 2022, a time when the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting infodemic created information overwhelm and distrust of health information. Findings will inform better promotional strategies for sharing health information with specific age groups.

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Teaching Social Marketing Concepts Through Prosocial Behavior Lenses

Best Paper in Track Best Paper in Conference

Bela Florenthal

Abstract: This study investigates the educational value of a prosocial project embedded in a college-level marketing course. Framed through a humanistic and holistic lens, the initiative integrated acts of kindness (AOKs) to engage students in real-world application of social marketing concepts. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through student reflections and surveys, revealing high levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Students developed empathy, compassion, and self-awareness, reinforcing the importance of integrating experiential learning into business education. The project also addressed AACSB's emphasis on societal impact and aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by promoting emotional well-being and civic responsibility.

Keywords: *College Students, Prosocial Behavior, Social Marketing, Experiential Learning*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: *This study offers practical insights for marketing educators and curriculum designers aiming to incorporate social responsibility and emotional intelligence into their courses. By aligning marketing education with experiential, student-centered, and humanistic learning principles, the Spread Kindness project provides a replicable framework for fostering empathy, critical thinking, and civic engagement. The findings support the growing demand for socially conscious marketing professionals and offer researchers a grounded approach to assessing student transformation through qualitative data. Practitioners interested in bridging theory and social impact will find the AOK typology useful for training, outreach, or community-driven campaigns.*

Introduction

Socially responsible business education increasingly incorporates humanistic and holistic learning, promoting not only academic knowledge but also emotional intelligence and civic engagement. Aligned with AACSB's standards and SDG 3, this study explores how marketing students can internalize empathy and responsibility through experiential learning. The "Spread Kindness" project asked students to perform AOKs and reflect on their impact, bridging marketing theory with social relevance. Rooted in prior research on inclusive learning environments and social marketing frameworks (Binfet, 2015; Kotler, 2008), this study focuses on students' engagement and development through intentional prosocial action.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

The SKP is grounded in multiple intersecting theoretical frameworks that support its design and implementation in marketing education. Social marketing theory (Kotler, 2008) emphasizes behavior change for social good, offering a foundational lens for the prosocial behaviors embedded in the SKP. Community engagement literature highlights the civic value of experiential service learning (Berman, 1990; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996), reinforcing the project's alignment with broader societal goals. Holistic and humanistic education (Fink, 2014) integrates emotional, ethical, and intellectual development, while experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014) and self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998) position students as active agents in their learning. Reflective practice (Ash et al., 2005) deepens this engagement by encouraging critical self-examination. These perspectives collectively shaped five guiding research questions: Can the project effectively cultivate prosocial behavior? Does it promote meaningful community impact? In what ways does it foster students' professional and personal growth? Can it enhance emotional well-being? And finally, does it deepen engagement through experiential learning?

The Spread Kindness Project and Learning Objectives

The SKP was implemented in an upper-level marketing course as a semester-long, experiential project requiring students to perform intentional acts of kindness (AOKs). Through blogs, reflections, and survey responses, students documented their AOKs, which were then assessed for academic and emotional impact. The five learning objectives (LOs) were directly tied to these experiences: LO1 addressed the application of social marketing strategies; LO2 explored the ripple effect of prosocial behavior on community engagement; LO3 examined professional growth through the lens of holistic education; LO4 evaluated student-centered learning via perceived value and engagement; and LO5 focused on self-realization, emphasizing emotional reflection and personal development. These objectives were central to assessing how the SKP enhanced students' academic competencies, civic awareness, and emotional intelligence within the framework of marketing education.

Methodology

In Fall 2022, students in a 16-week Marketing Management course at a public university completed the SK project, performing 72 AOKs across diverse categories. Data collection included reflective journals, logs, and an end-of-semester survey. A structured typology categorized AOKs into five groups based on recipient and effort type (Pressman et al., 2015; Dunn et al., 2008). Thematic and content analysis were applied using Braun & Clarke's (2006) method. Emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement were coded, and Maslow's framework was used to assess motivational outcomes (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Findings

Students demonstrated strong engagement across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral domains. Most acts targeted family and peers, and 77% were witnessed by others, indicating the potential for ripple effects. Benefits included heightened awareness (56%) and improved collaboration and empathy, while challenges included time management and integrating course content. Engagement included intellectual planning, emotional satisfaction, and active group collaboration. Maslow's framework revealed that students' needs for belongingness and esteem

were most fulfilled. Emotional feedback was overwhelmingly positive—pride and excitement were the most cited feelings.

Discussions

The SK project successfully demonstrated the integration of social marketing theory with practice. Students' preference for non-monetary, relational acts reflects a deeper, values-based engagement. The project promoted emotional intelligence and civic responsibility, meeting both pedagogical and professional goals. As a scalable model, this initiative affirms the value of experiential learning for business education. Despite a small sample size, findings support wider implementation across courses. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts and cross-disciplinary applications.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
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More Insight, More Impact: Co-Teaching as a Catalyst for Engagement in Sales Education

Best Abstract in Track Best Abstract in Conference

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Extended Abstract

The purpose of this work is to determine the effect that co-teaching has on undergraduate students in an advanced selling course. Courses related to advanced selling skills are typically demanding because they cover a wide range of material and skill development including several cases and role-play exercises. It can be challenging for a single instructor to effectively fulfill the multiple required roles of lecturer, role-player, sales coach, career advisor and feedback provider. This work discusses how having two instructors during every class session can have a more positive impact on students. The two instructors had collaborated previously as coaches for the university sales team. Qualitative research findings demonstrate that students find class lectures and role-play exercises, and personalized coaching more meaningful with the greater attention two instructors can provide. The results have implications for both advanced and introductory selling courses that help students build selling skills and confidence before entering the work force.

Key Words: team teaching, co-teaching, selling, role play, sales training, sales coaching

Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
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Acquiring Marketing Skills Through Experiential Learning

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With potential gaps in the expectations of skills acquired through experiential learning among business students, practitioners, and business faculty in terms of what are required in the workplace in mind, this study aims to reveal and fill these gaps (Gray 2025). Given the ultimate goal of experiential learning is to enhance student’s marketability, it is pertinent to design specific experiential learning opportunities based on the skills with practitioners’, as opposed to students’ and faculty’s, needs and wants in mind will greatly enhance students’ marketability.

As educators strive to equip students with necessary skills for the rigors of the workplace, businesses constantly struggle with finding the job seekers with competitive attributes to be “workforce ready” (e.g., Fried 2020). Accordingly, it is imperative for marketing educators to incorporate practical aspects of business into classrooms more innovatively to accelerate students’ learning, enhance their adaptability to workplace, and shape them as the future workers and competitors. For example, many educators acknowledge that hard skills, such as writing skills (Musto 2016), have been short of employers’ expectations for a while.

In addition, recent research suggests that employers place value on both hard and soft skills (e.g., Hain & Ritz 2021). Also, a study collecting data from 6,600 students across ten countries found that it is the soft (vs. hard) skills which will determine students’ preparedness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Aberé & Constantinides 2021). Furthermore, soft skills were redefined to include employability skills which refer to a set of “workforce ready” attributes that employers expect from new hires (McArthur et al. 2017). Additionally, Grewal, Guha, Saturnino, and Becker (2025) propose to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) and generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) into marketing curricula “to reflect the technology-augmented marketing era”. Finally, listed as career readiness competencies by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, there are eight soft skills (e.g., communication, critical thinking, leadership, etc.) that are critical to “prepare college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management” (National Association of Colleges & Employers 2025).

Schlee and Harich (2010) and Schlee and Karns (2017) identified three categories of skills to reflect various aspects of competence required from marketing graduates by employers: marketing knowledge (i.e., conceptual knowledge in various functions of marketing profession such as budgeting, developing marketing plans, direct marketing, selling etc.), meta-skills (i.e., applied or transferrable skills such as oral and written communications, presentations, time management, creative problem solving, ethics etc.), and technical skills (i.e., knowledge of specific software, programming language or other technical knowledge). In addition to these knowledge and skills, personal attributes (e.g., adaptability, positive attitude towards work,

ability to take initiatives, etc.) were suggested to become increasingly important due to fast evolving conditions in business environment (e.g., Schlee and Karns 2017).

To connect classroom to the real world, experiential learning, defined as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” and “[k]nowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience”, has received tremendous amount of attention and has been practiced for decades (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). In marketing, there have been various formats of innovative experiential teaching methods, such as role playing (Magnotta 2018), performance coaching (Chapman, Schetzslle, & Zeiss 2021), field-based experiential learning (Schaller 2020), and customer journey mapping (Bennett, Matos, & Andonova 2019). However, the challenges remain for honing employability attributes and skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, agility to learn and apply, and collaboration/teamwork at all levels in a business environment. For instance, instructor’s hindsight via students’ communication materials may not effectively guide students to appreciate workplace dynamics and pace their learning/work accordingly (Barr & McNeilly 2002). In particular, Canhoto & Murphy (2016) posited that employers’ feedback will facilitate deep learning via not only contents in the feedback but also the way the feedback is delivered. Finally, even though universities typically list study abroad as a form of experiential learning, what kind of skills students learn is still unclear. Additionally, although internship has been demonstrated to relate to improved student self-awareness (Pettersen, Kubberad, van der Lingen, & Neethling 2023), the question of whether self-awareness is a skill valued by practitioners is unknown.

To mitigate the noted challenges, this research proposes that experiential learning should be: (1) initiated by identifying specific skills in workforce readiness from the perspectives of practitioners, academicians, and students, (2) proposed and designed based on knowledge and/or skills identified, and (3) assessed from the perspectives of practitioners, academicians, and students as well as before (i.e., expectations) and after (i.e., perceptions) the initiation of experiential learning.

Therefore, the participants of this study are business students, practitioners, and academicians. Specifically, for the expectations of skills acquired through experiential learnings, participants are: (1) business students who are at least 18 years old or older and from regional universities, (2) hiring managers (i.e., practitioners/employers) from regional businesses, and (3) full-time business faculty from regional universities. For the perceptions of skills acquired through experiential learnings, participants are business students with actual experiential learning experiences from regional universities. Additionally, data regarding participant gender, disciplines (e.g., majors, types of business, or, area of specialty), types of experiential learning, and business/university sizes will be collected.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1812

The Impact of Paid Generative Ai Access on Student Career Readiness: A Comparative Evaluation of Quinnia.Ai Adoption In Higher Education

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Extended Abstract

As generative AI (GenAI) tools gain traction across industries, colleges and universities face growing pressure to integrate these technologies into instruction and student support services. Paid GenAI platforms like Quinnia.ai offer scalable, individualized feedback on professional materials such as resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and mock interviews. However, their adoption presents trade-offs: subscription-based access can deepen inequities among students, while institution-wide licensing demands significant financial investment. This study examines whether providing undergraduate students with access to Quinnia meaningfully improves performance on key career development tasks compared to students receiving traditional support. Results show no significant differences between groups, raising questions about the return on investment for paid GenAI tools in educational settings. Implications for institutional policy, instructional design, and equitable AI implementation are discussed.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), Career Readiness, Higher Education Technology

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and/or Practitioners – This study shows that integrating paid GenAI tools, like Quinnia, does not automatically improve student outcomes. Educators need to consider beta testing paid platforms before adopting and pairing AI tools with instructional support to drive meaningful skill development. These findings highlight the need for intentional integration of technology into higher education.

Introduction

As higher education institutions face mounting pressure to improve graduates' career readiness, traditional career services often struggle to deliver personalized guidance at scale. Paid generative AI (GenAI) platforms like Quinnia.ai offer a potential solution by providing scalable, individualized feedback on resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and mock interviews. Yet, their adoption raises concerns. Subscription-based models may exacerbate inequities if only some students can afford access, while institution-wide licensing presents a costly investment requiring justification through measurable outcomes.

Recent research reflects this tension. Sanchez and Kim (2024) warn that paywalled GenAI tools

risk deepening educational disparities, while Rodriguez and Allen (2024) call for institutional oversight to ensure equitable access. Meanwhile, Li and Reynolds (2025) report positive outcomes for schools implementing universal GenAI access, including improved engagement and employability. Despite these developments, few empirical studies have rigorously assessed whether GenAI tools like Quinnia meaningfully improve student performance.

This study evaluates the impact of providing undergraduates with access to Quinnia.ai through a campus-sponsored license. Specifically, we test whether students in the Quinnia condition outperform those in a control group on key career-readiness tasks, including resume writing, LinkedIn profiles, mock interviews, and speed branding.

H1: Quinnia users will outperform control group students on all four tasks.

H1a: Quinnia users will receive higher resume grades than the control group

H1b: Quinnia users will receive higher LinkedIn grades than the control group

H1c: Quinnia users will receive higher mock interview grades than the control group

H1d: Quinnia users will receive higher speed branding grades than the control group

H2: These differences will remain significant after controlling for class standing and final course grade.

Methodology and Sample

Fifty-four undergraduate students enrolled in *Personal Branding and Networking*, a 15-week, in-person professional development course, participated in this study. Students were divided into two groups: the experimental group ($n = 27$), which received full access to Quinnia.ai, and the control group ($n = 27$), which completed the same career assignments using traditional methods and unpaid GenAI tools. All students were taught by the same instructor, with support from the university's Career Center for resume, LinkedIn, and interview preparation.

Four graded assignments served as dependent variables: resume, LinkedIn profile, mock interview, and a final Speed Branding evaluation. Students in the experimental group were required to submit their resume and LinkedIn profile through Quinnia for feedback prior to final submission. For the mock interview, they used Quinnia's AI-based practice tool, receiving a grade based on their highest score. Control group students practiced in small groups and then completed a traditional video-recorded interview, which they could revise and resubmit independently.

The Speed Branding final was evaluated by eight external professionals, three Career Center staff, and the course instructor, using a 7-point scale (1 would not hire to 7 would hire on the spot). Scores were averaged and normalized to the highest possible score.

The sample included sophomores (35%), juniors (40%), and seniors (25%) at a Southeastern

U.S. university. Most students were business majors, predominantly male (93%) and white (80%). As demographic variables did not affect outcomes, they are not further analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The use of Quinnicia did not positively impact students' grades on their LinkedIn profiles, mock interview grades, or the professionally reviewed Speed Branding event. It did, however, improve students' resume grade ($M_{\text{Quinnicia}} = 82.35$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 75.81$, $t = 1.97$, $p = .054$). See Table 1.

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviation, and T-tests of Dependent Variables

Measure	Quinnicia Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	t-statistic	p-value
Resume	82.35 (11.35)	75.81 (12.54)	1.97	0.05
LinkedIn	79.40 (14.62)	81.14 (15.53)	-0.42	0.67
Mock Interview	71.77 (13.60)	77.52 (16.16)	-1.40	0.16
Speed Branding	79.50 (12.25)	80.96 (10.90)	-0.46	0.64

Note: Means in bold are significantly different.

To evaluate the impact of the Quinnicia platform on student performance while controlling for prior academic achievement and academic seniority, ANCOVA analyses were conducted for each dependent measure. The models included condition (Quinnicia vs. Control) as the independent variable, with final course grade and class standing as covariates. Results indicated that, after adjusting for covariates, there remained no statistically significant differences between groups on mock interview scores, LinkedIn submissions, or speed branding ($p > .05$ for all). However, the effect of condition on resume scores was reduced ($F(1,47) = 3.38$, $p = .072$), suggesting that the initial grade difference might have been a result of student differences and not the use of Quinnicia.

The findings from this study suggest that offering students paid access to the Quinnicia.ai platform did not produce significant improvements in key career readiness outcomes, including LinkedIn profiles, mock interview performance, or performance in a final Speed Branding event. These results held even after adjusting for students' academic performance and class standing. Although the resume score was initially higher in the Quinnicia condition ($M = 82.35$ vs. 75.81), this effect was no longer statistically significant once final grade and class year were accounted for ($F(1,47) = 3.38$, $p = .072$). The marginal nature of this effect suggests that the observed difference may be due more to general student differences than to the Quinnicia intervention itself.

These results contribute to the growing conversation around the pedagogical value and institutional cost of paid generative AI tools in higher education. While prior literature has emphasized the potential of GenAI platforms to scale career services and personalize feedback

(Li & Reynolds, 2025), this study cautions against assuming that access alone is sufficient to generate measurable improvements in performance. The lack of significant improvement may reflect students' difficulty in translating AI-generated feedback into actionable revisions, or it may indicate that peer and instructor feedback within a well-structured course already provides sufficient support.

For marketing educators and career center leaders, the results highlight the need for more intentional integration of AI tools into pedagogical workflows. Rather than positioning AI as a standalone solution, institutions may benefit from pairing GenAI tools with targeted human support and scaffolding to help students interpret and apply feedback. Furthermore, as resume-building was the only area where a potential effect emerged, future research might explore whether narrowly scoped, single-skill GenAI tools offer greater value than generalized platforms. Finally, from an equity standpoint, these findings underscore the importance of critically evaluating whether institutional investments in paid AI tools yield measurable educational returns. Without clear evidence of benefit, such expenditures may not be justifiable—particularly in resource-constrained environments or where access may exacerbate existing educational inequalities.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1814

Slowing Down Fast Fashion with a Closet Inventory Project

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Submission #1815

Abstract – Explaining the business of fast fashion to students with an applied personal closet inventory project helps them to understand their part in the industry. It also encourages them to devote more time and attention to future purchases with a focus on sustainability. They can start to connect their decisions with societal impacts. The project requires students to investigate their clothes for the materials, countries of origin, and brands. They then research these topics and come up with recommendations for themselves to build a more sustainable closet. Pre- and post-test surveys indicate the project educates them about the topic and has an impact on future purchases. The project relates to sustainable development goals (SDGs) 8: decent work and economic growth and 12: responsible consumption and production.

Keywords - *slow fashion, fast fashion, clothes, textiles, garment*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This article presents marketing academics with an approach to teaching undergraduate students about the fashion industry with an emphasis on their own clothing.

Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning

ID#: 1815

Addressing the GenAI Proficiency Gap in Marketing Education: A Multi-Dimensional Assessment Framework

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Abstract - As generative AI (GenAI) transforms the marketing profession, a widening proficiency gap threatens to leave students unprepared for workforce expectations. While industry reports indicate the growing demand for AI fluency in content generation, consumer insight, and strategy, many marketing educators lack the necessary training and tools to teach these competencies. Further complicating the issue is the absence of standardized assessment methods to guide instruction and measure student progress. This paper proposes a comprehensive, theoretically grounded self-assessment framework for evaluating GenAI proficiency in marketing education. Anchored in the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition, the framework encompasses seven core dimensions: Prompt Engineering, Critical Evaluation, Process Integration, Learning Approach, Strategic Application, Ethical Awareness, and Collaborative Practices. Each dimension is assessed through three targeted questions using five-tier proficiency scales, enabling instructors to identify learning needs and tailor instruction accordingly. Future validation through expert review and empirical testing will further establish its utility. This framework supports marketing educators in preparing students for an AI-integrated future by providing a structured approach to GenAI literacy. It contributes to the broader effort of modernizing marketing curricula.

Keywords - Generative AI, Marketing Education, AI Literacy, Skill Assessment, Curriculum Development

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners - As student use of Generative AI increases, instructors need to understand their level of proficiency at the beginning of each course. The authors are developing a self-assessment to measure this, enabling instructors to determine the appropriate level at which to teach their continued use of GenAI.

Introduction

Marketing educators face a critical challenge as generative AI (GenAI) rapidly gains importance, creating a significant "proficiency gap" that could hinder student career readiness. Recent industry research suggests a strong expectation for entry-level marketing hires to possess basic AI literacy, particularly in content generation, consumer insight analysis, and campaign optimization (American Marketing Association, 2024; Lightricks, 2024). However, a considerable portion of marketing faculty reports feeling unprepared to teach AI applications, even while acknowledging its crucial role in student career preparation (Rauschnabel et al., 2022). The absence of standardized methods to evaluate AI proficiency makes it difficult for educators to identify learning needs, design effective curricula, and measure the success of AI

literacy initiatives.

Literature Review

The urgency of this challenge is underscored by AI's potential impact on the marketing profession. Research from McKinsey suggests that AI technologies could automate a significant percentage of work hours within marketing departments (McKinsey Global Institute, 2023a, 2023b). Furthermore, the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report highlights AI and machine learning specialists as rapidly growing roles, emphasizing the increasing importance of AI literacy across various marketing functions (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Current approaches to assessment in marketing education appear to be lagging. While there is expressed interest among marketing program directors in integrating AI literacy into curricula (Hoffman & Novak, 2021), the establishment of formal assessment methods remains limited. Studies also suggest a tendency in marketing programs to emphasize technical AI skills, potentially at the expense of ethical considerations and critical evaluation abilities (Kumar et al., 2025). Existing frameworks often lack specific relevance to marketing education or fail to provide clear pathways for skill development. While resources like those from the Marketing AI Institute offer valuable insights into AI competencies for marketing professionals (Marketing AI Institute, 2023), they may not always align with the pedagogical needs of educational settings.

Findings

We propose a comprehensive GenAI Proficiency Self-Assessment for marketing education to address this gap based on established learning theories and current industry research. This framework evaluates seven critical dimensions of AI proficiency:

- **Prompt Engineering:** Crafting effective prompts for marketing content creation and analysis.
- **Critical Evaluation:** Verifying and refining AI-generated outputs for accuracy and brand alignment.
- **Process Integration:** Incorporating AI into marketing workflows and technology stacks.
- **Learning Approach:** Methods for staying current with rapidly evolving AI capabilities in marketing.
- **Strategic Application:** Applying AI to increasingly complex marketing problems and challenges.
- **Ethical Awareness:** Responsible AI use in persuasive marketing communications and customer interactions.
- **Collaborative Practices:** Knowledge sharing and team coordination for AI-enhanced marketing work.

The assessment consists of three questions measuring distinct but related aspects of each dimension, leading to a total of 21 questions. Each question employs five proficiency levels aligned with the Dreyfus Model of Skill Acquisition (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980), ranging from novice to expert behaviors. The assessment includes relevant terminology and clarifying examples to ensure accessibility for beginners while providing educational value.

Comprehensive scoring guidelines allow marketing educators to identify proficiency as well as dimension-specific strengths and weaknesses, facilitating targeted instructional interventions.

Discussions

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Self-assessment inherently carries the potential for reporting bias, as individuals may have limited insight into their competencies (Dunning et al., 2004). Additionally, the rapid evolution of AI technologies poses a challenge to the long-term stability of any framework. While the core dimensions are expected to remain relevant, specific expert behaviors may evolve.

While performance-based assessments can provide a more direct measure of proficiency, they often present significant practical challenges in educational settings, particularly concerning time constraints and standardization. Our self-assessment approach strikes a practical balance between measurement validity and implementation feasibility.

Future steps involve validating the framework through expert review, factor analysis, criterion-related validity testing, and reliability assessment. Marketing educators can use this assessment for diagnostic purposes, formative assessment during instruction, and summative evaluation upon program completion. Further research should investigate cultural and contextual factors that influence AI proficiency development among marketing students and conduct longitudinal studies to monitor proficiency development over time.

By establishing standardized methods for measuring GenAI proficiency in marketing education, this framework addresses a crucial need within marketing programs. It provides a foundation for the systematic development of AI literacy among future marketing professionals.

The self-assessment will be shared at the conference for review and feedback.

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Available upon request.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1818

Exploring the Benefits of Marketing Certifications in Higher Ed

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Abstract – This study originated from a case study on personal branding projects in the undergraduate classroom and pivoted to how faculty can better prepare undergraduate students for career success by integrating industry certifications into their curriculum. Students have multiple options when it comes to completing certifications that range from certifications on marketing technology platforms like Google Ads, certifications focused on key marketing topics like HubSpot or industry certifications like those offered by the American Marketing Association.

Certifications can benefit both faculty and students alike. They can help faculty keep up with the pace of change, save time and lead to higher perceived credibility for a course (Crowley et al. 2021), enable faculty to concentrate on key skills such as communications and problem solving (Goldring 2017) and also help with the flipped classroom approach (Lavarie et al., 2020). Additional studies (Cowley et al., 2021; Goldring, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Laverie et al., 2020; Spiller & Tuten, 2019) found students are attracted to certificates for multiple reasons and cite a number of benefits including adding value to their resume, promoting lifelong learning, increasing their overall level of experience in addition to helping them get an interview and train for work in their future career.

An end of course survey was conducted with 49 marketing majors in their capstone course at a public regional university in the Mid-Atlantic in spring 2025 to learn more about the benefits of industry certifications. One of the requirements for the course included successful completion of an industry marketing certification of their choice as part of a personal branding project. Findings supported and added to knowledge in the literature review.

In the survey, students shared how their thoughts on certifications evolved during the course from “optional” or a “nice to have” to being a valuable addition to their qualifications and something that would help them stand out in comparison to their peers. Key findings from the survey also discovered that the opportunity to add value to their resume and increase their level of expertise along with promoting life-long learning was considered a higher benefit to completing a certification than perceived benefits tied to preparing the student for their job search, helping them get an interview or the likelihood of leading partly or directly to a job offer. Additional study on this topic is being pursued across the university with the potential for follow-up post-graduation with young alumni in the study.

Keywords - *Industry certifications, Marketing credentials, Career success*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners:

This study provides valuable insight and a plan to assist higher education faculty in implementing marketing certifications into the curriculum. Benefits to certifications are explored and key findings shared based on an end of course survey.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1821

Building Career Readiness in a Marketing Research Classroom

Elizabeth C. Alexander

Abstract – Marketing research students engaged in a variety of tasks during a marketing research course designed to benefit their career readiness in the marketing field upon graduation. Activities included completing micro credential training, and experiential activities, as well as a research project devoted to marketing careers and readiness. Students were pre- and post-tested on their perceptions of readiness and capabilities. Results from the exercise are mixed and need further study to determine the effectiveness of embedding career readiness activities in the course content.

Keywords - *marketing career readiness, course embedded activities*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: Schools of business are being tasked with preparing students for their careers beyond the traditional business class content. Examples of successful implementation provide ideas to spur enhanced or modified career instruction.

Literature Review

Career readiness, defined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers as “the foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management,” (naceweb.org), has become a focus in higher education with degree programs being tasked with preparing students with both content knowledge and career/job readiness due to demands from stakeholders including employers, families, and the students themselves. Courses seeking to prepare students are found with various titles and labels including career launch, career readiness, career planning, and career orientation (Priddis, Brinthead, Hayes, Green, Maynor, Buckner, Calahan, Spooner and Eady, 2025). As suggested by Bullen, Kordecki, and Capener (2020), recent graduates are needed that have the skills to meet the new requirements for success arising from market conditions and advances in technology. It is suggested that educators need to provide students with the background to establish and build their careers, going beyond traditional discipline skills and knowledge (Amoroso and Burke, 2018).

The Brennan School of Business at Dominican University developed a three-phase program with the goal of increasing students career readiness and career management skills. Phase one offered a one-credit elective course, but it was soon determined that the offering was not accomplishing the goal of career readiness. The second phase saw career readiness activities embedded in business courses, making the acquisition of the knowledge and skills no longer voluntary. The third phase instituted required co-curricular activities to complement the career readiness content in the courses. Students now follow a pathway starting with self- and career exploration and moving to internships, EIR mentoring, and experiential learning opportunities (Amoroso and Burke, 2018).

Recognizing the need to address career readiness, Texas A&M Kingsville developed a Student Professional Development Program along with an immersion experience (internship, study abroad, or faculty led research). In a study with 82 student respondents, Carmona, Daniel, Delcours, and Longoria (2020) studied the relationship between three areas of the student experience and the conceptualization of a career plan by students, labeled “activating your plan”. Mixed findings indicate developing a personal value proposition and self-marketing had a positive influence on activating the plan, while the “discovering your options” did not.

Other examples can be found in the literature of schools and programs building some type of career readiness into their curriculum, giving weight to the importance of training students beyond discipline content knowledge and skills (Bullen, 2020; Clark, 2005; Hora, 2023; Perera, Fernandes, and Paniker, 2020; Priddis, et al. 2025; and Seth, 2020).

Anecdotal results from deep empathy interviews conducted by the author with undergraduates within 1 to 2 semesters of graduation found that many students were unsure of direction upon completing their degree, seemingly knowing little of the opportunities available, providing support that students are not prepared to engage in career management. Pesch, Larson, and Seipel (2018) studied students’ career exploration activities and occupational knowledge as related to career certainty and major satisfaction. Generally, their findings indicate that students are surer of their career choice when they have participated in career exploration and feel more knowledgeable about the career. However, the study uncovered that students’ actual career knowledge did not match their perceived level of knowledge, leading the authors to conclude that students were making, at least some, career decisions on beliefs.

Methodology

Students in a marketing research class were assigned various activities to improve their career readiness, specifically career knowledge. The research topic students studied was career readiness, particularly the career management aspect as defined by NACE, in the marketing field. The project activities included secondary research into careers in marketing, data collection, and analysis from employers. Additionally, students completed several micro credentials, received training from the office of Career Education, received training in Design Thinking, and engaged in deep empathy interviews with fellow students concerning career readiness. Students were also tasked with a traditional research project analyzing data from an employer survey on the topic of career readiness.

Students in the class were tested at the beginning of the semester and again, with the same instrument, at the end of the semester. A control group of marketing research also completed the student survey the following semester.

Students were assessed on their self-reported level of knowledge on employment outlook, types of positions in the marketing industry, technical skills needed, and soft skills needed to be successful in a marketing job. Additionally, they provided a measure of their level of confidence using a 1 – 5 scale on being able to acquire information about the same items (job outlook, skills needed, etc.). Students were also asked to provide their level of agreement with descriptive statements about their knowledge, skills, and preparedness regarding working in the marketing field.

Findings

Nineteen students participated in the pre-test, 16 of which completed the post test. An additional 6 students who did not take the pre-test also completed the post-test. Differences can be found when comparing the pre- and post-test individual measures as well as overall measures with the largest differences being found in the responses to the descriptive statements, such as “My degree has prepared me for a career in marketing” or “I can make a career in marketing.” With the data available it cannot be determined what impact the manipulation within the course produced. The study does, however, provide a framework for additional testing and methodological refinement, including a larger sample size and a mixed methods approach including focus student focus groups or individual interviews.

Discussions

Incentivizing (or nudging) students by including career readiness activities in the classroom may benefit students more than offering these in a voluntary nature, as they have multiple demands on their time including schoolwork, but also employment, child rearing, and sometimes caregiving to a parent or grandparent. Squeezing in volunteer attendance to a Career Services training would have a low priority in comparison as recognized by Amoroso and Burke (2018). While several institutions have successfully, with the cooperative work of faculty and administration, modified their business curriculum to include career readiness aspects from freshman through senior ranks, the reality is that many institutions are resource poor with regards to space within the curriculum for addition credit courses and the faculty to oversee career readiness activities.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1828

A Tale of Two Systems: A Cross-Cultural Reflection on AI Integration in Higher Education between France and the United States

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly redefining educational practices by enabling personalized instruction, immediate feedback, and creative collaboration (Ma, Zhang, & Hui, 2023; OpenAI, 2025). However, its integration into higher education remains uneven across global contexts. While tools like ChatGPT are commonplace in certain academic environments, their adoption remains limited or contested in others. This study explores these disparities through the lived experience of a French student undertaking a semester of study at an American university.

Purpose of the Study

This research investigates the differential integration of generative AI in higher education institutions in France and the United States. It examines how cultural, institutional, and policy-driven factors influence the acceptance and application of AI tools (UNESCO, 2022). The central research question explores why a globally available technology elicits such varied institutional and behavioral responses

Methodology

This qualitative study adopts a **Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP)** framework to assess how students and faculty in the two countries perceive and engage with AI. The research design combines:

- A structured review of academic literature, government policy documents, and media analyses (Khan, Umer, & Faruqe, 2021);
- Reflective ethnographic techniques, including personal narrative and classroom immersion.
- Informal interviews and anecdotal insights from both French and American academic communities.

Triangulation of these sources enabled a culturally nuanced, comparative interpretation of AI-related behaviors and institutional postures.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Generative AI, Higher Education, Cross-Cultural*

Comparison, Knowledge, attitudes, and Practices (KAP), academic integrity, digital pedagogy, innovation diffusion.

Results

In the United States, AI tools are generally accepted and widely used within academic routines. Institutions permit usage under instructor discretion, and students apply generative AI for summarization, ideation, and writing support (BMC Psychology, 2023). Nevertheless, the lack of consistent policy guidance often leads to uncertainty about acceptable use.

Conversely, French institutions adopt a more restrictive stance. Universities such as Sciences Po and the University of Lille have banned AI-assisted work, emphasizing risks to academic integrity and cognitive development (Franceinfo, 2023; L'Étudiant, 2023). Student engagement with AI is largely private and unofficial.

Despite these differences, shared concerns persist in both contexts: the erosion of critical thinking, rising academic dishonesty, and increasing student dependency on AI technologies (Khan, Umer, & Faruqe, 2021).

Discussion/Conclusion

This cross-national reflection reveals that while generative AI is a global innovation, its adoption in higher education is mediated by entrenched educational philosophies and governance models. U.S. institutions tend to emphasize innovation and learner autonomy, whereas French universities prioritize ethical oversight and pedagogical rigor.

The study underscores that effective AI integration requires more than technological access—it demands cultural literacy, policy coherence, and a pedagogical commitment to safeguarding human-centered learning. As generative AI tools continue to proliferate, the extent to which they support or supplant authentic education will depend on the ability of institutions to strike a meaningful balance between innovation and integrity.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
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Beauty in the AI of the Beholder: Exploring Human and Machine Assessment of Creative Work

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Introduction. Artificial intelligence (AI) has quickly emerged as a significant force in higher education, impacting various aspects of teaching, learning, and administration (Crompton and Burke, 2023). The integration of AI technologies in educational settings has facilitated personalized learning experiences, adapting instructional methods to address the diverse needs of students (Castillo-Martinez et al., 2024). AI-driven tools are increasingly used for assessment and evaluation, providing timely and customized feedback that can influence student learning outcomes. Additionally, AI applications in higher education include predictive analytics, which help institutions identify at-risk students and implement support measures. The use of intelligent tutoring systems and AI assistants has also affected administrative tasks, potentially allowing educators to focus more on pedagogical strategies and student engagement. As AI continues to evolve, its role in higher education remains significant, with the potential to influence educational practices in various ways.

Assessing visual creativity in educational contexts involves evaluating the originality, technical skill, and emotional impact of student-created visuals. Traditional human assessment relies on the subjective judgment of educators, who consider the creative process, the use of artistic elements, and the overall aesthetic quality (Akca and Kavak, 2021). This method benefits from the assessor's ability to understand nuanced expressions and contextual influences, providing feedback that is rich in personal insight and experience (Raiyn, 2016). However, human assessment can be inconsistent due to inherent biases and variability in evaluative criteria (Seli, et al., 2025). In contrast, AI-based assessment systems use algorithms to analyze visual elements such as color, composition, and symmetry, comparing them against large datasets of existing artworks (Butterworth, 2023). These systems can offer objective and consistent evaluations, quickly processing large volumes of work and providing immediate feedback (Jiang et al., 2023). AI can also identify patterns and trends that might be overlooked by human assessors, contributing to a more data-driven understanding of creativity (Zhou and Lee, 2024). Nevertheless, AI assessments may struggle with interpreting the emotional and contextual subtleties that are often crucial to creative works.

Research questions. Exploring the comparative ratings of creative works among professors, students, and AI systems is essential for several reasons. Firstly, understanding these differences can provide valuable insights into the subjective nature of creativity and how it is perceived by various evaluators. Professors, with their extensive experience and expertise, may have different criteria and standards compared to students, who might bring fresh perspectives and contemporary tastes. AI systems, on the other hand, offer a unique, data-driven approach that could either align with or diverge from human evaluations. Investigating these comparisons can help identify potential biases, enhance the reliability of creative assessments, and inform the development of more effective evaluation tools. Additionally, this research can contribute to the

broader discourse on the integration of AI in educational and creative fields, highlighting its strengths and limitations in comparison to human judgment.

This leads to:

RQ1: How do the ratings of creative works compare across professors, students, and AI systems?

Understanding the relationship between the time spent assessing advertisements and the resulting ratings is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of different evaluators. Professors, with their extensive experience, might approach the assessment process differently compared to students, who may have varying levels of familiarity and engagement with the material. Investigating whether increased assessment time correlates with higher or lower ratings can reveal important insights into the cognitive processes involved in evaluation (Grady et. al. 2019). This leads to the research question:

RQ2: How does the time spent assessing advertisements correlate with the ratings given by professors, students, and AI systems? Does increased assessment time lead to higher or lower ratings?

Examining the evolution of creativity over time across different cohorts is essential for understanding how societal, technological, and educational changes impact creative output. Creativity is a dynamic trait influenced by various factors, including cultural shifts, advancements in technology, and changes in educational practices. Research has shown that creativity can be highly concentrated in specific periods and locations, often driven by favorable economic and political conditions (Sarafinelli and Tabellini, 2022). Additionally, the integration of AI in creative processes has been found to significantly enhance human creative productivity (Zhou and Lee, 2024). Understanding whether creativity has improved or declined over time can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of current educational and creative practices and inform future strategies for nurturing creativity. This leads to the research question:

RQ3: How has the level of creativity in creative works evolved over time across different cohorts? Has creativity improved or declined as time progresses?

Method. To investigate the research questions, this study analyzed creative assignments submitted by undergraduate students enrolled in a Marketing Communications course at a private institution in the southern United States. The assignment required students to design a magazine advertisement promoting themselves as prospective group members for a course project. The task was intentionally open-ended to encourage maximal creative expression. Students were explicitly instructed to omit any identifying information, including names, to ensure that peer selection was based solely on the content and presentation of the advertisement, rather than prior acquaintance or bias.

Data were collected from eight cohorts spanning the academic years 2016 through 2024, yielding a total of 101 unique advertisements. Each submission was evaluated using a standardized rubric comprising seven evaluative dimensions: creativity, design and layout, content quality, message

clarity, visual elements, grammar and spelling, and overall impact. Each criterion was rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated minimal proficiency and 5 represented exemplary performance.

The rubric was designed to ensure a comprehensive and balanced assessment. "Creativity" measured the originality and engagement of the concept; "design and layout" assessed visual organization and aesthetic coherence; "content quality" evaluated the relevance and informativeness of the message; "message clarity" examined the precision and effectiveness of communication; "visual elements" considered the appropriateness and quality of imagery; "grammar and spelling" identified linguistic accuracy; and "overall impact" captured the advertisement's ability to leave a lasting impression. A full version of the rubric is provided in the Appendix.

To assess interrater reliability across the rubric's evaluative dimensions, a two-way mixed-effects intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) model was employed using SPSS. This model was selected to account for fixed raters and random effects across items. The analysis was conducted exclusively on ratings provided by faculty evaluators. The resulting ICC values for each rubric criterion can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Interrater Reliability Values

Criterion	ICC Value
Creativity	0.715
Design and Layout	0.252
Message Clarity	0.614
Visual Elements	0.721
Grammar and Spelling	0.293
Content Quality	0.565
Overall Impact	0.631

These results indicate moderate to high interrater reliability for most dimensions, particularly for creativity, visual elements, and overall impact. However, notably lower reliability was observed for design and layout, as well as grammar and spelling, suggesting potential ambiguity in the interpretation of these criteria or inconsistency in their application by raters.

To date, data collection has been completed for faculty evaluations, comprising 101 advertisements assessed using a standardized rubric. Ratings from three student evaluators and multiple AI systems are currently being collected. To complement faculty evaluations, this study also incorporates assessments from student evaluators. The inclusion of students serves a dual purpose: it not only broadens the evaluative perspective but also aligns with pedagogical principles that emphasize student agency in the learning process. Students who are motivated to excel in academic settings often possess a keen understanding of what constitutes high-quality work, particularly within the context of shared classroom experiences. By engaging students as evaluators, the study acknowledges their capacity to articulate and apply meaningful criteria for

assessment—criteria that may reflect contemporary aesthetic sensibilities and peer-relevant standards. Moreover, involving students in the evaluative process fosters metacognitive awareness and critical thinking, as they must reflect on the elements that contribute to effective creative communication. This approach also allows for a richer comparison of how evaluative judgments differ across levels of expertise and experiential framing. Consequently, comparative and correlational analyses across rater types and temporal trends have not yet been conducted. The present dataset provides a foundational benchmark for interrater reliability and will serve as a reference point for subsequent cross-group comparisons and longitudinal analyses.

Upon completion of data collection, a multi-phase analytical approach will be employed to address the research questions. For RQ1, interrater reliability will be assessed using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) to evaluate consistency within and between rater groups (professors, students, and AI systems). Comparative analyses of mean rubric scores across rater types will be conducted using repeated measures ANOVA, with post hoc pairwise comparisons to identify statistically significant differences in evaluative patterns. For RQ2, Pearson correlation coefficients will be calculated to examine the relationship between time spent on assessment and the ratings assigned by each rater group. Regression analyses will further explore whether assessment duration predicts rating magnitude, controlling for rubric dimension and rater type. To address RQ3, a longitudinal analysis will be conducted using linear mixed-effects modeling to evaluate trends in creativity scores across cohorts from 2016 to 2024. This approach will account for both fixed effects (e.g., cohort year) and random effects (e.g., individual raters), enabling robust inference about temporal changes in creative output. All analyses will be conducted using SPSS, with significance thresholds set at $p < .05$. Effect sizes will be reported to contextualize the magnitude of observed differences and relationships.

Anticipated Contributions. This study is expected to make several key contributions to the literature on creative assessment, interdisciplinary pedagogy, and human–AI collaboration in evaluative contexts. First, by systematically comparing the evaluative judgments of professors, students, and AI systems, the research will provide empirical insights into the consistency, divergence, and potential biases inherent in human and machine-based assessment of creative work. This has implications for the design of hybrid evaluation frameworks that integrate human judgment with algorithmic support. Second, the investigation into the relationship between assessment duration and rating outcomes will offer a novel perspective on cognitive engagement in evaluative tasks. Understanding whether prolonged assessment time correlates with more favorable or critical evaluations can inform best practices for training evaluators and structuring assessment protocols in educational settings. Third, the longitudinal analysis of creativity across eight cohorts will contribute to the understanding of how creative expression evolves over time within a controlled curricular context. This may reveal broader trends in student creativity in response to shifting pedagogical, technological, or cultural influences. Collectively, these contributions aim to advance theoretical and practical understanding of how creativity is perceived, measured, and influenced across diverse evaluative agents and temporal contexts.

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Appendix

Magazine Ad Rubric

Criteria	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points
Creativity	Lacks originality; ad is very basic or copied.	Some creative elements, but not very engaging.	Shows creativity; somewhat engaging.	Creative and engaging; captures attention.	Highly creative and original; very engaging and memorable.
Design & Layout	Poor design; cluttered or unappealing layout.	Basic design; some layout issues.	Good design; mostly clear layout.	Very good design; clear and appealing layout.	Excellent design; professional and visually appealing layout.
Content Quality	Content is unclear or irrelevant.	Some relevant content, but lacks clarity.	Clear and relevant content; minor issues.	Very clear and relevant content; well-written.	Exceptionally clear, relevant, and compelling content.
Message Clarity	Message is confusing or not conveyed.	Message is somewhat clear but lacks impact.	Message is clear; somewhat impactful.	Message is very clear and impactful.	Message is exceptionally clear, impactful, and persuasive.
Visual Elements	Poor use of visuals; irrelevant or low quality.	Basic visuals; some relevance.	Good use of visuals; mostly relevant and high quality.	Very good use of visuals; relevant and high quality.	Excellent use of visuals; highly relevant and professional quality.
Grammar & Spelling	Multiple errors; distracts from message.	Some errors; somewhat distracting.	Few errors; does not distract from message.	Very few errors; minor distractions.	No errors; polished and professional.

Criteria	1 Point	2 Points	3 Points	4 Points	5 Points
Overall Impact	Ad fails to make an impact.	Ad makes a minimal impact.	Ad makes a moderate impact.	Ad makes a strong impact.	Ad makes a very strong and lasting impact.

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Illuminating Key Teamwork Skills with Case Studies to Increase Student Satisfaction

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Keywords- teamwork skills, case study, student satisfaction, team formation, interpersonal communication, workload sharing, conflict resolution

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: Using a criterion-based team formation method and teaching teamwork skills with a case study when assigning team projects in business courses will increase student satisfaction with working in teams and build student teamwork skills needed in the modern workforce.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported that strong teamwork skills were one of the most important employee skills in 2024 (Gray, 2024). To prepare college students for entry into the modern workforce, accreditation organizations, such as AACSB, encourage team-based projects in the business-school curriculum to provide opportunities for students to develop necessary soft skills such as teamwork (AACSB, 2020). The advantages of teamwork include exposure to a variety of people, strengthened interpersonal skills, and the opportunity for learning creative problem-solving, leadership, and communication skills (Burke, 2011; Cuseo, 1996; Huff, 2014; Larsen et al., 2021; Orlando, 2017, Thompson-Abbott, 2020; Wright et al., 1998).

Despite the need for and advantages of having strong teamwork skills, students will not develop this key skill in college without opportunities to engage in team projects. Anecdotal evidence indicates that professors struggle with managing student teams and preventing student dissatisfaction with team assignments in their courses. Other professors recognize the need for enhancing student teamwork skills and they assign team projects, but they do not have/take time to teach teamwork skills in addition to course content. Without assistance, teams often muddle through the team assignments and may just work as individuals in a group (without real teamwork).

The purpose of this study is to increase student satisfaction with working in teams in college business courses and increase students' teamwork skills. The authors hypothesize that providing opportunities for students to practice key teamwork skills by a) forming teams using the criterion-based selection method and b) teaching teamwork skills (i.e., workload sharing, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution), students will report increased satisfaction with working in teams. The authors also hypothesize that if professors create opportunities for demonstrating effective teamwork skills by teaching workload sharing, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution, then students will report increased effectiveness when

working in teams.

Criterion-based Formation of Teams

Forming teams can be a challenge when implementing group assignments in college courses but typically, team formation is student-directed or professor-directed (e.g., self-selection, interest-based selection, random selection, or criterion-based selection). Criterion-based methods are often used by business leaders to form their teams. For example, Thompson-Abbott's qualitative study (2020) of business partners stressed the importance of "knowing how to build a bench or team based upon each person's strengths and weaknesses" (p. 44). Successful business leaders "build their bench" based upon key criteria such as employee's skills and areas of opportunity.

The authors propose using the *criterion-based selection method* where students evaluate and self-report their individual ability on designated criteria (i.e., writing, speaking, research, creativity, leadership, and organization). After analyzing the self-reported individual student skills, the professor creates teams that contain members with the necessary skills to successfully complete the assignment.

Teaching Key Teamwork Skills

In the authors' experience, professors cannot assume students possess teamwork skills nor that all students know how to effectively work in teams. Researchers suggest a strong correlation between students' satisfaction with teamwork and three key skills: workload sharing, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution (Pang et al., 2011; Pang & Hung, 2012; Pertegal-Felices et al., 2019). The authors believe illuminating these key teamwork skills can be accomplished with an in-class case study. The case study is an appropriate tool to use based on its ability to vicariously engage students with the topic before beginning the teamwork project (Fink, 2013). In addition, case studies are a prepare the students to handle the situations in the case without the risks and consequences of an actual situation (Fink, 2013). Further a case study can be implemented within the constraints of limited classroom time.

The authors recommend the use of "Groups, Groups, Groups" case study by Fisher et al. (1994). Students will read the case study on their own, and then complete a series of activities inside and outside of class. The six activities are described here:

Activity #1 (individual and teams)

- Prework writing assignment- -Have students identify and summarize three conflicts in the case, rate each character on their ability to function effectively in the team, and explain their ratings of each character with specific examples.
- When class convenes, have students discuss their summarized conflicts and ratings with their teams and challenge teams to come to a consensus about three conflicts. Ask teams to share their conclusions with the whole class.

Activity #2 (whole class) Interpersonal communication skills

- Ask the class as a whole, "What does it mean to be a good communicator?" and to identify examples of strong and weak interpersonal communication skills in the case study. Compile answers on the board or on a real-time co-authored document.
- Discuss the importance and examples of effective interpersonal communication (e.g., being informed and being respectful).

Activity #3 (teams) Workload sharing skills

- Ask student teams, “What does effective workload sharing look like?” and to identify examples of ineffective workload sharing skills demonstrated in the case study. Also ask teams to suggest effective methods of workload sharing.
- Ask teams to report to the whole class methods of workload sharing they identified (e.g., assigning tasks versus allowing members to volunteer for tasks based on their skills and talents).

Activity #4 (teams) Conflict resolution skills

- Have teams refer back to the conflicts they identified in Activity #1 and agree upon suggestions for avoiding or resolving the case study conflict(s).
- Ask teams to report suggestions to the whole class.

Activity #5 (whole class) Case study wrap-up

- Share with students via in-class discussion that research shows that workload sharing, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution are vital skills for effectively working in teams.

Activity #6 (individual homework) Critical reflection

- Ask students to individually reflect on the following questions:
 - “Was your team conflict resolution idea better than the ones you generated individually? Why or why not?”
 - “How does effective interpersonal communication impact workload sharing and conflict resolution?”

Activity #7 (teams) Team project begins

- Review team project assignment guidelines to ensure students understand goals, outcomes, and deadlines.
- Have students discuss roles/responsibilities based on their self-identified skills and honesty, trustworthiness, respect, and commitment to the team.
- Require teams to establish team rules and member responsibilities in a team contract.
- Discuss required weekly progress reports, peer reviews and self-reviews.

Conclusion

To be competitive in the modern workforce, students must be able to demonstrate teamwork skills and application of knowledge in practice (AACSB, 2020). This study aims to improve student satisfaction with teamwork through the use of criterion-based team selection and teaching teamwork skills. It further aims to increase student effectiveness when working in teams.

Plans for Future Research

The authors plan to implement criterion-based selection, teach teamwork skills using a case study, and create a satisfaction survey before gathering and analyzing student satisfaction based on criterion-based team formation and illumination of key teamwork skills.

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Toward aligning incentives to improve business research and education outcomes: A supply chain perspective

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Abstract - University education costs continue to rise. At the same time, business school faculty spend a significant portion of their time generating research that does not inform practical applications. The disconnect between business education resources (e.g., time, tuition, and faculty effort) and its end products (graduate employability and practical knowledge) is no longer theoretical, it's systemic.

We argue that business schools are facing a supply chain failure. Its end products are created by a value chain misaligned with real-world demands. Students struggle with critical thinking and receive technical skills that are of less value to employers and society—the ultimate beneficiary. Peer-reviewed research does not find its way into practice. This research examines the shortcomings in business school incentives and seeks to suggest an actionable framework for a comprehensive redesign.

Our research considers business schools as the hub of a dual supply chain: one for producing productive graduates and one for generating business knowledge. Using in-depth interviews with 30 business leaders and academics, we mapped out how these supply chains function.

In both domains—teaching and research—we find that performance metrics are misaligned with stakeholder value. Business schools optimize for ease of measurement, not societal or market impact. The current reward system incentivizes research published in somewhat arbitrarily “preferred” journals without regard for practical relevance. Citations, number of articles, and journal quality lists and rankings, not impact, drive publication strategies. Researchers, deans, and provosts equate citations with impact. Faculty evaluations often rely on journal rankings rather than real-world outcomes. In the classroom, teaching performance is often judged through student satisfaction surveys, which have led to grade inflation, diluted rigor, and a decline in critical thinking.

Keywords - *Business school research, Business school education, Incentives, Supply chain management, Stakeholder theory*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: The symptoms of value chain misalignment are clear: rising costs, declining graduate value, and research with minimal societal benefit. The root cause is equally clear: misaligned incentives, optimizing for the wrong customers using the wrong metrics. Business education must reorient around its stakeholders—students, employers, and society—and define success based on the value it creates for them. For this to happen, faculty, deans, accreditors, and industry leaders must act together. Our recommendations point toward a more responsive, resilient, and relevant model for business schools.

Introduction

Since 1983, the costs of a university education have risen nearly 900% (See BLS, 2024). At the same time, business school research is increasingly criticized (Martin, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2022) for benefiting no one but the authors who receive pay increases and promotions for publications that have little impact on society despite accounting for a major portion of a faculty member’s time commitments (French et al., 2020). As the value of higher education is questioned, new paths toward a successful career in business are emerging, and some hiring organizations have removed requirements for a degree (Gilbert, 2024). If university education is the preeminent source of learning, how can this be? Our findings suggest that higher education has lost sight of the true customers. This exploratory study proposes the business school is the focal member of a supply chain, where outputs include peer-reviewed research and university graduates. We critically examine how various customers and stakeholders are being served by current business school processes. We make the case that bad metrics are incentivizing the wrong behavior. For instance, the current method of using student evaluations of faculty teaching to assess business school faculty performance has resulted in less-rigorous content, easier exams, grade inflation, less critical thinking, and declining student achievement. In addition, deans, hiring and promotion committees, and provosts alike rely on easy yet inadequate measures of research quality such as citations and questionably-quantified journal quality lists rather than the impact of the research on management practice or society at large. We conclude that there is a way forward by rethinking the role of the business schools as members of a supply chain with a focus on creating value for its customers and stakeholders by adjusting metrics to incentivize better performance.

Literature Review

We ground our ideas in our prior work such as Lambert (2019) and an extensive review of 39 articles challenging the utility of academic research, summaries of which may be found in an online supplement to our previous work published in the *Journal of Business Logistics* (Hawkins et al., 2022). Moreover, we find a multitude of relevant literature that has examined these issues but not through the lens of supply chain mapping and its disciplines focus on value and an associate supply chain. Table 1 illustrates several of these pertinent studies.

Table 1: Relevant Literature

Author	Concern
Ivancevich et al., 2005	Management schools need to learn from traditional professions such as medicine, engineering, and law, where there is more of a connection and interaction between ongoing research, practice, and education.
Roberts, 2010	There is a real danger that we could drown in our own esoterica.
Bartunek and Rynes, 2010	49% of the research papers from 5 management journals examined did not include explicitly implications for practice.
Martin, 2012	The cost of producing “not-actionable” A-level journal articles is \$600M per year. Actionable research is more difficult than is non-actionable research.
Pearce and Huang 2012	Nonactionable research has increased significantly.
Storbacka, 2014	Academics are interested in doing research on issues that managers consider were solved many years ago.

Glick et al., 2018	Academic journals are neither read nor cited widely beyond the academic community. The current model will be unsustainable as business schools compete for resources in the future. Misaligned incentive systems decrease usefulness and credibility.
Lambert, 2019	Need to realign incentives toward research that is useful to society. Should resist the temptation to emulate journals in other business fields, appoint business executives to the editorial review boards, and stress the managerial and/or government policy implications when evaluating articles for publication.
Hawkins et al., 2022	LSCM academic research is only “somewhat” relevant – confirming that a relevance problem exists. The relevance of research does not correlate with performance ratings; a fulfilling academic career does not require relevance. Journals typically do not reject research due to a lack of practical relevance. Practical contributions are secondary to teaching and research. The measurement of managerial impact remains elusive.

Methodology

We use interviews conducted in FY2025 with 30 academics and business leaders. Academics were selected based upon having at least published with regularity and served in tenured academic roles. Business leaders were chosen from those that have served as executive officers within companies. These interviews allowed us to: (1) define the supply chains for business school research and graduates, (2) identify key suppliers and customers in the creation and dissemination of business school knowledge, and (3) examine the incentives for business schools and their faculty. We identify the current state of these supply chains and what they should be. Our analysis highlights the differences between existing practices and those that could more effectively meet the needs of society and industry. Our study contributes original insights into the "relevance crisis" by proposing a framework that realigns academic incentives with societal needs.

Findings

We provide evidence of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in the creation and dissemination of business school research and teaching. The current metrics and reward systems do not drive the desired outcomes for stakeholders. We present detailed accounts from our interviews, illustrating how these incentives fail to provide students with the necessary skills or to produce research that addresses societal needs.

Discussions

Business school faculty, university administrators, government, and business leaders must collaborate to create more dynamic and responsive business schools. This study addresses a longstanding issue in academia, offering a path forward that promises greater impact and relevance of scholarly work in a time of episodic change. We advocate for a systemic change in the evaluation and dissemination of research using a supply chain management lens to examine the ecosystem of knowledge creation and dissemination. We offer a new perspective on coordinating the multiple entities involved in the academic supply chain to maximize societal and economic value. The research addresses both higher education relevance and cost-effectiveness. We believe our findings can influence the future direction of business education and research, making it more relevant and valuable to all stakeholders involved.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1845

Rethinking Service Learning in Marketing Education: A Case Study in Simulated Nonprofit Consulting

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Abstract - This instructional case study examines the use of Simulated Virtual Service Learning (SVSL) in an upper-level undergraduate course on digital and social media marketing. In this project, student teams developed strategic marketing plans for real nonprofit organizations, working from publicly available information to simulate a professional consulting engagement. The course was delivered in a hybrid format, with both in-person and online components, and emphasized four pillars of professionalism—design quality, strategic communication, research credibility, and community engagement. Scaffolded assignments, peer collaboration, and a final client-style presentation encouraged students to apply theory to practice while developing career-relevant skills. Reflections from nearly 100 students across two semesters suggest that SVSL helped them grow as strategic thinkers, communicators, and ethical marketers. This case contributes to ongoing conversations about how instructors can use simulated, project-based experiences to replicate the benefits of service learning in flexible or resource-limited instructional settings.

Keywords - *Simulated Virtual Service learning, E-service learning, Social media marketing education, social media strategies for nonprofits*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This case study provides marketing educators with a practical approach to incorporating experiential learning in courses that may be delivered online, in hybrid formats, or in settings where live client partnerships are not always feasible. By simulating nonprofit consulting work, instructors can give students meaningful opportunities to apply marketing concepts in real-world contexts while still maintaining control over the learning environment. For researchers, the paper contributes to ongoing conversations about service learning by introducing the SVSL framework, which blends experiential learning theory with simulation-based pedagogy. Practitioners, particularly those working in nonprofits or resource-limited organizations, may find value in seeing how student-led marketing plans can offer fresh insights and serve as a pipeline for emerging talent.

Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning

ID#: 1847

Examining The Use and Perceived Benefits of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Higher Educations: Student Perspectives

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Extended Abstract

The increasing accessibility of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has accelerated their widespread adoption across numerous sectors, including education. In higher education, the growing use of AI presents significant opportunities for both faculty and students. Students, in particular, are adopting a variety of AI tools to enhance their academic performance and efficiency. This study examines the current state of AI usage in higher education, focusing on how students engage with AI tools and perceive their value. Specifically, the research aims to: (1) identify the most commonly used AI tools among students and assess whether usage varies by gender; (2) investigate the purposes for which students use AI, the benefits they perceive, and their self-reported knowledge and competence in using these tools; (3) examine students' perceptions of ethical concerns related to AI usage in academic context; and (4) determine their likelihood of recommending AI tools to their peers.

To achieve these objectives, a survey instrument was designed, incorporating both carefully crafted questions developed based on relevant literature. The survey included questions about the use of AI tools and their impact on enhancing various academic skills, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The question evaluating students' likelihood of recommending AI tools to peers was measured on an 11-point scale (0 = not at all likely, 10 = extremely likely). Additionally, the survey included questions identifying the most frequently used AI tools and collecting respondent demographics. The survey questions underwent pretesting to ensure clarity, understandability, appropriateness, and reliability. The instrument was administered to university students via an email link, yielding 244 usable responses from students actively using AI tools.

Results indicate that ChatGPT, Grammarly, Snapchat AI, Gemini, Copilot, and Canva AI are identified as the most frequently used tools among students. Students generally report confidence in their technological skills and primarily use AI tools for personalized learning. The findings provide insights into students' knowledge of AI tools, their purposes for using them, and the perceived benefits of AI integration in their academic work. The results also reveal that Students have ethical concerns regarding the use of AI tools, and interestingly, they are generally unlikely to recommend these tools to their peers. Overall, the Findings provide valuable insights into students' experiences with AI tools, highlighting both their benefits and associated ethical concerns. The study discusses the managerial implications of the findings for higher education

institutions.

Keywords: *Student use of AI, perceived benefits of AI, AI use capabilities, AI and ethics*
References are available upon request.

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Musa Pinar (Ph.D., Mississippi State University) is a Professor of Marketing at Valparaiso University. His research interests include service quality, brand orientation, gender effect in the sales field and tourism, gender-food stereotypes, brand ecosystem, and measuring brand equity in banking, higher education, sports leagues, and political parties. He has published in various academic journals and presented papers in national and international conferences, and has received several best paper awards at several conferences.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning

ID#: 1851

Building Ground Work Agency: The Power of Applied Learning Through a Student-Run Marketing Agency

Laurie Michaelson, MAdv., APR

Abstract

This presentation explores the process of launching and developing a student-run marketing agency within a university setting, highlighting the intersection of applied learning, professional development, and student success. The session will outline the step-by-step framework used to establish and grow the agency, from gaining institutional support and defining the agency's mission, to building client relationships and implementing operational structures that mirror professional marketing environments.

Grounded in experiential learning theory and supported by a real-world case example via Kennesaw State University's student agency, Ground Work Agency, this presentation emphasizes how immersive, hands-on experiences enhance student engagement, skill development, and career readiness. The session will also address the challenges and opportunities involved in aligning academic objectives with client needs and maintaining a sustainable model that benefits both students and the institution.

Attendees will leave with practical strategies for launching similar initiatives at their own institutions, along with evidence of how applied learning environments like student agencies can directly impact retention, confidence, and post-graduation outcomes.

Keywords

Experiential Learning

Student Success and Engagement

Professional Development

Replicable Framework

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners:

This session provides valuable insights for marketing educators seeking to expand applied learning opportunities within their curriculum. By sharing a replicable model for launching a student-run marketing agency, the presentation offers practical guidance on integrating real-world experiences that enhance student learning, retention, and career outcomes.

For researchers, the agency model presents an opportunity to explore the impact of experiential education on student performance, confidence, and professional identity formation. It also opens the door for future research into scalable structures for applied learning within higher education.

Marketing practitioners will benefit from understanding how student agencies can serve as innovative talent pipelines and collaborative partners. These agencies offer businesses access to fresh ideas and Gen Z perspectives, while also contributing to workforce development and community engagement.

Author Information

Laurie Michaelson is a Lecturer of Marketing at Kennesaw State University, where she specializes in social media strategy, digital marketing, and applied learning. She is the founder and faculty advisor of Ground Work Agency, KSU's student-run marketing agency, which provides hands-on client experience for undergraduate students. With over 15 years of industry experience in marketing strategy and nonprofit consulting, Laurie bridges the gap between the classroom and the boardroom, empowering students to engage in real-world problem solving. Her teaching philosophy is rooted in experiential education, creativity, and professional development.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1852

The Impact of Alumni Engagement: Exploring Perceived Value and Alumni-University Identification

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Anita Radon
Joseph Reardon

Abstract – Although the importance of alumni engagement in the higher education sector is recognized, comprehensive research on its influence on affective and behavioral outcomes remains limited. This thesis aims to assess the impact of alumni engagement on these outcomes through the mediating roles of perceived value and alumni-university identification. It also investigates how these relationships influence brand equity and vocal advocacy in the context of higher education institutions. The study involved an online survey conducted among 318 alumni from Lithuanian higher education institutions, aiming to understand how active engagement impacts their perception of value and identification with their alma mater. The research findings confirm that higher levels of engagement are positively correlated with perceived value, which in turn enhances brand equity and vocal advocacy. However, alumni-university identification did not significantly moderate these relationships, suggesting a complex interplay of factors that influence alumni's brand-related behaviors. This study presents limitations, proposes future research directions, and suggests practical implications for educational institutions seeking to strengthen their relationships with alumni through targeted engagement strategies.

Keywords - *Alumni Engagement, Perceived Value, Alumni-University Identification, Brand Equity, Brand Vocal, Higher Education Institutions, Relationship Marketing, Brand Management.*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This study gives insight into branding in higher education and the impact this has on the institution's reputation and how this can increase the attractiveness of the institution to potential students.

Introduction

The higher education market is becoming increasingly competitive, with institutions aiming for more than academic and research excellence. They also seek to build stronger, more enduring relationships with their alumni. According to Hart and Rodgers (2023), these alumni relationships are crucial, significantly contributing to a university's reputation, financial health, and community strength. The most recent report from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (2022) shows a significant increase in alumni contributions, emphasizing their growing financial impact with a 10.8% rise in 2021. Formerly regarded mostly as internal stakeholders, alumni have transitioned to play more influential external roles, actively investing in the success and development of their alma maters (Broom et al., 2023; Politis et al., 2023). Amidst globalization, technological advancements, and changing societal expectations, the role of alumni has expanded beyond traditional philanthropic efforts to include broader affective and behavioral outcomes. This shift reflects a deeper, more complex form of engagement that many universities struggle to fully realize, often due to a lack of understanding of the key drivers of alumni behavior and their emotional connections to their alma mater (Valencik, 2023). The shift towards relationship marketing, emphasizing long-term engagement over transactional exchanges, plays a pivotal role in this dynamic, providing an excellent opportunity to explore how customer relationship management is applied in educational settings (Pfajfar, 2022; Gholami et al., 2020).

In this competitive environment, higher education institutions face the challenge of distinguishing themselves and attracting students amidst a sea of choices. Effective brand management emerges as a critical solution, employing strategic brand management techniques to enhance brand equity and deliver substantial value through targeted marketing strategies (Loken & Ahluwalia, 2023). Branding in higher education aims to amplify brand awareness, bolster competitive positioning, and increase the institution's attractiveness to prospective students (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). Successful branding strategies are vital for increasing student enrollment and retention and play a significant role in fostering higher satisfaction levels, loyalty, and positive communication among graduates (Calitz et al., 2023). This comprehensive approach to branding enhances the educational journey and solidifies the institution's reputation in the academic world and beyond.

Recent literature has explored various dimensions of alumni engagement, primarily focusing on philanthropic contributions (Drezner et al., 2021; Oetjen et al., 2023; Souto-Otero et al., 2023). This study extends beyond financial giving to explore a broader spectrum of engagement activities, including volunteerism, participation in alumni networks, and other non-financial interactions. Although previous studies (Pedro et al., 2021; Gosier, 2022) have underlined the importance of perceived value in motivating alumni engagement, this study pivots to examine how alumni engagement might, in turn, influence the perceived value of the institution. It aims to determine if active alumni participation and commitment enhance their perception of the benefits and value offered by their alma mater.

While current research acknowledges the importance of relationship marketing and brand management in fostering alumni engagement, limited research exists on how these marketing principles can be effectively used in the context of higher education (Jain et al., 2022; Gardner, 2022). This oversight is essential, as it impedes the development of strategic frameworks that

could guide universities in boosting alumni engagement through tailored, value-driven initiatives (Burgess, 2023). Finally, there is a lack of literature regarding alumni in the European context. Sekakki (2022) indicates that the mindset prevalent in Europe might underestimate the importance of non-financial contributions from alumni, which are frequently critical to launching and growing effective alumni relations programs.

This study aims to fill these gaps by offering new perspectives on the dynamics of alumni engagement, particularly how it influences affective and behavioral outcomes. The research is of great importance to university administrators, alumni relations professionals, and academic researchers who are at the forefront of exploring innovative strategies for enhancing alumni engagement. By addressing the identified gaps, this research aims to explain the complex dynamics of alumni engagement, offering insights into how universities can leverage relationship marketing and brand management principles to foster meaningful relationships with their alumni. The theoretical framework of this study provides a valuable lens through which to examine these phenomena. Ultimately, this research holds the potential to transform alumni engagement practices, leading to more robust alumni networks that support institutional advancement and create lasting value for both alumni and their alma mater. This study aims to answer the following questions:

How does alumni engagement influence affective and behavioral outcomes through perceived value and alumni-university identification?

The aim is to assess the impact of alumni engagement on affective and behavioral outcomes through the roles of perceived value and alumni-university identification.

Literature Review

By understanding the dynamics of relationship marketing, the review assesses how institutions can enhance alumni relations and effectively engage other stakeholders. This leads to a discussion on stakeholder theory, which further discusses the complexities of managing stakeholder relationships within the educational context. The concept of alumni engagement is introduced, including various factors influencing alumni engagement and the modern strategies institutions employ to enhance this engagement. In examining these strategies, theories such as social identity and organizational identification are analyzed to understand how they underpin the motivations and behaviors of alumni. Further, the review addresses brand management practices within higher education, exploring how these institutions can differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Additionally, the notions of brand equity and brand vocal are explored to understand how these elements contribute to the reputation and advocacy of higher education institutions (HEIs), influencing stakeholder perceptions and enhancing institutional attractiveness to prospective students. The review also covers perceived value, discussing how students and alumni perceive the value offered by their institutions and how this perception influences their engagement and loyalty. The review also provides an overview of the higher education system in Lithuania, offering context-specific insights that help to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities facing Lithuanian universities.

By addressing these topics, the literature review aims to lay a comprehensive foundation for understanding the relationships between educational institutions and their alumni and prepare the

groundwork for further empirical investigation.

Methodology

The quantitative cross-sectional research design, specifically an online survey, will be used to reach the research objectives. Respondents will be allowed to choose one university from which they have graduated. Then, respondents will be asked to specify the university and answer the questions having this particular university in mind.

In the development of the hypotheses, it is posited that engaged alumni who perceive high value in their interactions with their alma mater and who feel a strong sense of identification with the university are more likely to exhibit positive behavioral and affective outcomes. Alumni engagement can manifest in various forms, including financial donations, volunteering, mentoring, networking, and advocacy (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2020). The perceived value is derived from tangible benefits, such as career support, and intangible benefits, such as social recognition and emotional satisfaction (Seo & Um, 2022). Meanwhile, alumni-university identification encompasses alumni's sense of belonging, loyalty, and pride toward their institution (Sekkaki, 2022). It is hypothesized that such identification amplifies the impact of engagement activities on the desired outcomes.

Thus, the hypothesis development follows a logical sequence whereby the alumni's behavioral and affective responses – brand equity and brand vocal – are shaped by the perceived value and identification stemming from alumni engagement.

Findings

The survey was launched on the Qualtrics platform and distributed online via personal social media from April 9th to 24th, 2024. It was distributed to Lithuanian student and alumni communities and groups on Facebook to reach a wide range of participants. In addition, some participants who were eligible for the survey were invited through personal messages on LinkedIn. The survey was accessed a total of 532 times. Of these, 494 respondents began by verifying the privacy policy, and 357 acknowledged having graduated from a higher education institution in Lithuania. 318 respondents successfully completed the questionnaire by selecting the higher education institution and providing the correct response to the attention check question. Furthermore, the study exclusively gathered unique responses, ensuring that only one survey was considered per IP address. IBM SPSS statistics software was used to analyze the data.

The research hypotheses were tested using SPSS PROCESS Model 5 Andrew F. Hayes. The summary of the findings are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Hypotheses testing summary

No.	Hypothesis	Supported / Not supported
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The impact of alumni engagement

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------|
| H1a | Alumni engagement has a direct positive impact on brand equity. | Supported |
| H1b | Alumni engagement has a direct positive impact on brand vocal. | Supported |
| H1c | Alumni engagement has a direct positive impact on perceived value. | Supported |

The impact of perceived value

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------|
| H2a | Perceived value has a direct positive impact on brand equity. | Supported |
| H2b | Perceived value has a direct positive impact on brand vocal. | Supported |
| H2c | Perceived value mediates the relationship between alumni engagement and brand equity. | Supported |
| H2d | Perceived value mediates the relationship between alumni engagement and brand vocal. | Supported |

The impact of alumni-university identification

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------------|
| H3a | Alumni-university identification moderates the relationship between alumni engagement and brand equity so that the effect is stronger for those with higher levels of identification with the university. | Not supported |
| H3b | Alumni-university identification moderates the relationship between alumni engagement and brand vocal so that the effect is stronger for those with higher levels of identification with the university. | Not supported |
-

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the impact of alumni engagement on affective and behavioral outcomes in the context of Lithuanian higher education institutions, specifically through perceived value and alumni-university identification.

Building upon the theoretical findings of relationship marketing as presented by Morgan and Hunt (1994) and further explored in higher education by Martinez-Hague et al. (2022), this study found that stronger alumni engagement significantly correlates with increased perceived value and alumni-university identification. These findings reflect the conceptual framework Siegfried

(2022) suggested, highlighting the essential role of trust and commitment in nurturing long-term relationships. In addition, the research explored elements of brand management, demonstrating how effectively managed university brands strengthen alumni loyalty and promote sustained engagement (Subbarayalu, 2021).

The empirical research conducted through an online survey of alumni from Lithuanian higher education institutions revealed several critical insights. The study explored the relationship between brand equity and brand vocal, which was supported, aligning with findings by Mourad et al. (2020) and Perera et al. (2020). In addition, the collected data demonstrated that alumni who were more actively involved with their universities reported greater value in their connections, validating Gholami et al.'s (2020) insights about the relevance of perceived benefits in alumni relationships. Moreover, the study explored the role of alumni-university identification as a moderator in the relationship between alumni engagement and brand equity and vocal. This investigation was based on the findings of Schlesinger et al. (2021), who found a strong link between identity factors and engagement behaviors. However, contrary to the theoretical expectations set by the existing literature, the findings from this research did not identify alumni-university identification as a significant moderator in the Lithuanian context.

In conclusion, this study addresses the intricate dynamics of alumni engagement, offering contributions to both theory and practice. It emphasizes the importance of strategic relationship marketing in fostering robust alumni networks and enhancing institutional advancement. By implementing the suggested strategies, higher education institutions can foster stronger, more beneficial relationships with alumni, paving the way for sustained institutional growth and success.

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Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1853

Bringing Career Conversations Into the (Virtual) Classroom: Making 1:1 Office Hours Mandatory in an Online Marketing Capstone

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Abstract – Marketing degrees promise “career readiness,” yet many students, especially in online sections, never use office hours for professional coaching. This study examines a simple, scalable intervention: making a virtual 1:1 career-planning office hour a required assignment for an online senior-level Marketing Strategy course. The assignment integrates three graded components: pre-survey, coaching session and post-survey (with a required resume upload), which positions the meeting as part of core learning rather than an optional add-on.

Using a pre/post design, we measure changes in (1) self-reported confidence on resume quality, interviewing, and overall career preparedness (5-point Likert), (2) resume quality indicators coded with a brief rubric (format, clarity, results-oriented statements, alignment with target roles), and (3) job-search activity signals (e.g., LinkedIn profile status, application counts/plans). The session itself applies evidence-based coaching practices (behavioral specificity, next-step planning, brief rehearsal). Aggregate, de-identified data preserve student privacy while enabling class-level analysis.

Preliminary findings from the current term will be shared, with attention to practical significance. Early patterns indicate directional gains in confidence and resume quality, with qualitative comments highlighting the value of individualized feedback for online courses. The session will share (1) a ready-to-use assignment template and rubric, (2) survey instruments, (3) scheduling logistics that scale (e.g., last-name windows and booking links), and (4) implementation tips to increase uptake and equity in access to mentoring.

The contribution is an efficient and effective model that embeds professional coaching into course design, supports equitable access to mentoring, and strengthens assessment in marketing education.

Keywords - marketing education, online learning, office hours, career readiness, assessment, capstone

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: Educators get a plug-and-play assignment that embeds 1:1 career coaching into capstones and produces clean AoL evidence (pre/post confidence, rubric-scored resumes) for accreditation. Researchers gain a replicable intervention with analyzable data, while practitioners and career services benefit from measurable gains in resume quality and job-readiness aligned to entry-level marketing roles.

Author Information

Professor Dayna Reed is a Lecturer of Marketing at the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University where she specializes in marketing strategy and experiential learning. With over

20 years of industry experience in sales and retail marketing strategy, Professor Reed brings practitioner rigor to the classroom in Principles of Marketing, Marketing Strategy and Consumer Behavior. Her work focuses on teaching innovation, assessment, and industry aligned preparation for entry-level marketing roles.

Track: Marketing Education & Experiential Learning
ID#: 1865

MARKETING STRATEGY, RESEARCH & ANALYTICS

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A Holistic Approach to Country Branding: Examining A Master Brand and Sub-Brand Framework

Best Abstract in Track

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Extended Abstract

Nation/country branding is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool for enhancing a country's global image and competitiveness. It uses marketing and communication strategies to attract tourists, investors, and skilled labor while improving a nation's/country's economic position. Despite growing attention, research in this area remains fragmented, particularly in understanding the interrelations among macro-level (national identity), micro-level (perceived image), and nation equity (economic appeal) perspectives.

This study addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual framework based on a brand architecture approach, viewing the country as a master brand and its offerings (e.g., exports, tourism, FDI) as sub-brands. The model integrates these components to examine their combined impact on country brand equity, which is conceptualized through brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and loyalty.

The objectives are (1) to develop a framework linking master brand, sub-brand, and brand equity; and (2) to identify reliable measurement scales for each component. Four model dimensions are proposed:

1. Macro/master brand (e.g., economy, governance, trust)
2. Micro/sub-brand (e.g., product quality, tourism, FDI)
3. Country brand equity (consumer-based brand equity dimensions)
4. Consumer preference (e.g., willingness to pay premium, brand advocacy)

The model hypothesizes that the master brand directly and indirectly influences brand equity via sub-brands, and that sub-brands also directly influence brand equity. This integrative framework advances theory and provides practical guidance for policymakers aiming to strengthen their country's brand position.

Keywords: Country branding, Country Brand Equity, Master-brand, Sub-brand

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: Understanding the interrelationships would offer useful insights for policymakers and brand strategists on how to manage brand architecture effectively. This research aims to achieve this and offers strategic approaches for integrating sub-brand strengths into a coherent national branding strategy.

References are available upon request.

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Track: Marketing Strategy, Research & Analytics

ID#: 1854

Defying Conventions: The Marketing Alchemy of Transforming 'Ugly' into Iconic

Monisha Gupta Dr, Marshall University and Rex McClure Dr, Marshall University

Introduction

The transformation of UGG from a utilitarian footwear label into a global fashion phenomenon presents a compelling case of cultural repositioning, symbolic consumption, and brand-led aesthetic disruption. Once derided as “ugly” for its bulky, fleece-lined silhouettes, UGG has transcended the limits of conventional beauty standards to become an emblem of comfort, identity signaling, and postmodern authenticity. This paper examines how UGG has strategically redefined consumer expectations by drawing on cultural capital, behavioral conditioning, and symbolic rebellion, thereby positioning itself at the intersection of style, identity, and aesthetic imperfection.

Purpose of Study

This study explores how UGG's marketing strategy aligns with emergent consumer values—namely authenticity, comfort, inclusivity, and countercultural signaling—to reposition “ugly fashion” as aspirational. It further analyzes how shifts in consumer psychology during the COVID-19 pandemic—driven by remote work, wellness lifestyles, and aesthetic liberalization—accelerated a comfort-first fashion revolution. Drawing from Pavlov's Classical Conditioning theory, the study evaluates how UGG effectively transferred meaning from unconditioned stimuli (warmth, relaxation) to a conditioned brand image that commands loyalty and prestige. The research contributes to marketing theory by explaining how consistent positive reinforcement, in the form of embodied comfort and inclusive narratives, fosters consumer acceptance of nonconforming aesthetics.

Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design supported by secondary data sources, including brand case studies, industry analyses, campaign reviews, and academic theory. The analytical framework integrates established theories in consumer behavior:

- **The Red Sneakers Effect** (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014): signaling autonomy through aesthetic deviance. The brand's ability to partner with influencers such as Kendall Jenner and gender-fluid icon Alok Vaid-Menon has been instrumental in aligning itself with Gen Z and Millennial values of inclusivity, authenticity, and self-expression (Williams & Haslam, 2022).
- **Self-Concept and Extended Self** (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988): exploring the brand as identity symbol.
- **Embodied Cognition** (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014): understanding physical comfort as psychological stimulus.

This framework is further contextualized through comparative brand analysis of other footwear brands such as Crocs, Birkenstock, Dr. Martens, and Hush Puppies to assess how comfort-led “ugly” fashion gained symbolic and market value. These brands have similarly repositioned their identities by embracing nonconformity and functionality—signaling a growing consumer appetite for authenticity, comfort, and cultural irony (Crane, 2012; Gladwell, 2000).

Key Terms

Ugly fashion, symbolic consumption, identity signaling, Red Sneakers Effect, classical conditioning, embodied cognition, authenticity, postmodern consumer, ABC model, nonconformity marketing, cultural capital, behavioral learning theory.

Results

UGG’s brand evolution illustrates a paradigm shift in fashion leadership—from elite aesthetics to experiential authenticity. By embracing the very attributes that once marginalized it, UGG successfully rebranded “ugliness” into a desirable aesthetic. The brand’s collaborations with gender-fluid influencers (e.g., Alok Vaid-Menon) and avant-garde designers (e.g., Telfar, Molly Goddard) amplified its resonance with Gen Z and Millennial consumers who value nonbinary identity expression, inclusivity, and cultural defiance.

Repeated exposure to UGG’s core associations—comfort, relaxation, warmth—has conditioned consumers to attach aspirational value to the product. Over time, these positive stimuli fostered brand loyalty and redefined symbolic fashion capital. This aligns with Pavlovian conditioning, wherein once-unfashionable stimuli gain value through emotional reinforcement and contextual storytelling.

Using the BCG Matrix, UGG’s product portfolio reveals a strategic positioning of cash cows in the western market to Stars in the Asia-pacific. This typology reveals a brand that is not only culturally adaptive but also analytically disciplined in resource allocation and market segmentation

Discussion / Conclusion

UGG’s marketing alchemy—transforming functional footwear into cultural capital—exemplifies a broader shift in postmodern consumerism. No longer bound by traditional beauty norms, today’s consumers seek products that resonate with their inner narratives and embodied values. As aesthetic deviance becomes a form of status signaling, brands that embrace symbolic nonconformity stand to gain both cultural legitimacy and market share.

UGG’s brand leadership is particularly salient in a post-pandemic economy, where emotional well-being, authenticity, and comfort have become cornerstones of consumer identity. By normalizing formerly stigmatized forms (e.g., distressed jeans, hoodies, fleece boots), UGG affirms that rebellion itself is a form of emotional and social truth. The once-dismissed “ugly” is now not only accepted but celebrated as a signifier of individuality and liberation.

This paper concludes that symbolic consumption is no longer merely about luxury or aesthetics—it is increasingly about identity affirmation through comfort and imperfection.

UGG's journey offers a marketing blueprint: challenge the status quo, leverage cultural insight, and deliver embodied emotional value. In doing so, brands can transform pejorative labels into powerful icons of authenticity and redefine the aesthetics of aspiration for the next generation of consumers.

Track: Marketing Strategy
ID# 1832

How Can Natural Language Processing Help Examine Branding Strategies? Evidence from U.S. Nonprofit Healthcare Brands

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Abstract - A stakeholder-based brand perspective complements the conventional financial value-based brand perspective. A nonprofit brand communicates its purpose in its mission statement and engages with a variety of stakeholders to build brand awareness, trust, and commitment. Although a mission statement plays a crucial role in nonprofit branding and stakeholder engagement, the lack of empirical investigation has limited our understanding of nonprofit brands' roles reflected in their mission statements. Structural Topic Modeling analysis revealed various topics as artifacts of nonprofit healthcare brands' branding strategies, the interwoven topics leveraged by these brands, and insights helpful for executing evidence-based branding strategies to engage stakeholders effectively.

Keywords - Healthcare, nonprofit brand, stakeholder engagement, mission statement, structural topic modeling

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners - This study employs a stakeholder-based brand perspective to investigate nonprofit brands in the healthcare sector empirically. This empirical investigation reveals a typology by examining the mission statements of U.S. nonprofit healthcare brands, providing theoretical and managerial implications.

Introduction

Scholars have noted the importance of nonprofit brands for internal and external stakeholder engagement to negotiate relationships in a service sector with social missions and vision (e.g., healthcare) (Liu et al., 2015). A brand includes a set of associations to represent what the target audience knows or believes about an organization (Keller, 1993; Simoes & Dibb, 2001). For nonprofit brands, a strong brand is one that is well-known to a target group of interest (the general population vs. some populations-groups) and, favorably perceived by a target group of interest, and believed to be exceptional and extraordinary in comparison to peer brands by a target group of interest (Wymer, Goss, and Heming, 2015).

Although the intricate relationship between nonprofit brands and their stakeholders exists in all nonprofit sectors (Carroll, 2018), it is especially evident in the nonprofit healthcare sector, partly because it features a wide range of nonprofit brands with various missions and functions. Building upon Frumkin's (2002) four main functions of nonprofit action, this paper proposes a typology of nonprofit healthcare brand by considering the underlying reason for the existence (asymmetric information versus heterogeneous preferences) and the nature of the role played by the nonprofit (expressive mission versus instrumental mission). Then, it empirically investigates

the typology by examining U.S. nonprofit healthcare brands' mission statements.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. A literature review which provides a theoretical background for empirical investigation will be presented. In the methods section, data collection and analysis will be discussed. Theoretical and managerial implications will be discussed.

Literature review

As a mission-driven organization, the mission statements of nonprofit brands are important in signaling value creation to various stakeholders. The authors analyzed the activism of nonprofit brands in terms of their orientation (demand/supply side) and rationales (instrumental/expressive), which helps to investigate their mission statements. In the domain of healthcare, existing theories on the roles of nonprofit brands in addressing asymmetric information and heterogeneous preferences are reviewed to inform further investigation.

Methodology

The mission statements of nonprofit brands in the healthcare sector were gathered from the websites of nonprofit organizations to organize information for stakeholder engagement. The brands represent diverse categories, including support for patients and caregivers, specific diseases or disciplines, and preventive or curative measures. According to An (2024), the analysis was conducted using Structural Topic Modeling (STM), an unsupervised machine learning technique implemented in the programming language R.

Findings

Four clusters from twenty interwoven topics were detected, which is consistent with the typology the authors discovered, providing room to advance the scholarship.

Discussions

Theoretical and Practical implications

This research helps advance developing the typology with machine learning method, which may complement existing literature. This natural language processing approach helps nonprofit brands innovate their mission statements for greater stakeholder engagement with the rise of generative artificial intelligence.

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Track: Marketing Strategy, Research & Analytics

ID#: 1850

The Demise of a Nostalgic Brand: The Case of The Hudson's Bay Company

Jon Littlefield and Lorne L. Pendleton

Extended Abstract

Thank you Canada, for 355 years.

With the above headline, The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) announced in March of 2025 that it was planning to close most of its retail locations, and a month later announced the decision to close all locations. Described as a heartfelt goodbye, the headline emphasized the longevity of the Hudson's Bay Company and the nostalgic positioning of this iconic Canadian brand that has been described as the oldest brand in North America. In this paper we examine the HBC's demise through the lens of nostalgic marketing to assess the role of that positioning in forestalling or contributing to the brand's demise amidst ongoing challenges in the bricks and mortar retail market.

The Hudson's Bay Company:

Founded in 1670, The Hudson's Bay Company is the oldest company in Canada. Originally a fur trading company, HBC (or "The Bay" as it was rebranded in 2013) played a significant role in the development of trade relations with indigenous groups and played a large part in the development of Western Canada during the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s (Bown 2021). During the late 1900s, HBC shifted from a fur trading company to a retail chain, with major retail locations in most Canadian cities that were typically located in downtown central business districts but eventually transition to anchor store locations in malls. There were additional forays into petroleum and natural gas, real estate, and financial services. Perhaps most associated with its familiar striped Hudson's Bay blanket, retail locations were organized as traditional department stores with a variety of household and fashion goods.

The original HBC charter granted exclusive rights to Rupert's Land, which extended roughly from Labrador in what is now Eastern Canada to the Rocky Mountains in the West. After joining with competitor North West Company in 1821, HBC had a near monopoly in that area for nearly a century, including the time in which Canada became a country in the late 1800s. More recently, HBC was purchased by the U.S.-based NRDC Equity Partners in 2006 and was taken private by a group of shareholders headed by Richard Baker in 2020. The March 2025 announcement including liquidating and closing 74 Hudson's Bay stores among other retail brands that HBC owned, leaving only six stores remaining. Closure of these remaining stores was announced in April 2025, resulting in the loss of approximately 9,000 jobs nationwide.

Nostalgia:

Nostalgia in marketing has been examined for decades in the academic marketing literature; however one might suggest that its use by practitioners occurred earlier. Holbrook and Schindler (1991) consider nostalgia as an association with objects from the past and, later (2003), they suggest it also includes connections with lost experiences from the past. McCracken (1986) further suggests that this past referent may be idealized rather than actual. Attempts to tease out nuances in how nostalgia is used in marketing have been made. For instance, retro marketing and retro branding have been used to describe the deliberate insertion of an historical referent in branding or promotion (Brown 1999). For instance, this might include relaunching a product or service brand from an earlier period by using familiar promotion, packaging or product designs to evoke nostalgia among consumers (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr. 2003). Retrosapes used in retail settings may accomplish similar nostalgic evocation (Brown and Sherry 2003; Hirschman 2006), although there may be a pragmatic reason for using nostalgia--modern brands are sometimes repositioned using retro branding because of the low cost of taking advantage of existing brand equity. Retro marketing sells modern products using a referent to the past (Hallegatte, Ertz, and Marticotte 2018). Within retro marketing, retro branding involves introducing updated versions of previously-successful brands, such as the reintroduction of the VW Beetle and the Fiat 500.

Brown (1999) describes three types of retro marketing: repro, retro, and repro-retro. Repro involves reproducing previous brands as they were, retro involves combing new technology with earlier styling, while repro-retro involves new ways of using previous nostalgia positioning. Brown, Sherry, and Kozinets (2003) look at brand characteristics that encourage the use of retro marketing in the revival of a brand, including dormancy, iconicity, evocativeness, utopianism, solidarity, and perfectibility.

HBC and Retail Trends:

Modern retailing looks quite a bit different from the first several iterations of the HBC, with larger stores, more competition, and the digital presence of retail brands. As demand for traditional department stores wanes and online shopping becomes more prevalent, we wonder what the role of retrosapes will be in the future retail experience. In the context of HBC's demise, this paper assess what role nostalgia had in the success and subsequent failure of this longstanding iconic brand.

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Keywords - Nostalgia, Retail, Bankruptcy.

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: This paper examines the processes when a nostalgically-positioned retail brand undergoes bankruptcy, and examines the limits of such brand positioning.

Track: Marketing Strategy, Research & Analytics

ID#: 1859

PROFESSIONAL SALES & SALES MANAGEMENT

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When Digital Engagement Builds Trust: Exploring Buyer Responses to Salesperson Social Media Use

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Abstract – As business-to-business (B2B) selling increasingly occurs through digital channels, social media has emerged as a critical platform for buyer–seller engagement. While social media enables salespeople to connect, share knowledge, and signal expertise, it can also risk undermining relational authenticity if used superficially. Drawing on social tuning theory, this study examines how salesperson social media use influences buyer trust and how this effect depends on the buyer’s perception of salesperson likability. Using data collected from professional buyers across industries, the findings reveal that salesperson social media use can serve as a mechanism for building buyer trust, but only when the salesperson is perceived as likable. Our research suggests that likability can be developed through personalized communication and preferential treatment. This research extends existing work on social selling by introducing social tuning as a novel theoretical lens to explain divergent buyer reactions to digital engagement.

Keywords – *Salesperson Social Media Use, Social Tuning, Likability, Trust*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and/or Practitioners: This study advances understanding of how digital interactions shape relational outcomes in B2B contexts. For educators, it highlights the importance of focusing on interpersonal dynamics when integrating social media strategy into sales training. For researchers, it provides a foundation for exploring the psychological mechanisms underlying digital trust formation, emphasizing the importance of being perceived as likable by the buyer.

Track: Professional Sales & Sales Management

ID#: 1860

RETAILING & SERVICES MARKETING

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Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't: Booking Channel Attribution in Hospitality, Retail, and Food Services

Best Abstract in Track

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Abstract – Consumers today are navigating an increasingly fragmented service landscape. Whether booking a hotel, ordering dinner, or purchasing a new pair of shoes, they often interact with third-party platforms rather than the businesses providing the actual service. This evolution raises critical questions about loyalty, accountability, and customer perception.

In today's omnichannel world, a customer might thank DoorDash for dinner, Expedia for the hotel, and Instacart for the groceries—even though none of them cooked, cleaned, or stocked the shelves. This study explores how booking channels—direct versus third-party platforms—impact customer satisfaction and loyalty across hospitality, food services, and retail, and investigates the mediating roles of relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and perceived opportunistic behavior. Drawing on attribution theory (Oliver, 1980; Ajzen, 1991) and relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), we examine whether customers assign credit (or blame) to the service provider or the platform.

Survey data from 600 U.S. consumers will be analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Respondents must have used both direct and third-party booking methods in at least two service categories within the last six months. We will examine key mediators such as relationship benefits (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998), shared values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), communication quality (Mohr & Sohi, 1995), and perceived opportunistic behavior (John, 1984). We hypothesize that direct bookings will yield higher satisfaction and loyalty (H1, H2), with mediating effects through relationship quality dimensions (H1a–H2d). Furthermore, we anticipate that customers will attribute satisfaction and loyalty outcomes differently depending on the booking channel, often giving credit to the intermediary rather than the service provider (H4). Additional hypotheses will explore moderation by demographics, service category, and technology savviness (H5–H8).

Ultimately, this research aims to help businesses navigate the paradox of platform reliance versus relationship control. For companies that depend on third-party platforms to scale, our findings will offer guidance on how to preserve brand equity and customer loyalty even when another logo stands between you and the buyer. Whether through exclusive promotions, improved communication touchpoints, or strategic co-branding, firms can take proactive steps to reclaim the credit they deserve—or at least make sure the right party takes the blame when things go sideways.

Keywords - Channel attribution, service marketing, customer loyalty, direct booking, intermediaries, hospitality, food service, retail

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: For marketing educators, this research brings abstract theories to life using a relatable modern dilemma: who

really owns the customer experience? For researchers, it connects attribution theory with service outcomes in a multi-sector model. For practitioners, it provides actionable insights for mitigating third-party platform risk, strengthening brand relationships, and designing service experiences that retain credit—and loyalty—where it belongs.

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Track: Retailing & Services Marketing

ID#: 1857

Service Quality Assessment of Disparate African American Heritage Trails Using the SERVQUAL Model

Jerome Christia

Introduction

African American heritage trails serve as essential tools for the preservation and interpretation of Black communities' histories across the United States. However, the cultural narratives and tourist experiences they offer can vary greatly from one region to another. This paper specifically compares the African American Heritage Trail in Georgetown, SC, and the Portland Freedom Trail in Maine. Both trails highlight different aspects of African American history and their respective significance in the communities they represent.

This comparative study references theoretical frameworks such as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), authenticity in tourism (MacCannell, 1973), and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) to explore how these trails are marketed and experienced by visitors. Understanding these frameworks will help us explore the nuanced ways in which African American history is marketed and consumed across different geographic and social contexts.

Particularly, to evaluate the visitor experience across the Georgetown, SC and Portland, ME African American heritage trails, this paper applies the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). SERVQUAL is a widely used framework in tourism and service industries that assesses service quality based on five core dimensions: **tangibles**, **reliability**, **responsiveness**, **assurance**, and **empathy**. By analyzing each dimension, this study provides a better understanding of how each heritage trail delivers value to its visitors.

Historical Context

Georgetown, SC, is a focal point for the Gullah Geechee people, whose history and culture are deeply entwined with the legacy of slavery and post-emancipation America. The Gullah Geechee trail emphasizes themes of cultural survival, spirituality, and community leadership, particularly through the lens of prominent figures like Joseph H. Rainey. This community-driven heritage creates what Bourdieu (1986) refers to as "cultural capital," which adds value to the local heritage and encourages the transmission of traditions to future generations.

Portland, ME, has a very different historical background, with a focus on abolitionism and the role of free Black communities in the North. The Portland Freedom Trail celebrates the contributions of Black sailors, abolitionists, and other key figures in the fight against slavery, showcasing a history less widely recognized in mainstream historical narratives. This trail's emphasis on institutional history gives it a different kind of authority, legitimizing the African American experience in the North.

Key Heritage Sites

In Georgetown, visitors can experience:

- The Joseph H. Rainey House, the former home of the first Black U.S. Congressman
- Bethel AME Church and Friendship Baptist Church, both pivotal in the African American community during and after the Reconstruction era
- Kaminski Cemetery, the burial site for enslaved individuals and freedmen
- Kings Highway/African American Historical Marker, which commemorates the history of enslaved Africans along the coastal trade route

Portland's Freedom Trail includes:

- The Abyssinian Meeting House, a center for African American religious and social life
- Several historical markers related to abolitionism and the Underground Railroad
- Monuments to Black mariners and abolitionists who shaped the fight for freedom

Interpretive Focus and Cultural Themes

Georgetown's heritage trail primarily emphasizes themes of resilience and community-building in the aftermath of slavery. The experience here is deeply immersive, with a focus on spiritual and cultural authenticity. It provides a "lived" experience that resonates emotionally with visitors, allowing them to connect with the stories and people of the past. The authenticity here aligns with MacCannell's (1973) concept of "staged authenticity," where the preservation of historic sites and community-driven narratives enhance the perceived genuineness of the experience.

Portland, on the other hand, highlights themes of abolitionism and activism. The interpretive focus is more academic, aimed at educating visitors about the role of African Americans in the fight for freedom. The trail's use of digital tools and historical markers facilitates a more structured, educational experience, appealing to visitors interested in social justice history. This aligns with the concept of the **experience economy** (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), where educational value is an integral part of the experience.

Tourism Infrastructure and Economic Impact

Georgetown's trail is part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and has significant potential for tourism, especially related to ancestry and heritage tourism. However, Georgetown faces challenges with underfunding, preservation issues, and limited marketing visibility. Despite these obstacles, there is significant potential for growth if these resources were leveraged for broader experiential marketing strategies, as proposed by Schmitt (1999).

Portland's trail benefits from better infrastructure and integration with the larger New England tourism ecosystem. While its African American population is smaller, the city has successfully branded its Freedom Trail as part of the region's broader historical tourism offerings. The use of digital guides and interactive tools enhances the educational experience and helps Portland's trail maintain its relevance in the competitive New England tourism market.

Social and Cultural Impacts

Both heritage trails promote a deeper understanding of African American history, but the way they engage their audiences differs. Georgetown's trail connects visitors with the Gullah Geechee community's resilience and cultural survival, fostering strong emotional and ancestral ties. Portland's trail appeals more to intellectual curiosity, focusing on the history of abolitionism and interracial cooperation in the fight for freedom.

Both trails encourage visitors to engage with African American history, but they do so in distinct ways that reflect the unique historical and cultural contexts of each location. Georgetown's trail taps into the affective dimensions of cultural tourism, while Portland's trail engages visitors' cognitive faculties through structured educational experiences.

SERVQUAL

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is a widely used tool for measuring service quality by comparing customer expectations with their perceptions of actual service performance. Originally designed for service industries, SERVQUAL has been adapted for use in tourism and cultural heritage contexts to assess how well experiences align with visitor expectations, providing valuable feedback for improving service delivery and customer satisfaction. It evaluates five key dimensions.

Tangibles

Tangibles refer to the physical facilities, signage, and appearance of personnel or guides. In Portland, the Freedom Trail benefits from well-maintained urban infrastructure, digital resources, and visible historical markers that guide visitors through a curated path. These physical features enhance the trail's accessibility and professional appearance. In contrast, Georgetown's trail includes historically significant yet less formally maintained sites such as the Kaminski Cemetery and community churches. While these sites evoke authenticity and spiritual resonance, they may appear underfunded or less accessible to unfamiliar tourists, highlighting a potential service gap in tangible presentation.

Reliability

Reliability relates to the consistency and accuracy of the service provided. Portland excels in this dimension through structured itineraries, guided tours, and educational resources provided by historical societies and local government. Visitors can expect a consistent and informative experience. Georgetown, on the other hand, may offer more variable experiences due to community-led storytelling and limited institutional coordination. While this approach contributes to authenticity, it may also lead to inconsistencies in delivery, particularly for tourists unfamiliar with Gullah Geechee culture.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness reflects the willingness and promptness of the service providers in helping visitors. Portland's tourism infrastructure includes visitor centers, digital tools, and online maps, allowing for self-guided or scheduled tours. Georgetown's responsiveness is largely dependent on community engagement. While local guides and historians are passionate and informative, the lack of centralized coordination may affect the perceived responsiveness. However, when engaged, Georgetown's community members often provide deeply personal and enriching interactions.

Assurance

Assurance encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of staff and their ability to instill trust and confidence. Portland's professionalization through partnerships with heritage and tourism organizations supports a sense of credibility and safety. Georgetown offers a different kind of assurance—rooted in cultural pride and intimate knowledge of history. Local storytellers, religious leaders, and cultural interpreters often provide compelling narratives that build trust through sincerity and historical authority, albeit in less formal ways.

Empathy

Empathy is defined by the degree of individualized attention and care provided to visitors. Georgetown performs strongly in this category. Visitors often experience high levels of emotional engagement and interpersonal connection, particularly when tours are led by community members who share their lived experiences. Portland, while informative and well-organized, offers a more generalized educational approach that may not connect with visitors on the same personal level. This distinction echoes findings in heritage tourism where community involvement can enhance emotional resonance (Chronis, 2005).

Hypotheses

This study explores how visitors' expectations—prior to engaging with heritage sites—can influence their intentions and anticipated experiences. Drawing from the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), the following hypotheses propose how perceived service quality dimensions impact interest in two African American heritage trails.

Tangibles

H1: When visitors perceive the visual and informational materials (e.g., websites, brochures, promotional videos) as high-quality and professionally presented, they are more likely to express interest in visiting the heritage trail.

Reliability

H2: Clear, consistent, and accurate historical content—delivered through online sources and trail-related materials—is expected to build trust in the site’s legitimacy and increase the likelihood of planning a visit.

Responsiveness

H3: If potential visitors believe they will receive timely and helpful responses to inquiries or booking questions, they are more inclined to feel confident in their plans to engage with the site.

Assurance

H4: Anticipated competence and professionalism of interpreters, tour guides, and site staff will lead visitors to expect a trustworthy and informative experience, reinforcing their intent to participate in the tour.

Empathy

H5: Heritage trails that are perceived as inclusive, culturally respectful, and personally meaningful—based on marketing materials and online presence—are more likely to attract individuals seeking emotional connection and historical relevance.

Summary

Georgetown and Portland represent two distinct approaches to African American heritage tourism. Georgetown’s trail focuses on cultural survival and the Gullah Geechee community’s enduring legacy, while Portland’s trail emphasizes the abolitionist movement and the fight for freedom. These differences highlight how regional contexts shape the interpretation of African American history, with implications for tourism marketing and heritage site development.

This SERVQUAL-based comparison should reveal complementary strengths and challenges in each heritage trail. Portland should score higher on dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, and assurance due to its formal infrastructure and digital integration. Georgetown excels in empathy and emotional authenticity, offering a more personal, culturally rich experience despite infrastructural limitations. The findings would reinforce the need for context-sensitive marketing strategies that align with each trail’s service strengths and cultural narratives.

Future research should explore how these trails influence visitor behaviors and contribute to both local economies and the broader narrative of African American history. In particular, empirical studies examining visitor satisfaction, emotional engagement, and post-visit behavior could offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of these heritage trails as tools for social change and economic development.

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Track: Retailing & Services Marketing

ID#: 1831

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

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A Framework for Integrating Content Marketing and Social Media Engagement for More Effective University Branding

Best Paper in Track

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Abstract

In an increasingly competitive and digital higher education environment, effective university branding requires strategies that are both authoritative and engaging. While content marketing and social media engagement have each demonstrated value, they are often implemented in isolation. This paper synthesizes recent research on these two approaches and introduces the Integrated Content Marketing Framework for Higher Education Branding—a model that unites the structured, credibility-building elements of content marketing with the interactive, participatory nature of social media engagement. Grounded in Content Marketing Theory and Social Media Engagement Theory, the framework offers a dual-track system for creating, repurposing, and distributing institutional messages across owned and shared platforms. Practical implications are outlined for marketing professionals seeking to increase brand consistency, stakeholder engagement, and campaign efficiency.

Keywords: Content marketing, social media marketing, university branding

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: The integrated framework represents a significant contribution to both research and practice, addressing a persistent gap in the digital marketing literature and providing actionable guidance for modern university brand strategy.

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive and digital-first landscape, higher education institutions face mounting pressure to differentiate their brands and cultivate meaningful engagement with prospective students. Content marketing and social media have emerged as essential tools in this endeavor. While each has independently demonstrated value for brand building, the literature reveals a notable gap: few models integrate the long-form, credibility-building strength of content marketing with the relational and participatory strengths of social media engagement.

This paper addresses that gap by introducing the Integrated Content Marketing Framework for Higher Education Branding, a dual-track model that aligns the structured value of content marketing with the dialogic potential of social media engagement. Drawing on both theoretical foundations and research-backed practices, the framework is offered as a conceptual and practical contribution for institutional leaders and marketers seeking to modernize and unify their digital branding efforts.

Literature Review: Social Media & Content Marketing in Higher Ed Branding

Research shows that content marketing and social media engagement are both valuable tools for institutional branding, yet they serve distinct roles. Content marketing—through channels like blogs, websites, and newsletters—delivers structured, credibility-enhancing content (Garcia et al., 2021; Nurjanah et al., 2024). Social media engagement, on the other hand, builds emotional connection and interactive relationships through platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok (Perera, Nayak, & Nguyen, 2023; Hao, 2022).

Despite their complementary strengths, these approaches are often siloed in practice and literature. Scholars such as Pawar (2024) call for more integrated strategies that combine value-driven content with socially engaging delivery. Hao (2022) and Perera, Nayak, and Nguyen (2022) further emphasize the need for alignment between content and user interaction to foster more authentic brand experiences. However, a comprehensive model operationalizing this integration in higher education branding has been lacking.

While social media marketing has been extensively studied for its role in higher education branding, the empirical literature on content marketing—particularly in terms of its direct effects on student engagement, university brand equity, and enrollment behavior—has been comparatively limited. However, emerging studies are beginning to shed light on how institutions strategically use content marketing to enhance brand perception and guide prospective students through the decision-making journey.

Garcia, Pereira, and Cairrão (2021) conducted a case study analyzing how content marketing strategies implemented on social media platforms contributed to improved brand engagement in a Portuguese university. Their findings suggest that carefully planned content—such as academic program highlights, alumni stories, and campus life features—can effectively drive prospective student interest when tailored to platform-specific user behavior. The study reinforces the idea that content and delivery channel must be aligned to maximize impact.

Complementing this, an internal analytics-driven report from Carnegie Higher Ed (2025) explored the return on investment (ROI) of content marketing in higher education across 42 universities in North America. The study found that institutions with a centralized content strategy and consistent brand voice across platforms saw, on average, a 21 percent higher increase in organic website traffic and a 17 percent increase in inquiry conversions over a two-year period compared to institutions without such a strategy. Importantly, this study highlighted how content marketing—when aligned with prospective student search behavior and decision timelines—can support a university’s student recruitment goals.

Additionally, a recent Modern Campus (2024) report synthesized best practices from leading content marketing initiatives in higher education. It identified storytelling, personalization, and content modularity as three critical drivers of successful campaigns. The report also emphasized the importance of aligning content formats (e.g., video, student profiles, blog posts) with the target audience’s information preferences, showing that emotionally resonant narratives tend to outperform generic institutional messaging in both reach and engagement.

Together, these studies provide empirical support for integrating content marketing as a core component of higher education branding. They also reinforce the rationale for combining content

marketing and social media strategies, as the two are not mutually exclusive but symbiotic: high-quality content is most effective when it is also socially visible and easily shareable. These insights validate the structural basis of the Integrated Content Marketing Framework introduced in this paper, particularly its emphasis on modular content development and cross-platform repurposing.

Contrasting Theoretical Foundations

Content Marketing Theory centers on creating valuable, consistent content that attracts and retains a target audience by informing or inspiring (Pulizzi, 2012). In higher education, it is often executed through institution-driven messaging such as expert articles, academic blog posts, and student success stories—typically distributed on owned platforms like websites and email newsletters. This approach is strategic and depth-oriented but often lacks dialogic engagement with the audience.

By contrast, Social Media Engagement Theory focuses on fostering real-time, two-way communication that empowers audiences to interact, co-create, and emotionally invest in the brand (Brodie et al., 2011). In the university context, this includes practices like student takeovers, hashtag campaigns, and short-form videos that encourage user participation and community formation.

These theories converge in a growing trend—Content Social Media Marketing—where long-form content is modularized and adapted for use across social platforms. This hybrid approach allows institutions to maintain consistent messaging while encouraging interaction, extending the reach and resonance of their content. However, research has yet to offer a cohesive model that demonstrates how to strategically manage this convergence.

Critique and Need for Integration

While Content Marketing Theory provides a valuable foundation for creating structured, informative content that reinforces institutional credibility, its typical implementation in higher education tends to be highly institution-driven and limited in dialogic engagement. That is, universities often maintain full control over content creation and distribution—publishing articles, program spotlights, and strategic messaging through owned channels such as websites, blogs, and newsletters. This top-down approach is effective for delivering depth and consistency, but it positions the audience primarily as passive recipients of information. As a result, it often lacks the two-way, real-time communication that characterizes dialogic engagement and is central to relationship-building in digital spaces. This critique is central to the rationale for integration: institutions need a model that retains content’s strategic value while amplifying its impact through social participation.

The Integrated Content Marketing Framework for Higher Education Branding responds directly to this challenge. By combining the long-form, trust-building strengths of traditional content marketing with the interactive, participatory dynamics of social media engagement, institutions can extend the reach and relational impact of their messaging. Repurposing foundational content into shareable, platform-specific formats (e.g., Instagram stories, LinkedIn infographics, TikTok clips) allows institutions not only to maintain message consistency but also to activate audience

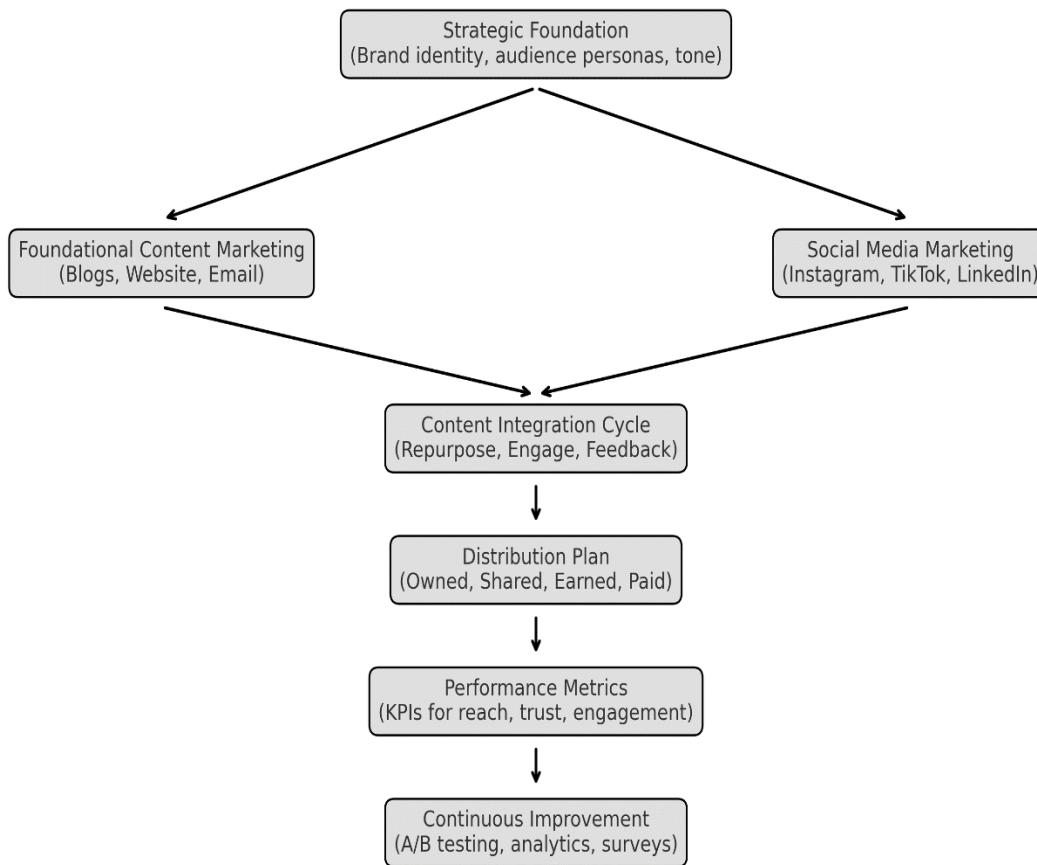
engagement. In this way, content becomes socially distributed, not just institutionally published—bridging the gap between authority and authenticity, and aligning with the communication preferences of modern prospective students.

Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework emerges from the literature’s clear call for synthesis. Garcia et al. (2021) demonstrate how planned content can build credibility, while Perera et al. (2023) and Hao (2022) show that brand equity grows through interactive, identity-driven engagement. Yet no existing model systematically combines these insights into a usable structure.

The Integrated Content Marketing Framework (see Figure 1) addresses this gap. It starts with strategic brand foundations, then flows into two parallel tracks: foundational content marketing and platform-specific social media engagement. These are linked by a continuous content integration cycle that supports repurposing, distribution, measurement, and refinement. The framework provides institutions with a clear process for unifying their messaging across digital platforms and elevating both brand reach and resonance.

Figure 1. Integrated Content Marketing Framework for Higher Education Branding



The following outline elaborates the framework and offers guidance for its intended use:

1. Strategic Foundation

Objective: Align all content efforts with institutional goals and brand identity.

- Define core brand pillars (e.g., academic excellence, innovation, student life, inclusivity)
 - Identify key audiences: prospective students, parents, alumni, faculty, partners
 - Map audience personas and their content consumption behaviors
 - Establish brand voice and tone across all platforms
-

2. Dual-Track Content Strategy

Split content efforts into two interdependent tracks:

A. Foundational Content Marketing (Long-Form/Owned Channels)

Platform:	Website, blogs, email newsletters, online brochures, YouTube
Content Types:	Faculty profiles, academic research highlights, admissions guides, alumni success stories, expert papers
Purpose:	Provide credibility, deepen trust, aid in SEO, serve as source material for social media
Tone:	Informative, evergreen, search-optimized

B. Amplified Social Media Marketing (Short-Form/Shared Channels)

Platform:	Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, X (Twitter)
Content Types:	Reels, student takeovers, live Q&As, polls, memes, highlights of blog content
Purpose:	Build engagement, showcase brand personality, increase shareability, drive traffic to owned content
Tone:	Conversational, visual, reactive, timely

3. Content Integration Cycle

A seamless loop connecting both strategies:

1. **Create** long-form “anchor content” (e.g., blog post: “What Makes Our MBA Unique?”)
2. **Repurpose** into:
 - Instagram carousel: “5 Unique Things About Our MBA”
 - LinkedIn post: Alumni testimonial quote
 - TikTok: Student interview clips

3. **Engage** audience via comments, polls, or DMs
 4. **Capture insights** from engagement (e.g., questions, sentiment)
 5. **Feed back** into future long-form content or FAQs
-

4. Engagement and Distribution Plan

- **Owned Media:** Blogs, email newsletters, course landing pages
 - **Shared Media:** Social media platforms
 - **Earned Media:** Shares, reposts, influencer mentions (student or alumni)
 - **Paid Media:** Boosted posts, sponsored content, remarketing ads
-

5. Performance Measurement

Evaluate both content streams using appropriate KPIs:

Track: **Metrics:**

Foundational Website traffic, time on page, SEO rank, downloads, email open/click rates
Social Media Impressions, likes, shares, comments, saves, CTR, UGC volume

6. Continuous Improvement

- Use A/B testing on content formats (e.g., video vs. carousel)
 - Conduct audience feedback surveys
 - Analyze engagement patterns and update content calendar
 - Revisit analytics dashboards monthly/quarterly
-

Contribution of the Study

The Integrated Content Marketing Framework is the central contribution of this study. It serves not just as a visual or operational model but as a conceptual advancement in higher education marketing. Drawing from both content marketing and social media engagement theory, it enables institutions to communicate consistently while engaging interactively—an increasingly critical capability in today’s branding environment. The framework bridges a gap in theory and practice by uniting value-driven messaging with active audience engagement.

Implications, Conclusions, and Suggestions for Future Research

The Integrated Content Marketing Framework for Higher Education Branding offers institutions a cohesive model for uniting credibility-building content with engagement-driven social media

strategies. Drawing from both theory and empirical research, this framework provides practical guidance for how institutions can modernize their marketing practices in ways that resonate with today's prospective students and other key stakeholders.

1. Break Down Silos Between Content and Social Teams

Many institutions treat long-form content development (e.g., website articles, blog posts, faculty spotlights) and social media management as separate functions. This disjointed structure often results in missed opportunities for amplification and engagement. Implementing the integrated framework requires collaboration across marketing units to ensure that valuable content assets are systematically adapted for social platforms. For example, a faculty Q&A featured on a university blog can be repurposed into an Instagram story, a LinkedIn infographic, and a Twitter thread—all tailored to platform norms but tied to a consistent message.

2. Adopt a Repurposing Mindset

Rather than producing content for a single channel or audience segment, institutions should design content with modularity and adaptability in mind. A single piece of foundational content—such as a report on graduate outcomes or a student success story—can be transformed into multiple short-form social media posts, videos, or reels. This approach maximizes content ROI and allows institutions to meet audiences where they are, with messaging that is both accessible and shareable.

3. Balance Authority with Authenticity

The literature clearly distinguishes between content that is institution-driven and content that fosters dialogic engagement. Institutions should balance their strategic storytelling with opportunities for user interaction and voice. This includes encouraging user-generated content (UGC), highlighting real student perspectives, and responding publicly to comments and questions. Research by Perera et al. (2023) suggests that brand equity grows when students feel part of the brand conversation, not just targets of it.

4. Develop Integrated Analytics Dashboards

To support continuous improvement, institutions should align metrics across content and social platforms. A blog post's traffic and time-on-page should be viewed alongside its social reach, engagement, and click-through rates. Integrated dashboards help marketing teams identify which types of content generate the most meaningful engagement and how users move across digital touchpoints. This evidence-based approach enables more strategic content planning and resource allocation.

5. Start Small, Then Scale

Full integration may not be immediately feasible for all institutions, especially those with limited staff. A pilot initiative—such as coordinating a single campaign across the blog, Instagram, and

LinkedIn—can demonstrate proof of concept and build internal support. Institutions can then scale efforts incrementally, embedding integration as an operational norm.

By implementing the practices outlined above, higher education institutions can move beyond transactional marketing and toward a relational model of brand communication—one that combines the strategic depth of content marketing with the dynamic engagement power of social media. The integrated framework provides a practical blueprint for this evolution.

Suggestions for Future Research

To build on the conceptual and practical foundations laid in this study, future research should pursue empirical validation of the Integrated Content Marketing Framework. Longitudinal studies could track the branding outcomes of institutions that implement the framework compared to those that maintain separate content and social media strategies. Experimental designs could test specific mechanisms—such as the impact of modular content repurposing or the effect of integrated analytics dashboards—on engagement metrics and prospective student behavior. Additional research could also examine cross-cultural applicability of the framework, evaluating how institutional branding through content and engagement may vary by region or institutional type. Furthermore, qualitative case studies could shed light on the internal organizational dynamics and change management strategies necessary to operationalize such integration in real-world settings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the growing need for higher education institutions to move beyond fragmented communication strategies. While content marketing offers depth and credibility, and social media fosters immediacy and dialogue, neither alone is sufficient for modern university branding. The Integrated Content Marketing Framework introduced here provides a strategic solution, uniting these two approaches into a cohesive, actionable system. As institutions face increasingly competitive environments, the ability to communicate both consistently and interactively will define the next generation of university branding strategies.

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Track: Social Media Marketing

ID#: 1858

From a Racial Reckoning to Retrenchment: A Longitudinal Analysis of Retailers' Corporate Sociopolitical Activism Messaging

Best Abstract in Track

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Abstract

2020 saw a surge in companies embracing corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA), which is “a firm’s public demonstration (statements and/or actions) of support for or opposition to one side of a partisan sociopolitical issue” (Bhagwat et al., 2020, p. 1). However, President Trump’s second term in office has ushered in sweeping changes to policies and culture, posing ethical and strategic dilemmas as businesses decide whether to engage in CSA (Wolff, 2025). The killing of George Floyd in May of 2020 was the catalyst for one of the largest social movements to date. In conjunction with the broader Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, a civil rights activist network opposing the systemic racism impacting the Black community (Bestvater et al., 2023), Floyd’s death and the subsequent shootings of Breonna Taylor and other unarmed Black people spurred a racial justice reckoning that included a widespread social media movement, protests, and demonstrations (Altman, 2020; Chavez, 2020; Horowitz et al., 2020). The movement led many, including prominent retailers, to publicly advocate against racial injustice (Segal, 2021) and signified the “first time corporations took a stance against injustice and social issues en masse” (Brownen-Trinh & Orujov, 2023, para. 20). Moreover, companies began to reassess and reaffirm their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, such as inclusive hiring and diversity training (Ellis, 2025). Although major retailers, such as Target and McDonald’s, made public statements on social media and other platforms condemning racism and affirming their commitment to take action through means such as donations and internal changes, 2025 has introduced new political pressures and public scrutiny that have led some companies to reverse course. For example, a wave of federal, state, and local legislation targeting DEI has been enacted as Trump and other Republican lawmakers have waged a war on ‘woke’ ideology and policies (Guynn, 2025).

In response to a changing political and cultural landscape, the purpose of this research is to explore the evolution of companies’ CSA messaging related to racial justice. This longitudinal analysis will assess CSA messaging during two distinct periods of time to explore the potential changes in the message themes, language, and action commitments made on behalf of companies. Therefore, we sought to answer the following research questions: 1) Of the top 100 U.S. retailers, how many posted CSA messages related to racial justice on social media in the three-week period following the murder of George Floyd?, (2) What CSA messaging themes emerged from the data?, (3) For those retailers that shared messages during the initial data collection period in 2020, how many have shared subsequent CSA messages related to racial justice and/or DEI during the first six months of President Trump’s second term in office?, and (4) What CSA messaging themes emerged from the data? We contend that the political climate

and other external factors can significantly alter a company's position on sociopolitical issues, sometimes necessitating the dismissal of some stakeholders' reactions or sentiments.

To answer the research questions, we employed content analysis for this study. The population consisted of companies included in the National Retail Federation's (NRF) Top 100 Retailers 2020 List (National Retail Federation, 2020). This company list was selected for several reasons. First, retailers are public-serving entities that must appeal to a broad range of stakeholders, including consumers, employees, and communities. Second, the list provided from the NRF ranks retailers based on annual revenue and includes a wide range of retail formats (e.g., grocery stores, department stores, etc.), thus providing a more all-encompassing sample. Analyzing CSA in the context of the retail industry is of interest given its reputation for contributing to sociopolitical issues, such as environmental degradation and human rights offenses (Howland et al., 2019; Paton et al., 2021). Therefore, investigating if and in what ways retailers engage in CSA communication and how it evolves over time has important implications for business ethics and marketing strategy. Using George Floyd's murder in May of 2020 as the initial study context, a content analysis of social media response strategies was conducted, focusing on the NRF's top 100 retailers' Instagram communications. Of those 100 retailers, 58 posted CSA-related messages, while 42 remained silent. Within the data set, two retailers did not have active Instagram accounts. A systematic approach was used to analyze the content of each message from the 58 retailers who communicated during this time. Twenty-six of those retailers posted several times for a total of 110 analyzed messages. The analysis identified messaging themes, revealing that most retailers used a mix of polite (i.e., the use of abstract, general, and hopeful language that lacked a concrete connection to the issue) and polarizing (i.e., the use of specific language clearly taking a side on a partisan and emotionally charged issue) language. Just over half of the sample committed to internal or external CSA actions (e.g., donations, partnerships, etc.) that could foster systemic change, and for many, this took multiple messaging attempts. A typology comprising four different communication approaches is proposed: *Silent*, *Advocate Ambassadors*, *Woefully Woke*, and *Blissfully Blind*. The follow-up analysis, also employing content analysis, will assess communications from the 58 retailers who initially shared CSA messages on social media. This phase of analysis, which is currently in progress, will include Instagram, Facebook, X, and retailers' websites and will occur during the first six months of President Trump's second term in office, spanning from Inauguration Day on January 20, 2025, to July 20, 2025. A systematic approach will be used to analyze the message content to assess the message themes, language, action commitments, and the reversal of prior action commitments.

While there is growing use of CSA, the academic literature regarding this phenomenon is lacking, and there is a need to explore the evolution of companies' CSA messaging over time, especially amidst shifting societal, cultural, and political tides. Specifically, our analysis explores the nature of retailers' CSA communication related to racial justice in the period following George Floyd's murder in 2020 and then tracks the changes to messaging approaches and CSA commitments in the wake of President Trump's second term in office and the corresponding anti-DEI/anti-woke movement. To our knowledge, this working paper is the first to examine CSA messaging from a longitudinal perspective. Our thematic analysis and response typology delineates retailers' messaging during two distinct periods of time, each marked by a very different political and cultural zeitgeist. The findings will illuminate the extent to which companies have reaffirmed, retrenched from, or rebranded their initial CSA and DEI commitments and the nature of these changes. This study contributes to the literature on practices

such as woke-washing, performative allyship, true allyship, and authentic activism (Mirzaei et al., 2022; Spielmann et al., 2023; Vredenburg et al., 2020) and expands our understanding of the role of social media as a platform for CSA delivery. The findings of this study offer significant contributions to further the CSA and business ethics literature streams with important implications for public policy and marketing.

Keywords: *Corporate sociopolitical activism (CSA); brand activism; social media messaging; content analysis; racial justice; diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)*

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners: In this study, we offer a thematic analysis and response typology that spans two different periods of interest in the study of CSA related to racial justice and DEI. For educators and researchers, our findings contribute to the CSA literature and social media marketing research to expand our understanding of if and how CSA messaging evolves in concert with the shifting societal, cultural, and political climate. For practitioners, the thematic analysis, proposed typology, and analysis of the evolution of messaging over time can provide strategic and ethical guidance as companies grapple with effectively communicating and engaging in future CSA issues.

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Track: Social Media Marketing

ID#: 1834

Snip or Skip? Consumer attitudes and marketing message development for spay/neuter efforts

Rebecca Burcham

Abstract - Bob Barker, host of "The Price Is Right" for 35 years, famously concluded each episode with the message, "Have your pet spayed or neutered". This was part of his broader advocacy for responsible pet ownership and animal welfare (Bender, 2016). He believed, rightfully so, that spaying and neutering helps control the pet population and reduces the number of animals in shelters. Indeed, his is likely the earliest public service announcement as a social marketing campaign for spay/neuter services. Spay/neuter services to address pet overpopulation and improve animal welfare have been available for decades. However, pet overpopulation issues continue to plague the United States. In the field of animal care, spaying and neutering have been highlighted as responsible and humane approaches to population control (Fossati, 2024). The purpose of this study is to investigate consumers' attitudes toward spay/neuter procedures and potential marketing messaging to positively impact consumer intentions.

According to leading animal welfare organizations, the U.S. population of stray animals continues to rise, with approximately 5-6 million homeless dogs and cats entering shelters each year (Best Friends 2023 National Report, 2023; ASPCA 2024 US Animal Shelter Statistics, 2024). Despite efforts to increase adoption rates, the number of animals entering shelters far exceeds the number of available homes, leading to overcrowding and resource shortages (Guenther & Hassen, 2024). The concept of responsible pet population management has evolved to incorporate a proactive and sustainable approach to reducing stray and abandoned animal numbers. Unlike reactive measures such as euthanasia or sheltering without long-term solutions, one critical strategy focuses on widespread access to affordable spay/neuter programs (Rowan & Kartal, 2018). Veterinarians, animal shelters, and advocacy organizations across the country widely agree that the most effective way to prevent the suffering and death caused by pet overpopulation is to spay and neuter cats and dogs (Glaser, 2021). American Humane Society strongly supports this practice, recommending that all cats and dogs adopted from public or private animal shelters and control facilities be spayed or neutered (American Humane Association, 2021). In fact, at least 32 states require sterilization as a condition of adoption from pounds, shelters, or rescue organizations (Hodges, 2010).

Spay and neuter surgeries are routine, low-risk procedures commonly performed in veterinary clinics. Spaying, the procedure for female cats and dogs, typically involves the removal of the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and uterus—though some procedures leave the uterus intact. As long as the ovaries are removed, the animal cannot reproduce, and hormone-driven breeding behaviors are significantly reduced. Neutering, the procedure for male pets, involves removing the testicles, which prevents reproduction and decreases behaviors linked to mating instincts. Additionally, alternative sterilization methods exist that preserve hormone production while still preventing reproduction, and research continues into non-surgical sterilization options. While both spaying and neutering are considered major surgeries, they are highly common, safe, and particularly low-risk when performed early in an animal's life.

Beyond controlling the pet population, spaying and neutering provide significant behavioral and health benefits. Undesirable behaviors such as spraying, marking, mounting, howling, and aggression are often reduced after surgery (Jude, Rand, Morton & Fleming, 2017). Additionally, sterilization lowers the risk of certain cancers and diseases. Neutered males, particularly dogs, are also less likely to roam—sometimes traveling up to four miles in search of a mate—a behavior that increases their chances of being lost or ending up in shelters (Jude, Rand, Morton & Fleming, 2017).

Despite this progress, research on consumer attitudes toward spay and neuter procedures remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on the direct impact of spay/neuter programs on euthanasia rates or shelter adoption trends, rather than examining broader consumer attitudes and behaviors toward spaying and neutering their pets. Accordingly, it is necessary to expand our academic and practical understanding by investigating consumer perceptions of spay and neuter procedures. This study aims to explore how barriers to and drivers of spaying and neutering affect consumer attitudes and determine what communications work to positively change these attitudes and behaviors.

The first step of this study is to hold focus groups with community members to understand perceptions, motivations and barriers relating to spay/neuter. Step one takes a qualitative research approach to explore attitudes toward spay/neuter and obstacles to getting the procedure for pet owners. Step one informs the creation of a social marketing survey used in step two. The second step of this study is to conduct large-scale, representative surveys to create a panel of people with pets, representative of a target audience, to gauge reactions to potential messages encouraging spay/neuter based on the findings of the first step. The third step is to determine what proposed communications actually resound with the target audience. This step involves qualitative research to test and refine varied messages created from step one and two findings. Furthermore, obtaining feedback on message presentation and tracking which media platforms and outreach efforts generate the most persuasive outcomes is tantamount to determining the success or failure of messaging. Step three is completed through a pilot marketing implementation and evaluation phase (Cammisa, 2009).

This 3-pronged approach to data collection is premised on previous work by a 2011 study conducted by The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Maddie's Fund (Cammisa, 2009). The goal is to hear from the target audience about the drivers of and barriers to spaying and neutering, then develop spay/neuter messages that are effective and would resonate with them. Furthermore, the above article cites the benefit of tailoring marketing messages as local as possible. Therefore, the author looks to conduct this 3-pronged research study in a small, rural Mississippi town of approximately 15,000 people. In the southern US, pet overpopulation is prevalent at higher rates than other parts of the country and spay/neuter rates are lower (Woodruff & Smith, 2020). This statistic is further exacerbated in rural parts of the southern US. A small, rural area at most risk for high pet overpopulation and low rates of spay/neuter has a great need for this research project.

Keywords - Spay, Neuter, Pet Overpopulation, Consumer Attitude Relevance to Marketing

Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners - The findings of this research will contribute to

the academic discourse on spaying and neutering pets by providing a more comprehensive understanding of consumer attitudes toward these procedures. Furthermore, this study will offer insights for veterinarians, policymakers, and animal welfare organizations by identifying key messages that should be emphasized and addressing concerns that may deter pet owners from sterilizing their animals.

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Track: Social Media Marketing

ID#: 1848

STUDENT SUBMISSIONS

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Symbolic Consumption as Self-Preservation: Psychological Vulnerabilities and Identity Repair in Low-Income Luxury Consumers

Best Abstract in Track

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Abstract - Tasha, a 24-year-old retail worker, stares at the Louis Vuitton wallet through the glass of the brick-and-mortar, contemplating whether she will postpone another household bill to purchase that wallet. Though the wallet costs more than half her paycheck, to her, it is not just leather and logos. It symbolizes that she belongs in the spaces where she often feels invisible. For many low-income consumers like Tasha, luxury fashion items such as handbags, T-shirts, or perfume serve as more than status symbols. They offer psychological freedom, identity repair, and emotional refuge. These purchases become gateways to dignity, signaling self-worth in environments that routinely deny it.

Tasha's experience reflects a broader consumption pattern in which low-income individuals use symbolic goods to cope with exclusion and affirm aspirational identities, a phenomenon increasingly observed in consumer research and market trends (Hamilton, 2011). This paper investigates a pressing question at the intersection of consumer behavior, identity, and inequality: What internal psychological vulnerabilities, such as perceived social identity lock-in and emotional coping, drive aspirational luxury fashion consumption among low-income consumers despite financial awareness?

In recent years, aspirational luxury consumption has increased among individuals with limited income, a phenomenon aligned with the democratization of luxury, where high-end goods are no longer reserved for the ultra-wealthy (Rosendo-Rio & Shukla, 2023). Yet, this trend presents a paradox: Why do people with financial constraints make such high-cost purchases? Classic consumer research often explains luxury consumption through conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899), materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992), or status signaling (Berger & Ward, 2010). These frameworks assume rational, externally driven motivations. However, they largely ignore the emotional and psychological realities of low-income consumers who may not look wealthy but instead try to feel worthy.

This study, grounded in a Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) perspective, reframes symbolic consumption not as irrational or indulgent but as a response to emotional deprivation and identity-based exclusion. Drawing from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Identity-Based Motivation Theory (Oyserman, 2009), Self-Signaling Theory (Bodner & Prelec, 2003), and the VEAR Model of Addiction (Leyton, 2013), this research introduces a conceptual model that examines the psychological processes underlying symbolic consumption.

At the center of this model is perceived social identity lock-in, the deeply internalized belief that one's current social standing is not only stigmatized but difficult or even impossible to escape. This is not merely a reflection of income but a psychological experience of entrapment, where consumers see limited pathways to upward mobility, dignity, or recognition. Prior research shows that low-income individuals often internalize societal stigma and experience their social identity as fixed and marginalized (Henry, 2005; Hill, 2001). Repeated cultural messaging and class-based barriers reinforce these feelings, contributing to symbolic exclusion from spaces associated with success and belonging (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). This psychological lock-in produces emotional distress, prompting consumers to seek coping mechanisms that help manage the tension between their current and aspirational identities. These coping strategies are often inward and emotional, not just behavioral, and aim to preserve self-worth in the face of systemic inequity (Mick & Fournier, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Rather than attempting to change their circumstances, consumers may rationalize their behavior by reframing luxury consumption as emotionally necessary or symbolically meaningful (Henry, 2005; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

As emotional coping intensifies, it often leads to moral self-validation, an internal narrative that asserts the consumer's deservingness of symbolic goods. This construct captures how consumers frame aspirational purchases not as indulgent but as earned rewards for enduring hardship or emotional labor (Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Mick & DeMoss, 1990). Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv (2009) further explain that when individuals experience threats to their moral or competent self-view, they often select symbolic products that reinforce identity and restore confidence. This justification process is emotionally restorative, helping consumers reconcile perceived contradictions between financial limitation and symbolic consumption.

These internal experiences culminate in symbolic social identity performance, where acquiring and displaying luxury goods becomes a visible expression of aspirational identity and psychological worth. Belk (1988) describes how possessions become extensions of the self, enabling individuals to assert or transform their social identity. In aspirational consumption, symbolic goods function not just as signals to others but as identity scripts, tools through which consumers affirm their imagined or aspirational selves (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Han et al., 2010). This performance helps bridge the identity gap, offering consumers both emotional relief and temporary access to dignity and visibility in social settings that may otherwise exclude them.

These conceptual relationships lead to the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Perceived social identity lock-in is positively associated with coping behaviors related to the social identity gap.
- **H2:** Coping with the social identity gap is positively associated with moral self-validation.
- **H3:** Moral self-validation is positively associated with symbolic social identity performance.
- **H4:** Coping with the social identity gap and moral self-validation sequentially mediate the relationship between perceived social identity lock-in and symbolic social identity performance.
- **H5:** Perceived upward mobility moderates the relationship between perceived social identity lock-in and coping, such that the relationship is weaker when perceived upward mobility is high.
- **H6:** Community belonging moderates the relationship between moral self-validation and symbolic social identity performance, such that the relationship is weaker when community belonging is high.
- **H7:** Perceived social identity lock-in is positively associated with symbolic social identity performance.

These relationships are visualized in the proposed conceptual model (see Figure 1).

***Figure 1:** Conceptual Model displaying the relationship between Perceived Social Identity Lock-In and Symbolic Social Identity Performance amongst low-income consumers in luxury fashion consumption.*

This study adopts a sequential mixed-methods design to explore the psychological mechanisms behind symbolic consumption, integrating qualitative insight with empirical validation. The first phase, Study 1, will consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with approximately 20 to 30 low-income consumers. Interviews will explore participants' lived experiences with identity entrapment, emotional coping, moral self-validation, and symbolic consumption. Data will be analyzed thematically using NVivo, and findings from this phase will inform the refinement of constructs and language for the second study.

Study 2 will involve a cross-sectional survey of 350 to 500 low-income U.S. consumers recruited through Qualtrics Panels. Participants will be screened for income eligibility and recent symbolic or aspirational consumption engagement. The survey will include adapted and validated measures for all core constructs, including perceived social identity lock-in, coping with identity gap, moral self-validation, symbolic social identity performance, perceived upward mobility, and community belonging. The data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via SmartPLS to assess direct, mediating, and moderating effects as outlined in the conceptual model.

This study reframes symbolic luxury consumption among low-income consumers as a psychological and emotional strategy for identity repair rather than a misguided attempt at status signaling. It surfaces the internal narratives and coping mechanisms that drive consumption in

the face of exclusion and stigma (Henry, 2005; Hill, 2001). Such acts are not irrational or irresponsible but are often rooted in emotional resilience, the pursuit of dignity, recognition, and symbolic agency when traditional paths to upward mobility and belonging are restricted (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Sandikci & Ger, 2010). These insights challenge dominant marketing frameworks that emphasize rationality and status, offering instead a more humanized understanding of consumer behavior in the context of structural inequality.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the TCR tradition by introducing moral self-validation as a novel construct that explains how consumers emotionally justify aspirational consumption amid hardship (Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009; Mick & DeMoss, 1990). It also underscores perceived social identity lock-in as a key psychological vulnerability that shapes coping responses and symbolic behavior (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mick & Fournier, 1998). Together, these constructs illuminate the emotional dimensions of identity management and consumption, expanding current models that often overlook the complexity of low-income consumers' internal struggles and meaning-making processes (Henry, 2005).

These findings highlight the need for more empathetic and dignity-centered branding strategies for marketing practitioners. Marketers must move beyond superficial signals of exclusivity and instead affirm consumers' emotional strength, resilience, and identity transformation (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2010). Campaigns that validate the lived experiences of aspirational consumers through inclusive messaging, product accessibility, and authentic storytelling can build deeper emotional connections.

Ultimately, symbolic consumption in this context reflects not materialism but a creative and adaptive effort to reclaim identity and visibility (Belk, 1988; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). This work advances a more just and inclusive vision of consumer behavior and marketing theory by centering emotional well-being and structural awareness.

Keywords - Symbolic Consumption, Low-Income Consumers, Identity Lock-In, Moral Self-Validation, Transformative Consumer

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and/or Practitioners - This research informs marketing educators by offering a culturally relevant case to explore how emotional vulnerability and identity gaps influence consumption, expanding classroom discussions beyond traditional rational-choice models. It contributes to marketing theory by introducing the constructs of perceived social identity lock-in and moral self-validation, deepening our understanding of symbolic consumption as a psychologically adaptive behavior. For practitioners, the study urges brands to adopt dignity-driven, inclusive messaging strategies that engage low-income aspirational consumers through emotional affirmation rather than status signaling.

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Track: Student Submissions

ID#: 1105

Raffe Studio, Inc. Repositioning to Meet the Evolving “Influencer” Industry

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Submission #1101

Abstract- Since 2001, the music business Raffe Studio, Inc. (formerly Raffe Reeds) has served music communities as a multifaceted bassoon corporation. Raffe Studio is nestled in the foothills of Alabama between Atlanta and Birmingham. The founder, Eryn Oft, began the organization to cultivate growth in local music communities through educational outreach, professional performances and the sale of music materials. In 2014, Raffe Studio realized a larger global need. The organization expanded the products and services available and increased social media marketing. As platforms have evolved, Raffe Studio has recognized a need to reposition the corporate marketing strategy to better serve the music community. By streamlining operations, Raffe Studio can address safety-privacy concerns and increase profit margins. As the brand chases a wider audience, the case follows the challenges of small business media marketing and the excitement of working in the music industry.

Track: Student Submissions

ID#: 1101

Geofencing in Tourism & Recreation: A Revolution in How Marketing-Centric Data is Collected & Employed?

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Abstract - This study aims to delve into, analyze, and ultimately divulge what geofencing technology is and decipher whether it is an effective tool to employ in making marketing decisions. Geofencing, a location-based service that triggers actions based on visitors' real-time location, has revolutionized tourism marketing, enhanced visitor experiences, and facilitated crowd management. Additionally, this research analyzes a study that was conducted with the purpose of proving the validity and accuracy of geofencing. This study compares primary data to data collected through Placer.AI, a geofencing platform, and how the findings from both collection methods are highly correlated.

Keywords - Geofencing, Marketing, Location-Based Service, Tourism, Recreation

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and/or Practitioners – Knowing where to target marketing efforts in a timely and accurate manner is perhaps the most critical piece of knowledge a marketer can possess. Using geofencing technology, a marketer in any field can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of obtaining and utilizing this all-important information. The study conducted in this case is targeted toward those in tourism and recreation. However, the principles discussed tend to be widely applicable.

Introduction

Integrating digital and geospatial technologies has significantly transformed tourism marketing, visitor tracking, and recreation planning. Among these advancements, geofencing—a location-based service that creates virtual boundaries to trigger location-specific actions—has emerged as a key tool for engaging tourists and enhancing recreational experiences. Geofencing's relevance to tourism and recreation stems from its ability to provide instant, location-specific information, improving visitor experience and enhancing marketing efforts. Despite these benefits, concerns surrounding data privacy and ethical considerations remain significant challenges, requiring robust policy frameworks to balance innovation with responsible data usage (Ho et al., 2020)

Literature Review

Studies have shown real-time location-based notifications significantly enhance consumer engagement and satisfaction (Bernritter et al., 2021). By leveraging geofencing, businesses can send timely discounts, alerts about nearby attractions, and personalized offers, ultimately increasing tourist spending and brand loyalty (Garcia, 2022).

Tourism operators increasingly use geofencing to segment customers based on their real-time movements and interactions. Several studies indicate that geofencing applications in the hospitality sector, including hotels and restaurants, improve customer engagement by offering

exclusive, location-based incentives that drive higher foot traffic (Albuquerque et al., 2020).

However, adopting geofencing in tourism and recreation does raise critical ethical concerns regarding data privacy and security. Collecting and storing visitor location data introduces risks related to data breaches and unauthorized tracking. Several studies emphasize the importance of establishing clear data policies and obtaining user consent before implementing geofencing technologies (Ho et al., 2020). Research indicates that while tourists generally appreciate the convenience of location-based services, they express concerns over how their data is used and shared (Zubcsek et al., 2017). Ethical discussions surrounding geofencing also extend to the potential for intrusive marketing practices, where excessive notifications may lead to visitor fatigue and reduced engagement (Taha, 2022).

Methodology

To test the validity and applications of geofencing in tourism and recreation, a 29-question intercept survey, a traditional method of data collection employed by marketers, was conducted and compared to geofencing data. The surveys had a mobile self-administration option via QR code, and a paper survey was also available and provided to and collected from participants by park officials at Cherokee Rock Village in Leesburg, Alabama.

Findings

Among the information collected in the intercept surveys was the visitor's age. The surveys revealed that over half of visitors were between 18 and 34. Data collected from geofencing the location revealed the same pattern. Education level, gender, and visiting reasons were also collected via the intercept survey. This information also appeared to be consistent with geofencing data.

Total visits (66,500), visit frequency (2.05), and average dwell time (292 minutes) are all easily collectible metrics through utilizing geofencing that would require time-consuming calculations following the collection of intercept surveys. Additionally, geofencing technology provides insights into where visitors come from and where they go before their visit. In the case of Cherokee Rock Village, most are coming from Walmart, Decks & Docks Restaurant, Little River Canyon, Waffle House, and Coosa Corner. Meanwhile, they are heading to Decks and Docks Restaurant, Little River Canyon, Walmart, Sonic, and Waffle House after leaving.

Geofencing also offers insight into when visitors are at their highest levels. As would be expected at an outdoor recreation spot, visitors slowly increase in the spring and peak in the summer.

Finally, geofencing data zip codes, but not specific locations to not violate individuals' privacy, can be seen. The geofencing of Cherokee Rock Village revealed that 3,600 visitors in 2024 were from Centre, AL (35960), 2,500 visitors were from Collinsville, AL (35961), and 1,800 were from Leesburg, AL (35983), where Cherokee Rock Village is located.

Discussion

All the above data could hypothetically be collected by hand through methods such as intercept surveys. However, significant time would be required to approach anywhere near the depth of what geofencing reveals by the click of a few buttons. So, for marketers who need in-depth information to make accurate and informed decisions, there is no question that there is a case to be made for geofencing. This is not only true for those in places like Cherokee Rock Village, who utilize data to plan events and promote tourism and recreation opportunities, but also for marketers with any number of businesses in all shapes and sizes.

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Track: Student Submissions

ID#: 1102

Ideal Leadership and Marketing Strategies During Times of Transition

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Abstract – This study investigates the effects of transitional leadership in an organization on marketing strategies. The qualitative research, gathered through semi-structured interviews with four leaders at different stages of transition, highlights key themes such as the development of trust, adaptability, relationship-building, and the importance of gradual change. The results suggest that the most successful leaders in transition prioritize humility, respect the history of the firm, and focus on developing relationships with stakeholders. Further, these leaders focus marketing strategies on the core products or services of the organization to better understand customer preferences and create long-term relationships. The study indicates that successful transitions are marked by strategic, steady changes to marketing strategies that foster growth and innovation and maintain customer trust. This study offers meaningful insights into marketing strategies during periods of transition.

Track: Student Submissions
ID#: 1103

Overconsumption and The Role of the Marketer

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Abstract – Consumers value ethical brands and are willing to pay more and repurchase from companies that hold similar values. Specifically, overconsumption initiatives from companies have been shown to benefit brand image and can lead to increased sales due to increased trust, especially from younger generations, Gen Z and Millennials, due to their preference for CSR and ESG claims. For this research, a study was carried out with 111 participants to measure repurchase intentions given an impulse purchase from 3 company types: ethical, neutral, and unethical. From the series of questions and conditions conducted, it was shown that participants have a higher intention to repurchase a product from an ethical company, regardless of whether the product succeeded or failed, as compared to neutral and unethical companies.

Track: Student Submissions

ID#: 1104

Accelerating Growth: Exploring The Modern Marketing Strategies Fueling Formula 1's Growth in the United States and Lessons for Foreign Sports Engagement in American Markets

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Abstract - The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the modern marketing strategies driving the growth of international sports in foreign markets, with a focus on Formula 1's recent expansion in the United States. The research aims to develop potential future strategies for international sports organizations seeking to attract new audiences across geographic boundaries. To determine which marketing practices have been most effective for Formula 1, this study examines consumer sentiment toward long-form content strategies, specifically the Netflix series *Drive to Survive* and the summer film, *F1: The Movie*. Data were collected through a codebook analysis of online reviews, a survey measuring interest, knowledge, and fandom, and a focus group centered on audience reactions to the film. These methods were designed to identify which elements of Formula 1's marketing efforts most effectively generate interest and long-term fandom. Although the research is ongoing, preliminary findings from the initial survey and codebook analysis highlight the importance of storytelling and emotional connection in fostering engagement with Formula 1. Based on these early insights, international sports organizations seeking to enter new markets should focus on creating relatable, narrative-driven content that helps audiences build personal connections with athletes and the sport.

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