



2025 Spring Virtual Conference Proceedings

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Marketing Management Association

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Marketing Management Association, it is a pleasure to host the 2025 MMA Virtual Spring Conference. As we continue to advance MMA's commitment to promoting scholarly work in marketing and marketing education, I would like to express sincere appreciation to all individuals whose contributions have been instrumental in making this event a success.

We have been exceptionally impressed by the depth and diversity of submissions received this year. The range of research presented has been both thought-provoking and inspiring. Our gratitude extends to all authors of refereed and developmental papers, as well as those who generously shared their insights through special sessions and panel participation.

We are also deeply thankful for the dedication of our reviewers, whose names are acknowledged in these proceedings. Their thoughtful evaluations were essential to maintaining the high standard of our program. Special recognition is also due to Becky Hochradel and Beth Houran, our Proceedings Editors, for their meticulous work in compiling the conference materials.

We would like to extend our congratulations to the three finalists for the Best Paper Award. The selected winning paper and its authors are featured in the proceedings. Your research and participation have played a pivotal role in shaping this conference, and we look forward to your continued engagement in future events. Your work stands as a valuable contribution to the field and a source of inspiration to your peers.

Thank you once again to all participants, contributors, and organizers. It is our hope that this conference has offered meaningful opportunities for scholarly, professional growth, and collaborative networking within the marketing community. Please mark your calendars for the upcoming Fall 2025 MMA Conference, to be held in person from September 17–19 at the Embassy Suites by Hilton in Las Vegas, Nevada. We look forward to welcoming you there!

Dalila Salazar Morningstar, Conference Program Chair

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Dr. Jimmy Peltier

Professor of Marketing, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Dr. Peltier received his Ph.D. in Marketing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has nearly 40 years of business experience as a consultant, Research Director in an Advertising Agency, and as President of a marketing consulting firm. Dr. Peltier's research lies in developing buyer-seller sales relationships, digital marketing, advertising, artificial intelligence, health care, marketing education, among a host of other areas. Dr. Peltier has been faculty advisor for UW-Whitewater's AMA chapter since 1986 and has directed the UWW Chapter to 19 International Chapter of the Year Awards, including 12 years in a row from 2012-2024. With a prolific research career spanning and he is known for his unwavering commitment to sharing knowledge and advancing the field. He has been recognized for Lifetime Achievement Awards by the American Marketing Association, Direct Marketing Education Foundation, and the University Sales Center Alliance. Dr. Peltier is the only person at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater to have won all three of its Lifetime Achievement Awards for Teaching, Research and Service.

BEST PAPER AWARDS

WINNER

Supply Chain & Operations Management

AI AND SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT: USES AND CONCERNS

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Ekpen Owie, University of Findlay, ekpenowie@gmail.com

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained prominence in recent years with postulations about its applications and use cases. The technology is reshaping business models and various industries. This paper explores the significance of AI in transforming supply chain management (SCM) and its role in driving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction through accurate demand forecasting, risk management, inventory control optimization, and facilitating real-time visibility into supply chain processes. Concerns persist such as data quality, safety, and government regulation. Key propositions underscore the growing significance of AI in SCM and its potential to revolutionize various operational aspects for improved productivity and customer satisfaction.

Honorable Mention

Marketing Communications & Promotions

ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS IN IMC: A REFINED EXPLANATION THROUGH SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION THEORY

Jack Lesser, Metro State University, jack.lesser@metrostate.edu

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Marketing Communications & Promotions

PHYSICIAN'S NEW DRUG TRIAL INTENTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PHARMACEUTICAL FIRMS

Eddie Rhee, Stonehill College, erhee@stonehill.edu

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Consumer Behavior

SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY OF CUSTOMERS TOWARDS THE RETAIL STORE FORMATS—EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
MARKETING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OFFICERS	iii
CONFERENCE PROGRAM COMMITTEE.....	iii
CONFERENCE COMPETITIONS and AWARDS.....	iv
CONFERENCE PAPER REVIEWERS.....	vi
CONFERENCE SESSION CHAIRS	vii
CONFERENCE ATTENDEES	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
REFEREED PAPERS	1
DEVELOPMENTAL PAPERS	44
EXTENDED ABSTRACTS	69
POSITION PAPERS	91
PANEL POSITION PAPERS.....	118
SPECIAL SESSION POSITION PAPERS	127

PHYSICIAN'S NEW DRUG TRIAL INTENTION: IMPLICATION FOR PHARMACEUTICAL FIRMS

*Eddie Rhee, Stonehill College
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ABSTRACT

The pharmaceutical firm's detailing effort of a new drug plays an essential role in the success of the new drug launch. The study's objectives are to examine the variables and their relative influence on how soon the physicians intend to try the new drug and to target those doctors who show a higher chance of trying the new drug sooner. An empirical application of our model to a national online survey show that the firms should target physicians who have a larger number of patients with the disease, are aware of competing drugs, believe the new drug offers a modest benefit over their existing drugs, and are willing to try a new therapy if their patients request it, when the drug has a handsfree applicator, and when the doctors believe the new drug improves 50% of the patient's condition in a day. This study fills the gap in literature and potentially provides pharmaceutical firms with a customer-tailored detailing strategy.

INTRODUCTION

New drug products today are the key to survival in the pharmaceutical industry. However, the new product development process in the pharmaceutical industry happens to bear the riskiest and most expensive undertakings because of the considerable research and development costs involved. Consequently, the pharmaceutical firms' detailing effort of a new drug plays an essential role in the success of the new drug product (Campo et al., 2005). Anecdotal evidence suggests that over 70% of branded drug sales are attributed to detailing effort with digital marketing and speaker program attributing to remaining sales.

As the new drug comes out in the market, physicians first decide to try it for the treatment and then adopt it as a standard part of the treatment. In encouraging the doctor's new drug trial, the pharmaceutical firm's effort requires scheduling a meeting with potential prescribers, describing the benefits and side effects of the drug, and leaving behind free samples for patients to promote the drug. The cost of single detailing and sampling effort ranges from \$100 to \$250, and with each pharmaceutical sales rep typically scheduling at least five physician meetings per workday, the costs quickly add up to become the biggest investment companies make to market their drug (Yi and Kim, 2016). On top of that, the pharmaceutical firms should spend their marketing budget to promote the doctors' adoption of the new drug as a standard part of the treatment. For this reason, firms devote much of their resources to understand what variables influence the physicians' new drug trial stage and their adoption stage to maximize detailing effectiveness in each step while curbing unwanted investments.

The study's objectives are to examine the variables and their relative influence on the physicians' new drug trial intention and target the doctors who show a higher chance of trying the new drug sooner than later. The paper describes a national physician survey data, discusses the hypotheses on how the variables in this data would be related to the new drug trial intention, discusses an estimation model for the relationship, and tests the hypotheses. It further shows the forecast of a chance of trying the new drug. Then the paper discusses the managerial implications for the pharmaceutical firms' detailing efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature examined the trial of new consumer goods, but relatively fewer prior studies discussed the physicians' new drug trial. Lilien et al. (1981) find that marketing variables such as detailing and word-of-mouth affect new drug trials and repeat and forecast the rate of sales for a new drug. Hahn et al. (1994) also find that pharmaceutical firm's communication activities and word-of-mouth are effective on a new drug trial, and they forecast aggregate sales of a new drug. Gonul et al. (2001) find that pharmaceutical firms' promotional efforts such as detailing and sampling provide an informative effect on physicians' drug adoption. Kamakura et al. (2004) study a model that

considers the timing of past purchases across multiple product categories and predicts the physicians most likely to purchase a new drug and when this adoption may occur. Liu and Gupta (2012) find that targeted detailing and journal advertising positively influence individual physicians' adoption of the new drug. In addition, they find that the patient request, social contagion, and prescription volume increase the chance of adopting a new drug early. Chintagunta et al. (2012) discuss that as physicians become informed with detailing activity, their new drug adoption is hastened. Lubloy (2014) discusses that the doctor's prescription volume, professional and social interactions, the marketing efforts of pharmaceutical companies are more inclined to try the new drugs early. Iyengar et al. (2015) find peer influence in a new drug trial and repeat, and that the degree of such influence varies across stages. They study the new drug trial and repeat, but they focus on the social contagion effect. Stern and Wright (2016) find that the doctors who adopt a new drug in its first year on the market and innovators tend to be heavier category prescribers.

The literature in the physicians' trial of the new drug addresses the importance of the detailing and sampling, but prior research rarely studies the variables and their relationship with the new drug trial in a systematic way. Given the pharmaceutical firms' marketing effort and the amount of marketing budget for the success of the new drug launch, understanding the relative influence of the variables on the doctors' new drug trial in a systematic way would offer important and differing managerial implications for the pharmaceutical firms' detailing strategy.

PHYSICIAN SURVEY DATA

A national online survey of physicians was conducted on February 15th through February 24th, 2014, about a new topical drug. The new topical drug introduced to the respondents was a prescription drug with better efficacy and safety profile compared to the leading drug. The survey collected a total of 401 completed questionnaires. The name of the new drug and the specifics about the disease it could treat were kept confidential per our agreement with the physicians participating in this research.

The survey first measured the doctors' *individual differences* by their specialty (family practice, internal medicine, urologist, other), type of practice (solo, small group, mid-size, large group, clinic, hospital), the total number of patients in a typical month, the number of patients treated for the disease in a typical month, their use of combination drugs (yes or no), the number of years in practice post residency, percentage of time spent in research, level of difficulty in diagnosis (7-point Likert scale: Not Difficult at All – Extremely Difficult), awareness of competing drugs (the total number of drug therapies aware of), and the number of patients treated with OTC (Over-the-Counter) drugs. It then measured the *situations in the treatment of the disease* that included the patient preference for a drug, patient's low level of awareness and knowledge about their medical condition, the small amount of scientific data available on the performance of the current treatments, and the low degree of differentiation between drug choices. These items were measured by 7-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The survey then explained the details about the new topical drug and measured the *physicians' attitude* regarding the new drug therapy that included their attitude about the degree of unmet need in the treatment, the amount of benefit over the existing drugs, and the amount of dramatic improvement over existing treatment. These items were measured by 7-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. It also measured the *physicians' perception* about the new drug attributes that included their perception about the new drug's mode of application, i.e., hands-free application, patients' quick improvement, and the scent of the new topical drug.

The geographical locations of the physicians were evenly distributed across the country. Twenty-six percent of the physician responses were collected from the Northeast, twenty-eight percent from the South, thirty-one percent from Midwest, and fifteen percent from the West.

Finally, the new drug trial intention was measured by how soon the physicians would intend to try the new drug: within 1 month, 1 – 3 months, 4 – 6 months, 7 – 11 months, 1 – 2 years, and in more than 2 years.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

We assume that the physician's new drug trial intention depends on the attractiveness of the new drug and define the attractiveness of the drug to the physician h as $U_{T(h)}$. We assume that the physician's intention to try the new drug within 1 month ($Y_{T(h)} = 1$) if $U_{T(h)} \leq \mu_{T1}$, in 1 to 3 months ($Y_{T(h)} = 2$) if $\mu_{T1} < U_{T(h)} \leq \mu_{T2}$, in 4 to 6 months ($Y_{T(h)} = 3$) if $\mu_{T2} < U_{T(h)} \leq \mu_{T3}$, in 7 to 11 months ($Y_{T(h)} = 4$) if $\mu_{T3} < U_{T(h)} \leq \mu_{T4}$, in 1 to 2 years ($Y_{T(h)} = 5$) if $\mu_{T4} < U_{T(h)} \leq \mu_{T5}$, and in more than 2 years ($Y_{T(h)} = 6$) if $\mu_{T4} < U_{T(h)}$, where μ_{T1} , μ_{T2} , μ_{T3} , μ_{T4} , μ_{T5} are the threshold values estimated by the system. Hence, $U_{T(h)}$ is a latent variable that drives the drug trial intention of the physician.

$$U_{T(h)} = \alpha_0 + [\alpha_1 \text{Specialty}_{(h)} + \alpha_2 \text{PatVol1}_{(h)} + \alpha_3 \text{PatVol2}_{(h)} + \alpha_4 \text{ComboDrug}_{(h)}]$$

$$\begin{aligned}
& + \alpha_5 \text{YrsPractice}_{(h)} + \alpha_6 \text{TimeResearch}_{(h)} + \alpha_7 \text{DiffDiagnosis}_{(h)} + \alpha_8 \text{AwareDrugs}_{(h)}] \\
& + [\alpha_9 \text{PatPref}_{(h)} + \alpha_{10} \text{LowAware}_{(h)} + \alpha_{11} \text{ScienceData}_{(h)} + \alpha_{12} \text{NoDiffDrugs}_{(h)}] + [\alpha_{13} \text{UnmetNeed}_{(h)} + \alpha_{14} \text{Benefit}_{(h)} \\
& + \alpha_{15} \text{Hesitant}_{(h)}] + [\alpha_{16} \text{Mode}_{(h)} + \alpha_{17} \text{QuickImprove}_{(h)} + \alpha_{18} \text{NoScent}_{(h)}] + \varepsilon_{T(h)}, \varepsilon_{T(h)} \sim N(0,1)
\end{aligned}$$

where we assume that the attractiveness of the new drug to the physician is related to the Control variables (that recognize individual differences), Situation variables, Attitude variables, and the Perception variables.

The *Control* variables for doctor’s individual differences include physician’s specialty (Specialty), total number of patients in a typical month (PatVol1), the number of patients for the disease in a typical month (PatVol2), the use of combination drugs (ComboDrug), the number of years in practice post residency (YrsPractice), percentage of time spent in research (TimeResearch), the level of difficulty in diagnosis (DiffDiagnosis), awareness of competing drugs (AwareDrugs).

The *Situation* variables include the patient preference for a drug (PatPref), the patient’s low level of awareness and knowledge about their medical condition (LowAware), the small amount of scientific data available on the performance of the current treatments (ScienceData), and the low degree of differentiation between drug choices (NoDiffDrugs).

The *Attitude* variables include the degree of unmet need (UnmetNeed), the amount of benefit (Benefit), and being hesitant (Hesitant).

The *Perception* variables include the new drug’s good mode of application (Mode), patients’ quick improvement (QuickImprove), and the absence of scent of the new drug (NoScent).

Table 1 shows the measurements in the survey for the independent variables. The variables that are highly correlated (i.e., correlation coefficient larger than 0.75) are excluded to avoid multi-collinearity.

Table 1. Independent Variables

Variables	Survey Measurement
Physician Characteristics	Specialty (1. Family Practice 2. Internal Medicine 3. Urology 4. Other)
	PatVol 1: Number of patients in a typical month
	PatVol 2: Number of patients in a typical month that are treated for the disease
	ComboDrug: Use of mix of drugs (1. Yes 2. No)
	YrsPractice: Number of years in practice post residency
	TimeResearch: Percentage of time devoted to research
	DiffDiagnosis: Level of difficulty in correct diagnosis (1=Not Difficult At All, 7=Extremely Difficult)
	AwareDrugs: Number of competing drugs aware of
Situation	PatPref: Patient prefers pone drug before doctor offers options
	LowAware: Patient less aware about the medical condition
	NoScienceData: Too little scientific data available on current treatments
	NoDiffDrugs: Little differentiation between drug choices
Attitude	UnmetNeed: There is unmet need in the treatment (1=Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)
	Benefit: The new treatment should have even a modest benefit (1=Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)
	Hesitant: Hesitant unless the new treatment provides dramatic improvement (1=Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree)

HYPOTHESES

It is important for the pharmaceutical companies to encourage the doctors to try the new drug earlier than later. Hence, understanding how the variables are related to how soon the doctors intend to try the new drug would offer marketing implications for the pharmaceutical firms’ detailing effort. The hypotheses for the relationship are organized by three categories: general situations doctors are faced with in the treatment of the disease, doctor’s attitude about the new drug therapy in general, and more specifically the doctor’s perception about the new drug attributes.

General Situations in the Treatment of Disease

Hypothesis 5.1: When the patients prefer one drug over another before the doctors have a chance to explain different options, the doctors would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. Coscelli (2000) show that the patient's habit, i.e., preference to an old drug, contributes to doctor's persistence. Pareek et al. (2019) also shows that patients' drug requests have a significant effect on physicians' prescription decisions and patients can be consistent with physicians in choosing a drug. Hence, when the patients prefer a drug a priori, the doctors would intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

Hypothesis 5.2: On the other hand, when the patients are less aware and less informed about their medical condition, doctors would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. This is an opposite situation to the prior hypothesis. When the patients are less aware and less informed about their medical condition, they would not prefer a drug so the doctors would intend to try the new drug sooner than later.

Hypothesis 5.3: When there is too little scientific data on the relative performance of the current treatments, doctors would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. Serra-Sastre and McGuire (2013) find that accumulated scientific evidence has a strongly significant positive impact on the drug's diffusion. Vakratsas and Wang (2024) also show that scientific evidence can influence trial prescriptions through all stages of its production process due to the need for prescribing physicians to quickly build a comprehensive knowledge base to make appropriate and timely treatment decisions. Hence, when the scientific data is too little, the physicians would intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

Hypothesis 5.4: When there is little differentiation between drug choices, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. As Vakratsas and Wang (2024) finds, when there is little difference between the drugs, the physicians would have hard time building a comprehensive knowledge base to make appropriate and timely treatment decisions. Hence, when there is little differentiation between drug choices, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner

Doctor's Attitude about the New Drug Therapy in General

Hypothesis 5.5: When doctors think there is unmet need in the treatment, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. When the physicians see there are needs unmet by the current drug they are using, they would want to know how the new drug works and hence would intend to try the new drug sooner than later.

Hypothesis 5.6: When doctors think the new drug offers even modest benefit over what they already have, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. Zhu et al. (2012) show that providing drug effectiveness cues can increase perceived product efficacy and hence may increase initial purchase. Chan et al. (2013) also finds that the drug effectiveness positively impacts the prescription decision of a risk-averse physician.

Hypothesis 5.7: When doctors believe the new drug should provide a dramatic improvement over existing treatment, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. Chan et al (2013) find drug effectiveness positively impacts the prescription decision of a risk-averse physician but when the physicians believe the new drug should provide a dramatic improvement, which is a very risk-averse case, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

Doctor's Perception about the New Drug Attributes

Hypothesis 5.8: When doctors think the new drug has a good mode of application, i.e., hand-free application, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. When the physicians have a good perception about the drug's delivery method, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later.

Hypothesis 5.9: When doctors perceive that many patients could get better quickly with the new drug, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. Chintagunta et al. (2012) finds that the doctors hasten drug adoption when they are informed about the efficacy of the new drug. Hence, when doctors perceive that their patients could get better quickly, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later.

Hypothesis 5.10: When doctors perceive the new drug has no scent, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. The patients would like a good scent of a topical drug so when the physicians perceive that the new drug has no scent, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

ESTIMATION RESULTS

The estimation results tell interesting stories about the physician's new drug trial intention. The negative and significant slope coefficient implies that the doctors intend to try the new drug sooner than later. The positive and significant slope coefficient suggests that the doctors intend to delay the new drug trial.

Table 2. Estimation Result

Hypotheses		Estimate	Std Err
Control Variables			
Specialty		0.3333*	0.0816
Patient Vol in a Typical Month		0.0002	0.0009
Patient Vol for Disease in a Typical Month		-0.0171*	0.0045
Combination Drugs		0.2059	0.2710
Years of Practice		-0.0068	0.0194
Percentage of Time for Research		0.0008	0.0293
Difficulty in Diagnosis		0.0649	0.0950
Number of Competing Drugs Aware of		-0.1329*	0.0593
Situation Variables			
Patient Preference for a Drug	H 1: + Coscelli (2000) Pareek et al. (2019)	0.1673*	0.0682
Patient's Low Level of Awareness	H 2: - H 3: +	-0.0389	0.0929
Little Scientific Data on Current Treatments	Serra-Satre and McGuire (2013), Vakratsas and Wang (2024)	0.1304*	0.0597
Low Differentiation Among Drug Choices	H 4: + Vakratsas and Wang (2024)	0.0816	0.0998
Attitude Variables			
Degree of Unmet Need	H 5: -	-0.0355	0.1141
Amount of Benefit	H 6: - Zhu et al. (2012) Chan et al. (2013)	-0.1656*	0.0203
Being Hesitant	H 7: + Chan et al. (2013)	0.0014	0.0788
Perception Variables			
Good Mode of Application	H 8: -	-0.0237*	0.0107
Patient's Quick Improvement	H 9: - Chintagunta et al. (1012)	-0.0258*	0.0121
Absence of Scent	H 10: +	0.0394*	0.0171
Threshold Values			
μ_1		-2.9386	1.439
μ_2		-1.2971	1.417
μ_3		-0.1881	1.4231
μ_4		1.0707	1.457

* denotes $P < 0.05$.

The *Control* variables are included merely to control the effect of physician's individual differences and isolate the effect of other more important variables. Although it would not be meaningful to interpret these control variables, Specialty variable is significantly positively related to the physician's new drug trial intention. The more general practice doctors as opposed to specialized doctors are shown to try the new drug later than sooner. PatVol2 variable is significantly negatively related to the physician's new drug trial intention. The doctors with larger number of patients for the disease in a typical month are shown to try the new drug sooner than later. Finally, AwareDrugs

variable is significantly negatively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. The doctors who are more aware of the competing drugs are shown to try the new drug sooner than later.

Regarding the *Situation* variables, PatPref variable is significantly positively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.1. When the patients prefer one drug over another before the doctors have a chance to explain different options, the doctors tend to try the new drug later than sooner. LowAware variable is not significantly related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result does not support Hypothesis 5.2. ScienceData variable is significantly positively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.3. When there is too little scientific data on the relative performance of the current treatments, doctors would intend to try the new drug later than sooner. DiffDrugs variable is not significantly related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result does not support Hypothesis 5.4.

Regarding the *Attitude* variables, UnmetNeed variable is not significantly related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result does not support Hypothesis 5.5. Benefit variable is significantly negatively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.6. When doctors think the new drug offers even modest benefit over what they already have, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. Improve variable is not significantly related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result does not support Hypothesis 5.7.

Regarding *Perception* variables, Mode variable is significantly negatively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.8. When doctors think the new drug has a good mode of application, i.e., hand-free application, they would intend to try to new drug sooner than later. QuickImprove is significantly negatively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.9. When doctors perceive that many patients could get better quickly with the new drug, they would intend to try the new drug sooner than later. NoScent variable is significantly positively related to the physician’s new drug trial intention. This result supports Hypothesis 5.10. When doctors perceive the new drug has no scent, they would intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

In summary, the more general practice doctors as opposed to specialized doctors are shown to try the new drug later than sooner. The physicians with larger number of patients for the disease in a typical month, and who are more aware of the competing drug are shown to try the new drug sooner than later. When the doctors think the new drug offers even modest benefit over what they already have and it has a good mode of application, and when the doctors perceive that many patients could get better quickly, they intend to try the new drug sooner than later. However, when their patients prefer one drug over another and there is too little scientific data on the current treatments, and when the doctors perceive the new drug has no scent, they intend to try the new drug later than sooner.

FORECASTING AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Increasing the chance that the physicians try the new drug sooner is critical for the success of the new drug launch. As Srivastava and Bodkhe (2018) recommend in their study, there is a strong need for pharmaceutical firms to continue to find ways to be more effective with their marketing investment while curbing the unnecessary and unwanted expenditures to stay competitive. The results of the current study can be utilized to help firms fill these gaps. The estimation results of our empirical analysis provide important insights in correctly identifying physicians who are likely to try the new drug sooner than later. When the doctors think the new drug offers even modest benefit over what they already have and has a good mode of application, and when the doctors perceive that many patients could get better quickly, they intend to try the new drug sooner than later. These identifiers can be easily obtained by directly asking the physicians in their meetings or even asking the staff at the practice.

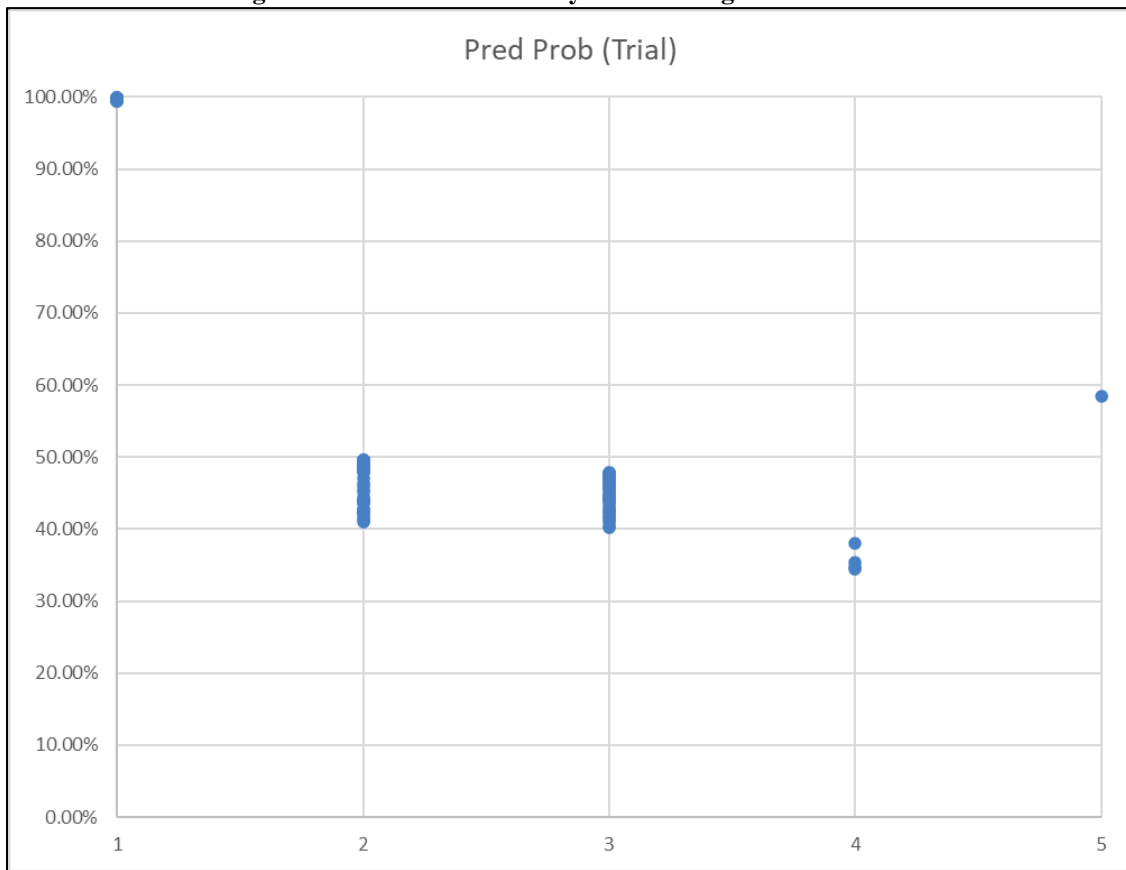
Table 3. Prediction Result

New Drug Trial		
Trial Intention	Percentage of Physicians	Average Predicted Probability
Within 1 Month	16.95%	99.73%
1 to 3 Months	38.14%	46.32%
4 to 6 Months	40.68%	45.08%
7 to 11 Months	3.39%	35.66%
1 to 2 Years	0.85%	58.49%

The pharmaceutical firms can also be more effective with their resources by targeting individual physicians that show a higher chance of trying the new drug sooner. How soon the doctors intend to try the new drug, and their probabilities can be computed using the results of our empirical analysis. For illustration, the current data has been

used for the prediction. Table 3 shows the predicted percentage of physicians and the average predicted probability to try the new drug. The percentage of physicians who intend to try the new drug within 1 month is predicted to be 16.95%, with a very high average predicted probability of 99.73%. The percentage of physicians to try the new drug in 1 to 3 months is 38.14%, with an average predicted probability of 46.32%. The percentage of physicians to try the new drug in 4 to 6 months is highest 40.68%, with an average predicted probability of 45.08%. These two groups are similar. Although the average predicted chance of trying the new drug in 1 to 2 years is 58.49%, the percentage of doctors in this category is tiny, 3.39%. The distribution of predicted probabilities is further shown as a scatter plot in Figure 1. The chance that the physicians try the new drug within 1 month is close to 100%, the probabilities of trying the new drug in 1 to 3 months are 40% - 50%, and the chances of trying the new drug in 4 to 6 months are 40% - 48%. These prediction results show that the pharmaceutical companies are recommended to focus their marketing effort on the doctors who are predicted to try the new drug within 1 month, in 1 to 3 months, and in 4 to 6 months since they show either a high percentage of doctors or highest predicted probability.

Figure 1. Predicted Probability of New Drug Trial Intention



1 = Within 1 Month, 2 = 1 to 3 Months, 3= 4 to 6 Months, 4 = 7 to 11 Months, 5 = 1 to 2 Years

CONCLUSION

The literature in the physicians' trial of the new drug investigates the importance of detailing, but prior research rarely studies the variables and their relationship with the new drug trial in a systematic way. This study fills the gap in the literature by systematically examining the variables that are related to the physicians' new drug trial intention by control variables, situation variables, attitude variables, and perception variables. The results offer interesting insights into the physicians' new drug trial intention. The study also provides managerial implications for the pharmaceutical firms about their detailing effort. It further provides predictions of how soon the individual doctors intend to try the new drug and their probabilities for individual targeting.

The study has several limitations, all of which provide avenues for future research. A future study with a new data set can include the physicians' new drug trial behavior. The current study is also limited to one type of drug, but a future study can be applied to other drugs.

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LEVERAGING THIRD PLACE AND IDENTITY IN THE METAVERSE

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical study explores consumer reluctance to adopt the metaverse, utilizing Third Place and Self-Identity theories as analytical frameworks. Through an examination of existing literature, key attributes of Third Places, namely neutrality, accessibility, and regularity, are identified, as are the complexities of self-identity in the metaverse, where issues of authenticity and privacy hinder meaningful user engagement. Findings suggest that the metaverse's failure to adequately fulfill the roles of a Third Place and support coherent self-identity expression contributes to consumer hesitancy. Recommendations for developers and marketers to potentially increase consumer acceptance of the metaverse, are suggested in the conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the metaverse has emerged as a frontier in digital interaction, combining elements of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and the internet to create immersive, persistent virtual environments. This market is predicted to increase at an annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2030) of almost 38% (Statista, 2024). There is not an agreed upon definition of the metaverse (Zho, Chen & Xiao-Ling, 2024). The metaverse is a virtual shared space that offers new opportunities for social interaction, commerce and entertainment. Tech giants and startups alike have heavily invested in its development, foreseeing a future where digital and physical realities blur (Schwab, 2016). Despite these technological advancements and substantial investments, consumer adoption of the metaverse has been slower than anticipated. The metaverse was initially expected to change the way we access the internet and, by extension, the world. But, by 2024, the metaverse did not come close to performing as promised (Enterprise Management 360, 2024). Consumers simply were not engaging in the technology as expected. Decentraland, a highly funded Metaverse product with an invested \$1.3 billion, had approximately 38 daily active users by October 2022 (Enterprise Management 360, 2024). This resistance raises questions about the psychological and social dynamics at play in the acceptance of new technologies.

Understanding why consumers are hesitant to fully embrace the metaverse requires an analysis of not only the technology itself but also the social and personal implications of its use. Theoretical frameworks such as Third Place theory (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1982) and Self-Identity theory (Swann, 1983) provide valuable lenses through which to examine these dynamics. Third Place theory proposes that for social spaces to be fulfilling, they must serve as neutral grounds where individuals can come together and form communities outside of their first (home) and second (work) places. Oldenburg's characteristics of Third Places include neutrality, accessibility, and accommodation of regular visitors suggesting a framework for evaluating the social fulfillment provided by virtual environments (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Self-Identity theory offers insights into the personal dimensions of metaverse engagement, focusing on how individuals perceive their identities within these spaces. According to this theory, people strive to maintain a self-concept that is consistent across different contexts and seek social environments that affirm this self-concept (Swann, 1983). This could translate into how personal identity is projected and perceived in an environment where physical cues are absent, and interactions are mediated by digital avatars. The reluctance to adopt the metaverse may be caused by its failure to adequately fulfill the roles expected of a Third Place and to provide a conducive space for authentic self-identity expression. This mismatch can lead to a lack of emotional engagement with the platform and a feeling of detachment that hinders regular use (Zhao, 2020). Moreover, the commercial motives often apparent in the design and operation of these platforms may further alienate users who seek genuine social connections rather than transaction-based interactions (DePaoli & Teli, 2017).

Furthermore, privacy concerns and the fear of identity manipulation are significant barriers. In digital realms, where personal data can be easily commodified, users may feel a lack of control over their personal and identity data, leading to mistrust and reluctance to engage deeply with these platforms (Bargh et al., 2002). These issues are

compounded by the metaverse's challenge in replicating the spontaneous, organic interactions that characterize successful Third Places in the physical world (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006). This manuscript aims to provide an analysis of why the metaverse has not been more widely embraced by consumers. Through a review of existing literature and theoretical analysis, it seeks to uncover the gaps between the promise of the metaverse as a new social frontier and the reality of its current consumer engagement. The goal is to offer insights and recommendations that can guide developers and marketers in reshaping the metaverse into a space that resonates with users, meeting their social and identity needs in meaningful ways. Addressing these concerns and aligning the design of metaverse environments more closely with the needs identified through Third Place and Self-Identity theories could enhance user acceptance and integration of the metaverse into everyday life, fulfilling its promise as a revolutionary digital space.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Third Place theory offers a useful framework for analyzing why the metaverse might not be fully embraced by consumers. According to Oldenburg and Brissett (1982), Third Places are essential for community life, serving as anchors of community life and facilitating and fostering broader, more creative interaction (Rosenbaum, Ward, Walker & Ostrom, 2017). These environments are characterized by their neutrality, accessibility, regularity, and support for playful interactions among regulars (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982, Laing & Royle, 2012). The metaverse, designed to be an immersive digital environment, struggles with these characteristics. Neutrality, a key component, is often compromised in the metaverse due to the heavy commercialization and presence of branded experiences, which can overshadow purely social interactions (DePaoli & Teli, 2017). Unlike traditional Third Places that are physically accessible and generally cost-free, access to the metaverse frequently requires hardware and continuous software updates, limiting accessibility (Schwab, 2016). Moreover, the spontaneous, organic interaction that typifies Third Places like cafes and parks is challenging to replicate in digital spaces where interactions may feel contrived or artificially moderated (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006).

The commercial motives apparent in the metaverse's design often alienate users who seek genuine social connections rather than transaction-based interactions. For instance, the introduction of digital goods and services for purchase within the metaverse can create an environment that feels more like a marketplace than a neutral ground for social interaction (Hollensen, 2020). These elements contribute to a lack of emotional engagement and a feeling of detachment that can deter regular use and hinder the development of community which is a fundamental aspect of Third Places.

Self-Identity theory provides another lens through which to understand consumer reluctance toward the metaverse. This theory emphasizes the importance of environments that support consistent and authentic self-representation and verification (Swann, 1983). In the metaverse, however, the flexibility to alter one's avatar and online persona might seem liberating but can also lead to identity dissonance where the virtual self diverges significantly from the real self. The capacity for users to represent themselves in entirely fantastical ways can undermine the authenticity of interactions and make it difficult for users to feel truly connected to their metaverse identities (Bargh et al., 2002). Additionally, privacy concerns related to data handling and identity management in the metaverse contribute to consumer mistrust. The fear that personal information might be misused or that online identities might be manipulated without consent discourages deep engagement with the platform (DePaoli & Teli, 2017). Research shows that when users perceive a digital space as safe and respectful of their identity and data, they are more likely to engage deeply and authentically with that space (Zhao, 2020, Best, 2021). The metaverse, however, often fails to provide this assurance, leaving potential users wary of fully investing themselves in such environments. Furthermore, the psychological distress caused by the disconnect between one's real self and virtual avatar can lead to what Turkle (1995) describes as "identity fatigue," a phenomenon that can cause users to retract from the digital space to seek authenticity and peace in the physical world.

Integrating insights from Third Place and Self-Identity theories highlights the metaverse's shortcomings in providing a space that can truly replicate the feeling of a Third Place or support a coherent and authentic self-identity. The metaverse's design, often driven by technological capabilities and commercial interests, fails to align with the essential human needs for neutral, accessible, and authentic social spaces where individuals can consistently express and verify their identities.

DISCUSSION

The analysis provided in the previous sections, grounded in Third Place and Self-Identity theories, sheds light on significant barriers to consumer adoption of the metaverse. This discussion aims to interpret these findings, understanding their broader implications for technology developers and marketers, and suggesting paths forward to enhance consumer acceptance.

The metaverse's challenge in replicating the essence of Third Places highlights a fundamental disconnect between consumer expectations and the current virtual environments offered. Third Places are traditionally characterized by their neutrality, accessibility, and their role as community hubs free from the influences of home and work—places where social status is leveled, and community life prevails (Oldenburg, 1989). However, the metaverse often presents a highly commercialized space, dominated by corporate interests that prioritize profit over genuine social interaction (DePaoli & Teli, 2017). This commercialization can alienate users seeking authentic connections, which are the bedrock of traditional Third Places.

To make the metaverse more appealing and effective as a Third Place, developers need to consider designing spaces that prioritize social interaction over commercial transactions. This could involve creating community-driven environments that encourage user participation in governance and design, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and belonging among users (Zhao, 2020). By reducing the emphasis on commercialization, and increasing the opportunities for spontaneous, unstructured interaction, the metaverse could better fulfill its potential as a modern Third Place.

The issue of self-identity congruence in the metaverse also presents a significant challenge. As Self-Identity theory suggests, individuals seek environments that affirm their self-concept and allow them to present themselves authentically (Swann, 1983). In the metaverse, the disconnect between a user's real-world identity and their virtual avatar can create psychological discomfort or identity dissonance, leading to less engagement (Bargh et al., 2002). Moreover, the lack of control over personal data and identity manipulation exacerbates these concerns, further deterring deep engagement.

Addressing these issues requires a dual approach: enhancing user control over their virtual identity and improving the authenticity of these identities. Platforms could offer more nuanced avatar customization tools that allow for representations that users feel truly reflect their real-world selves. Additionally, implementing robust privacy controls and transparent data usage policies can help build trust with users, making them more willing to engage deeply with the platform (DePaoli & Teli, 2017).

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of consumer reluctance toward the metaverse, rooted in Third Place and Self-Identity theories, yields several key implications for managers and developers involved in the design, marketing, and management of virtual environments. Addressing these theoretical insights effectively can lead to higher consumer acceptance and sustained engagement.

One of the significant barriers to the metaverse becoming a Third Place is its commercialization. Managers should consider creating distinct zones within the metaverse that are free from overt commercial influences. These areas could be designed to foster community interaction and social connection without the pressure of transactions or corporate branding. For example, virtual public parks or community centers where avatars can gather informally would mimic the neutral ground that Third Places traditionally provide.

To truly become a Third Place, the metaverse needs to be accessible to a broader demographic. This includes considering economic and technological barriers that potential users may face. Managers should advocate for lower-cost access points and develop platforms that require minimal technical specifications. Additionally, inclusivity should be addressed by ensuring that the platform supports multiple languages and is designed with accessibility features to accommodate users with disabilities.

Allowing users to create avatars that more closely resemble their real-world appearance or desired self-presentation can reduce identity dissonance and increase comfort in the virtual space. Managers should invest in advanced avatar customization tools that include diverse body types, facial features, clothing, and cultural symbols to accommodate a wide range of identities.

Concerns about privacy and data security are significant barriers to metaverse adoption. Managers must ensure that their platforms have strong privacy protections that are transparent and user-friendly. This includes giving users control over who can see their information and activities and how their data is used. Communicating these policies clearly and ensuring they are easily accessible will help build trust with users.

Encouraging users to create and share their own content not only fosters a sense of ownership and community but also allows for more genuine self-expression. Managers should provide tools and resources that make it easy for users to create environments, objects, and even games within the metaverse. This empowerment can significantly enhance the personal connection users feel with the space.

Marketing strategies should focus on highlighting the metaverse as a community space rather than just a technological marvel. Communications should emphasize the platform's ability to serve as a modern Third Place, where users can find relaxation, enjoyment, and social interaction. By designing parts of the metaverse to be free from commercial activities, managers can create a welcoming atmosphere where users feel at ease to socialize and engage without feeling the pressure of transactions (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Furthermore, making these spaces more accessible and inclusive addresses economic and technological barriers, broadening the user base and enhancing the community aspect of the metaverse (Schwab, 2016).

The implementation of enhanced avatar customization tools is another critical area. By allowing users to present themselves in ways that reflect their real-world identities or aspirations more accurately, the platform can reduce the identity dissonance that may deter engagement (Bargh et al., 2002). This customization should extend to embodying diverse physical features, cultural symbols, and accessible functionalities, thus supporting a broader range of identities and enhancing user comfort and connection with the platform.

Moreover, privacy controls are essential to build trust and encourage deeper user engagement. In the digital age, concerns about data privacy and security are paramount. Transparent, user-friendly privacy settings that allow users control over their data and how it is shared within the metaverse are crucial (DePaoli & Teli, 2017). These policies must be communicated clearly and made easily accessible to ensure users feel secure and informed.

Encouraging user-generated content also plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of ownership and community within the metaverse. By providing users with the tools and support to create their own content, managers can empower them, enhancing their engagement and commitment to the platform. This empowerment not only enriches the user experience but also cultivates a dynamic and creative community, driving the continuous evolution and relevance of the metaverse (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006).

Marketing the metaverse as a community space is essential. Positioning it as a modern Third Place highlights its potential as a site for relaxation and social interaction, aligning with the desires of potential users looking for more than just technological innovation. Educational initiatives play a crucial role here, helping new users overcome barriers to entry by demystifying the technology and showcasing the opportunities for personal expression and community involvement within the metaverse (Hollensen, 2020).

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Third Place and Self-Identity theories are presented as ways to understand possible consumer reluctance toward the metaverse. By incorporating these theories into consumer behavior pedagogy, educators can provide students with theories to use to understand consumer behavior in digital environments. This theoretical grounding helps students appreciate the psychological and social dynamics that influence consumer decisions.

Also discussed are practical implications for developers and marketers, such as creating inclusive and accessible virtual environments by balancing commercial and social interactions. These insights can be integrated into marketing education to teach students how to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios. This approach bridges the gap between theory and practice, making learning more relevant.

Finally, the focus on positioning the metaverse as a community space rather than just a technological marvel can result in marketing strategies that emphasize community building. Students can learn how to create marketing campaigns that foster a sense of belonging and engagement among consumers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The integration of Third Place and Self-Identity theories in this analysis not only provides insights into current consumer hesitancy but also opens avenues for future research. Subsequent studies could explore longitudinal data to assess how consumer attitudes towards the metaverse evolve as technology and societal norms change. Additionally, comparative studies between different virtual platforms could elucidate specific features or practices that effectively address the issues identified in this study. For developers, ongoing feedback loops with users can provide invaluable insights into their needs and expectations, guiding future enhancements. By embracing a user-centered design philosophy, the development of the metaverse can be more aligned with the principles identified as critical for fostering community and supporting authentic self-expression.

CONCLUSION

The analysis based on Third Place and Self-Identity theories provides actionable insights for managers and developers of virtual environments. These insights are critical in shaping a metaverse that not only attracts users but also retains them through meaningful engagement and satisfaction. Enhancing the Third Place characteristics of the metaverse is crucial. As Oldenburg & Brissett (1982) emphasize, Third Places are vital for social well-being, offering spaces where individuals can interact on neutral ground, free from the roles imposed by other social settings. Integrating the principles derived from Third Place and Self-Identity theories offers a comprehensive strategy for developing a metaverse that resonates with users. By addressing these foundational needs for neutral, accessible social spaces and supporting authentic self-expression, managers can significantly enhance the appeal and utility of the metaverse. These efforts will not only drive adoption but also foster a vibrant, engaged community that can sustain and evolve with the platform, ensuring its long-term success and relevance in the digital ecosystem.

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AI AND SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT: USES AND CONCERNS

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained prominence in recent years with postulations about its applications and use cases. The technology is reshaping business models and various industries. This paper explores the significance of AI in transforming supply chain management (SCM) and its role in driving operational efficiency and customer satisfaction through accurate demand forecasting, risk management, inventory control optimization, and facilitating real-time visibility into supply chain processes. Concerns persist such as data quality, safety, and government regulation. Key propositions underscore the growing significance of AI in SCM and its potential to revolutionize various operational aspects for improved productivity and customer satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Supply chains play a significant role in society in the flow of goods and services and economic development. Supply chain management (SCM) involves coordination and cooperation among firms from suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers, among others to create value for customers (Foster et al., 2019; Wisner et al. 2023). SCM is the centralized administration of the flow of goods and services, and it encompasses all operations that convert raw materials into commodity products (Hayes, 2022). SCM facilitates the collaboration and integration of key players from the upstream to the downstream and is vital for effective and efficient value creation for stakeholders. It entails a range of interconnected operations such as procurement, manufacturing, marketing, and logistics, all aimed at efficiently and cost-effectively providing products or services. The crucial importance of supply chain management within modern companies stems from its capacity to improve operational efficiency, lower costs, and increase customer satisfaction.

In today's competitive and digitally driven corporate environment, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in supply chain management has become increasingly crucial. According to a study, 37% of organizations, including supply chain firms, are already seeing the benefits of AI solutions (Roller, 2023). AI will also contribute \$15.7 trillion to the global economy (Jovanovic, 2020). The future of AI in the supply chain looks bright, with the potential to reshape various operational aspects for innovation and efficiency. However, there are broader issues with the application of AI that must also be considered. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to outline and assess areas in the supply chain where AI can be implemented and has been leveraged to improve and increase productivity as well as the major concerns on the horizon. We conclude with ramifications and key considerations for research and practice.

AI-SCM APPLICATIONS

Data Analysis and Predictive Insights

AI can be used to evaluate massive amounts of data from a variety of sources (e.g., IoT sensors, historical data, market patterns) to provide real-time visibility into supply chain processes. It can also facilitate predictive analytics to forecast demand, optimize inventory levels, and detect future disruptions. According to Gartner, the world's leading research and advisory group, businesses that implement predictive supply chains experience the greatest returns on their investments (Zabolotnyy, n.d.). With the development of generative AI, which has a greater reach than traditional machine learning models, real-time prediction and analysis may be performed rather than relying on historical data to draw conclusions.

Big data analytics, for example, synchronize SCM in a distinct stream and enable enterprises to acquire, process, analyze, store, and communicate data about their operations (Oncioiu et al., 2019). Data analytics now provide access to an immense quantity of data relevant to a company's multiple sustainability traits. As a result, leading suppliers in

the environmental quality management space, such as EcoVadis and Intalex, have recently begun to offer AI solutions to generate actionable insights from these massive data sets, such as supplier selection and development based on sustainable development standards (Boute & Udenio, 2023). To increase visibility, predictive analytics can raise the confidence of shipping ETAs (Expected Time of Arrival), decrease network latency, safeguard profit margins, and shorten cycle times, as demonstrated by Apple and Amazon (Zabolotnyy, n.d.). AI-powered predictive analytics can assist corporations in identifying areas where customer service can be enhanced, hence improving overall client satisfaction (Admin, 2023).

Forecasting and Risk Management

AI can process massive volumes of data to establish patterns and forecast consequences light years ahead of what humans can do (Stühler, 2023). Simple delivery of a product depends on multiple factors like weather, power, human labor available, traffic, resource shortage, or other manufacturing delays. By examining historical data, customer patterns, and preferences, several businesses, including e-commerce, healthcare, and streaming providers, are utilizing AI for demand forecasting to optimize operations and improve customer satisfaction (Jain, 2023). AI effectively anticipates future challenges and prescribes contextualized solutions, allowing systems to relieve individuals of some of the burden of decision-making so that they may focus on more complex issues requiring direct involvement (Lebovitz et al, 2023). For example, Coca-Cola and Danone have been able to use AI systems to significantly improve forecasting accuracy, demand planning, and performance cycles. Forecasting accuracy improved by 6% and 5% for Coca-Cola and Danone respectively, and Coca-Cola gained a 10% improvement in overall efficiency (Imamudeen, 2025)

Global supply chains, despite the attendant benefits, continue to pose risks for stakeholders given the complexity and scope of transactions and resource flows. The capabilities of AI can help aggregate the numerous data points, historical events, and current trends to better predict issues in the supply chain and help key decision-makers develop timely response plans. Companies can use techniques such as Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs) to analyze and model risks in collaboration with their supply chain partners to increase visibility and resilience (Sølvsten, Meng, & Li, 2025). Other uses of these AI-directed technologies are for material quality, preventative maintenance, and risk management from supply to manufacturing to consumer provision. AI enables the proactive detection of areas where shortages may occur, due to a mix of geopolitical events and fluctuating commodity pricing, providing decision-makers with proactive and preventative insights into the supply chain (Dollar & Parrott, n.d.).

Warehouse Automation and Robotics

AI robotics implementation has accelerated the tasks performed by people in warehouses such as sorting, picking, packaging, and arranging goods, as well as order fulfillment operations. The availability of these robots around the clock can further reduce the demand for manual labor and boost productivity (How Artificial Intelligence Is Changing Warehouse Operations, 2023). As a result, warehouse automation powered by AI has converted traditional warehouses into efficient, high-tech distribution facilities capable of keeping up with the speed of fulfillment required in today's consumer market and helping to improve the customer experience (Muynck, 2023).

In warehouses, automation serves a variety of functions, including process improvement by automating repetitive tasks, worker safety enhancement by removing workers from hazardous positions, order accuracy and efficiency enhancement through SKU scanning and inventory tracking, and operational flexibility enhancement while lowering the risk of worker fatigue and injury (Warehouse Automation and Robotics, n.d.).

According to a Deloitte study, an AI-powered predictive maintenance program can reduce overall maintenance expenditures by up to 10% (Patil, 2024). In addition to the efficiencies that these technologies facilitate, safety is being enhanced through the reduction of the risks of workplace accidents (*How Artificial Intelligence Is Changing Warehouse Operations*, 2023).

Inventory Control

Inventory is a major cost driver in operations and supply chains. AI-driven inventory and management systems can evaluate customer behavior patterns and assist organizations in stocking the appropriate inventory, organizing stock, automating inventory fulfillment procedures, and optimizing inventory delivery by recommending the optimal routes (Edwin Lisowski, 2022). AI-enabled tools have the potential to change inventory management into a revenue generator by extracting efficiencies gained from deeper inventory data analysis, such as optimizing inventory levels more efficiently, using price and tracking data to move products to more valuable locations, or determining the most efficient method to manage free- and foreign-trade zones (Simons, 2023). AI-Powered Inventory Management can interact with existing ERP and BI systems to provide early warning for problem stock, allowing these issues to be

handled before they impact the bottom line (AI-Powered Inventory Management, n.d.). One significant advantage of AI-enhanced inventory management is that it provides greater insights, which can lead to more profitable marketing tactics. Target is currently investing in AI and machine learning to improve inventory positioning and the bottom line against the backdrop of excess inventory that impacted its financial performance (Garland, 2025).

AI can improve warehouse management by improving communication via cloud-based devices and optimizing logistical operations such as pallet counting and equipment allocation, resulting in reduced processing time and errors. Furthermore, AI can optimize inventory control, freeing up resources and budgets. It can also automate compensation calculations and performance updates, providing significant insights into employee performance (AI Inventory Management: 7 Ways Artificial Intelligence Can Enhance Inventory Management, 2023). However, AI and other automated data science tools can never completely replace decision-makers' analytical skills and personal knowledge of their own business enterprises (Hypersonix, n.d.). Therefore, decision-makers should augment the insights from AI with their knowledge and experiences.

AI in Sourcing of Materials

AI algorithms can analyze supplier data, such as past performance, quality ratings, and delivery times, to provide insights into the best suppliers for each raw material, allowing procurement teams to make more informed supplier selection decisions and reduce the risk of supply chain disruptions (Nanda et al, 2023). AI-powered dashboards advise professionals on recommended actions, such as analyzing potential hazards associated with certain commodities and suppliers or updating raw material and part prices. This technology enables companies to communicate quickly with their entire supply base, reducing negotiation timelines (Source to Pay, 2023).

AI systems can also help facilitate the sourcing and flow of quality raw materials for production efficiency. For example, Kraft Heinz developed a system to help with screening cucumbers and working with suppliers to ensure they meet specifications for high-quality pickles and achieved a 12% increase in production efficiency (Doering, 2025). In light of the attendant costs of quality, such AI systems can help to streamline quality assurance and minimize overall operational costs.

AI in Site Selection

Making informed judgments about where to locate manufacturing or distribution locations is critical for improving supply chain efficiency, lowering costs, and meeting consumer demand (Blick, n.d.). Location Intelligence (LI) software, including GIS smart maps, apps, and dashboards, enables users to manage, visualize, and analyze geospatial data, making it a vital tool for analysts and data experts to merge and investigate various forms of data while facilitating the sharing of location-based information with executives and decision-makers (Ikiz, 2023). AI in site selection assists in answering concerns such as which place is appropriate for the initiation, whether that location will help in marketing and business, how it will affect connections, and the benefits of selecting that location.

AI for Marketing Intelligence

AI for marketing intelligence is the application of artificial intelligence to improve marketing strategies such as customer segmentation, predictive analytics, chatbots, content generation, personalization, ad campaign optimization, sentiment analysis, and more, for data-driven decision-making and enhanced customer experiences. Autonomous Customer Experience Management (CEM) foresees a future in which artificial intelligence (AI) technologies manage and improve the complete customer journey, from initial contact to post-purchase assistance (Kumar et al, 2019). While these developments are encouraging, they are not without their own set of obstacles, such as the necessity for strong data management, ethical issues, and maintaining a smooth user experience. The research by Gacanic and Wagner (2019), highlighted some of the implementation challenges of autonomous customer experience management (CEM).

AI User Interfaces (AIUI) streamline complicated activities and increase the effectiveness of client interactions in the field of client Relationship Management (CRM). AI-powered user interfaces may aid communication tracking, data management, and predictive analytics, which can help organizations better nurture and keep their consumers. AIUI has aided Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tasks (Seranmadevi & Kumar, 2019). Artificial intelligence (AI) can help marketers with strategy and planning marketing efforts by assisting with segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP). Text mining and machine learning algorithms can be used in industries such as banking and finance, art marketing, retail, and tourism to identify valuable consumer categories (Verma et al., 2021).

Another area where AI adds enormous value is in the optimization of advertising efforts. AI can increase ROI by fine-tuning ad targeting, placement, and timing by evaluating massive volumes of data. Opinion analysis uses artificial intelligence to evaluate public opinion about a brand or product, allowing businesses to assess their reputation and

make required improvements. Some companies such as Henkel and Constellation Brands have been able to leverage AI accordingly. Henkel uses AI to evaluate promotions, and the impact and enhance ROI (Imamudeen, 2025) more effectively. Likewise, uses AI to improve the claim settlement process that typically requires countless manhours and redundant processes (Imamudeen, 2025).

Furthermore, AI is not confined to business-to-consumer (B2C) settings. In the field of business-to-business (B2B) marketing, AI may help with identifying ideal clients, speeding up lead generation, and tailoring communication techniques. A marketing analytics tool based on artificial intelligence may assess the compatibility of product design with consumer needs and the resulting customer satisfaction (Dekimpe, 2019). AI-powered marketing effectively automates data collecting and behavioral targeting to assist firms in meeting their objectives (Geysler, 2023).

AI for Benchmarking in Business Supply Chain Management (SCM)

Benchmarking is a valuable business process that allows a company to gather new beneficial business knowledge in a methodical manner, which can improve the quality of its decision-making (Amoako et al., 2021). Benchmarks are useful for evaluating various technical solutions within a Big Data and AI project as well as comparing new technological developments/products to competing ones (Berre et al., 2022). Artificial intelligence can be used to evaluate and improve supply chain performance by comparing industry standards and best practices, allowing organizations to improve efficiency, lower costs, and increase competitiveness.

KEY CHALLENGES

Data Quality

It can be quite easy for companies to be mostly dependent on technology, having successfully used it to achieve success over time. But these technologies like AI are as good as the data that shape them, and poor data can lead to inaccurate interpretations and conclusions, with highly consequential business decisions. Data quality has been identified as one of the major issues with leveraging AI in the supply chain (Eyo-Udo, 2024; Fosso Wamba et al., 2023). Companies are typically siloed, with functional areas and sequestered information that could be in the way of a unified data model (Pattnaik & Bruce, 2023). The result is a discrete view of key organization information and a lack of synergy, leading to redundancies and sub-optimal decision-making.

From a supply chain-wide view, the potential to access more data and improve efficiency is present. AI can be used to aggregate and analyze data to enhance the supply chain if the data is accurate. However, supply chain partners may not have the capacity to facilitate data unification (Zamani et al., 2023). In complex supply chains, this problem can be exacerbated leading to delays and inaccuracies in information flow that could cascade and impact value creation and delivery across key players in the upstream and downstream. Such inaccuracies can be quite costly for companies in managing supply chain processes and activities (Cannas et al., 2024). This challenge could discourage adoption as companies may not want a technology that would cost money and yet generate wrong conclusions.

Security

There are still many unknowns concerning the capability of AI and how it could replicate, with openings for external intrusion such as hacking. This situation could pose security vulnerabilities and other broader disruption issues for businesses in the supply chain. Company infrastructure can be infiltrated by hackers by manipulating AI-driven systems to fully take control, distort outputs, and capture sensitive information and IP that could put customers and other societal stakeholders at risk (Kunkle, 2024; Nozari et al., 2022). Cyberattacks are on the increase as companies embrace more technologies in their supply chains (Teophilo, 2025). Security and confidentiality become paramount (Culot, Podrecca, & Nassimbeni, 2024) and may discourage or slow down the adoption rate. Consumers have reservations about the use of AI (Byer, 2020), and such skepticism could be amplified by stories about the potential for hackers to collect sensitive information from companies in the supply chain that could include their data as well. Security and Privacy become central concerns in this regard.

The effects on society that followed the COVID-19 pandemic are an indication of what could happen when the systems of major players in the supply chain are attacked by bad actors and how the flow of basic necessities may be hampered. This aspect of cybersecurity is not something that will be resolved, at least in the short term. A recent report indicated that 77% of supply chain workers are concerned about cybersecurity risks and 42% of organizations are unclear about the response (Hexnode, 2025). There is still no silver bullet as to how to mitigate cybersecurity issues, with varied approaches. Key decision makers still do not have a clearly articulated approach to dealing with IT security and AI adding another layer to the conundrum.

Regulation

Top technology leaders have expressed concerns about the use and future of AI and have called for a more introspective approach and some regulations. Key players in the technology sector have been quite vocal about the dangers of AI (Whyman, 2023), and in a recent meeting with US lawmakers, some of them discussed the potential issues that could arise with unleashing the power of artificial intelligence without some regulations (Clayton, 2023). Such government regulations could impact how companies in the supply chain leverage their AI assets. Innovation could be stifled, with additional administrative costs that could impact competitiveness but, on the flip side, assure some level of safety. In the same vein, could companies also self-regulate to stay ahead of the curve and articulate what steps are being taken to address the concerns associated with AI as part of their operations and avoid some of the burdens of government regulations?

In the same vein, top executives across supply chain organizations are concerned about the regulatory uncertainty, and what the ramifications could be in the future if AI is embraced (Gep, 2024). That is, if companies commit so many investments into AI, in managing supply chain operations, in this unclear regulatory space, future regulations could have strangling effects and thus a concern. Further, regulations could vary from country to country, and for companies at the center of global supply chains, navigating the country-specific requirements could be a major headache. Customizing the technology to capture current classifications of products, ever-changing trade agreements, tariffs, and duties, and vetting parties to transactions, consistent with varied laws and regulations, is a challenge for companies (Galkin, 2024). In fact, in light of the current dynamic posture on tariffs, fair-trade arguments, and protection of local industries of the Trump administration, supply chain firms will increasingly have to be nimble to adapt.

IMPLICATIONS AND SUMMARY

Considering the aforementioned the use of AI in the supply chain is revolutionary and could help to usher in significant operational gains in the value creation processes. There are some implications for professional practice and research. From a research standpoint, there is more to be done to empirically advance AI in supply chain management and sustainability. Studies could be done to examine how data quality issues could be effectively addressed and the impact on accuracy. Likewise, the impact of AI on sustainability efforts in the supply chain with regard to social and environmental metrics. Most importantly, the development of a framework for the use of AI in the supply chain as well as a model for navigating potential regulatory issues may be instructive.

Nevertheless, stakeholders in the industry can leverage AI to aggregate and discrete data across the supply chain as part of a real-time dashboard to enhance decision-making in a highly dynamic and uncertain business environment. Such information generated can be used to optimize supply chain operations such as inventory levels, waste, and resource allocation, and predict failures and risks, with the appropriate response strategies. AI systems can also be used to enhance supply chain visibility and address sustainability issues. In summary, table 1 below highlights key applications that some major companies are using to enhance and optimize key activities and processes in their operations.

Table 1. Summary Use Cases

COMPANY	KEY ACTIVITIES/PROCESSES & AI TOOLS
AMAZON	Warehouse picking, packing, and sorting automation. <i>Kiva Robots (AI-driven AMRs)</i>
UPS	Delivery routing optimization <i>ORION (On-Road Integrated Optimization and Navigation)</i>
MAERSK	Real-time logistics tracking and optimization. <i>Captain Peter (AI-enabled reefer visibility assistant)</i>
PROCTER & GAMBLE	Warehouse optimization and resource allocation <i>AutoScheduler.AI</i>
LOWES	Forecasting, supply chain planning, and optimization <i>Blue Yonder Luminare Platform</i>

CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a crucial force in supply chain management, playing a

multidimensional role in data collecting and effective resource management, particularly raw commodities. AI will undoubtedly revolutionize supply chain management processes, and improve visibility, collaboration, integration, and efficiency. As noted in the preceding sections, key areas in planning, forecasting, and other logistics functions will be enhanced as a result of AI. However, there are potential issues that could prove to be a challenge in the use of AI in the supply chain. Such issues include the quality of data, security, privacy, and government regulations.

Despite these challenges, proactive steps could be taken to address them such as a systematic procedure to regularly cleanse and update training data for accuracy, developing an ethically grounded governance framework in collaboration with key supply chain partners that will ensure AI systems are developed within current and anticipated regulatory expectations. A sense of cautious optimism would not be unreasonable at this point. Nevertheless, effective stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and transparency could be significant in dealing with the attendant issues with the use of AI in the supply chain and driving sustainable value creation.

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ACHIEVING STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: THE EFFICACY OF THE NEW SHOES SIMULATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on how well students who participated in a commercial marketing simulation achieved the stated student learning objectives (SLO) as required by the syllabus. The study evaluated a total of four Principles of Marketing sections within the same school year. The analysis was made possible by a testing technique that required students to provide a self-learning assessment (SLA). The SLA's were analyzed to determine which students achieved each of the 4 SLO's stated in the syllabus, and were further analyzed to determine if any identifiable results correlated with the student's overall grade in the class. This focused analysis of how the New Shoes Simulation met the prescribed SLOs, while also delving into how performance varies across different student levels. The results of the analysis showed that each of the SLO's was subjectively achieved by the majority of students and minimal identified differences between the learning achieved by A, B, C, and D students.

INTRODUCTION

As a proponent of experiential learning, learning by doing (LBD) has dominated my delivery to all my classes since 2013. Actual projects that create opportunities for students to be involved in the community have included Learning by Doing (LBD) projects such as our Service Audit, Career Skills Showcase, Radio Ad Project, Non-Profit project, Registered Student Organization Project (RSO), and the Retail Shadow Day Project. These projects have been the focus of previously published research (Scholarship of Teaching) and conference presentations. The limitations of Covid 19 severely limited our ability to involve students in group projects on campus, much less send the students out into the community. The second factor that caused me to add simulations to the curriculum was that our testing results from the major field exam (MFT) showed our students lacked knowledge of basic marketing principles that might have been gained from a normal text and lecture class. It was theorized that adding a simulation into the curriculum might be a good way to holistically expose students to a more integrated activity that examined marketing in terms of getting the right product to the right place, at the right time, and the right price (PPTP). It was my expectation that students would adequately be exposed to the components of marketing: professional sales, paid advertising, and promotion with activities that caused students to use marketing research, initiate product development and have to make decisions with regard to budgets. In recent years, the integration of commercial simulations into educational settings has gained significant traction as an innovative teaching tool. Simulations offer dynamic, interactive experiences that provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical concepts in practical, real-world scenarios. These tools promise not only to enhance student engagement but also to promote deeper learning and skill development. However, despite their growing popularity, there is a need for empirical research to evaluate their effectiveness in meeting specific educational goals, such as achieving Student Learning Objectives (SLOs).

This research aims to examine the impact of a commercial simulation on student achievement of a class's defined SLOs. By aligning the simulation's activities with the course objectives, the study sought to determine whether students successfully meet these goals and how their performance aligns with their final grades. The study uses a subjective evaluation framework, which assesses whether each SLO was achieved for individual students, alongside an analysis of their overall academic performance. The findings aim to provide insights into the utility of simulations as pedagogical tools and their effectiveness in fostering student success in targeted learning outcomes.

With that in mind, it would be desirable to determine if the simulation resulted in student achievement of the stated student learning objectives (SLO). Further, this study analyzed the student achievement of the SLO's. One advantage of simulations over the LBD projects was that students could complete these remotely online as part of a hybrid class format and might build a better marketing foundation that would stick with them.

This study evaluates the achievement of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) in four sections over two semesters of the Principles of Marketing course that used the New Shoes (Interpretive) simulation. The analysis also examined

whether different students (Final Course Grade of A, B, C, or D) demonstrated varying levels of success in meeting the SLOs. Students were required, as part of their final exam, to reflect on their experience with the simulation, detailing both what they learned and providing a personal statement about their participation. These responses were then compared to the SLOs and assessed hermeneutically to determine whether the outcomes were achieved. The data collected was further analyzed to identify potential correlations between students' final grades and their performance in achieving the SLOs.

Context of the Study.

The primary objective of the course is to introduce students to the vital functions that marketing plays in the competitive business world. Successful completion of Principles of Marketing should enable one to:

- Understand the role of marketing within a business and within the marketplace
- Perform tasks within the typical marketing environment
- Understand the evolution of marketing and its importance in the global environment
- Work as a team to produce professional quality results

Students who had participated in the New Shoes Simulation as part of a Principles of Marketing classes at Schreiner University were required to answer the following question on a test without notes, internet, or neighbors: Discuss the value of the New Shoes Simulation. and what marketing concepts you learned.

Objective of the Research:

Evaluate the effectiveness of the New Shoes Simulation in meeting the course SLOs through a comprehensive analysis, including a comparative assessment based on student final grades (A, B, C, D). This comparison aims to determine whether higher-performing students excel more in a simulation-based learning environment compared to their peers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of New Shoes Simulation

“New Shoes provides a comprehensive, engaging learning experience for introductory marketing students. As participants manage their own simulated athletic shoe companies, they gain practical understanding of business strategy, marketing decision-making, and market competition. This interactive environment encourages collaboration and critical thinking and enhances students’ grasp of marketing concepts.” (Interpretive, n.d.)

Previous Research

There is no shortage of studies about use of simulations in the educational realm. Lohman, et.al. (March 2019) determined that online business simulations provided an authentic team-based learning which could improve learning outcomes. Arguably, the majority of research provided by our library database and Google Scholar showed the related studies of use of simulation to achieve outcomes was dominated by medical studies (clinical) and such areas as aeronautical training. Several studies did conclude that leadership competency skills could be enhanced with simulations (McPherson, et.al., 2017) (Drew, et.al. 1993)(Keys & Wolfe, 1990). as cited by Barbaroux, 2022. Salas,et.al. (2009) provided that simulation-based training could be implemented in such a way as to improve management education. Business simulations have proven to be powerful tools in education, offering substantial benefits in areas such as team collaboration, decision-making, and marketing strategy comprehension. Research suggests that simulations create environments where students can engage in realistic and immersive activities, facilitating active learning and practical application of theoretical knowledge.

In terms of team collaboration, business simulations often require students to work in groups to solve problems, make decisions, and achieve objectives. This collaborative setting mirrors workplace dynamics, encouraging the development of communication, negotiation, and conflict-resolution skills. According to Clarke (2009), simulations improve teamwork capabilities by providing structured yet flexible opportunities for students to practice and refine these skills in a low-risk environment.

Clarke's research (2009) underscores the value of simulations in creating authentic learning experiences that enhance collaboration and practical application. By engaging students in simulated business environments, they gain insights into the complexities of teamwork and decision-making, which are critical in professional settings. Clarke also notes challenges such as the need for instructor support and alignment with learning objectives, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful implementation to maximize outcomes.

Decision-making is another critical area enhanced by simulations. Participants are often tasked with analyzing complex scenarios, weighing various options, and making strategic choices under time constraints. Research by Faria et al. (2009) highlights that simulations help students develop critical thinking and decision-making abilities by exposing them to realistic business challenges where their choices have immediate and visible consequences.

Moreover, simulations are particularly effective in improving comprehension of marketing strategies. By engaging with simulated markets, students can test hypotheses, analyze consumer behavior, and observe the outcomes of their marketing decisions. Studies like those by Lean et al. (2006) indicated that these exercises enhance students' understanding of core business principles and foster the ability to apply them in practical contexts.

This study focused on examining the application of a specific simulation within a defined educational environment to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) of a particular course. By analyzing how well the simulation aligns with and supports these objectives, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the pedagogical value of simulations. The findings aim to highlight the potential of simulations to foster targeted learning outcomes while providing practical insights for educators seeking to implement similar tools in their classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the responses of forty-seven students who participated in the New Shoes Simulation as part of the Principles of Marketing class over a single year period as the data sources..

This study employs a combined methodology of narrative inquiry and hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry to analyze the achievement of course Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) through the use of a commercial simulation. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore individual student experiences and their personal narratives, providing rich qualitative data about how students engage with and perceive the simulation. Hermeneutic phenomenology complements this by focusing on the interpretation of these experiences, aiming to uncover the underlying meanings and connections to the SLOs.

To enhance the validity of the analysis, artificial intelligence software was used to assist in categorizing and evaluating student responses. The user-generated prompts were written to determine whether each student achieved the stated learning objectives. This approach combines the strengths of qualitative research with computational tools to process and interpret a substantial volume of data systematically.

This study incorporates core components of qualitative research design to ensure a robust and comprehensive analysis. The research paradigm is constructivist, emphasizing the subjective experiences of students and the meanings they construct through engagement with the simulation. The methodological approach integrates narrative and phenomenological strategies to capture both the lived experiences and the interpretive dimensions of student learning. This dual framework aligns with the study's goal of providing both descriptive and analytical insights into the educational impact of simulations.

FINDINGS

Overall Achievement of SLOs

Student Learning Objectives:

The primary objective of the course is to introduce students to the vital functions that marketing plays in the competitive business world. Successful completion of Principles of Marketing should enable one to:

- 1 Understand the role of marketing within a business and within the marketplace
- 2 Perform tasks within the typical marketing environment
- 3 Understand the evolution of marketing and its importance in the global environment
- 4 Work as a team to produce professional quality results

A total of 47 students answered the question – The students were not allowed to use notes, the internet or their neighbors to compose their answers. The students were instructed to write their answers in terms of what they learned, with the invitation to include research or personal views to add depth to their answers. There was no minimum or maximum word count required. They were not prompted to answer in terms of the SLO's – simply recall what you learned from participating in the New Shoes Simulation.

The Table 1 presents the evaluation of student responses (by the instructor) to the New Shoes Simulation in terms of their achievement of the course's Student Learning Objectives (SLOs).

Table 1. Student Responses by Instructor

Student	SLO A (Role of Marketing)	SLO B (Perform Tasks)	SLO C (Global)	SLO D (Teamwork)	Final Grade
Student 1	0	1	0	1	B
Student 2	1	1	1	1	B
Student 3	1	0	0	1	C
Student 4	1	1	0	1	B
Student 5	1	1	1	0	A
Student 6	1	0	0	0	B
Student 7	1	1	1	1	A
Student 8	1	1	1	0	B
Student 9	1	0	1	0	A
Student 10	1	1	1	0	B
Student 11	1	1	0	1	C
Student 12	1	1	1	0	A
Student 13	1	1	1	1	B
Student 14	1	1	0	1	B
Student 15	1	1	1	0	A
Student 16	1	1	1	1	A
Student 17	1	1	1	1	A
Student 18	1	0	1	1	A
Student 19	1	1	0	1	C
Student 20	1	1	1	1	A
Student 21	1	1	1	1	B
Student 22	1	1	0	1	A
Student 23	1	1	0	1	A
Student 24	0	0	0	1	A
Student 25	1	0	0	0	C
Student 26	0	0	0	0	C
Student 27	0	0	0	1	B
Student 28	0	0	0	1	C
Student 29	0	0	0	1	B
Student 30	0	1	0	0	A
Student 31	1	1	0	0	B
Student 32	1	1	1	1	C
Student 33	1	0	0	0	C
Student 34	1	0	1	1	C
Student 35	1	0	0	1	D
Student 36	1	1	0	1	B
Student 37	1	1	0	1	A

Student	SLO A (Role of Marketing)	SLO B (Perform Tasks)	SLO C (Global)	SLO D (Teamwork)	Final Grade
Student 38	1	1	0	0	B
Student 39	1	0	0	0	C
Student 40	1	1	0	1	C
Student 41	1	0	0	1	A
Student 42	0	0	0	1	C
Student 43	1	1	0	0	A
Student 44	1	0	0	0	B
Student 45	1	1	1	1	A
Student 46	1	1	0	0	B
Student 47	0	1	0	0	D
	38	29	17	29	
Achieve %	0.808511	0.617021	0.361702	0.617021	INSTR

To validate or compare my evaluations of the student answers, the following was entered into Scholar ChatGPT: Prompt:- If the student answer referred to any detail of the SLO - since they were simply writing their answers from memory - the SLO was considered to have been achieved. For example, if they mention the importance of marketing or the various roles of marketing in the business environment - SLO 1 would be a yes. If they mentioned the functions of marketing - not necessarily all but some - advertising, personal selling, promotion, publicity, public relations - then SLO 2 would be satisfied. For SLO 3 - if they mentioned the global markets or international business - it would be a yes. For SLO 4 if they mentioned teamwork or how they worked in teams - unless it specifically said the teams did not work well - SLO 4 would be a yes. Table 2 presents the AI results:

Table 2. AI Results

<i>Student</i>	<i>SLO A (Role of Marketing)</i>	<i>SLO B (Perform Tasks)</i>	<i>SLO C (Global)</i>	<i>SLO D (Teamwork)</i>	<i>Final Grade</i>
<i>Student 1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 4</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 5</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 6</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 7</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 8</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 9</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 10</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 12</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 13</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 14</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 15</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 16</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 17</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>

<i>Student</i>	<i>SLO A (Role of Marketing)</i>	<i>SLO B (Perform Tasks)</i>	<i>SLO C (Global)</i>	<i>SLO D (Teamwork)</i>	<i>Final Grade</i>
<i>Student 18</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 19</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 20</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 21</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 22</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 23</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 24</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 25</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 26</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 27</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 28</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 29</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 30</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 31</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 32</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 33</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 34</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 35</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>D</i>
<i>Student 36</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 37</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 38</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 39</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 40</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 41</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 42</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>Student 43</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 44</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 45</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Student 46</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Student 47</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>D</i>
	<i>38</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>31</i>	
<i>Achieve %</i>	<i>0.808511</i>	<i>0.723404</i>	<i>0.382979</i>	<i>0.659574</i>	<i>AI</i>
	<i>0.808511</i>	<i>0.617021</i>	<i>0.361702</i>	<i>0.617021</i>	<i>Instructor</i>

CONCLUSIONS

Considering that the simulation was simply one part of the overall curriculum of the Marketing classes, the lack of achievement of all the SLO's by a large percentage of students would not be a disqualifier for the efficacy of the simulation. Nor was there a predisposition as to what percentage of student achievement would prove the efficacy of the simulation to achieve the SLO's.

- 38/47 – 81% WERE DEEMED TO HAVE Satisfied SLO 1
- 29/47 – 62% WERE DEEMED TO HAVE Satisfied SLO 2
- 17/47 – 36% WERE DEEMED TO HAVE Satisfied SLO 3
- 29/47 – 62% WERE DEEMED TO HAVE Satisfied SLO 4

Conclusion of Data Analysis

The achievement percentage of SLO 1 justified the inclusion of the simulation in the Marketing sections. The analysis indicates that while certain SLOs (like A and C) align more closely with higher grades, others (such as SLO D) are achieved more universally regardless of overall academic performance. These findings suggest that the simulation effectively addresses a range of learning outcomes, but individual achievements within those outcomes may vary by student proficiency. Further research could explore the specific aspects of the simulation that foster success in different SLOs.

Observations and Correlations Identified

- 1 Performance Patterns by Grade: A-grade students showed consistent achievement across multiple SLOs, especially SLO A (Role of Marketing) and SLO C (Marketing Evolution). This suggests a potential alignment between higher grades and comprehension of marketing concepts.
- 2 Teamwork Contributions (SLO D): Students with lower grades (C or below) frequently excelled in SLO D, suggesting that teamwork abilities may not directly correlate with overall academic success.
- 3 Variability in Task Performance (SLO B): Students who performed well on SLO B (Perform Tasks) were distributed across all grade levels, indicating task performance alone may not predict final grades.
- 4 Marketing Evolution (SLO C): Higher-achieving students tended to perform better on SLO C. This could point to the complexity of marketing evolution concepts being a differentiator among students.

While completing the data collection for this research project, the thought of using AI to possibly gain additional perspectives arose. AI's conclusions and patterns provided greater detail and insight than was achieved by the author of this research.

AI Evaluation

The percentages of students who achieved each SLO are as follows:

- SLO 1 (Role of Marketing): 80.85%
- SLO 2 (Perform Tasks): 72.34%
- SLO 3 (Global): 38.30%
- SLO 4 (Teamwork): 65.96%

Prompt: What conclusions can you draw from these % of achievements by the A,B,C and D students?

Response: *From the percentage of SLO achievements across grades (A, B, C, D), we can draw the following conclusions:*

1. **Students with Grade A:**
 - These students have the highest achievement rates for all SLOs except "Teamwork" (SLO 4), where they slightly lag behind Grade C students.
 - They demonstrate strong overall comprehension and application of marketing concepts, global awareness, and teamwork, suggesting these are the most well-rounded performers.
2. **Students with Grade B:**
 - Grade B students exhibit solid performance in "Role of Marketing" (SLO 1) and "Perform Tasks" (SLO 2), nearly matching Grade A levels.
 - Their performance in "Global" (SLO 3) is moderate, indicating some struggle in applying marketing concepts in an international context.
 - Their teamwork abilities (SLO 4) align closely with Grade A but are slightly lower.
3. **Students with Grade C:**
 - These students have noticeably lower achievements in all SLOs except for "Teamwork" (SLO 4), where they outperform Grade A and B students.
 - The low "Global" (SLO 3) and "Perform Tasks" (SLO 2) scores indicate a need for greater focus on global markets and functional marketing tasks.
4. **Students with Grade D:**

- *These students show significant struggles overall, with the lowest performance in most SLOs except "Perform Tasks" (SLO 2), where they achieve full success.*
- *They have no achievement in "Global" (SLO 3) or "Teamwork" (SLO 4), suggesting issues with collaboration and understanding international marketing dynamics.*

Key Patterns include

- **Global Concepts (SLO 3):** *Achievement is strongly correlated with higher grades. Students with lower grades struggle significantly in this area.*
- **Teamwork (SLO 4):** *Interestingly, Grade C students outperform others, including Grade A, perhaps due to compensatory teamwork focus when other skills are weaker.*
- **Core Marketing Knowledge (SLO 1 & SLO 2):** *Students with Grades A and B maintain strong performance, while Grade D students lag the most.*

This analysis suggests targeted interventions for lower-performing students could focus on global marketing concepts and practical application tasks to boost overall success rates. For Grade C students, leveraging their teamwork strengths could help support improvements in other areas.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The results of analysis justified the use of the simulation for the Marketing classes. The AI analysis was particularly helpful in identifying Key Patterns by final grade. Some were not surprising, the 1 D student only achieved one of the SLO's, but the high achievement of SLO 4 by C students was interesting. Basic understanding of core marketing knowledge SLO 1 and 2 were achieved more consistently by A and B students, as would be expected.

The review in detail of the student answers did identify the need for early instruction and intervention with individuals who were feeling lost or confused. Specific coverage of International Marketing should be included in the curriculum to improve the achievement of SLO 3. The other project-based learning included in the Marketing classes (now that we are back to a full 15-week term) will likely improved SLO 4 (Teamwork). SLO 2 was achieved at 62% by my estimation (72% AI) but is adequately discussed in the Lecture part of the class. Use of AI did not eliminate the need for human analysis, rather enhanced the process and cause the researcher to think more deeply about what correlations and conclusions that could be drawn.

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FROM COLLABORATION TO COMPREHENSION: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF REFLECTION ESSAYS ON MARKETING STUDENTS' LEARNING OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how reflective essays in group-based marketing projects affect individual accountability and comprehension. The research addresses common challenges in group work: fragmented learning and unequal participation. Through self-assessment surveys and performance evaluations, we compared two student cohorts—one with reflective essays and one without. Results showed modest improvements in students' perceived overall understanding, with significant gains in distribution/place comprehension, but limited impact on other project components. The findings highlight both the potential and limitations of reflective practices in collaborative learning settings.

INTRODUCTION

Group work is a common and valuable pedagogical tool in higher education, particularly in business and marketing courses. It offers students the opportunity to collaborate, share ideas, and develop teamwork skills that are crucial in the professional world (Curşeu et al., 2018).

Our Principles of Marketing course is designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of marketing concepts, strategies, and their practical applications in the business world. A key component of this course is the group project, where students collaborate to develop a marketing plan for a new business venture. This project serves as a hands-on opportunity for students to apply the theoretical knowledge gained throughout the semester to a real-world scenario.

Group projects often present challenges that can compromise individual educational development. Task division among team members frequently leads to partial learning, where students deeply engage with only a portion of the project, resulting in fragmented knowledge and a lack of understanding of the full scope of the material (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008). This division, coupled with varying levels of engagement, can create significant knowledge gaps in students' comprehension of key concepts (Chang & Brickman, 2018). Furthermore, group grades may fail to accurately reflect individual contributions, as a team's high grade might result from the exceptional efforts of one or two members, masking limited participation or understanding by others (Crescendo, 2024; Chang & Brickman, 2018).

Educators have implemented various strategies to enhance individual accountability and learning within group projects. One approach is incorporating individual assessments to distinguish personal contributions, providing a clearer picture of each student's understanding and engagement (Lejk & Wyvill, 1996). This strategy addresses partial learning by ensuring students are accountable for their knowledge of the entire project. Similarly, comprehensive final presentations, where each team member demonstrates knowledge of all aspects of the project, promote deeper learning and concept integration by requiring students to articulate their understanding (Millis & Cottell, 1998).

Peer evaluations offer another effective tool for fostering accountability, encouraging students to reflect on their contributions and those of their peers. By surfacing imbalances in group efforts, peer evaluations enhance responsibility and engagement, potentially improving learning outcomes (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Process-based grading complements these methods by evaluating participation throughout the project, emphasizing continuous contribution and accountability. Formative peer evaluations, as highlighted by Gueldenzoph and May (2002), help maintain consistent involvement and reduce the risk of unequal participation through regular feedback.

Finally, role rotation addresses knowledge gaps and fosters collaboration by requiring students to periodically switch roles. This strategy promotes diverse learning experiences, skill development, and innovation while preventing burnout and dependency on specific individuals (Jiang, 2017; Wise & Chiu, 2014; Zhong & Wang, 2019). Role rotation also empowers team members by encouraging respect for different tasks and providing fresh perspectives,

further enhancing group dynamics (Puvvada, 2022).

In this course, we have chosen to implement a reflective essay as a solution to the challenges commonly associated with group work. Reflective essays promote deeper learning by encouraging students to critically engage with their experiences and synthesize knowledge across various components of a project. As Brennan (2014) notes, this approach helps students connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications. By compelling students to consider aspects of the project they may not have directly worked on, reflective essays address the tendency toward fragmented understanding that often occurs when students divide work and focus primarily on their own assigned tasks (Sormunen et al., 2013). This approach responds to the knowledge imbalances identified by Huber and Huber (2008) in collaborative learning settings, where structured interaction becomes necessary to promote cohesion and a shared understanding of the project's goals.

Additionally, the reflective essay provides an opportunity for each student to demonstrate their personal understanding, independent of their specific role in the group project. This aligns with the challenges of fair assessment and unequal contributions often highlighted in group work (Forsell et al., 2020). While peer evaluations are a widely used tool for assessing participation, Forsell et al. emphasize the importance of individual assessment methods to address fairness in group work. Reflective essays complement these approaches by capturing individual insights and comprehension, potentially promoting deeper engagement and a more holistic understanding of the project.

Through reflection, students develop greater awareness of their own learning processes, identifying strengths and areas for growth. Boud et al. (1985) highlight metacognition as a critical outcome of reflective practice, enabling learners to take ownership of their development by critically evaluating their experiences. For example, reflecting on teamwork dynamics may help students recognize areas for improvement, such as communication or collaboration, thereby fostering both personal and professional growth.

Finally, reflective practices allow for a more nuanced evaluation of each student's grasp of course material while addressing challenges related to group work assessment. Traditional assessments often struggle to capture individual understanding within collaborative projects. Brennan (2014) emphasizes that reflection supports the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical application, offering educators insights into how well students synthesize key concepts and apply them to real-world scenarios. As a form of authentic assessment, reflective practices can help ensure that individual learning outcomes are recognized, even in collaborative learning environments.

By integrating reflective essays into this course's group project structure, we aim to address common challenges associated with collaborative learning while maintaining its benefits. This approach aligns with modern pedagogical practices emphasizing reflection as a critical component of experiential learning. The reflective essay serves as a bridge between collaborative learning and individual understanding, encouraging students to synthesize their experiences and knowledge gained throughout the project. By combining group work with individual reflection, we strive to create a more comprehensive and effective learning experience that prepares students for the complexities of real-world marketing challenges.

This study is designed to assess the role of reflective essays in enhancing learning outcomes within a group marketing project. To this end, we investigate the following key questions:

1. Self-Assessment: Does the inclusion of a reflective essay influence students' self-perceived understanding of the group marketing project?
2. Group Project Performance: Does the reflective essay have a noticeable impact on the overall performance of group project?
3. Element-Specific Understanding: Does the reflective essay improve students' demonstrated understanding of the specific elements of the marketing plan (e.g., target market, pricing strategy, etc.)?
4. Involvement-Performance Correlation: How does students' self-reported involvement in specific project areas correlate with their performance on related quiz questions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits and Shortcomings of Reflective Essays

Reflective essays are grounded in the educational theories of John Dewey (1933) and Donald Schön (1983). Dewey introduced reflection as a critical component of experiential learning, while Schön expanded this foundation with his concepts of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action.' Their frameworks established reflective practice as a tool for promoting critical thinking across disciplines. In educational settings, reflective essays foster holistic understanding by integrating various aspects of learning (Brennan, 2014), encourage critical analysis and synthesis (Moon, 2004), and enhance metacognition by making students aware of their own learning processes (Boud et al., 1985).

However, reflective essays are not without their shortcomings. The personal nature of reflection can lead to variability in quality and depth, making assessment challenging (Moon, 2006). Some students may struggle with or resist reflective activities if they perceive them as irrelevant or difficult (Brookfield, 1995). The effectiveness of reflective essays can also vary depending on their format; structured reflections provide clearer guidance but may limit personal expression, whereas open-ended reflections allow for more personal insights but can lack focus.

Implementation Across Disciplines

Reflective essays are a valuable tool in business education, enhancing students' ability to connect theoretical concepts with real-world applications. Brennan (2014) demonstrated that reflective essays in marketing courses enable students to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical experience, fostering strategic thinking skills crucial for success in the business world.

Beyond business, reflective essays have been widely incorporated across other disciplines to improve learning outcomes. In nursing education, reflective writing develops clinical reasoning and empathy by prompting students to examine patient interactions critically. Bulman and Schutz (2013) described how structured reflection on clinical experiences enhanced nursing students' understanding of patient care.

In teacher education, reflective practice is foundational for developing critically reflective teachers who can navigate the complexities of modern classrooms. Larrivee (2000) emphasizes that reflective practice goes beyond refining teaching techniques; it requires educators to critically examine their deeply held beliefs, ethical considerations, and assumptions about teaching and learning. By engaging in critical reflection, teachers become more self-aware and adaptable, addressing classroom challenges with a deliberate code of conduct. This process enables them to move from teacher-centered approaches to creating student-centered, authentic learning communities. Moreover, reflective practice fosters a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of teaching decisions, empowering educators to act with integrity, openness, and commitment while continuously adapting to the dynamic needs of their students.

Despite these benefits, challenges remain in group work settings, such as unequal contributions and the perception of group assignments as time-consuming "busy work" with little cognitive benefit (Latané et al., 2001). To address these issues, educators have implemented various strategies. One approach is incorporating individual assessment components alongside group projects, such as quizzes or exams, to gauge personal understanding separate from the group's output (Lejk & Wyvill, 1996; Millis & Cottell, 1998).

Peer assessment is another common method for evaluating individual contributions. Students can rate other group members on specific criteria, providing valuable information about group dynamics and individual performance (Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, n.d.). Self-evaluations can be used to encourage students to assess their own teamwork skills and contributions, fostering reflection on their performance and individual responsibilities (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

Reflective learning has emerged as a promising approach to promote critical thinking and holistic understanding in group projects. By requiring students to reflect on the entire project, including aspects they may not have directly worked on, reflection encourages a more comprehensive grasp of the material (Brennan, 2014). It also provides an opportunity for each student to demonstrate personal understanding.

In this study, we introduce a reflective essay component to a group marketing project in a Principles of Marketing course. By comparing student performance and perceptions between groups with and without the reflection essay, we aim to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach in addressing challenges such as partial learning, and knowledge gaps in group work.

This research project will employ a comparative study design to assess the impact of reflection on students' holistic understanding of marketing concepts. Two groups of students will be compared: one completing the group project without a reflection essay and another with the addition of a reflection essay. Both groups will be assessed using a comprehensive quiz designed to measure both perceived and actual understanding of marketing principles.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the Course

Our Principles of Marketing course is designed for sophomores within a joint economics and business major at a small undergraduate institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The course typically attracts a diverse group of students, including upperclassmen from other majors, as well as first-year students with advanced standing. This diversity in student backgrounds means that traditional metrics like GPA or standardized test scores are not uniformly available, particularly due to recent changes in testing availability.

The course is consistently taught by the same instructor each semester, using a standardized textbook and schedule which provides consistency in teaching conditions. This standardization is crucial for controlling variables that might otherwise influence study outcomes.

The instructional approach employed in this course is dynamic lecturing, which integrates traditional lectures with active learning techniques. This method involves interspersing lectures with activities such as individual reflection, and group discussions, promoting deeper engagement with the material and collaborative interactions among students.

Project Description

A key component of the Principles of Marketing course is the group project, where students collaborate to develop a comprehensive marketing plan for a start-up. This project serves as a hands-on opportunity for students to apply theoretical knowledge gained throughout the semester to a real-world scenario. The project encompasses multiple stages, beginning with an analysis of the target market, competition, and industry, followed by the development and planning of key marketing mix elements—product, price, place, and promotion.

The group project is a substantial component of the course, accounting for approximately 50% of the students' overall grade. And while this group project is an excellent tool for collaborative learning and simulating real-world marketing challenges, it also presents inherent limitations such as partial learning and inaccurate grade reflection. To address these limitations and enhance individual learning outcomes, we introduced a reflection essay component to the project.

Reflection Essay Assignment

To address the challenges associated with group work, we introduced a reflection essay component to the marketing project. The primary purpose of this assignment is to foster critical engagement with the entire marketing plan and enhance individual accountability.

Students were given two prompt options for their reflection essays:

1. Consider the development of empathy for your target audience and your understanding of the competitive landscape. How did these insights shape your marketing decisions across product, pricing, distribution, and messaging? Reflect on the influence of customer needs, values, behaviors, and competitor offerings on your strategic choices.
2. Reflect on the process of combining the elements of the marketing mix – product, price, place, and promotion – in your start-up's marketing plan. How did this integration contribute to the overall success and long-term goals of your project? Discuss how bringing these elements together influenced the effectiveness and coherence of your marketing strategy.

The essays were required to be no more than 1,000 words in length and cite only the group project. Each student submitted their essay individually via Canvas to ensure personal accountability.

Quiz Design for Effectiveness Assessment

To evaluate the impact of the reflection essay on students' understanding, we designed a comprehensive quiz that covered key aspects of the marketing plan. The quiz was structured in two parts to address different dimensions of student learning:

Multiple-Choice Questions: These questions assessed students' self-evaluation of their understanding of the project. Using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Little Understanding" to "Complete Understanding," students responded to the following:

- How well do you understand your team's overall marketing plan in this project?
- How well do you understand the parts of the project handled by you?
- How well do you understand the parts of the project handled by your teammates?

Students rated their level of involvement in each project section—Target Market, Product, Pricing Strategy, Distribution Channels, Promotion Strategy, and Competition—using three categories: "None/Minimal Participation," "Moderate Participation," or "High Participation."

Short-Answer Questions: This section was designed to assess students' actual comprehension of the various elements of the project. The short-answer format required students to articulate their understanding in their own words, providing a more accurate measure of their grasp of the material. Students were first presented with the prompt: 'For the following six questions, please provide thorough and detailed descriptions of various aspects of your team's project. Your responses will help evaluate your understanding and knowledge of each project element.' This was followed by:

- Who is your target market? How did this influence decisions in other areas of your marketing plan?

- Briefly describe the key features of your product and how they meet the needs of your target market.
- How did the cost structure of your product influence your pricing strategy? What factors did you consider when setting the price?
- Identify the primary distribution channels for your product and the rationale behind choosing them.
- Outline the main promotional activities you plan to use and their intended impact on your target audience.
- Describe at least one key competitor and how your marketing strategy differentiates from theirs.

This two-part structure allowed us to contrast self-perceived knowledge with demonstrated understanding, highlighting any discrepancies between the two. To provide a foundational overview of student responses, we calculated summary statistics for all quiz questions. These statistics, detailed in Table 1, include mean scores and standard deviations for each self-assessment and comprehension question. This baseline data offers insight into overall trends in student understanding and self-perception, which serve as the basis for subsequent analyses.

Table 1. Summary Statistics

Groups	Count						
No reflection paper	44						
Reflection paper	42						
Reflection Score	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.			
Reflection paper score/60	49.024	4.572	39.000	56.000			
Group paper score	85.500	6.066	68.000	95.000			
	Mean	Std. dev.	Little	Basic	Moderate	Good	Complete
Understand_Project	4.442	0.625	0	0	6	36	4
Understand_Yours	4.767	0.501	0	0	3	14	69
Understand_Others	4.000	0.782	0	3	17	43	23
	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Mode	High		
Involvement_Target	2.535	0.568	3	34	49		
Involvement_Product	2.628	0.510	1	30	55		
Involvement_Pricing	2.360	0.684	10	35	41		
Involvement_Distribution	2.233	0.762	17	32	37		
Involvement_Promotion	2.430	0.564	3	43	40		
Involvement_Competition	2.477	0.681	9	27	50		
	Mean	Std. dev.	Minimal (1)	Basic (2)	Partial (3)	Good (4)	Comprehensive (5)
Assessed_Target	3.570	0.660	0	4	33	45	4
Assessed_Product	3.535	0.850	0	10	30	36	10
Assessed_Pricing	3.791	0.769	0	4	24	44	14
Assessed_Distribution	2.942	1.056	12	14	27	33	0
Assessed_Promotion	3.640	0.906	1	7	29	34	15
Assessed_Competition	3.140	0.722	1	14	43	28	0

Administration

The study involved two groups of students from different semesters:

- **Fall Semester:** Students completed the group project without a reflection essay.
- **Spring Semester:** Students completed the group project with the addition of a reflection essay.

Both groups were administered the same *quiz* to ensure consistency in assessment. By comparing the performance of these groups, we aimed to determine the benefits of incorporating reflection essays into the curriculum. This approach allowed us to assess not only the direct impact of reflective writing on learning outcomes but also its role in addressing common challenges associated with group work, such as partial learning and inaccurate grade reflection.

Through this study, we seek to provide evidence-based insights into effective pedagogical practices in marketing education, demonstrating how reflective essays can enhance individual accountability and holistic understanding within group projects. This revised narrative integrates specific quiz questions and provides a clear explanation of how each part of the quiz contributes to assessing student understanding.

Process

Our comprehensive assessment methodology involved developing a custom GPT to evaluate student quiz performance, using their group projects as contextual background. This approach ensured consistency in assessing 24 student groups across six distinct questions. We began by developing the custom GPT and uploading comprehensive project guidelines, simultaneously employing a random number generator to determine the randomized order of project scoring and eliminate sequential evaluation bias.

We initialized the GPT with a carefully crafted prompt that established its role as a marketing instructor with specific assessment criteria. This prompt, fully documented in Appendix A, provided clear guidelines for evaluation. Our assessment process was methodical and structured. For the first question, we began by uploading the first group's project along with their responses. We then evaluated each member of that group before proceeding to the next group, systematically completing the assessments for all 24 groups.

Once the evaluations for the first question were completed, we initiated a new chat session with updated guidelines tailored to the second question. Following the same process, we uploaded the first group's project and responses, assessed all members of that group, and then moved on to evaluate the remaining groups in sequence. This precise, step-by-step approach was consistently applied across all six short-answer questions in our study, maintaining a structured, reproducible methodology that ensured each project received a standardized, objective evaluation.

The structured 1-5 rating scale and defined criteria provided a clear, objective framework. By uploading project guidelines and each team's project before assessment, we gave the AI necessary context to accurately evaluate student answers, aligning assessments with specific project requirements. Our sequential, prompt-by-prompt evaluation—assessing each prompt for all teams before advancing—kept the evaluation consistent and focused, enabling fair comparisons across all student submissions.

RESULTS

The first step in our analysis was to examine whether the inclusion of a reflection paper influenced students' self-assessment. We conducted an ANOVA to compare the responses of students who completed the reflection paper with those who did not, focusing on three self-assessment questions:

1. How well do you understand your team's overall plan in this marketing project?
2. How well do you understand the parts of the project handled by you?
3. How well do you understand the parts of the project handled by your teammates?

The results, presented in Tables 2a-2c, were evaluated against a conventional significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The analysis revealed that the reflection paper's impact on students' self-perceived understanding of their team's overall plan approached, but did not reach, conventional statistical significance ($p = 0.0599$). For the remaining two self-assessment questions, the differences were notably less substantial: understanding of one's own part ($p = 0.4500$) and understanding of teammates' work ($p = 0.2725$). These findings suggest that while the reflection paper may enhance students' perception of their understanding of the broader project, it does not significantly impact their self-assessment of individual or peer contributions.

Next, we examined whether the inclusion of the reflection paper had a noticeable impact on group project performance. Using an independent t-test, we compared the performance of students with and without the reflection paper. As shown in Table 3, the analysis revealed no significant difference between the two groups. These findings suggest that the addition of the reflection paper did not directly influence the overall quality of group project outcomes.

Table 2a. Understand the Projects

SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
No reflection paper	44	190	4.3182	0.4545		
Reflection paper	42	192	4.5714	0.2997		

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	1.3781	1	1.3781	3.6368	0.599	3.9546
Within Groups	31.8312	84	0.3789			
Total	33.2093	85				

Table 2b. Understand Your Part

SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
No reflection paper	44	208	4.7273	0.2960		
Reflection paper	42	202	4.8095	0.2067		

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	0.1454	1	0.1454	0.5759	0.4500	3.9546
Within Groups	21.2035	84	0.2524			
Total	21.3488	85				

Table 2c. Understand the Work of Others

SUMMARY						
<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>		
No reflection paper	44	172	3.9091	0.5032		
Reflection paper	42	172	4.0952	0.7224		

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	0.7446	1	0.7446	1.2203	0.2725	3.9546
Within Groups	51.2554	84	0.6102			
Total	52	85				

Table 3. Performance on Group Project

	No reflection	Reflection
Mean	84.9091	86.1190
Variance	53.8985	18.9855
Observations	44	42
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	71	
t Stat	-0.9343	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.1766	
t Critical one-tail	1.6666	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.3533	
t Critical two-tail	1.9939	

We then turn to the central focus of this study: did the inclusion of the reflection paper meaningfully improve students' understanding of the various elements of the project? To address this, we analyzed the following six questions:

1. Who is your target market and how did this influence decisions in other areas of your marketing plan?
2. Briefly describe the key features of your product and how they meet the needs of your target market.
3. How did the cost structure of your product influence your pricing strategy? What factors did you consider when setting the price?
4. Identify the primary distribution channels for your product and the rationale behind choosing them.
5. Outline the main promotional activities you plan to use and their intended impact on your target audience.
6. Describe at least one key competitor and how your marketing strategy differentiates from theirs.

To evaluate differences between the two groups, we conducted a t-test comparing the performance of students with and without the reflection paper. The results, shown in Tables 4a–b, reveal that the reflection paper had minimal overall impact. Of the six areas assessed, only one—distribution/place—showed a positive and statistically significant improvement linked to the reflection paper. The remaining five areas showed no significant differences.

These findings suggest that while the reflection paper may enhance understanding in specific aspects of the marketing project (e.g., distribution channels), it does not uniformly improve comprehension across all components.

Table 4a. Comparison of Student Performance With and Without Reflection Papers

Reflection paper assignment	<i>Target Market</i>		<i>Product</i>		<i>Price</i>	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean	3.5909	3.5476	3.6136	3.4524	3.8636	3.7143
Variance	0.4334	0.4489	0.8007	0.6440	0.69321	0.5505
Observations	44	42	44	42	44	42
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		0		0	
df	84		84		84	
t Stat	0.3021		0.8806		0.9010	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.38174		0.1905		0.1851	
t Critical one-tail	1.6632		1.6632		1.6632	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.7633		0.3810		0.3701	
t Critical two-tail	1.9886		1.9586		1.9886	

Table 4b. Comparison of Student Performance With and Without Reflection Papers

Reflection paper assignment	Distribution		Promotion		Competition	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mean	2.6364	3.2619	3.5227	3.7619	3.1136	3.1667
Variance	1.2135	0.8322	0.9530	0.6736	0.61477	0.4350
Observations	44	42	44	42	44	42
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		0		0	
df	82		83		83	
t Stat	-2.8734		-1.2319		-0.3400	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0026		0.1107		0.3674	
t Critical one-tail	1.6636		1.6634		1.6634	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0052		0.2215		0.7347	
t Critical two-tail	1.9893		1.9890		1.9890	

Finally, we examined the correlation between students' self-reported involvement in each area of the project and their performance on the corresponding quiz question. For each correlation, we also calculated the associated t-statistic. As shown in Table 5, the correlation for the 'Distribution' component is statistically significant, indicating that higher self-reported involvement in this area is linked to better performance on the related quiz question.

Table 5. Correlations (Involvement and Score)

	Correlation	t-statistic
Target market	0.0563	0.5270
Product	0.1118	1.0484
Pricing	0.0780	0.7316
Distribution	0.2949	2.7653
Promotion	0.1457	1.3669
Competition	0.1262	1.1841

2-tailed t-value @ 5% = 1.9890

In contrast, the correlations for the other components show no meaningful differences, suggesting no significant relationship between self-reported involvement and quiz performance for these areas. This finding highlights the unique role of the distribution component, potentially reflecting its relative complexity or the emphasis placed on it during the project.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight both the potential and limitations of incorporating reflective essays into group projects. Reflective essays demonstrated a modest positive impact on students' self-perceived understanding of the overall project but showed limited effects on their grasp of individual project components or peer contributions. The

results suggest that while reflective essays encourage students to engage with the broader context of their work, they do not uniformly improve comprehension across all elements of the marketing plan.

The observed significant improvement in the "distribution/place" component suggests that reflective essays may be particularly effective for more complex or underemphasized project aspects. This finding highlights the potential of targeted reflection prompts to address specific learning gaps. Additionally, the significant correlation between self-reported involvement and quiz performance for the distribution component reinforces the importance of active engagement in improving understanding.

However, the lack of significant differences in other areas underscores the challenges of ensuring that reflective essays translate into deeper learning across all project elements. Factors such as variability in student engagement and the effectiveness of prompts may limit their impact.

Despite these limitations, reflective essays offer valuable benefits, such as promoting individual accountability and providing instructors with nuanced insights into student learning. By addressing common issues in group work, including partial learning and grade inequities, reflective essays enhance the balance between collaboration and individual understanding.

IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of this study have significant implications for teaching practices in courses that incorporate group projects. Reflective essays can play a key role in addressing common challenges, such as fragmented understanding and unequal participation, by encouraging students to engage with all aspects of a project. By promoting individual accountability, reflective practices provide educators with a deeper understanding of student learning and ensure that students recognize the interconnectedness of their contributions within the group's work.

To maximize their impact, careful design of reflection prompts is essential. Tailored prompts that emphasize underexplored or complex aspects of a project, such as the "distribution/place" component in this study, can help address specific learning gaps. Additionally, future research should explore how different types of prompts influence student engagement and learning across project components. Examining the longitudinal effects of reflective essays could provide valuable insights into whether these practices enhance critical thinking, collaborative skills, and knowledge application in subsequent coursework or professional contexts.

It is also important to investigate how reflective practices perform across different academic disciplines to determine whether outcomes vary based on subject matter or project structure. Furthermore, integrating digital tools, such as AI-assisted evaluation of reflections, may enhance feedback processes and support individualized learning. By pursuing these avenues, future research can refine the role of reflection in education and provide insights into strategies for fostering more effective and equitable group learning experiences.

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APPENDIX – CHATGPT PROMPT

You are a marketing professor. Your students have submitted a group project, and they recently completed an in-class quiz from memory to assess their understanding of various elements of the project. I will upload each team project, one at a time, along with the individual responses from the team members for evaluation. Please assess each student's response in light of their group's project. Since students completed the quiz without access to their projects, evaluate each response based on the student's demonstrated understanding of the target market and any general influence they recall.

Guidelines for Assessment:

- Ensure consistency in scoring across all students and groups by applying the same evaluation criteria.
- Evaluate each response independently of previous submissions to avoid content carry-over.
- The prompt given to students is “**Who is your target market and how did this influence decisions in other areas of your marketing plan?**”
- Use the following rating scale:
- **Score 1 (Minimal Understanding):**
 - **The response demonstrates little to no understanding of the product's key features or how they meet the target market's needs.**
 - **The description of product features is vague, irrelevant, or nonexistent, and no logical connection is made to the target market's needs.**

- Responses may include generic statements, unrelated information, or a misunderstanding of the question.
- Example: "Our product is something people might find useful."
- **Score 2 (Basic but Incomplete Understanding):**
 - The response shows some awareness of the product features but lacks clarity, completeness, or specificity.
 - The student mentions one or more product features but provides little explanation of how they address the target market's needs, or the explanation is unclear or overly generalized.
 - The connection between the product features and the target market is weak, and key details are missing.
 - Example: "Our product is designed for families. It is affordable and has features that are good for children."
- **Score 3 (Partial Understanding):**
 - The response describes the product's features and identifies a connection to the target market's needs, but the explanation is somewhat vague, generalized, or underdeveloped.
 - The student demonstrates a basic understanding of how the product aligns with the target market, but the reasoning is not fully articulated, and specific examples may be missing.
 - Example: "Our product is a toy designed for middle-class families. It's affordable and easy to use, making it accessible to our target market."
- **Score 4 (Good Understanding with Minor Gaps):**
 - The response demonstrates a solid understanding of the product's features and their relevance to the target market.
 - Product features are described clearly, and a logical connection is made to the target market's needs.
 - While the explanation is mostly well-developed, some details, examples, or nuances are missing that would further strengthen the argument.
 - Example: "Our product is a durable toy for middle-class families with children. It's designed with safety features and an affordable price to cater to the needs of parents. However, more details on how this durability stands out against competitors could strengthen the response."
- **Score 5 (Comprehensive Understanding):**
 - The response thoroughly and clearly describes the product's features and makes a strong, logical connection to the target market's needs.
 - The explanation is detailed, well-developed, and specific, showing a deep understanding of how the product solves the target market's problems or fulfills their desires.
 - The response includes relevant examples or reasoning that illustrate how the product's design aligns with the specific characteristics or preferences of the target market.
 - Example: "Our product is a durable, child-safe toy designed for middle-class families with children in suburban areas. It includes features like eco-friendly materials, simple assembly, and an interactive design that fosters creativity. These features meet the practical and emotional needs of parents who value safety, sustainability, and meaningful play experiences. The price point is set to match family budgets, and the customizable options cater to parents looking for a personal touch."

Output Format: Provide your assessment in a table format with four columns and two rows, as follows: Student 1 Student 2 Student 3 Student 4 Score [score] [score] [score] [score] Explanation [explanation] [explanation] [explanation] [explanation] Replace [score] and [explanation] with the actual assessment details for each student.

Process for Consistency: To maintain consistency across students and groups, we will assess one question at a time for the entire class before moving on to the next question. Apply the same criteria uniformly to ensure fair and accurate comparisons.

Ready?

Note: The student prompt and the assessment rubric, in bold, are modified for each of the six short answer questions.

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HOW INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF HEALTH-RELATED CONTENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE SHAPED: THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION SOURCES AND MESSAGE CHARACTERISTICS

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

In today's digital world, many people turn to social media for health advice and information, making it important to study the credibility and effectiveness of the information (Chen and Wang, 2021). Social media platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram have become popular places to look for health information. However, not all the information found online is accurate or trustworthy (Chen and Wang, 2021). This has significant implications for public health, as the spread of misinformation can lead to harmful health decisions and behavior. Many non-profit organizations and pharmaceutical companies use social media to provide health information to consumers (Ventola, 2014). These platforms offer direct and efficient ways to reach large audiences, share updates, and engage with the public (Ventola, 2014). However, the presence of fake information online makes it challenging for consumers to differentiate what is trustworthy/accurate and what is not. If consumers do not receive accurate information from pharmaceutical companies, they may lose trust in the organizations, potentially leading to negative consequences for both public health and the companies' reputations.

Given the pervasive nature of social media, it is important to develop strategies to identify and promote credible health information while mitigating the spread of misinformation. This includes understanding characteristics of trustworthy sources and understanding factors influencing individuals' perceptions of credibility on social media. This study aims to identify the most effective social media posts by looking at both the source of the content and the nature of the content itself. This will be measured by users' perceived credibility of the account and content itself and their likelihood to engage with the content.

Exploring the factors influencing individuals' perceptions of health-related content on social media can help pharmaceutical companies and health educators create more effective strategies for spreading accurate information and diminishing false information. These strategies could help mitigate risks regarding health-related decisions. This study is important because it aims to understand the kind of social media content that has large impacts on consumer-perceived credibility as it is essential in raising/ increasing health literacy across the public. While prior research has explored message characteristics (type of content) (Rains and Karmikel, 2009) and information sources (organization versus individual) (Flanagin and Metzger, 2000 and Tallion et al., 2020), this study offers a comprehensive analysis integrating both elements. By consolidating these factors, this study will provide an overarching view of how individuals' social media usage and preferences collectively influence their perceptions of health-related information. The research question for this study is as follows: How does the presentation of health-related information (statistics vs. testimonials) influence people's attitudes and behaviors (like, comment, and share) toward social media posts?

These findings are expected to offer insights that can inform strategies for more effective health communication and information dissemination on social media platforms. This contribution could aid health educators, communicators, and policymakers in developing targeted content to increase the accuracy and reliability of health information targeted to this demographic on social media.

A few common themes in the literature provide important implications for further explorations in the field. The themes begin by looking at what creates credible content and what ultimately leads people to engage with content online.

Important insights in researching for this study were found in an article by Rains and Karmikel (2009), titled *Health information-seeking and perceptions of website credibility: Examining Web-use orientation, message characteristics, and structural features of websites*. Rains and Karmikel (2009) looked at how individuals seek health-related content online. The study specifically used a 2 X 2 model to look at the relationship between message characteristics (statistics and testimonials) and website credibility (privacy policy statement and third-party endorsements). The study also considered a website's structural features. It was concluded that message characteristics and structural features of a website impact people's perceptions of a company's credibility and overall attitudes toward the health content. The more features present on a website, the more credible participants ranked the site. One limitation of this study was that participants only viewed one website from which researchers then gathered their findings. This leaves the door open for additional research to be done, specifically related to another platform of online information-seeking.

Another study providing implications for further research in the digital healthcare field is an article published by Flanagin and Metzger (2000) titled *Perceptions of Internet Information Credibility*. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) looked at how people ranked the credibility of online health information compared to other mediums of health content (i.e. TV, radio, magazines, and newspapers). It was concluded that information found online was perceived to be as credible as information found on TV, radio, and magazines. However, newspaper information remained most credible. The article was published in 2000, therefore, the findings may be outdated as digital media consumption over the past 24 years has significantly increased. Additionally, the article advises further research looking at the role of the specific source of information (i.e. personal versus institutional sources).

In a more recent study published by Oh and Lee (2019), the authors used a 3 X 2 approach to understand the relationship between message factors and behavioral intentions for rumor verification and sharing on social media. The 3 (label: none vs. news vs. rumor) X 2 (valence: positive vs. negative) showed a few notable implications. When a message was labeled as "news" versus "rumor" or "no-label" participants found this to be more important. This is concerning because information online is often incorrectly or misleadingly labeled, leading people to find truth in false information. Further, health literacy is linked to being a moderator between message importance in intentions to verify a message and then actually sharing a message. Health literacy is defined as "the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access, to understand, and to use information in ways which promote and maintain good health" (WHO, 1998). It is imperative that the general population can effectively recognize and shut down health rumors seen and shared online. Additionally, health organizations should consistently monitor health-related information being shared online so they can quickly combat false information (Oh and Lee, 2019). Overall, this study shows people will verify health information online when they consider it important. The study advises that future research consider different relationship factors. For example, it could be beneficial to look at the different implications existing between individual factors (demographics, prior knowledge, habits, motivations, etc.) and message factors (content, frequency, credibility, etc).

In the realm of social media, many strategies are used to engage customers. However, companies are beginning to alter their marketing strategies to include the voices and presence of social media influencers. Tallion et al. (2020) showed that attractiveness and likeability are linked with positive attitudes towards an influencer, purchase intentions, and word-of-mouth communication. Influencer marketing is an effective strategy using key social media figures to increase consumers' awareness of different brands and ultimately influence consumers' purchasing behaviors (Ahmad, 2018). Tallion et al. (2020), looked primarily at purchase intentions, likeability, and word-of-mouth marketing. Even so, there is a need for further research regarding the credibility of influencer marketing, specifically regarding health professionals such as Dr. Pimple Popper, Lady Spine Doc, etc.

Various limitations have presented themselves within the research topic of digital healthcare. For example, previous studies have looked at how individuals perceive health information online via websites (Rains and Karmikel, 2009 and Flanagin and Metzger, 2000) but did not address health information on social media. On the contrary, other studies addressing social media and health information explained that understanding individuals' demographics and preferences could help researchers understand why people find specific content to be credible and trustworthy (Oh and Lee, 2019). Finally, the presence of influencer marketing on social media is a growing profession changing the way consumers see media online (Tallion et al., 2020). With these various gaps in current research, this study aims to understand what leads social media users to believe health information is credible.

This study aims to examine two significant factors impacting individuals' perceptions of health-related information: (1) information sources (Flanagin and Metzger, 2000 and Tallion et al., 2020), and (2) message characteristics (Rains and Karmikel, 2009).

In this study, information sources can be defined as who is posting or sharing the social media content: an individual (i.e. social media influencer) or a credible organization (i.e. WHO, FDA, etc.). Social media influencers are individuals who post all types of content on social media platforms: informational, educational, and promotional (De Veirman et al., 2017 and Abidin, 2016). By sharing their daily lives, influencers have grown large followings of people who like to engage with their content. Marketing strategies and budget allocations have started to pivot to consider how to incorporate social media influencers in brand development (Tallion, et. al, 2020). Influencers are ultimately changing how social media can be used to market to consumers. The Federal Drug and Food Administration founded in 1906 ("FDA History", 2018), and the World Health Organization established in 1948 ("About WHO", n.d.) are just two examples of organizations providing trustworthy health information. While both are newer to social media, the WHO shared how utilizing tools like social media offers significant potential for increased public health intelligence ("Social media: hope or hype?", n.d.). This study will further address the current and potential opportunities for increased social media use regarding health-related content via different information sources.

For this study, message characteristics can be defined as elements of an online social media post. The specific elements addressed in this study are general statements, statements with statistics, and statements with testimonies (Rains and Karmikel, 2009). A general statement is a public message shared on social media to inform the public about something. It typically conveys broad information, often reinforcing common knowledge without strong factual support (Dictionary.com, n.d.). A statistical statement is a social media post sharing a fact from a healthcare study. For example, on July 28, 2024, for World Hepatitis Day, the WHO posted on Instagram a graphic stating, "Only 1 in 6 people with hepatitis know they have it" (World Health Organization, 2024). Finally, a statement with a testimony involves a social media post where someone shares their health journey or their role as a caregiver for a family member facing health concerns. It needs to accurately identify a person's journey, without being influenced by financial compensation (American Medical Association, 2004). This can be in the form of a photo with text or video. These three kinds of message characteristics can be observed in many forms across social media. This study aims to explore what types of message characteristics in health-related content leads individuals to ultimately engage with the content.

Rains and Karmikel (2009) found that content (such as testimonials and statistics) and structural features of a website are strongly associated with how people perceive its credibility, as well as their overall attitudes toward the site and its content. They suggest including more statistics and detailed information on a website positively influences individuals' attitudes toward topics presented. Based on this, this study expects that incorporating statistics or testimonials in a social media post focused on health-related information can enhance perceived information credibility and increase an individual's likelihood of engaging with the post. Specifically, this study proposes:

H1: Compared to general statements, when organizations use statistics in social media posts focused on health-related information, it leads to (a) higher perceived information credibility and (b) increased consumer engagement.

H2: Compared to general statements, when individual influencers use statistics in social media posts focused on health-related information, it leads to (a) higher perceived information credibility and (b) increased consumer engagement.

H3: Compared to general statements, when organizations use testimonials in social media posts focused on health-related information, it leads to (a) higher perceived information credibility and (b) increased consumer engagement.

H4: Compared to general statements, when individual influencers use testimonials in social media posts focused on health-related information, it leads to (a) higher perceived information credibility and (b) increased consumer engagement.

Even though it is proposed that using statistics or testimonials in health-related social media posts can generally enhance both perceived credibility and engagement, if social media managers must choose between using testimonials or statistics, the source of the information becomes crucial. In other words, who shares the information will moderate the impact of either testimonials or statistics on an individual's perceived credibility and likelihood to engage with the social media post. Heldman et al. (2013) found that individuals are more likely to engage with posts that provide clear, factual information – particularly when the source is perceived as less authoritative. Statistics in social media posts

are seen as more objective, making them more effective in personal accounts, which may need additional authority to boost credibility. On the other hand, testimonials can create a more personal connection, evoking emotional responses and trust, particularly when shared by organizations that may seem less personally connected compared to individual accounts. Therefore, organizations can benefit more from personal testimonials to humanize their content and foster emotional connections (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Based on this, this study proposes:

H5: Compared to nonprofit health-related organizations' social media accounts, incorporating statistics into health-related posts will benefit personal accounts more.

H6: Compared to personal social media accounts, incorporating personal testimonials into health-related posts will benefit nonprofit health-related organizations' accounts more.

A 2 x 3 factorial experiment will be conducted to examine the impact of information sources and message characteristics on individuals' attitudes toward online health information. The experiment will explore two types of information sources (Individual Influencers and Nonprofit Organizations) and three types of message characteristics (General Message, Message with Statistics, and Message with Testimony). The dependent variables measured across all conditions include perceived information credibility and likelihood of engagement with social media posts. Individuals' general social media usage will be measured as control variables. Individuals will also be asked to report their demographic information.

One hundred eighty participants will be recruited through Amazon's MTurk and will be paid \$1 for their participation. Participants will be randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (Individual Influencer vs. Nonprofit Organization) x 3 (General Message vs. Message with Statistics vs. Message with Testimony) between-subjects design. Participants will be asked to read one of six social media posts focused on health information and will then respond to a variety of questions about the post. The study will also include an attention check and manipulation check. Participants who fail the attention check or the manipulation check will be excluded from the analysis.

The measurement scales used in the study are adapted from existing literature, and all the questions are listed in Appendix B.

Perceived Information Credibility. The five most consistent aspects used to assess media credibility are believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness of information (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). To measure perceived information credibility, this study will follow the approach of Rains and Karmikel (2009) and Flanagin and Metzger (2000). Perceived information credibility will be measured using a 7-point Likert scale, with participants evaluating believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and completeness of social media posts. *Likelihood of Engagement with Social Media Post.* A similar process used by Bode and Vraga (2018) and Oh and Lee (2019) will be followed to measure engagement in this study. Likelihood of engagement was assessed on a 5-point scale, where participants indicated their likelihood to like, share, comment, or conduct further research after viewing a post.

General Social Media Usage. Adapted from Tallion et al. (2020), general social media usage will be measured by asking participants which apps they use most frequently, how much time they spend on social media daily, the types of content they typically encounter, and their perceptions of trustworthiness and frequency of health-related information found on social media.

Finally, demographic information, including gender, education level, and age, will be collected to provide context for participants' social media use.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ONLINE HEALTH-RELATED INFORMATION

Article	Title of paper	Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Research Methods
Rains and Karmikel (2009)	Health information-seeking and perceptions of website credibility: examining Web-use orientation, message characteristics, and structural features of websites	Perceptions of website credibility Attitudes about health topic	Health topic (smoking cessation/ Type I diabetes) Web-use orientation (i.e., searching or surfing)	2 X 2 design Participants search the web and fill out questionnaire, rate using 7-point Likert scale
Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2000)	Perceptions of Internet Information Credibility	Information credibility	Health information found on internet, TV, radio, magazines, newspapers	Media credibility (7-point scale) Verification of internet information (5-point scale) Type of information and media

				Internet experience and demographics
Oh and Lee (2019)	When Do People Verify and Share Health Rumors on Social Media? The Effects of Message Importance, Health Anxiety, and Health Literacy	Intentions to verify message Intentions to share message	Message label (none vs news vs rumor) Message Valence (positive vs. negative) Perceived message importance Health anxiety Health literacy	Measured five main variables: (1) perceived message importance, (2) verification intention, (3) sharing intentions, (4) health anxiety, and (5) health literacy. All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.
Taillon et al (2020)	Understanding the relationships between social media influencers and their followers: the moderating role of closeness.	Attitudes toward social media influencers, purchase intentions, word of mouth	Attractiveness, likeability, closeness, similarity	Sent survey to 301 university students asking about general understanding of influencers and if they were more likely to make decisions based on influencers attractiveness and likeability.
Bode and Vraga (2018)	See Something, Say Something: Correction of Global Health Misinformation on Social Media	Spread of misinformation (ability to minimize)	Introduction of corrective health information (via different mechanisms: other users share/ more social vs algorithm share) Pre-existing conspiracy beliefs	Belief in misinformation about Zika, rate their level 7-point scale Credibility evaluations of responses, 7-point scales (adapted from Meyer, 1988). Conspiracist ideation measured on a 5-point scale.

APPENDIX B: MEASUREMENT SCALES

Perceived Information Credibility of Social Media Post

(Adapted from Rains & Karmikel, 2009; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000)

Participants will be asked to evaluate the credibility of a social media post using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree) based on the following items:

- This post is believable.
- This post is accurate.
- This post is trustworthy.
- This post shows bias. (*reverse coded*)
- This post provides all the information needed to understand the topic.

Likelihood of Engagement with Social Media Post

(Adapted from Oh & Lee, 2019)

Participants will be asked to evaluate the likelihood of engaging with a social media post using a 5-point scale ranging from "Extremely Unlikely" to "Very Likely" for the following items:

- How likely are you to like this post?
- How likely are you to share this post?
- How likely are you to comment on this post?
- How likely are you to do further research after seeing this post?

General Social Media Usage

(Adapted from Tallion et al., 2020)

Participants will be asked about their general social media usage:

- a. Which social media apps do you use most each day? *(Select all that apply)*
 - Instagram
 - Snapchat
 - TikTok
 - LinkedIn
 - Facebook
 - None
 - Other (please specify): _____
- b. How much time do you spend on the social media app you use most each day?
(Adapted from Tallion et al., 2020)
 - Less than 1 hour
 - 1-2 hours
 - 2-3 hours
 - 3-4 hours
 - More than 4 hours
- c. What types of content do you see on social media? *(Check all that apply)*
 - Entertainment
 - Fashion
 - Beauty
 - Athletics
 - Health
 - Inspiration
 - Other (please specify): _____
- d. How trustworthy do you perceive information on social media to be? *(Adapted from Flanagin & Metzger, 2000)*
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
- e. How frequently do you encounter health-related information (e.g., mental health, physical well-being) on social media?
 - Never
 - Occasionally
 - Sometimes
 - Often
 - Always
- f. What types of health-related information do you see most on social media? *(Check all that apply)*
 - Mental health-related information
 - Chronic diseases
 - Allergies
 - Information from pharmaceutical companies
 - Other (please specify): _____

Demographics

- a. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
- b. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - Some high school or less
 - High school diploma or GED

- Some college but no degree
 - Associate or technical degree
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS, etc.)
- c. How old are you?
- 18-24 years old
 - 25-34 years old
 - 35-44 years old
 - 45-54 years old
 - 55-64 years old
 - 65+ years
-

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IDENTIFYING INDUSTRY-RELEVANT DIGITAL MARKETING COMPETENCIES USING NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING OF JOB LISTINGS

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

In recent years, there has been increasing concern among higher education stakeholders that educational programs are failing to adequately prepare students for the rapidly evolving demands of the workforce. This concern is particularly relevant for digital marketing field, which is changing rapidly. Recent research conducted by a digital marketing institute reveals that around 58% of marketers acknowledge that their roles are evolving due to emerging technologies like AI, and they highlight a significant skill gap in the digital marketing field, not just at the undergraduate level but across all levels.

Historically, higher education programs have sought industry input on competencies through methods like industry advisory boards, panel discussions, and surveys of alumni, faculty, and the community. However, these approaches to identifying and integrating industry-relevant competencies have become both resource-intensive and time-consuming. Given the rapidly evolving nature of digital marketing, traditional methods, while effective, may cause digital programs to fall behind in meeting workforce skill demands. As a result, higher education programs must explore alternative approaches for identifying and incorporating industry-relevant competencies. With the advancement of computational capabilities and Artificial Intelligence, Natural Language Processing (NLP) offers a faster, more resource-efficient way to identify key competencies from workforce job listings. This research focuses on using NLP to identify important competencies in digital marketing. A small sample of job postings from the United States was analyzed using NLP, revealing critical competencies, skills, tools, and techniques in the digital marketing field, with insights provided for integrating these findings into the digital marketing curriculum.

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ENHANCING MARKETING EDUCATION SUCCESS: INTEGRATING HOW STUDENTS STUDY WITH HOW THEY LEARN

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

In conceptualizing how individuals learn, researchers have provided a wealth of evidence to support a range of learning “styles.” In fact, over 70 learning styles models have been promulgated. Among those most frequently recognized are Barbe’s VAK model (Barbe, et al., 1979), Kolb’s experiential learning model and Learning Style Inventory (2007), the Felder-Silverman model and its Index of Learning Survey (1984), and Flemings’s VARK model (Fleming & Bonwell, 2019). These primarily focus on students’ preferences for modes of receiving information in educational settings. For assessing the activities utilized by students to engage in and bring about their learning, nearly a dozen inventories exist for measuring “approaches” or “strategies” to studying/learning. In this area, the more frequently cited batteries include the Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, 1987a, 1987b), the Study Habits Inventory (Jones et al., 1995), and the Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory (RASI) (Entwistle et al., 2000; Entwistle et al., 2013). Our research into student learning employs the RASI.

Comprising three primary approaches to learning - deep, surface, and strategic - this battery has seen widespread use by higher education researchers. The deep approach centers on extensive understanding of course material, and seeking to relate ideas to prior knowledge. The surface approach indicates rote learning without reflection or purpose, memorizing material solely for reproduction. The strategic approach focuses on achieving the highest marks possible, aided by paying careful attention to assessment criteria and by organizing/managing study time. Evidence points to a preference for the deep approach among liberal arts students, yet students in the hard sciences often favor surface approaches to learning. These findings led to several questions: What approach would undergraduate business students generally favor? Marketing students, in particular? What pattern of preferences might emerge? Answers to these questions could inform curriculum decisions which might improve the quality of learning outcomes.

The RASI has been universally applicable in a variety of disciplines and cultures; however, use within the business disciplines, with the exception of accounting, has been limited. The first marketing study to employ the RASI was Faranda et al. (2021). They found that strategic learning was favored by marketing students, and that approach related most positively to their satisfaction with academic achievement and their perceptions of the learning environment. Major themes of over 30 subsequent works by others include learning approaches and their effectiveness, the impact of personality/individual learning characteristics, and students’ perceptions of learning environments. As this stream of learning-approaches research continues to evolve, a new exploratory question has arisen and motivated this developmental paper: Can more be gained by integrating the approaches to learning framework with existing learning styles models?

Although the learning styles literature is vast, coupled with the availability of numerous measurement toolkits for educators to assess students’ learning styles, there are voices that level criticism of these popular models. While many professionals associated with education advocate the use of learning styles models, others express concern regarding their major premise: Mode of instruction is best provided in a format that matches the assessed learning style of the student. Some researchers have cast doubt on the idea that matching instructional methods to individual students’ learning styles positively affects their learning (e.g., Pashler et al. 2009).

On the other hand, research stemming from the use of the RASI frequently shows positive connections to learning outcomes, particularly with respect to the strategic and deep approaches (see Faranda et al., 2021). The intent of the RASI is not to slot students into a predetermined category, but rather to determine their preferences for an approach to their own learning. Neither does it seek to individualize learning modalities for each student according to learning

style. Evidence exists that marketing students favor the strategic approach, followed by the deep approach, with the surface approach a distant third. Perhaps a useful way to employ one or more of the prevalent learning styles models is to find connections between learning types (e.g., from VARK: visual, auditory, etc.) and the RASI's three learning approaches. Such ties may provide greater insights into appropriate instructional tools for reinforcing and promoting marketing students' use of strategic and deep learning activities and for positively influencing these students' perceptions of their learning environment.

Such research could result in extensions to one (or more) of the more popular learning styles models. Our intention is to determine whether marrying these two areas of learning theory might provide practicable insights for marketing educators to enact specific curriculum changes to foster and support students' use of favorable learning approaches.

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UNDERSTANDING TERRORIST ACTIVITIES THROUGH A MARKETING LENSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTER-TERRORISM

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Recruitment is critical for terrorist groups' growth and sustainability. This study uses the 7 Ps of service marketing—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence—to examine how these groups attract and keep members. Applying marketing frameworks to terrorist recruitment offers insights for counter-terrorism and de-radicalization.

Terrorist organizations use marketing strategies to target vulnerable groups. By segmenting populations through demographics, psychographics, and behaviors, they tailor messages to those prone to radicalization. Understanding these methods is key to countering extremist narratives and preventing recruitment.

The ideological offering serves as the "product" of terrorist groups, providing an intangible benefit such as extremist ideology or a sense of belonging. Much like brands sell lifestyles, terrorist organizations promote purpose, identity, and social validation to attract recruits. This study examines how these ideological products are framed and adapted for different audiences. Participation in extremist organizations comes with a "price" involving personal sacrifices—social alienation, financial costs, legal risks, and physical danger. These groups, however, frame these costs as honorable investments in a greater cause, a strategy seen in commercial branding where high prices signify exclusivity or prestige.

Recruitment occurs in various "places," both physical and digital spaces, with terrorist organizations leveraging social media, encrypted messaging, religious centers, and conflict zones. The shift to online recruitment has expanded their reach while enabling personalized engagement with potential members. For "promotion," extremist groups craft compelling narratives through propaganda, emotional storytelling, and targeted rhetoric. By analyzing recruitment content—such as videos, speeches, and manifestos—this study identifies persuasive tactics and highlights counter-messaging strategies that can disrupt radicalization.

The "people" element of recruitment relies on charismatic leaders, peer networks, and trusted figures who personalize radical messaging and build trust over time. Online influencers and real-world mentors play a critical role in guiding potential recruits toward deeper ideological commitment. The recruitment "process" follows a structured pathway, from initial exposure to full radicalization. Terrorist organizations use progressive engagement tactics, including indoctrination, training camps, and social bonding rituals, to solidify commitment. Identifying these steps can aid early intervention efforts. Like brands that use logos and merchandise to reinforce identity, terrorist organizations employ "physical evidence" such as flags, slogans, uniforms, and symbols to foster commitment. These elements serve as cultural markers of belonging, making disengagement more difficult. This study explores how counter-terrorism strategies can disrupt these visual cues to weaken group cohesion.

Applying the 7 Ps framework to terrorist recruitment allows policymakers and security professionals to design targeted counter-strategies. By disrupting recruitment pipelines, authorities can identify key recruitment spaces and influencers, target digital platforms, disrupt physical networks, and monitor online radicalization patterns. Developing counter-narratives is essential, as effective de-radicalization efforts must offer alternative ideological products—aspirational narratives that challenge extremist messaging. Community-based interventions involve training local leaders, educators, and peer groups to recognize and counter extremist recruitment, helping prevent radicalization before it escalates. Strategic messaging and behavioral nudges enable governments and NGOs to leverage marketing principles to reframe de-radicalization programs as positive, socially rewarding, and empowering.

We will connect the 7 Ps to a rational choice framework and leverage existing research based on observational data and cases to show how the 7 P framework can be a practical guide to disrupting terrorist networks.

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FUNERAL PRODUCT AND/OR SERVICE PROVIDERS SHOULD NOT WAIT FOR FTC'S FUNERAL RULE TO BE REVISED

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

The FTC is considering “whether and how funeral providers should be required to display or distribute their price information online or through electronic means” (Fair, 2023) but funeral providers of products and/or services should not wait for the FTC to update the Funeral Rule, but rather be proactive in their marketing strategy and brand management.

The FTC’s Funeral Rule was implemented in 1984, and revised in 1994, to protect consumers in purchasing funeral goods and services. The Funeral Rule applies to all U.S. providers of both funeral services and products, and requires that goods and services be offered and priced on an itemized basis, product and pricing details are disclosed on a timely basis, and other legal requirements are met (Federal Trade Commission, 2019; Kopp & Kemp, 2007). Since the Funeral Rule was implemented prior to the internet, prices are not required to be published or shared electronically with consumers (Crane, 2024). While “funeral homes and funeral directors remain the top source of information for both making arrangements (65 percent) and selecting merchandise (66 percent) for adults over the age of 40” (Funeral and Memorial Information Council, 2015), this same study found that the majority (51%) of younger adults (age 20-39) obtain funeral-related information online through social networking.

Some funeral service providers include price ranges and/or pricing detail on their websites. For instance, the Newcomer Funeral Service Group (n.d.), which has more than 40 locations in 10 states, provides pricing transparency on their location websites that supports their value proposition (Crane, 2024; New Comer Cremations & Funerals, 2024; Newcomer Cremations, Funerals, & Receptions; 2024).

Leveraging situational factors and marketing scales in Crane (2010), a quantitative consumer research study is proposed to test hypotheses related to online pricing transparency of funeral products and/or services by providers and situational factors of consumer knowledge, involvement, financial concern, and satisfaction. The proposed research design consists of a questionnaire design using marketing scales, data collection via a consumer panel of adults 50 years and older who have arranged a funeral following the death of a spouse or parent, statistical analysis, and conclusions and recommendations.

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PLACE MARKETING: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LONGTIME LOCALS, NEWCOMERS, AND TOURISTS THROUGH DIGITAL MARKETING

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

There has been tremendous growth in smaller communities that border urban centers. For example, the small city of Kyle, just south of Austin, Texas, is the second- fastest growing in the state with a huge influx of housing developments and businesses relocating there (Wirz, 2024). Similar growth can be observed in Heber City, Midway, and Kamas, Utah, suburbs of the popular ski destination Park City, Utah (Keates, 2024). Growth ushers in a wave of new residents, businesses, opportunities, and challenges. This can change the culture and identity of a place.

Drawing on literature from branding and place marketing, this research examines how those responsible for marketing and communications in regions experiencing rapid population growth develop and disseminate messaging that resonates with longtime residents, newcomers, and tourists. Specifically, this project focuses on digital marketing strategies to reach these different audiences.

The identity of a place is shaped by both its inherent characteristics and the way these qualities are perceived by individuals within that environment. Place identity is defined as “those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment” (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155). Often, these characteristics are marketed to attract tourism or appeal to external audiences (e.g., Skinner, 2008). Effective place marketing can significantly contribute to the economic development of an area (Hanna et al., 2021). Prior research highlights the importance of collaborative marketing efforts between local governments and businesses (Hagen et al., 2022) in stimulating tourism and attracting new residents.

However, in rapidly growing areas, tensions can arise between preserving qualities valued by longtime residents and catering to the preferences of new residents or tourists. Drawing on branding literature, particularly research on brand evolution (e.g., Rindell & Strandvik, 2010), this work explores the concept of “brand morphosis” (Wijaya, 2012) in the context of place branding. Similar to how marketers evolve brands while retaining their core authenticity, place marketers must adapt their digital messaging and imagery to resonate with diverse audiences.

This exploratory research seeks to address the following questions:

- RQ1:** What digital channels are leveraged to communicate with different audiences for a municipality?
- RQ2:** How are digital images used to reach (a) longtime residents and (b) new residents and (c) tourists?
- RQ3:** How is content messaging used to reach (a) longtime residents and (b) new residents and (c) tourists?

This research uses a multimethod approach to answer the research questions. Depth interviews are conducted with members of marketing and communications teams in fast-growing municipalities. Interviews are conducted to explore how these teams have adapted their community’s digital marketing strategies to balance and address the shared and unique communication needs of longtime residents, new residents, and tourists. In addition to the interviews, images and texts are collected from social media channels to capture the evolution of digital strategy over time. Initial interviews and an analysis of social media content indicate a focus on language and content that emphasize the value of events, new capital projects, and the introduction of new businesses for diverse stakeholder groups. The same event or project is framed to highlight its benefits for different groups, rather than being promoted through entirely separate campaigns for each constituency.

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GROOMED FOR GREATNESS: NURTURING IDENTITY AND WELL-BEING – AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY OF PERSONAL CARE PRACTICES AMONG BLACK MEN CONSUMERS

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Black American men are often overlooked when it comes to conversations about personal care and grooming practices. Personal care is often perceived as a feminine trait, that leads to the marginalization of Black men's experiences and preferences in this area (Mbilishaka, Mbande & Mbande, 2021). Skincare companies have fueled this perception by replicating the exact business model of women skincare companies without considering the mechanical nature of a man and the physiology of his skin which differs in so many ways (Patterson, 2022). Despite consistent evidence that hair and hair care have implications on mental health and Black identity for women, to date, there is limited research on the construction of Black men's identity through personal care practices (Mbilishaka, Mbande & Mbande, 2021).

Research questions that will guide this study include:

1. What are the personal care practices of Black men, and how do they vary across different ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic locations?
2. How do Black men perceive the role of personal care in their lives, and what meanings do they attach to their routines?
3. In what ways do cultural heritage and community expectations shape the personal care practices of Black men?
4. How do societal norms and stereotypes about race and gender influence the personal care decisions of Black men?
5. What challenges do Black men face in maintaining their personal care practices, and how do they navigate these challenges?

Personal care practices among Black men serve as a conduit for expressing identity, fostering self-esteem, and promoting mental and physical health. Personal care is not simply about looking presentable; it is about feeling fortified in one's own identity and cultivating a sense of pride and self-worth. The unique hair and skin care needs of Black men, coupled with the cultural significance of grooming, make personal care an essential aspect of daily life that warrants greater attention, from a qualitative context, by researchers.

The authors posit that a qualitative study on the personal care practices of Black men is essential to capture the complexities and nuances of their experiences. Personal care practices are not merely routines of hygiene and grooming; they are deeply embedded in cultural identity, self-expression and self-image, and societal perceptions. This even includes the selection of fragranced personal care products such as deodorant (Van Paasschen, Walker, Phillips, Downing, & Tipper, 2015). Black men's personal care practices may be influenced by a myriad of factors, including but not limited to historical context, media representation, socioeconomic status, and community norms. A qualitative approach allows researchers to engage with participants in a manner that respects and values their lived experiences and personal narratives. The need to examine the depth and breadth of Black male racial socialization is critical in understanding unique ways in which Black boys and men develop racialized gendered identities, self-pride, and the social analyses needed to make meaning of navigating life as a member of a historically marginalized group (Smith, 2023).

A qualitative design, incorporating a grounded approach and thematic analysis will be utilized to explore the rich tapestry of personal care practices among Black men. This method will enable researchers to:

- Capture detailed descriptions of personal care routines and the products used.
- Explore the impact of social constructs, such as masculinity and racial identity, on personal care choices.
- Uncover the influence of family, peers, and media on shaping personal care perceptions and behaviors.
- Identify challenges and barriers faced by Black men in accessing personal care products and services that cater to their specific needs. Despite the importance of personal care for Black men, various barriers may hinder their access and engagement with these practices. These barriers include limited representation and availability of products specifically tailored to the needs of Black men, cultural stereotypes surrounding masculinity and personal care, and systemic factors such as racial mistrust of medical care and lack of health awareness (Stevenson et al., 2021).

A qualitative study on the personal care practices of Black men is a necessary step toward a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between personal care, cultural identity, and social dynamics. By adopting a qualitative approach, researchers can amplify the voices and experiences of Black men and provide a platform for their personal care narratives to be heard and appreciated. Such a study can inform and transform personal care industries, health practices, and societal perceptions, ultimately fostering greater inclusivity and esteem for diversity in personal care practices.

The findings from this study are significant for a range of stakeholders. The research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Black masculinity and cultural practices. For the personal care industry, insights could inform the development of products and services that better meet the needs of the Black male market. For health professionals, an understanding of these practices could lead to more culturally sensitive advice and care. Finally, for Black male consumers, this research could illuminate the diversity of their personal care practices, encouraging a more inclusive definition of self-care and grooming.

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EXPLORING THE AISLES OF AUTOMATION: THE BLACK CONSUMER EXPERIENCE WITH SELF-CHECKOUT IN RETAIL

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

The advent of self-checkout technology in retail stores has been heralded as a convenience and efficiency enhancer for consumers, aimed at reducing their wait times, giving consumers control over their shopping experience, and increasing their shopping engagement and enjoyment (Elliot, Hall, & Meng, 2013; Fernandes & Predroso, 2017; Lee, Fairhurst, & Cho, 2013). However, the impact of such technologies may not be uniform across different demographics since adopters of self-service technologies tend to be younger, well-educated males with limited need for personal contact in their shopping experience (Fernandes and Predroso, 2017; Lee, Fairhurst, & Cho, 2013; Weijters, Rangarajan, Falk, & Schillewaert, 2007). Years of underinvestment by the private sector has left certain segments of consumers with a paucity of options in retail (McKinsey Quarterly, 2021). For these consumers, is that underinvestment also salient in the retail automation experience?

Black shoppers often report feeling under heightened surveillance when using self-checkout, a perception that can stem from broader experiences of racial profiling in retail settings. Studies such as those conducted by Pittman (2017) detail the racial hierarchies that Black Americans navigate while procuring products and the marred experience they incur when shopping in retail settings. The presence of anti-theft measures, such as cameras and weight sensors, while intended to deter shoplifting, can inadvertently contribute to a sense of mistrust and discomfort among Black consumers due to past traumatic experiences with excessive monitoring in stores and false accusations of shoplifting (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2020).

The level of customer service available at self-checkout stations is a critical component of the user experience for Black consumers. When assistance is needed, the responsiveness and demeanor of staff can greatly affect perceptions of the technology and the retailer. In some cases, Black customers have reported feeling ignored or receiving subpar service when seeking help because they were seen as unfit. Pittman (2017) details this in customer interviews. Research participants consistently shared shopping experiences where the sales staff ignored them.

The demeanor of staff can impede the customer experience. In the field study conducted by Schreer, Smith, and Thomas (2009), sales staff complied when “customers” requested that the security sensor be removed from a pair of sunglasses at high end retail stores, but displayed greater levels of suspicion (e.g., staring, following) among the Black customers. Similar actions applied to the self-checkout process could exacerbate feelings of alienation, devaluation, or frustration.

This study focuses on the Black consumers, a group whose experiences in retail settings has been historically sculpted by racial dynamics, including profiling, excessive surveillance, and discrimination (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2020; Pittman, 2017; Schreer, Smith, & Thomas, 2009). Therefore, the efficacy and reception of these systems can vary widely among Black consumers. Their experience with self-checkout is further shaped by the wider social and cultural milieu, which can affect how they engage with the technology and the quality of service they ultimately receive. Understanding their interactions and experiences with self-checkout systems can illuminate those broader issues of technology adoptions and customer satisfaction within this crucial consumer group. Although earlier studies (i.e., Lee et. al, 2013) have examined self-checkout across demographic domains such as gender, limited research has been conducted across this group. As this qualitative study is developed, it aims to uncover the nuanced interactions

between race, technology, and the customer experience within the retail context, providing insights into how retailers can impactfully address the needs of a critical consumer group in an increasingly automated world.

Black consumers, like all consumers, exhibit a range of attitudes towards technology based on individual preferences, experiences, and levels of comfort. While some may embrace self-checkout for its perceived speed and autonomy, others may be skeptical, distrustful, question efficacy, or find it less intuitive. The digital divide, which disproportionately affects minority communities can influence the ease with which Black shoppers embrace and interact with self-checkout systems (Darko, Hinton, Horrigan, Levin, Mundi & Wintner, 2023). Although the digital divide encompasses lags of computer ownership, technology adoption, and digital skills (Darko, Hinton, Horrigan, Levin, Mundi & Wintner, 2023), studies on this have uncovered more nuances to the digital divide that transcends the mere solution of putting a computer or tablet in the hands of consumers (Walker, Hefner, Fareed, Huerta, & McAlearney, 2020).

Data collection for this study is in progress. A qualitative design, incorporating a grounded approach and thematic analysis, will be employed to provide rich, detailed insights into the experiences of Black consumers. Data collection methods consist of three components:

- In-depth interviews with 60 Black consumers, of varying ages, who have used self-checkout systems in various retail settings.
- Three focus group discussions with 8 to 10 participants each, allowing for interaction and shared experiences to emerge.

Retailers should be accountable and responsive to their customers (Kohan, 2022). The authors contend that a more inclusive and responsive self-checkout experience that recognizes the unique challenges and concerns faced by Black consumers is needed. The Black consumer has been historically overlooked by retail firms (McKinsey Quarterly, 2021). Retailers must demonstrate cultural competence by understanding and addressing the unique experiences of Black consumers with self-checkout systems. This involves training staff to manage their biases, change their behavior, and track their progress, and to provide equitable service to all shoppers. In their sessions, they should be given information that contravenes stereotypes and allows them to connect with people whose experiences differ from theirs (Gino & Coffman, 2021).

Additionally, retailers can engage with Black communities to solicit feedback on self-checkout experiences and to co-create solutions that enhance usability and satisfaction. The findings from this study can also serve as a guide in that process. The Mitigate Racial Bias in Retail Charter, which pledges to design and implement actions that reduce racial bias in the shopper experience and foster inclusive shopping experiences for all can also be leveraged (Kohan, 2022).

Black consumers, like all consumers, exhibit a range of attitudes towards technology based on individual preferences, experiences, and levels of comfort. While some may embrace self-checkout for its perceived speed and autonomy, others may be skeptical, distrustful, question efficacy, or find it less intuitive. The digital divide, which disproportionately affects minority communities can influence the ease with which Black shoppers embrace and interact with self-checkout systems (Darko, Hinton, Horrigan, Levin, Mundi & Wintner, 2023). Although the digital divide encompasses lags of computer ownership, technology adoption, and digital skills (Darko, Hinton, Horrigan, Levin, Mundi & Wintner, 2023), studies on this have uncovered more nuances to the digital divide that transcends the mere solution of putting a computer or tablet in the hands of consumers (Walker, Hefner, Fareed, Huerta, & McAlearney, 2020).

The experience of Black consumers with self-checkout in retail is multifaceted and influenced by a complex set of factors, including individual attitudes towards technology, societal perceptions, past shopping experiences, and the level of customer service received. Retailers have a responsibility to ensure that self-checkout systems are accessible, user-friendly, and sensitive to the needs of all consumers, including Black shoppers. By fostering an environment of inclusion, accountability, and responsiveness, retailers can improve the self-checkout experience for Black consumers and, in turn, for their broader customer base.

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EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS INTO THE BARRIERS OF INTEGRATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO MARKETING CURRICULUM: AN ANALYSIS OF AACSB-ACCREDITED BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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DEVELOPMENTAL PAPER

Recent literature has examined the extent to which business schools, accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), have integrated sustainability into their marketing curriculum. Prompted by recommendations for additional research, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of knowledge by conducting a quantitative analysis of three explanatory factors (student demand, faculty engagement, and accreditation) that may impact the extent of integration. The goal of this study is to help business schools identify and overcome the barriers of integrating sustainability into their marketing curriculum.

Incorporating sustainability into marketing curricula is crucial for preparing future business leaders to deliver on the dual mandate of pursuing growth and profitability while addressing the pressing environmental and social challenges of our time (Chandy et al., 2021). Recent literature provides two studies that examine the extent to which business schools, accredited by AACSB, have integrated sustainability into their marketing curriculum. Nicholls et al. (2013) conducted a study that surveyed business school deans and marketing department heads of 480 AACSB accredited schools and found that sustainability content is included in more than 40% of both undergraduate and graduate marketing courses. A decade later, a systematic analysis of AACSB accredited undergraduate marketing program websites found that “sustainability is seemingly *absent* from the marketing or business core curriculum of 67% ($n = 323$) of the 482 schools in our analysis” (Langan et al., 2024).

The aforementioned studies report, to varying degrees, that AACSB-accredited business schools are integrating sustainability into their marketing curriculum. What is not yet clear is the impact of specific factors on the extent of integration. Theoretical lenses that could be used in this study include Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). A hypothetical-deductive research design will be used to test the following hypotheses.

H1: Student demand for sustainability content is positively associated with the extent to which sustainability is integrated into marketing curricula.

H2: Faculty willingness to replace existing content, to make room for sustainability topics, is positively associated with the extent to which sustainability is integrated into marketing curricula.

H3: Documenting a marketing course to satisfy the requirements of AACSB Standard 4 (AACSB International, 2024, p. 42). is positively associated with the extent to which sustainability is integrated into marketing curricula.

Primary data will be collected via an online survey from heads of Marketing departments at AACSB-accredited business schools in the United States. Regression analysis will be performed to empirically test the research hypotheses and, more generally, to better understand and explain key drivers and barriers of sustainability integration in the marketing curriculum of these business schools.

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PRICING PUMPKINS: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING VALUE-BASED PRICING FOR A SEASONAL SMALL BUSINESS SERVICE

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This case study centers around an autumnal porch décor concierge service launched in Fall 2024 in the 8th largest Tennessee city (pop. 65,000+) in the western part of the state (About Jackson, 2024). The small business owners local pumpkin farmers, yielded an abundance of produce and, at the same time, a viral sensation touting the success of a pumpkin delivery service thriving in the Dallas-Fort Worth area became national news (Senanayake, 2024). With an abundance of supply and no local providers with delivery/concierge service similar to the one in Texas, the small business was born, stating: “With Fall in the air, sharing our joy for homegrown produce through our local concierge service to craft bespoke autumnal porches.” To build a portfolio and spread positive word of mouth, all while collecting valuable insight, the initial year one launch was intended to be limited to three demo homes. These demo homes were identified in various established, family-friendly neighborhoods whose owners were excitedly willing to participate in exchange for their complimentary, elaborate fall displays. Ideally, owners felt it could collect necessary information on the market, pumpkin prep and preservation methods impacting durability and produce life span, delivery/logistical bottlenecks, aesthetic trends, and competitor activity to fully and successfully launch in year two. Instead, Instagram popularity and word of mouth led to DM’s and texts from potential clients whose homes eagerly awaited to celebrate Fall. With an excess inventory of pumpkins and interested homes, the business launched from test to full rollout in a matter of a few days, all without the benefit of formal market assessment and data collection. Soft launch/demo year one was over within a few days. It was full steam ahead. There was just one big question: “What do you charge?” This case study aims to explore one significant pricing oversight, the repercussions of variable value perceptions, and key takeaways for the future.

Value-based pricing is a good strategy for unique or highly customizable services because it reflects the customer’s perceptions of what that service is worth (Stobierski, 2022). However, it is critical to ascertain any variability in value perception across desired markets. High-end, specialized service providers need to be able to provide information and set a price to maintain exclusivity and maximize desirability for clients interested in the specialized boutique offering (Decima, 2024). Packages and prices were set using the following sources: (1) indirect competitive pricing (other pumpkin concierge services in TX, OH, and Nashville, TN), (2) comparable undelivered pumpkin reference pricing (pumpkin patches, big box stores), (3) informal “what would you pay?” feedback from demo homeowners and friends who fell into either High or Low-Value groups, as well as (4) cost basis (delivery costs/mileage, farming expenses, prep costs, labor).

Source 3 qualitative homeowner feedback revealed some consistencies across homeowners and friends (importance and value of concierge service (delivery, setup, hands-free)) as main value-added component, followed closely with the inimitability of the bespoke aesthetic of the produce, a preference for the company’s heirloom varieties in pale blue, blush and white to create a unique look for their homes that neighbors could not easily source or replicate, and the appreciation that the pumpkins were locally-grown. A significant difference within Source 3 emerged: value perception fell into two groups (low and high).

High-Value: homeowners historically full of autumn spirit and had long since decorated for the season, mentioned, “I have to have this; I’m hosting Halloween/Thanksgiving.” These customers had a realistic idea of how much it costs to purchase pumpkins. They also have experience handling pumpkins and caring for them, and an appreciation for the hands-free concierge component of the service they had traditionally shouldered.

Low-Value: homeowners had an ambivalent perception of fall décor in general (e.g., typically minimally

decorated for Fall, located in an area without many visitors, or simply not home much in the Fall) mentioned: “Wow, some folks really get into decorating for fall, I’ve never done anything past carving a few pumpkins”, only willing to pay perhaps \$75-\$100 for 10 pumpkins. This low perceived value meant that those homeowners hadn’t thought much about using a service like this and/or had little reference price information. Low-value would not be considered a viable segment if it weren’t willing to pay more than \$75-\$100, which is below or at cost for pumpkin growers.

The key mistake made by the new start-up: the Low-Value homeowner was confused with the High-Value, Small Package homeowner. This mistake was critical in price-setting and affected market interest, growth, engagement, and market share. Confusing High-value/Small Package clients with Low-Value homeowners was the pain point for this startup as it had chosen not to offer the small package option for homes interested in only a small display, focusing solely on the large package, featuring 40-50 pumpkins, priced at \$350. Once the price and package description were posted, only five interested customers (25%) of those messaged ultimately purchased the \$350 package. Comprehensively, that’s a mere 3.8% conversion rate of followers-clients. Lessons learned in this small business pricing case study pertaining to the fact that it is necessary to fully understand whether there is variability in perceived value amongst customers to provide price points for every level of value perception in a desired market. Value perceptions for seasonal décor services are not as well-researched as those of other seasonal products. Neglecting a sizeable portion of the market that assigned a high value to the service but did not need a large quantity meant that the value-based pricing strategy was only for high-value, large-package customers.

The key takeaways from year one should help boost year two sales with key lessons learned: Make room for lower-volume segments with seasonal services, especially those seasons with promising growth projections. The small package/High-Value market can be profitable if deliveries can be batched, thus decreasing mileage and delivery costs. An online scheduling system with four delivery days across the first two weeks of October will be employed to maximize delivery efficiency while allowing sufficient prep time in between. Some sincere homeowners did desire the service; they just needed a small quantity.

Educational implications of this case study include a price-setting exercise based on value-based pricing. Students would be able to explore the characteristics of the target markets, price sensitivity, and tolerable price points. Students could also explore the differences between pricing seasonal services versus services consumed year-round. Students would also have the opportunity to calculate break-even points based on product cost, time, and mileage so that package pricing ideas could be generated for target markets. Students could also create efficient logistical route zones to batch homes together making deliveries more cost effective. Finally, having students spend time on a metric to determine the value perceptions of customers would be beneficial. Delineating between a Low-Value homeowner and a High-Value homeowner who needs or desires a small-scale display is critical. The market potential for small-package High Value is promising, whereas interest from Low Value would likely wither regardless of price.

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THE IMPACT OF CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY ON SALES: CASE STUDY ON THE LAUNCH OF AN ORIENTAL RESTAURANT IN ALGERIA

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This case study explores the effects of social media format and content on consumer responses in the Algerian restaurant industry, particularly focusing on La Parrillada, a new Syrian-style grill restaurant in Sidi Bel Abbes, Algeria. The study demonstrates that content marketing, especially through social media platforms, can significantly boost sales when executed correctly. The objective is to identify how to choose the most effective content strategy during a restaurant's launch.

The growing importance of digital communication in marketing strategies is evident. Content strategy goes beyond simple advertising and places the company in a well-defined territory, communicating its positioning, its values, as well as its benefits and advantages (Bouhlal, 2023). Content that is creative, varied, and showcases appetizing dishes or behind-the-scenes moments is highly effective in attracting potential customers. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of global customers trust online reviews for products, hotels, and restaurants (Li, 2021).

Several studies have explored the impact of social networks in the restaurant industry, particularly focusing on how narcissistic men are more likely to share posts about their culinary experiences, leading to positive outcomes for restaurants (Kim, 2018). The visual volume of a social media message had a positive effect on consumers' intention to visit the restaurant (Chan, 2023). The more photos included in a post, the more interesting it is to visit this restaurant because a post with several photos showing different aspects (food, service, environment) requires a greater cognitive effort (Chan, 2023). The dynamics of photos, such as using a fork or a sauce that flows, positively affects the viewer, attracts their attention, arouses their interest and makes the post more memorable (Chan, 2023). The conversion rate (comments and private discussions) positively impacts a restaurant's revenue, while the amplification and applause rates have no significant effect (Li, 2021).

For our case study, we have chosen a new oriental Syrian-style restaurant called "La Parrillada". We explore how it has been able to increase its sales thanks to social media and content strategy. Given that Syrian food with an Algerian touch is a brand-new concept in the city, our research question is the following: What is the optimal content marketing strategy to use to drive sales in this food service sector?

We used an unstructured interview, which, according to Yin (YIN, 2009), is a great tool for gathering rich qualitative data due to its flexibility. The interview was conversational but structured around three main themes. We began by addressing the topic of La Parrillada's success, focusing on its effective content strategy. Initial open-ended questions explored the strategy behind the success and which post formats generated the most engagement. Follow-up questions delved deeper into specific data, like access to private Facebook post statistics. Yin (YIN, 2009) suggests data triangulation, using various sources (documents, diagrams) to validate findings. We had access to a revenue tracking diagram and analyzed approximately 70 Facebook posts from the first six months, studying reactions to different content types (images, videos, texts, emojis, etc.).

La Parrillada employed a mix of paid, earned, and owned media in its digital marketing strategy. Paid media included sponsored posts, earned media came from user reviews and shares in online groups, and owned media consisted of the restaurant's regular posts on social media, showcasing its dishes. The restaurant posted three times a week, often using Instagram Stories and Reels to engage its audience.

Copywriting played a key role, with the community manager using enticing descriptions like “only for connoisseurs and grill lovers” to attract attention. A promotional video released a week before opening highlighted the restaurant's ambiance and the sound of a sizzling barbecue, generating a strong initial customer turnout.

The content strategy also aimed at retaining customers, with regular Facebook posts emphasizing ingredient freshness, cleanliness, and staff friendliness. The community manager strategically timed posts to coincide with peak engagement hours. Emotional messaging and frequent reminders helped maintain consistent growth in turnover during the first six months.

The use of medium-length text, emojis, and multiple photos in posts proved effective, generating more positive interactions and boosting turnover compared to shorter text or single images. This approach helped build brand awareness, trust, and customer loyalty.

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GETTING PHYGITAL: EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION OF PHYGITAL SHOPPING EXPERIENCES IN FRANCE THROUGH ONLINE REVIEWS

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Brick-and-mortar retail is changing, and its role as a simple point of transaction and exchange is no longer the same. Recently, researchers have begun to focus on how to implement digital technologies in physical retail stores to enhance customer experience. However, knowing how to implement which technologies at which touchpoints can be challenging for managers (Shankar et al., 2021). And research remains scant on how consumers perceive these digital technologies and how they impact perceived experience. This study focuses on “phygital” retail settings and aims to examine salient digital and non-digital touchpoints in phygital environments as well as their impact on perceived experience.

“Phygital” can be defined as “the transformation of physical stores in the digital era; concepts are completely redesigned to offer a new customer experience and use digital tools as sales support” (Banik & Gao, 2023, p. 1; Batat, 2019, p. 134). Batat (2024) suggests through her customer-centric, phygital paradigm that research should examine phygital experiences through consumers’ interpretations of them. The authors use Lemon & Verhoef’s (2016) definition of shopping experiences, Vannucci & Pantano’s (2019) definition of touchpoints, and Liu et al.’s (2024) definition of eWOM for this study. As a result, this paper proposes examining user-generated content that relates to perceived experiences within phygital retail contexts and considers online consumer reviews to be a relevant source of consumer reflections of shopping experiences once they have been completed.

The authors captured Google reviews from 2017 to 2024 for points-of-sale in France that the literature has already qualified as “phygital” (Bèzes, 2019). The authors also selected three traditional stores with similar customer ratings located in equivalent catchment areas to enable comparative analysis. Data collection and analysis were conducted using a combination of automated and manual methods with researcher triangulation (Caillaud & Flick, 2016). The authors used the Instant Data Scraper (IDS) tool for the initial data collection process, enabling efficient extraction of customer reviews from Google’s platform.

Sentiment and thematic analyses were used to explore the nature of the phygital environments in the sample. Thematic analysis was performed on the verbatims focusing on identifying and categorizing the most salient variables into consumer experience themes. The authors assessed each review for polarity, which measures sentiment on a scale from -1 (completely negative) to +1 (completely positive). The sentiment analysis of the user reviews revealed a diverse spectrum of positive, negative, and neutral feedback about the subject under study. The results from the thematic analysis for the phygital environments suggest that the salient shopping experience factors for consumers are the in-store environment and atmosphere (sensorial), store layout and interaction (behavioral), product quality and expertise; product availability and pricing (cognitive), customer-service experience (affective), and quality of advice and expertise (affective and cognitive). The data reveals no reference to specific digital touchpoints in the customer journey other than one touchpoint in one phygital store, suggesting that digital touchpoints play a secondary and complementary role in these shopping environments. In line with previous research, it is primarily human interactions

that make up moments of truth in the phygital customer journey, especially when interacting with products that require advice, touching, or trying on (Vannucci & Pantano, 2019).

This study contributes to the developing research on phygital shopping experience. By moving beyond the conventional dichotomous hedonic-utilitarian dimensions currently analyzed in phygital experience literature, this research offers nuanced insights into the complex landscape of digital integration in retail environments. The methodological approach of utilizing user-generated content analysis represents a significant departure from conventional interview and survey methods, providing a more organic and unfiltered perspective on consumer experiences in phygital contexts. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how digital touchpoints transform consumer interactions and perceptions. Future research should address the current exploratory limitations of this study through a comprehensive approach: developing experimental designs to validate the identified thematic factors' influence on customer satisfaction, broadening the sample to include a more extensive range of online reviews across diverse stores and sectors, and conducting comparative investigations to understand the varying saliency of digital touchpoints between phygital concept and phygitalized traditional stores.

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BUSINESS INTUITION IN THE AGE OF DATA AND AI

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Business schools increasingly emphasize data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) in their curricula, aligning with rising industry demands. However, this evolution potentially risks marginalizing another critical dimension of managerial judgment: business intuition. We explore the evolving relationship between data-driven decision-making and intuitive judgment, considering the implications for marketing education and practice.

Contemporary research positions intuition as a cognitive, dual-process, and domain-specific phenomenon (Svenson et al., 2023). While traditional views equate intuition with spontaneous, affective decision-making, recent studies suggest that expertise and contextual familiarity shape intuitive accuracy. For example, domain-specific extensions of the Unified Scale to Assess Individual Differences in Intuition and Deliberation reveal that intuitive preferences vary considerably across contexts and correlate with self-rated expertise (Pachur & Spaar, 2015). These findings complicate binary categorizations of intuitive versus analytical thinking.

Theoretically, the relationship between business intuition and the increasing use of data analytics and AIs can go in either negative or positive direction. Pushing into the negative direction would be potential overreliance on algorithms in decision-making, which would delegate decision-making to systems and reduce personal judgment and experiential learning; automation bias, which would lead to decreased critical thinking and challenge; over-quantification, too much focus on measurable metrics, which would crowd out tacit knowledge and ignore qualitative, contextual insights. All of that would be compounded by an overall loss of context and common sense and crowned by intuition atrophies from lack of use. On the other hand, AI and data analytics help support intuitive sense-making by pattern recognition at scale, surfacing hidden trends and anomalies, providing real-time insights which could sharpen on-the-spot decision-making and reinforce 'educated gut' responses with context. They could help develop predictive capabilities by helping leaders anticipate scenarios, not just react, and strengthening proactive, forward-thinking intuition. In addition, the cognitive load reduction offered by these systems could free up mental space from routine analysis, allowing intuition to focus on strategy and judgment.

Many marketing educators and practitioners acknowledge the enduring relevance of intuition, particularly in complex or ambiguous business environments along with the widespread implementation of analytics curricula. As Pachur (2015) suggests, effective managers rarely rely solely on either intuition or analysis. Instead, decision styles exist along a continuum, influenced by problem structure, time constraints, and individual experience. Rather than viewing intuition and analytics as competing paradigms, we advocate for a more integrated framework.

We discuss pedagogical methods to foster this integration. One approach involves scenario-based assessment tools that measure students' ability to apply both intuitive and analytical reasoning. For example, participants are presented with realistic marketing problems involving customer performance metrics and asked to evaluate potential responses. Their choices reveal not only comprehension of data but also insight into the strategic and interpersonal nuances of each case. Responses are evaluated along a spectrum, reflecting varying levels of intuition-informed judgment and profit-oriented thinking.

Additionally, we examine how instructional design can better reflect the interplay of analytics and intuition. Suggestions include comparative exercises involving AI and human decision-making, discussion of cases where over-reliance on either system led to suboptimal outcomes, and explicit instruction in metacognition to help students recognize their own decision-making styles.

Finally, we encourage a broader philosophical shift: repositioning intuition not as a counterpoint to analytics but as an essential, learnable competency in business education. As firms increasingly adopt data-informed strategies,

future leaders must also cultivate the tacit, experience-driven insight that enables nuanced judgment. Marketing educators are uniquely positioned to lead this evolution.

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SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACT ON EMOTIONS

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As social media continues to influence modern communication, it is essential to assess its impact on users' emotional well-being. Digital platforms have transformed the way individuals engage with content, connect with others, and express themselves. However, while social media fosters connectivity, it also raises concerns about its effects on mental health. Previous studies have shown conflicting outcomes, with some indicating enhanced emotional well-being through social validation and social support, while others highlight negative consequences, including stress, anxiety, and depression. This study seeks to clarify these complexities by examining the relationship between dominant emotional states and engagement with social media, considering key factors such as daily usage time, posting frequency, likes and comments received, and messaging activity.

Using data from 101 participants, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the impact of these variables on emotional well-being. The findings indicate that increased social media usage and receiving likes are positively correlated with dominant emotions, whereas comments and messaging activity exhibit negative correlations, suggesting potential stressors. Surprisingly, gender, age, and posting frequency were not significant predictors of emotional states. These results highlight the complex relationship between social media interactions and user well-being, emphasizing the need for platform designs that minimize negative emotional effects while maximizing positive experiences.

The study is guided by several hypotheses based on existing literature. First, daily social media usage and receiving likes are hypothesized to have a direct positive relationship with dominant emotional states, reinforcing the idea that social engagement fosters positive emotions. In contrast, receiving comments and messaging activity are expected to have a negative relationship with emotional well-being due to potential exposure to criticism or social pressure. Additionally, the study examines demographic control variables such as age and gender to assess their role in moderating these relationships.

The impact of social media on emotions is multifaceted. While engagement and positive reinforcement through likes may enhance emotional states, interactions involving comments and direct messaging may lead to unintended stress, anxiety, or even social comparison. This highlights a critical issue—how social media platforms can be redesigned to foster a more balanced and emotionally enriching user experience. Our research also reveals that not all forms of engagement contribute equally to well-being, suggesting that platform-specific factors influence emotional outcomes in ways that require deeper exploration.

Beyond individual users, these findings have broader implications for social media companies, policymakers, and mental health professionals. The study underscores the need for tech firms to integrate mental health considerations into platform design, such as reducing algorithmic amplification of emotionally triggering content or implementing better tools for user control over interactions. Policymakers can use this information to push for regulations ensuring safer digital environments, while mental health professionals can develop targeted interventions to help individuals manage their online interactions effectively.

Future research should explore variations across different demographic groups and social media platforms. Examining cultural influences, personality traits, and long-term behavioral changes associated with social media use could provide further insights into its psychological effects. Additionally, experimental studies tracking real-time emotional responses to specific types of social media interactions may yield more nuanced conclusions about digital well-being.

This study contributes to the growing discussion on digital well-being by offering insights into how different aspects of social media shape emotional health. The findings underscore the necessity for both users and platform developers to take a more mindful approach to social media engagement, fostering a healthier digital environment. As the world continues its digital evolution, understanding and addressing the emotional dimensions of social media will be crucial in shaping a future where technology enhances well-being rather than undermining it.

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SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY OF CUSTOMERS TOWARDS RETAIL STORE FORMATS – EVIDENCE FROM INDIA

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

India's retail sector is a key economic driver, contributing to employment, technological growth, and sales volume (Kakkar & Mathur, 2020). It is divided into organized retail, with large corporate chains, and unorganized retail, including traditional stores (Kumar & Rao, 2018). Globalization has brought multinational brands like Walmart and IKEA, yet India's 50 million small stores remain strong due to consumer trust and convenience (Haritha et al., 2017). Growth is fueled by urbanization, rising incomes, and liberalization policies, leading to an increase in malls and supermarkets (Tanwar, 2015). While organized retail offers variety, unorganized retail thrives on cultural familiarity and proximity (Gandhi & Chinnadorai, 2017). India's market mirrors trends in BRICS nations, where consumer behavior varies based on trust, modernization, and price sensitivity (Junior et al., 2014). Despite FDI restrictions supporting domestic retailers, debates persist over its impact on employment and supply chains (Nagpal & Sinha, 2017).

Indian consumer behavior is influenced by rising GDP, brand consciousness, and double-income families, fueling organized retail growth (Hameed, 2015). While price remains important, shoppers prioritize quality, value, and engaging experiences (Karmugil & Kannapa, 2015). Customer loyalty is driven by product quality, store layout, and service, leading to repeat purchases and recommendations (Vashishth & Tripathi, 2016). Cultural factors, including family traditions and festivals, give local stores an edge through personalized connections (Khare & Modi, 2024). With limited research on loyalty across retail formats, further studies are needed to track evolving consumer preferences in India.

Enhancing service quality is crucial for improving customer satisfaction and loyalty, with convenience factors like parking, trading hours, and store navigation playing a key role (Vashishth & Tripathi, 2016). Value-added services, personal interactions with sales staff, and retail innovations such as self-checkout and online ordering further influence shopping experiences (Chaudhary & Sharda, 2017). Consumers prioritize variety, competitive pricing, and convenience, with quality being the most significant factor in store preference (Mishra & Koul, 2017). Additionally, store atmospherics, including lighting, scent, and layout, impact consumer behavior, making shopping an experience rather than a necessity (Sreeram et al., 2017).

A structured questionnaire was utilized to collect data from 285 urban Indian consumers through a snowball sampling technique. The questionnaire comprised six key sections, including demographic profile, service attributes, product attributes, store attributes, customer loyalty and satisfaction, and store choice. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale, allowing for a standardized assessment of consumer perceptions. To refine the variables and ensure statistical validity, factor analysis was conducted. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the impact of store, product, and service attributes on customer loyalty and satisfaction, providing valuable insights into consumer preferences and shopping behaviors.

The study's key findings highlight the significant role of product and store attributes in shaping consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Product variety and quality emerged as the most influential factors, with consumers prioritizing assortment and freshness when choosing between organized and unorganized retail formats. Similarly, store attributes such as layout, lighting, and product arrangement play a crucial role in enhancing the shopping experience, as modern, well-organized stores attract greater customer loyalty. Interestingly, service attributes like self-checkout, customization, and online shopping had no significant impact on consumer satisfaction, suggesting that Indian consumers, particularly in urban areas, value product quality and store ambiance over service-related

conveniences. When it comes to retail format preferences, consumers tend to favor organized retail for bulk purchases due to price competitiveness, hygiene, and digital payment options, whereas unorganized retail remains the preferred choice for daily needs and top-up shopping, primarily due to its convenience, home delivery services, and flexible credit options. Despite the rapid expansion of organized retail, traditional stores continue to thrive, maintaining strong customer relationships and cultural relevance in India's retail landscape.

The implications of this study highlight key considerations for retail strategy development, policy implications, and future trends. In terms of retail strategy, organized retailers should focus on enhancing product variety and improving store ambience to attract and retain customers, while unorganized retailers must modernize their store layouts and offer diverse payment options to remain competitive. From a policy perspective, the study provides valuable insights into government regulations on foreign direct investment (FDI) in retail, emphasizing the need to balance foreign investment with protections for local retailers. Lessons can be drawn from other emerging economies such as China, Brazil, and South Africa, where governments have successfully facilitated foreign retail entry while ensuring the sustainability of local businesses. Additionally, while service attributes may currently be of lesser significance, they are likely to become more influential as digitalization continues to reshape consumer expectations.

The study confirms that Indian consumers exhibit dual shopping behaviors, preferring organized retail for bulk purchases and unorganized retail for daily needs. Retailers must focus on product variety and store ambience to drive customer satisfaction and loyalty. While service attributes are not yet a major driver, their importance may grow with digital transformation. Future research could explore the impact of e-commerce, age, and gender as moderating factors in retail preferences. Additionally, a qualitative approach could provide deeper insights into evolving consumer behavior.

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FOSTERING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING THROUGH PROSOCIAL EDUCATION IN MARKETING CURRICULUM

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Engaging students in prosocial behaviors enhances academic performance and fosters deeper engagement. Research shows that integrating acts of kindness into college education strengthens intellectual and emotional growth, with studies linking prosocial behaviors to improved academic outcomes (Cramp & Lamond, 2016). A key advantage is the "ripple effect," where acts of kindness inspire further kindness, benefiting both individuals and the broader community (Chancellor et al., 2018). Moreover, prosocial activities contribute to students' mental and emotional well-being, enriching their academic experiences (Curry et al., 2018). While prior research highlights the benefits of prosocial behavior, its application in business education, particularly marketing curricula, remains underexplored. Most studies focus on the overall well-being effects, whereas this study offers a structured intervention—a course-embedded prosocial project—that enhances students' prosocial motivation, behavior, and emotional intelligence. Several theories support this approach, including Humanistic Learning Theory (HLT), Social Exchange Theory (SET), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and Compassion Theory (CT; Cook et al., 2013; Durlak et al.; Gilbert, 2017).

Grounded in humanistic, holistic, and positive psychology theories, this study introduces and tests a structured prosocial education framework that integrates motivation, behavior, and emotional well-being. Prosocial motivation encompasses both intrinsic drivers, such as empathy and self-transcendence, and extrinsic factors, including social approval and personal growth. Prosocial behavior, exemplified by acts of kindness, spans relation-driven altruism and charitable activities, reflecting the multidimensional nature of prosocial engagement. Additionally, the emotional outcomes of prosocial behavior play a pivotal role in prosocial education. Emotional well-being is not only a consequence of prosocial behavior but also a catalyst for fostering prosocial motivation, reinforcing a positive feedback loop that sustains and enhances altruistic engagement.

This study explores whether educators can promote prosocial motivation, behavior, and emotional well-being through the course-embedded prosocial project, "Spread Kindness" (SK). Integrated into an upper-level Marketing Management course, SK required students to perform intentional acts of kindness (AOK) toward humans, animals, or nature, expecting no external reward. While acts were completed individually, collaboration promoted social exchange and observational learning. Students documented their experiences in blog entries, group reports, and class presentations, following the Intentional Acts of Kindness process (Binfet, 2015): planning, execution, and reflection. The initiative addressed four learning objectives: applying social marketing principles (Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis), fostering community engagement (Social-Emotional Learning, Social Learning Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior), strengthening social connections (Social Exchange and Compassionate Love Theories), and encouraging self-reflection on personal growth and intrinsic motivation (Humanistic Learning and Compassion Theories). The findings highlight the educational and societal impact of prosocial education.

Content analysis, a method well-suited for identifying themes and patterns in qualitative data, was employed (Krippendorff, 2018; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970) served as a framework to assess prosocial motivation, examining which psychological needs are fulfilled through prosocial behavior. Given the lack of consensus on categorizing altruistic behavior, this study introduces a clear and concise typology, created through thematic analysis, to classify prosocial actions. Additionally, a thematic approach was applied to analyze students' reflections, capturing and interpreting their emotional responses to the prosocial project.

The sample consisted of 48 students from three sections of the Marketing Management course—one in Fall 2019 and two in Spring 2020. The findings support the integration of prosocial projects into the curriculum, demonstrating

that students engaged in meaningful prosocial behaviors that benefited both themselves and their local communities. These activities addressed key psychological needs, such as fostering self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Moreover, the project significantly enhanced students' emotional well-being, generating a "ripple effect" that extended beyond individual participants to positively influence their immediate social networks and broader communities.

Engaging in micro-level acts of kindness enables students to participate in meaningful prosocial behaviors, deepening their understanding of their role in supporting others. These seemingly small yet impactful actions broaden students' perspectives as future professionals and consumers, equipping them with the skills to approach marketing and societal challenges with empathy and awareness. Additionally, fostering prosocial micro-acts enhances students' emotional well-being, contributing to better mental health and a more fulfilling college experience. Such initiatives also strengthen social awareness by improving students' comprehension of social marketing and the broader societal implications of their actions. By granting students autonomy in prosocial projects, they gain a sense of empowerment, further enhancing their well-being and reinforcing their sense of purpose in both personal and professional contexts.

This study has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. A more precise distinction between material and monetary exchanges in prosocial behavior could refine the thematic typology presented in this paper and provide deeper insights into the specific dynamics of micro-level acts of kindness. Additionally, Maslow's framework does not account for the fulfillment of non-human needs. Future research could explore the motivations behind prosocial actions directed toward non-humans, such as aiding animals or supporting the environment, to better understand the perceived needs driving such behaviors. While this study focused on positive emotions, examining the role of negative emotions, such as guilt or regret, in prosocial activities could add a new dimension to the findings. Finally, the study's generalizability is limited by its focus on upper-level marketing courses. Expanding future research to include lower-level courses, diverse age groups, and other business disciplines would provide a broader perspective on the impact and applicability of prosocial education.

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ENHANCING TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ENGAGEMENT: REASONS TO IMPLEMENT VIDEO QUIZZES IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

College professors continuously try to improve learning, engagement, and teaching within the classroom. Within this writing, the writer describes the implementation of video quizzes in the learning management system, Brightspace. Both students and professors can have favorable outcomes from utilizing video quizzes. This writing describes potential benefits of video quizzes, potential drawbacks of video quizzes, and ideas to consider when creating video quizzes.

Many college professors continuously try to improve their teaching, engagement, and student learning. The writings within this paper illustrate why college professors should consider using video quizzes in their college classroom. This paper details the experience of a professor at a small university. The professor in this paper uses the learning management system D2L Brightspace. Video quizzes can be implemented in online classes, hybrid classes, and face to face classes. Learning management systems can support the learner in many formats (Chaw & Tang, 2018). Within this writing, the author will detail why the professor chose to utilize video quizzes, reasons to love video quizzes, potential drawbacks of video quizzes, and things to think about when creating video quizzes.

The college that the professor in this case teaches at is a small university. Small class sizes are normal with anywhere from 10-30 students. Each semester, the professor enjoys getting to know each of the students. Getting to know students is a huge benefit of teaching at a small university. This semester, some professors were tasked with teaching a few hybrid classes. In a normal semester, by week 2 or 3, the professor in this case usually knows the names of all the students in each class. However, these hybrid classes were larger in size, and the professor was struggling to get to know students and put a name with the face. Another concept that many professors are always trying to improve upon is the engagement and atmosphere of the classroom. Creating an atmosphere that students are comfortable in can improve student loyalty (Dobill & Helfrich, 2024). After considering several options, the professor decided to try video quizzes in the classroom using Brightspace. The following paragraph describes several reasons why the professor loves video quizzes.

Most professors are always trying to find new ways to improve the classroom. Last semester, the professor experimented with video quizzes and fell in love with this technique. The professor plans to continue utilizing video quizzes in future classes. This paragraph will detail reasons why the professor truly enjoys video quizzes. The professor assigned a 1 question video quiz. The students were tasked with responding in a 1-to-2-minute video recorded answer. As mentioned before, the professor was struggling to know the names of students in classes. Video quizzes helped to remedy that problem. The professor could watch the video and put a name with a face. Next, video quizzes helped the professor to get to know the students on a deeper level. When asking a question via video quizzes, students were asked to elaborate and provide real world examples to answer the question. Many students responded with things they enjoy doing or things they enjoy buying. One student mentioned that he liked to hunt. Therefore, the professor got to know an interest of this particular student. Further, the professor could see that students were paying attention in class. Many of the video answers that students responded with mentioned things that the professor had talked about in the classroom. It is a great feeling, knowing that students are engaged in the classroom and then carrying that engagement outside of the classroom through video quizzes. Also, students enjoyed the video quizzes. Much of the world utilizes living virtually with the internet, video calling, social media, and specifically YouTube and Tik Tok. Many students feel comfortable creating videos. Therefore, when tasked to combine classroom knowledge and creating videos, many students were excited about the quizzes. How often are your students excited about taking

a quiz? Learning management systems can allow quality human connections in the learning space (Lopes, 2014). There are many reasons to love video quizzes, but these were some of the best takeaways.

When trying something new, potential drawbacks could occur. This paragraph will detail a few potential drawbacks or challenges. First, video quizzes take longer to grade. Watching many students answer questions via a video may take some time. However, with the extra time spent grading, extra connection with students could occur. Another drawback is that AI to answer the question could still be utilized. Although the student is answering the question via video, and you can see their face, that does not mean that they have not looked up the answer via AI tools before creating the video. The professor's experience is that most answer the quiz with genuine responses. However, there are tools available that provide a script for an answer. One consideration to reduce the use of AI would be to ask the student to add a personal story or detail to their video answer. Another potential drawback to consider is that the typical short video quiz is not meant for many questions within the quiz. The professor's video quizzes were designed with 1 question to respond to. The drawbacks listed above are just a few examples of drawbacks, however other drawbacks are possible.

This paragraph will detail some considerations to think about when creating video quizzes. Technology has allowed many changes in the educational space (Lopes, 2014). Therefore, when creating video quizzes a few ideas should be considered. The first concept to think about is the setup of the quiz. On Brightspace, there are a few backend buttons to click to enable the video quiz to happen. The professor's video quizzes are set up similarly to a short answer quiz, but some extra clicks are necessary. When creating your video quiz on your learning management system, make sure that you understand the set-up process for the quiz. Also, consider how to ensure adding the video quiz to the learning management gradebook. Another concept to consider is the actual quiz. The professor usually picks one very important topic from the lecture and poses that as an open-ended question. The professor asks students to respond in a 1-to-2-minute video. The professor's students are asked to include the answer to the question, a real-world example, and add a personal touch that relates the student's life to the topic. Questions on video quizzes have a lot of flexibility. Therefore, any professor using a video quiz could personalize the quiz in many ways. Below this paragraph are a couple of quiz question prompts that could be utilized in a video quiz:

In a video note, record your answer. List and describe the 8 universal functions of marketing.

In a video note, record your answer. Explain each of the 4 components of the marketing mix. Describe a company that you are loyal to and describe how the company utilizes each component of the marketing mix.

Video quizzes provide an avenue for professors and students alike to get engaged and improve learning. One study found that videos within learning management systems provided a more personalized and engaging learner experience (Akram, Iqbal, Ashraf, Arif, Alsubhi, & Aljahdali, 2023). In the current virtual world, video content is consumed immensely throughout the day. Therefore, any professor could consider adding video quizzes to their learning tools utilized. This particular professor's experience with video quizzes has been very positive and the professor is looking forward to using video quizzes in online classes, face to face classes, and hybrid classes. This paper provided insights on why video quizzes can be a favorable addition to teaching, potential drawbacks of video quizzes, and ideas to consider when creating video quizzes.

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ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS IN IMC: A REFINED EXPLANATION THROUGH SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION THEORY

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Understanding advertising effectiveness is critical in Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) as it shapes consumer engagement, brand perception, and purchase decisions (Belch & Belch, 2020). While traditional models such as AIDA (Strong, 1925) are important to Integrated Marketing Communications decisions, they lack the ability to consider deep psychological mechanisms that drive consumer behavior. This study integrates Kelman's (1958) Social Influence Theory and Ryan and Deci's (2017) Intrinsic Motivation Framework to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding advertising effectiveness beyond traditional AIDA models.

Drawing from ten years of student evaluations on advertising effectiveness, this research identifies key considerations of effective advertisements. These considerations are compared with Kelman's stages of Compliance, Identification, and Internalization, as well as Ryan and Deci's extrinsic and intrinsic motivation components. Seven expert judges evaluated the alignment between these advertising attributes and the theoretical constructs, supporting a refined conceptual model for IMC strategy.

Findings indicate that Compliance-based advertising elicits short-term engagement by leveraging external rewards, consistent with Kelman's (1958) framework. Identification-based advertising resonates with consumer self-concept and social aspirations (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), fostering deeper brand connections. Internalization represents the strongest form of influence, wherein brand messages relate to deeply held values, sustaining long-term brand loyalty and consumer advocacy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These findings support the importance of incorporating both Kelman's Social Influence theory, and intrinsic motivation theory, into IMC strategy to cultivate lasting consumer-brand relationships.

Future research should empirically test this conceptual model using a larger dataset and expanded media formats, particularly in digital advertising contexts where consumer engagement mechanisms may differ (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Understanding how psychological influence processes interact with advertising effectiveness will provide actionable insights for marketers seeking to optimize IMC strategies in an evolving digital landscape.

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HOW CAN IMAGE ANALYTICS HELP DECONSTRUCT TOURISM KNOWLEDGE FROM THE COLONIAL GAZE?

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The reflexive turn to tourism knowledge is central to examining the evolving understanding and communication of sustainable tourism. Travel writing (e.g., expedition book) is an important resource to exhibit how settler-colonialism has been commodified, marketized, and normalized, which reveals an explorer (often, with a first-person singular/plural reference) establishes an identity with geographical emplacement and power dynamics (Andéhn et al., 2020). Sobocinska (2014) suggests that tourism culture is grounded in a colonial/imperial explorer from the eighteenth century, and travel books help construct the colonial trope to govern “others” and practice colonial/imperial power even in the post-colonial era. This insight may help problematize the colonial gaze in tourism knowledge because their hegemonic power has influenced the meanings and relationships between places and tourists (Wijesinghe et al., 2019).

To investigate the intersection of tourism knowledge and colonial gaze, scholars found that image analytics may help deconstruct the performativity of visual images (e.g., print advertising, book cover, brochure) with representational, interactive, and compositional functions (Hoye and Kaiser, 2007; Sun and Luo, 2016). From this regard, the social semiotics-inspired image analytics can guide how tourism knowledge is illustrated and forms evolving relationships with various stakeholders. As this method emphasizes the role of interpretation to connect indexical and iconic meanings, qualitative approaches are dominant in existing studies (Bonsu, 2009; Li et al., 2019; Rindell and Santos, 2021; Zhao and Belk, 2008), but the rise of machine/computer vision techniques gives us quantitative and objective measurements to complement the qualitative findings (Mayer and Landwehr 2018; Graf et al., 2018).

This paper aims to incorporate traditional and non-traditional methods to investigate the following research questions: Q1: What are the patterns of colonial tropes in the book covers of New York Times Expedition Bestsellers?, and RQ2: How can the traditional and non-traditional (e.g., image analytics) methods of social semiotics triangulate the search for representational, interactive, and compositional functions?

The book covers of New York Times Bestseller list (2014-2017) were collected by the New York Times (2024)’s Application Programming Interface (API). The programming language R’s image fluency package (Meyer, 2024) was applied to implementing the computer vision approach by measuring contrast, complexity, vertical and horizontal symmetry (all in 0-1 range) for non-traditional image analytics. For the traditional social semiotics approach, Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer* (Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2024) was examined as it represents a tourist with a colonial gaze. This picture depicts a White (heroic) tourist on the top of the mountain to amaze himself with the awe of nature. The clustering analysis was applied to reveal the visual characteristics measured by the machine vision technique. Three clusters were detected by examining the book covers: knowledge adventure, colonial conquest against natural resources, and heroic journey. Using machine vision allows to complement the traditional semiotics approach with quantification to provide scalable and speedy insights which can be applicable cross-country studies.

Keywords: image analytics, computer vision, colonialism, visual method, critical marketing

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LEADING GLOBAL BRANDS' SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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POSITION PAPER

COVID-19 significantly impacted businesses and consumer behavior. The crucial role of social media in crisis management emerged as consumers sought information, support, and connection. Despite this, research remains limited in comprehensively examining how global businesses across different industries have responded to the consumers' various needs impacted by the crisis. Terror Management Theory (TMT) proposes that crises increase mortality awareness, which can trigger existential terror. To mitigate this terror, people develop buffering systems, such as upholding self-esteem, reinforcing cultural worldviews, and nurturing close relationships (Greenberg et al., 1997). TMT's dual-process model further explains these defense mechanisms, distinguishing between proximal defenses (conscious death awareness leading to rational strategies like health promotion or distraction) and distal defenses (unconscious death thoughts leading to value validation and meaning-seeking) (Pyszczynski et al., 1999). The COVID-19 pandemic activated proximal responses highlighting immediate safety as well as distal responses seeking self-worth and a sense of meaning and belonging. We apply TMT to examine how global brands address existential threats and manage the crisis on social media. Using thematic analysis of brands' messages on X (formally known as Twitter), we identify dominant themes that garnered significant engagement and explore how brands integrate TMT-based coping strategies in social media communications. We selected the top ten brands from Kantar BrandZ's 2020 list of most valuable global brands. We retrieved original tweets shared from March 11 to September 10, 2020. The final sample included 98 brands across 11 industries. We analyzed up to ten of the most engaging tweets from each brand, totaling 965 tweets. We found four main topics with 18 underlying themes.

In Topic 1, **COVID-19 Communication and Initiatives**, six themes emerged. Theme 1A highlighted companies' operational and adaptive strategies responding to COVID-19. Many brands (e.g., Nike, Lululemon, Adidas, Cinemark) addressed public concerns through operational changes, prioritizing safety. Hospitality brands (e.g., Hilton, Hyatt, Marriott) highlighted cleanliness protocols. Many brands (e.g., L'Oréal, Volvo, H&M) pivoted operations to produce masks and hand sanitizer, showcasing operational adaptability. Theme 1B emphasized social support and well-being. Brands (e.g., Nike, Volvo, Facebook) advocated public health messages and supported social well-being (e.g., Lululemon, Facebook). Theme 1C recognized the contributions of essential workers. Brands (e.g., Volvo, Tencent Global, Kraft Heinz) expressed gratitude to healthcare and frontline workers. Theme 1D showcased brands' involvement in COVID-related relief through donations. Actions included financial contributions (e.g., Under Armour, Ralph Lauren), product donations (e.g., Alibaba, Estée Lauder, Uniqlo, McCain Foods), and resource support (e.g., Hilton, Facebook), each tailored to the brand's capabilities. Theme 1E highlighted collaborative efforts in addressing COVID-19 challenges. Adidas and Volkswagen partnered to produce protective gear, and Tencent and Fosun supplied global medical necessities, addressing pandemic challenges and safety needs. Lastly, Theme 1F focused on prompt responses to consumer concerns amid pandemic-related service changes. From a TMT perspective, aligning brand communications with consumer needs during such existential threats enhances customer relations and crisis management (Verlegh et al., 2021). Brands adopting prevention measures and promoting community values drive consumer engagement. Creating virtual communities and acknowledging essential workers cater to the consumers' connection needs. Additionally, brands participating in prosocial actions such as donations resonate with consumers seeking meaning and purpose in challenging times (Jin & Ryu, 2022). In Topic 2, **Social and Environmental Issues**, five themes emerged. Theme 2A centered on racial and ethnic equality, with many brands supporting the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and committing to anti-racism efforts (Dove, Nike, Garnier, Hampton by Hilton). Theme 2B highlighted sustainability initiatives, focusing on climate change and net zero pledges. Brands (e.g., Unilever, Danone, Amazon, Ford, Ikea, Volvo) communicated their environmental commitments. Theme 2C showcased brands supporting a variety of other causes, including American Cancer Society (CVS, Gillette), Accessibility Awareness (Facebook), Child Poverty/Red Nose Day (Walgreens), Youth Day (Nestle), Food

Insecurity/Feeding America (Kraft Heinz), and DACA (Amazon). Theme 2D highlighted messages of inclusion and support for the LGBTQ+ community. Lastly, Theme 2E underscored support for various social and environmental issues/causes, often with donations. From a TMT perspective, by addressing important social and environmental issues and engaging in benevolent initiatives, businesses can strengthen their connection with consumers, affirming their role as valuable societal contributors during crises (Jin & Ryu, 2022). In Topic 3, **Product/Brand Promotion**, five themes emerged. Theme 3A included standard product-centric promotions without specific COVID-19 reference. Many brands (e.g., Dior, Zara, Ford, Porsche) featured new launches, while media companies (e.g., Netflix, Disney) leveraged increased viewership due to stay-at-home orders. Hospitality brands (e.g., Shangrila, Hampton) promoted COVID-safe travel options. Theme 3B involved celebrity endorsements and pop culture content. Brands (e.g., Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Nike, Under Armour) featured celebrities (e.g., BTS, Harry Styles) or athletes (e.g., Tom Brady, Michael Jordan). Theme 3C covered consumer-involved promotions such as sweepstakes, contests, and giveaways (e.g., Bud Light, Toyota, Pepsi). Theme 3D focused on products and services related to the COVID-19 crisis. Many brands (e.g., Lululemon, Victoria's Secret) promoted face masks, while others (e.g., Facebook, BMW) offered products or services for connection, showing empathy, and acknowledging community needs during the difficult times. Lastly, Theme 3E highlighted collaborations for new launches, including co-branded products with designers, celebrities, and organizations (e.g., Budweiser and Messi, Estee Lauder and the Met Museum, Airbnb, and Blockbuster). In line with TMT, promotional messages provide a break from pandemic realities, offering familiarity and a sense of normality. Engaging with these messages can alleviate death fears, reinforcing cultural worldviews and enhancing self-esteem. In Topic 4, **Social Engagement**, two themes emerged. Theme 4A involves engaging audiences with entertaining and relatable content. Brands (e.g., Netflix, Walmart, Dr. Pepper) used light-hearted, humorous messages to entertain rather than sell. In line with TMT, this strategy helps foster connections between brands and consumers (Greenberg et al., 1997). Theme 4B focused on informational content such as updates on earnings, profitability, and company news. This strategy can address consumers' need for continuity by offering information that signals corporate stability (Greenberg et al., 1997).

This study offers a unique contribution to the literature on crisis management and communication by identifying engaging social media communication strategies used by 98 global brands across 11 industries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using thematic analysis on highly engaging posts, we identified four dominant topics with 18 underlying themes. Among these, product/brand promotion emerged as the most salient topic, followed by COVID-19 related communication and initiatives, social and environmental issues, and social engagements. Connection was a common theme across all topics. Our findings, framed within TMT, offer valuable guidance for organizations aiming to connect with consumers on social media during crises, helping them respond to consumer concerns and maintain engagement amid heightened mortality saliences.

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AN OUTLOOK INTO DESIGNING RENEWABLE AND SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS TO FULFILL TRANSPORTATION ENERGY NEEDS

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POSITION PAPER

In recent decades, the extensive utilization of fossil fuels, especially in transportation, has raised significant concerns about energy security and the environment. This is primarily due to the non-renewable nature of fossil fuels and the considerable emissions of greenhouse gases they produce. Consequently, nations worldwide have been actively seeking alternative, renewable energy sources to complement traditional fossil fuels in the transportation sector. Biofuels, produced from various biomasses including first, second, and third-generation sources, have gained acceptance as a short-term transitional solution toward renewable and sustainable options for conventional vehicles. For a more enduring transition, electric vehicles powered by electricity derived from renewable and sustainable sources have gained widespread global acceptance.

Despite the emergence of various alternatives in recent years, uncertainties persist regarding the economic, environmental, and social benefits associated with these options. Therefore, the objective of this proposal is to identify numerous energy alternatives for transportation and understand their supply chain intricacies. It will provide literature insights on supply chain configurations, incorporating relevant and current strategies and tactics such as industrial symbiosis, circular economy, and operational hedging. Furthermore, the study will explore the impacts of sustainability policies and supply chain risks associated with energy supply chains. Various methodologies for evaluating and optimizing supply chains necessary for producing transportation fuel, along with considerations of sustainability trade-offs, will also be discussed.

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INFLUENCE OF NON-FAMILY CEO SUCCESSION ON BRAND IN B2B FAMILY-OWNED FIRMS

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POSITION PAPER

Family businesses have been long recognized as cornerstones in the global economy, significantly contributing to job creation, wealth creation, and societal stability (Astrachan, 2003; Maharani et al., 2021). Popular literature even goes so far as to say they drive a global economy (*Global Family Business Index*, 2023; Shah, 2023). The data corroborates that story. As recently as 2021, the top 119 family companies in the US contributed to 81% of the US economy (Roberson et al., 2021), and nearly 60% of the US workforce is employed by just over 32 million family-owned businesses (Pieper et al., 2021). Globally, family-owned enterprises provide over 50% of the global gross domestic product and are responsible for employing more than 65% of the worldwide workforce (*Global Family Business Index*, 2023).

Brand management is known to help a family brand distinguish itself from competitors (Craig et al., 2008), influence consumer purchasing behavior (Lude & Prügl, 2018), and enhance overall business performance (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Family-branded firm messaging bolsters consumer perceptions of brand authenticity and trust (Lude & Prügl, 2018). Nevertheless, there is a limited understanding related to how family businesses specifically handle their brand and how their brands are perceived over leadership succession, a significantly disruptive time during the company's history (Yeoh, 2014).

Despite the prominence of family firms using family names in their brand strategies (e.g., SC Johnson or Ford), research has shown that promoting the family business brand appears to have varying effects (Sageder et al., 2018). It is plausible that shifting from a family CEO to a non-family CEO might alter these perceptions. This proposed research sheds light on this under-researched area (Casprini, Dabic, et al., 2020) by delving into the complexities surrounding family brands in business-to-business (B2B) marketing within the context of CEO succession.

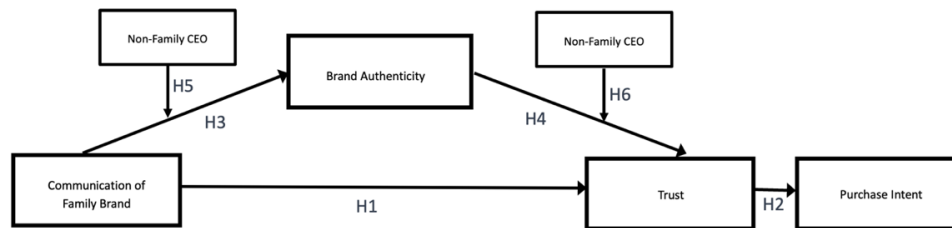
Communicating the brand is often done through cues, which involves tying the founder's brand identity (e.g., family name) directly to the company using a strong family identity (Beck et al., 2020). This type of marketing strategy can help to create a strong association between the business, the brand, and the family. Consequently, this brand marketing initiative leads to better customer loyalty and a more positive brand image that builds a competitive advantage and (Casprini, Melanthiou, et al., 2020; Craig et al., 2008) returns positive financial results (Beck et al., 2020). When a family brand's identity is known to the consumer, it also strongly correlates to word-of-mouth recommendations and purchase frequency (Sageder et al., 2015). Firms that bear the family name not only demonstrate heightened corporate citizenship (Beck, 2016) and customer-centric orientation (Craig et al., 2008) but also exhibit a strategic focus on long-term goals and community engagement (Zellweger et al., 2012).

Family businesses face unique challenges when managing their brand identity during succession because they must strike a balance between tradition and innovation, adapt to changing market conditions, and maintain their fundamental values and traditions (Casprini, Melanthiou, et al., 2020). When considering the impact of non-family CEOs joining a family-run business, it is important to recognize that such leadership changes may disrupt the established trust in family brands. This is because stakeholders might draw certain inferences from the leadership transition, potentially challenging the trust previously built. While research has focused on succession and generational transitions, this author found no literature on the impact of succession regarding external CEO on family brands. However, tangential literature on succession shows that performance suffers in specific periods during succession (Yeoh, 2014) and has mixed results on innovation (Sun et al., 2023).

Consumer research on family brands, revealed via inference theory that consumers infer higher brand authenticity and trust from family business brands, leading to stronger purchase intentions (Lude & Prügl, 2018). However, their

study did not consider ownership structure. In the context of family-owned B2B brands, the relationship that the family CEO maintains with customers plays a significant role in the organization's success (Arsić et al., 2018). The appointment of a new CEO from outside the company may alter the signals or impressions that customers associate with the brand. Therefore, the research question is, *How does a leadership transition to a non-family CEO in family-branded B2B firms influence brand trust and, ultimately, purchase intent?* This proposed research is based on Lude and Prügl (2018) and extends it to include the non-family CEO successor as a moderator, depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Moderated Inference Model



Note: Extension of Lude and Prügl (2018) Family Brand Impact Model with CEO Moderating Variables

This study will explore the complex landscape of family brands in B2B marketing, particularly within the context of CEO succession. It places the leadership structure into context and uses the level of professionalization as a proxy, using inference theory as a theoretical foundation. The focus will be on how the B2B brand cues change during succession and its impact on purchase brand trust and purchase intent.

In consumer behavior marketing, inference-making is a fundamental decision-making process (Kardes et al., 2004). It allows individuals to form judgments and predict outcomes based on the available cues and information. A notable cue is the communication of the family firm brand, as it has the potential to evoke memory-based inferences (Kardes et al., 2004). These memory-based inferences, in turn, influence attitude formation toward the respective brand. It will be interesting to see if consumer inference theory holds in a B2B family branded firm in succession.

The proposed hypotheses mirror Lude and Prügl (2018) and extend the model by adding the moderation variable of CEO succession. The contributions are threefold: first, exploring how the external leadership change impacts B2B customer attitudes will help family businesses in succession planning communication. Second, this research contributes to the broader literature on family business, branding, and B2B marketing. It bridges the gap between these domains and extends our knowledge of the intricate underlying relationships among them. Finally, it extends inference theory to B2B marketing. Through this exploration, this research will offer practical insights for family-owned B2B firms navigating the complexities of succession planning. Brand marketing and communication strategies can be tailored to ensure that family-focused perceptions of the company are maintained.

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THE ROLE OF CLIENT PROJECTS IN LAUNCHING CAREERS FOR WOMEN GRADUATES

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POSITION PAPER

Women outnumber and, by most accounts, academically outperform men in college (Fry, 2022); however, when they graduate, they enter a workplace that in many ways is stacked against them. In most industries, leadership is overwhelmingly male and hence lacking in female role models and mentors (AAUW, 2020). Bias toward male leaders persists, and men tend to receive more actionable guidance and career mentorship than women (Braun et al., 2017). In addition, the qualities that lead to academic success for women may not be the same that lead to workplace success, which tends to reward displays of confidence (Nasher, 2019). The result of this environment can mean fewer women with interest or self-efficacy in leadership positions, and fewer women actually achieving these roles. Colleges and universities have an opportunity and obligation to understand the challenges facing women college graduates and to provide programs and experiences to set them up for success. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), there is a gap between recent graduates' career readiness competencies and employers' needs (Collins, 2022). In short, there is a need to better prepare students for the workplace, particularly women.

A strategy in higher education that can increase career readiness in students is course-embedded client-based projects (CBPs), a subset of experiential learning. Through working with real clients, students apply their content knowledge to actual business challenges and collaborate with peers, faculty, and external professionals, increasing their professional readiness and self-efficacy (Beaupre et al., 2023). The authors of this paper assert that CBPs can be especially effective in preparing female students to succeed in their post-college careers.

Generally, leadership is associated with traditionally masculine characteristics such as risk-taking and assertiveness (Castaño et al., 2019). A recent data analysis of nearly 30,000 employees at a large corporation found that despite receiving higher performance ratings, women were rated lower than male counterparts on their “potential,” leading to slower promotions (Benson et al., 2023). Women’s self-efficacy and ambition can be negatively impacted by this environment (Beaupre, 2022). Increasing women’s self-efficacy could improve their early career growth and help to counter some of the biases they may face (Nasher, 2019). Young men tend to have higher self-confidence than their female counterparts, but that reverses as women gain experience (Zenger, 2019).

The authors hypothesize that female students who participate in CBPs have greater self-confidence in the job interviewing, onboarding process, and early career success. The proposed study will explore the experiences of women who graduated from college in the past two to three years and who participated in CBPs in college. This multi-method research will utilize both phenomenological qualitative and unobtrusive research techniques and will center on the importance of direct, firsthand experiences (Tuohy et al., 2013).

Unobtrusive research will include an analysis of LinkedIn profiles of female college graduates in the last one to five years, who participated in CBPs in college. This will enable the authors to gather insights, trends, or data related to various aspects such as skills, networking patterns, and career trajectories. The use of phenomenology as a method provides a profound understanding of human experiences; however, its drawbacks include issues related to subjectivity, generalizability, complexity, and resource requirements, among others.

While CBP experiences offer valuable learning opportunities, they also come with some challenges that educators must carefully consider and plan to ensure that the end result is effective and beneficial to all stakeholders. Among those challenges are aligning academic and client goals; variability in client engagement and commitment; resource

constraints such as time, funding, and materials; scaffolding client projects through a curricular lens; group dynamics and team management; and assessment and grading.

Future research could investigate whether CBPs are more crucial for the success of marginalized or underrepresented populations. Future research should explore a broader range of populations, such as men, Hispanic, or first-generation graduates. This research could also be extended to other types of university graduates to determine if university size, reputation, focus, and mission affect the value of CBPs for recent graduates.

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PROACTIVELY LEVERAGING AI TOOLS IN MARKETING COURSES: A PROCESS FOR PROMPT ENGINEERING ASSIGNMENTS

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POSITION PAPER

“As with any new tech, AI can be scary because it's unknown. That's okay, just don't hide from it. Start learning today,” advises Kanishka Bhattacharya, Senior Director of Data Science and Analytics at Publicis Sapient.

Artificial intelligence, marketing and marketing education-“Artificial intelligence” (AI) is the term posed by Professor John McCarthy in the 1950s to capture the ways machines (computer systems) can learn the way humans learn (Manning, 2020). These systems are “trained” with data much the way a human learns through repeated experiences. Prior research has highlighted the implications of AI on marketing channels, strategy, performance, and segmentation-targeting-positioning (STP) activities (Vlačić, et.al., 2021). For example, AI can be utilized to predict changing consumer tastes and identify more nuanced segmentation criteria.

The focus of this project is generative AI. Generative AI refers to deep-learning models that can generate high-quality text, images, and other content based on the data they were trained on (IBM, 2023). An individual can input a written prompt like “please build me a consumer profile for a pumpkin spice scented candle,” and a relatively detailed profile is provided. Generative AI tools allow marketers to quickly brainstorm ideas, create copy, develop visuals, and even generate consumer profiles. The advancement of tools like Open AI's ChatGPT and DALL-E, Google's Gemini, and Midjourney have made the use of generative AI accessible to the broader public. While these systems “learn,” the accuracy of responses varies based on how much information the generative AI has been trained on about a particular topic. However, utility and accuracy grow the more these generative AI tools are used, akin to Google's search prowess. Broad access to tools like ChatGPT rapidly disrupted various sectors, including marketing and thereby, marketing education.

Marketing educators have long integrated methods into their curriculum to allow students to build the skills necessary for the job market or further graduate study. For example, educators utilize case studies (Klebba & Hamilton 2007), simulations (Deitz et al., 2022), and debates (Roy & Macchiette, 2005) to develop writing, critical thinking, and oral communications skills. Recently, there have been calls (e.g., Ferrell and Ferrell, 2020) to thoughtfully consider the interdisciplinary nature of marketing so that courses can address industry shifts, including the widespread adoption and use of technologies like AI. Supporting students in marketing courses to learn (1) the usefulness and limitations of these tools and (2) how to leverage them is likely to become an increasingly important need.

Specific to generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT), scholars suggest considering developing methods to “train students to effectively use the tools in solving real-world marketing problems” and to consider “how prompt engineering can be taught and learned.” (Peres et.al., 2023). Interviews with marketing faculty members, industry practitioners, and students suggest a need to understand how AI tools work and how they can ethically and effectively be leveraged in the classroom and in practice (Elhajjar, et.al., 2021; Guha, et.al., 2023). Building on research to date, the purpose of this project is to utilize marketers', educators', and students' perspectives to develop a prompt engineering assignment that is reflective of tasks marketers may conduct in practice and can also be easily updated as technologies and marketing functions change.

Prompt Engineering-A prompt is a statement that tells a generative AI system to perform an action. For example, an individual can write a prompt asking ChatGPT to develop a consumer profile for a particular product or product class. The more specific guidance provided in the prompt, the more detailed and accurate the generated result is likely to be. There have been many courses developed on prompt engineering that offer guidance on the best ways to write

a prompt to generate accurate and precise results. However, these courses often provide guidance without allowing an iterative process whereby an individual refines a prompt several times to see this progression of superior results. Yet, to truly understand how a tool works, the process is just as important as the outcome itself. Therefore, this project aims to identify ways educators can develop prompt engineering assignments that allow students to refine their prompt engineering skills while also testing the boundary conditions of the different generative AI tools. Further, by integrating practitioner perspectives, the assignment can align with the way AI tools are being leveraged in practice.

A prompt engineering assignment was pilot tested with a digital marketing class (n=18) in fall 2023. This assignment was designed based on research (e.g., Vlačić et.al., 2021) and published practitioner guidance (e.g., LinkedIn Generative AI for Marketing course). Students were asked to develop an initial prompt and then improve it for three different tasks (developing a keyword research strategy for search engine marketing, developing a consumer profile, and creating a presentation outline for a social media plan). Student reflections on the assignment were collected to get an initial baseline of students' insights on the assignment and to gather more information about the ways in which they use generative AI tools. Based on this feedback and the literature to date, the researchers are developing a survey to more deeply understand marketers', educators', and students' perspectives about generative AI tools including (1) how the tools are currently being used and expected future use, (2) the challenges with the use of generative AI, and, (3) specific to marketers, what resources (e.g., websites, content sources) educators can utilize to adapt the assignment from year to year, since periodically consulting with practitioners may not be feasible. This feedback is not only useful for revising this prompt engineering assignment but also provides educators a deeper understanding of the commonalities and differences that exist among the different groups (marketers, faculty, students) in their outlooks related to the use and challenges of generative AI tools for marketing.

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ATMOSPHERICS IN THE MARKETING CLASSROOM: A STUDY ON STUDENT LOYALTY WITH REFLECTIONS FROM THE CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

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POSITION PAPER

Many customer experiences are surrounded by atmospheric elements. Atmospheric elements consist of sights, sounds, smells, taste, and interactive exhibits that allow touch. Classroom atmospherics at the college level remains a topic that has a gap in academic literature. This writing will detail the topics of atmospherics, marketing classrooms, customer loyalty, and the student as the customer. With these topics, the researcher hopes to combine atmospherics within the marketing classroom to improve student loyalty. A qualitative case study represents the method for this future research project. Being able to create a classroom space that students feel comfortable in represents the idea behind atmospherics within the classroom.

Imagine creating a space within your classroom that influences the student experience in a positive way. Many professors try to create an engaging classroom, but do the professors consider atmospheric elements within the classroom? The idea that atmospherics can influence the customer experience represents the topic of this writing. In this writing, the marketing student becomes a customer. This writing will detail a description of atmospherics, an overview of the marketing classroom, a description of customer loyalty, and the idea of combining atmospherics in the marketing classroom to improve student loyalty. Further, the author will include information on the methodology, findings, and implications.

The use of atmospheric elements to influence behavior represents the idea behind atmospherics. The atmosphere that surrounds an experience can be represented by sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Many businesses have used the influence of atmospheric elements for quite some time to increase the customer experience (Kotler, 1973). Businesses can use atmospherics as a tool within marketing (Kotler, 1973). Retail stores, restaurants, hotels, theme parks, and shopping malls have a certain atmosphere that surrounds them. Each place a customer visits can essentially increase atmospheric elements to increase the customer experience. If a customer has ever traveled to Las Vegas, Nevada or Disney World, the customer has been surrounded by atmospheric elements. Smells, sounds, sights, and interactive exhibits surround the customer. For example, smells impact a shopping experience. First, think about pleasant smells. If a customer walks by the cookie store in a mall and the sweet cookie smell surrounds the customer, the customer will begin to think about cookies and potentially buying a cookie. Next, think about an unpleasant smell. If a customer walks into a grocery store and it smells like rotten eggs, the customer may not complete shopping at that store. Another example of an atmospheric influence is represented by the decorations that a customer can see. A mall at Christmas time is decorated for Christmas. Does that create feelings of Christmas spirit for the customer during the shopping experience? A researcher could take the angle of all the atmospheric elements. A previous academic study researched the combination of the atmosphere in coffee shops and customer loyalty (Dobill, 2020). Two of the main discoveries from the previously mentioned study were comfort and uniqueness (Dobill, 2020). If customers felt comfortable within the business establishment, the customers returned (Dobill, 2020). If students feel comfortable within the marketing classroom and the classroom represents a unique space, the student experience may be increased. This intended study hopes to dive into increasing atmospheric elements in the marketing classroom to increase the student experience.

Many universities have a business program which includes marketing. Students become engaged in a marketing classroom in many ways. Textbooks, discussions, hands-on activities, case studies, real world situations, and more

represent ways that students can become involved in the marketing classroom. These tools can be used in other majors as well. However, this study will focus on the marketing major. Marketing students emphasize the importance of learning the skill of creativity in their studies (McCorkle, Payan, Reardon, & Kling, 2007). With the use of the tools listed above, marketing students can learn the skill of creativity. Many introductory marketing classes focus on the foundations and building blocks of marketing. Upper-level marketing courses reinforce these same foundations. Other marketing classes focus on a specific area of marketing such as digital marketing, social media marketing, retailing, consumer behavior, and more.

Customer loyalty is defined as repeat purchases, customer commitment, and favorable attitudes toward a business (Uncles, Dowling, & Hammond, 2003). Increasing the customer experience within a business transaction or customer visit can improve loyalty (Dobill, 2020). In the college or university setting, students become the customer. Therefore, improving the student experience could improve loyalty toward the classroom or the college. A large factor in marketing that contributes to customer loyalty is relationship building (Ndubisi, 2007). The same factor, relationship building, applies to students. If a relationship is built inside or outside the classroom with college stakeholders, the student experience may improve.

This section of writing details the idea of combining atmospherics within the marketing classroom to improve student loyalty. Specifically, this study will focus on the marketing classroom and marketing students. Incorporating music to your classroom, adding hands-on activities, having an engaging student discussion, bringing snacks to class, ensuring there is a pleasant smell in the classroom, ensuring that the lighting is correct, and improving the look of the classroom represent examples that the college or marketing professor can do to improve the atmosphere within the classroom. This list does not include all the atmospheric elements that can be improved but provides a great starting point. One study indicated that the seat location impacted student behavior (Vander Schee, 2011). Therefore, part of the atmosphere of the classroom can be seat locations or the organization of the seats. Providing a comfortable atmosphere within the space can improve loyalty of the customer (Dobill, 2020). Sound represents another atmospheric element to consider in the classroom. Faculty members can play music before class to get the students engaged. Faculty members can show videos or play sounds to engage the hearing aspect in the classroom. One example of a sound to generate conversation in the classroom within a digital marketing class is the dial up internet sound. Further, the relationship created between the student and the professor improves the atmosphere in the marketing classroom. If the students are comfortable or have a good relationship with their peers and the professor, classroom discussions could improve. This consists of both psychological comfort and physical comfort within the surroundings.

This study will consist of a qualitative case study using qualitative methods to add to the body of knowledge on this topic. This study will be exploratory in nature. The researcher will analyze current academic literature within the topics of atmospherics, student loyalty with the student being the customer, and customer loyalty to complete this study. The researcher intends to do marketing student interviews, marketing faculty interviews, and classroom observations to complete the research portion of this study. The researcher will utilize the mentioned qualitative methods to obtain rich and descriptive data. The results of this study have implications for academia, the overall business industry, and the marketing industry. The intended research findings will aim to reduce the gap in literature between the marketing classroom, student loyalty, and atmospherics. The researcher hopes to help professors create a space within their classroom where students feel comfortable allowing the student experience to create loyalty.

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SPEED KILLS? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME-ON-TASK, INFORMATION PROCESSING SPEED AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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POSITION PAPER

One of the primary goals of effective pedagogy is to optimize learning and academic performance for all students, including those who do not necessarily self-identify as ‘accommodation / disability’ students, but still process information at a relatively reduced speed compared to other students. Diminished speeds could arise from differences in cognitive style, language proficiency, underrepresentation of cultural influences / diverse backgrounds, illness, stress, fatigue, age, and other factors, (e.g. Ackerman & Ellingsen, 2016; Kyllonen & Zu, 2016). Although a complete investigation into all the causes of reduced processing speeds will not be addressed in this paper, language proficiency, (LP), and undergraduate grade point average, (GPA), will be considered here due to their relevance to student academic achievements. With respect to LP, since adequate levels of language comprehension are needed for the precise comprehension of questions / answers on exams, reduced LP students may require additional time for the consideration and interpretation of these materials. Similarly, slower information processing styles are correlated with both lower individual examination scores as well as relatedly, lower undergraduate GPA results. Since slower information processors also need additional time to consider questions and answers and since a substantial number of undergraduate examinations are time-restricted, slower processors likewise will not have sufficient time to optimally demonstrate their material mastery. Thus, simply because of differences in processing speeds, some students may experience unintentional systemic biases in the form of lower examination scores and GPA results.

In order to prevent these potential biases and to ensure inclusivity and equity for all students, one examination factor that can be easily modified is *time*. Rather than using restricted times for exams, (RT), an instructor could design examinations with very generous time allocations, (‘a power test’, (PT); Gernsbacher, Soicher & Becker-Blease, 2020). The literature suggests that power tests provide more accurate and valid student evaluations for all types of students. More specifically, during PT examinations, students who process information at a reduced rates would have enough time to consider examination question / answer content fully, potentially increasing their grades. Noting that many students tended to complete their examinations at quite diverse time intervals, the instructor decided to implement restricted (RT) and power test (PT) time variations on the two examinations in her four Sales class sections (n=231) to test the effect of time on student examination performance. Each of the sections had identical class content / structure and had no significant differences amongst sections with respect to gender, year of program, major, self-reported GPA, perceived difficulty of exams and how much they studied for each exam or average final class grade (74.23%). Students in the classes were evaluated by two multiple choice examinations, worth 35% and 40% respectively and one group project (25%). All examination questions were order- randomized but identical in content over all the sections. The first exam, covering the first half of the course materials consisted of sixty multiple choice questions with 60 minutes allocated for completion: the restricted- time condition (RT). The second exam, covering materials from the last half of the course, consisted of one hundred multiple choice questions but here, 180 minutes was allocated: the ‘power test’ condition. (PT). The preliminary questions investigated here are: first, were student examination results generally higher in the PT condition compared to the RT condition, second, did all students benefit equally from the PT condition, in terms of improvements (if any) of examination grades, third, did differing LP and GPA students vary in terms of how much of the time they did actually use and finally, did any other student demographics or other data have any impact on these results?

After confirming normalcy, the student means / time usage data for the RT and PT conditions were compared. The average grade in the RT condition was approximately 67.04% (scaled up by 3% for the final course grade calculation) and 230 of the 231 students took the full 60 minutes to complete the examinations (the other student had

less than one minute left before the examination period closed). For the PT condition, the average examination grade was 73.39 % and here, only two of the 231 students used the full 180 minutes to complete the exam. In the PT condition, the average time spent on the exam for all the students was approximately 110.7 minutes. The differences in the mean RT and PT examination grades were significant, $t(1, 230) = 10.49, p < .000$. All students performed better on the PT examinations. Next, a paired- sample GLM was completed with the examinations as the dependent variable and LP and student GPA as the between-subjects factors. Here, there was a main within-subjects effect for the test condition, $F(1, 230) = 50.80, p < .000$ which confirmed that students generally performed better on the PT test compared to the RT test. There was significant between-subject effect for GPA, $F(3, 228) = 13.121, p < .001$, which indicated as GPA increased, the relative performance effects of the RT condition decreased. Here, consistent with the literature, it appears that lower GPA students benefitted more from the PT condition (in terms of percentage improvement) than the higher GPA students. Lower GPA students had more time to consider the materials and this change seemed to improve their ability to more optimally demonstrate their knowledge of the course materials on the examination. There were also significant between- subject effects for LP, $F(4, 227) = 2.48, p = .045$, indicating that the effects of the examination conditions also varied by language proficiency. Similar to the effects for GPA, lower language proficiency students also appeared to generally benefit more from the PT time allocation, as compared to the higher LP students. Further, in terms of whether or not the amount of time remaining on the exam was impacted by either of LP or GPA, another GLM procedure was completed where the time remaining was the dependent variable and LP and GPA were the between- subjects factors. The effects of LP were significant, $F(4, 227) = 2.87, p = .024$ as were the effects of GPA, $F(3, 228) = 5.72, p < .001$. These results imply that students with both lower GPAs as well as lower LP factors used more time to complete the exam than their higher GPA and LP student counterparts, consistent with the current literature. Specifically, since lower GPAs and reduced LP tend to be related to slower processing speeds, additional time on examinations would tend to disproportionately be used by these particular students. Finally, the analyses revealed that none of the student demographics (sex, major, year of program) or collected data, including studying time for each exam, perceived difficulty of each exam, attendance, and teaching evaluations, had any significant effects on these results.

There are a number of limitations to this paper including the generalization of these results to other instructors, classes, course content, types of examination questions (short / long answer), types of students, and academic levels, the inclusion of additional student measures such as motivation, interest, and other similar factors. Despite these limitations, adding additional time to academic examinations is an easy, straightforward method which may help to alleviate some unwanted, unintentional but systemic negative evaluation biases for students in the classroom. Since learning, retention, and optimized academic performance for all types of students are some of the primary goals of academic pedagogy, this simple act of adding more time to examinations seems like a very minor modification which could garner substantial positive impacts towards achieving these goals.

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TEACHING INNOVATION IN RETAILING

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POSITION PAPER

In the US, retailing has been facing challenges due to shifts in consumer behavior triggered by the pandemic. There is a surge in online retailing, while retail stores are struggling to generate foot traffic. The macro-level external environmental factors (i.e., sociocultural, technological, and economic) have contributed to the struggles of retail stores. For example, San Francisco market has one of the worsts economic recovery after the pandemic. Retail thefts are on the rise and the city's downtown has experienced a rise in the homeless population. These market specific conditions of San Francisco has led to the closure of many stores (e.g., Nordstrom) in recent times. Consequently, in the current volatile retailing scenario marketing educators face challenges in teaching the effective application of marketing mix in stores. This challenge becomes tougher in an accelerated degree program where the duration of a marketing course is shortened. Specifically, marketing educators face difficulties in achieving two distinctive course learning objectives. First, explaining to students how different marketing mix variables can effectively interact in retail stores to affect consumer's purchase decision journey. Second, explaining to students how implementation of marketing mix variables in retail stores may differ across countries depending on specific macro-level external environment. The teaching innovation focuses on increasing student engagement and retention in an accelerated learning environment. The innovation focuses on active learning which is facilitated by live interaction with managers of a retail store. Additionally, the teaching innovation focuses on understanding the application of key marketing mix concepts in the retail context through comparative analysis using photographic narrative inquiry. The exercise of Photographic Narrative Inquiry Retail Atmospheric (PNIRA) suggested by Seung and Sergueeva (2017) was adapted to conduct a field visit. This field-based exercise required students to visit an assigned mall. Within the mall, students visited a specific retail footprint within an assigned retail store. Specifically, students visited the retail footprint of Emporio Armani located within the store of Bloomingdale's in Westfield Mall, San Francisco. To achieve the first learning objective, students interacted with the business managers of Emporio Armani's apparel, cosmetic sections, and of Bloomingdale's to understand how the brands have overcome the challenges posed by the recent macro-environmental trends. The managers explained the steps outlining the effective implementation of marketing mix variables. Some of the demonstrated marketing mix examples included involving the students by showing them sustainable labeling in Emporio Armani's apparel, offering them product trials of Emporio Armani's lipstick range, offering them promotional coupons, explaining them Bloomingdale's loyalty programs, and demonstrating them the prestige pricing strategy of Emporio Armani. To achieve the second learning objective, the teaching innovation focused on dividing the students into teams. Students analyzed a retail store of their choice in the mall and worked with their teams to conduct comparative analyses with a similar store located in another country. Through photographic narrative inquiry teams prepared a presentation comparing the retail stores explaining how implementation of marketing mix variables in retail context may differ across countries depending on the specific macro-environmental market forces. After the field visit, teams gave a presentation on the comparative analysis and did a reflective observation discussion on both the learning exercises. This innovation is novel as it positively impacts student learning outcomes through experiential learning. The innovation also positively impacts the business community. Due to current market condition challenges in San Francisco downtown malls are facing a decrease in retail traffic. The assigned retail store and mall were positively impacted by the footfalls generated by the field visit exercise. The team at Bloomingdale's also had a chance to showcase their brands and talk about their loyalty programs to the group. The business had an opportunity to interact with prospective consumers and to generate positive word of mouth.

The teaching innovation was used in teaching the core course of Marketing Strategy offered to the accelerated 1-year MBA students. This course was offered in the Fall-term of the academic program (2023-2024). The Marketing Strategy course is offered in 7 classes which are 3 hours each. The teaching innovation was offered in class 5 and over these classes students were working on understanding the course-concepts related to marketing mix. On class 4, students were told that they would have a field visit after class 5. I and the academic team accompanied the students on the field visit. Students were taken to Westfield mall in San Francisco. Students had live interaction with the business managers of Emporio Armani and Bloomingdale's. In teams, students analyzed a retail store of their choice

in the mall and conducted comparative analyses with a similar store located in another country. Through photographic narrative inquiry teams prepared a presentation comparing the retail stores. The explanation provided to students is described in Table 1. The teams explained how implementation of marketing mix variables in retail context may differ across countries depending on the specific macro-environmental market forces. The academic team (i.e., class Professor & Academic Dean of the program) accompanied the students. The mall was located close to the school campus. Appointments were made with the Emporio Armani and Bloomingdale's team. Bloomingdale's team organized additional security as there were 61 students.

Table 1. Explanation provided to students on the PNIRA exercise.

From the field tour:

- 1) Pick a brand of your choice from Westfield Mall, San Francisco.
 - 2) Submit reflection piece using photo narratives comparing the respective store's marketing communication with a similar store located in another country.
 - 3) Look at the following:
 - product assortment
 - new product displays
 - branding decisions/packaging
 - warranties and/or return policies
 - physical surroundings of the store including store employees,
 - purchase process of consumer
 - technological advances within the store
 - customer service personnel
-

The teaching innovations were live interaction with business managers within a retail store and comparative analysis of a retail store versus (vs.) another one in a different country using PNIRA. Such teaching innovations help in achieving student learning outcomes in an accelerated learning environment. Field visit strengthens the traditional learning environment by providing students with learning through observations and reflections (i.e., experiential learning). As future business leaders, besides academic preparation in marketing, industry demands a clear understanding of real-world market conditions. In-person retailing is shrinking and there is more demand for online retailing. Stores are struggling to increase footfall. Many stores are shutting down. The teaching innovation provided students with live interaction with a successful retailer. To demonstrate the application of course concepts in effective implementation of marketing mix, the retail store treated the students as prospective consumers. Therefore, through the role-play element students were demonstrated effective marketing mix strategies which were successful in attracting consumers to visit the retail store despite the challenging environment. This experience allowed students to observe how marketing mix course concepts are effectively implemented in complex real-world scenarios. Through the comparative analysis exercise using PNIRA, students developed critical thinking skills by understanding how retail environments can vary in different geographies due to varied macro-level external environment. The knowledge learned from the field visit can be integrated into the cognitive structure of students. Active participation in field visit results in greater retention of key course concepts thereby improving student learning.

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AI AND MARKETING ENVIRONMENT IN 2028-2033 -- OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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POSITION PAPER

In the realm of technological innovation, a radical phenomenon has gained raging attention. Artificial intelligence (AI) is redefining human interactions with machines. This is a groundbreaking concept which involves the development of computer systems that possess the ability to expand the human intelligence. These systems can process data, identify various patterns, make decisions, and also perform tasks that were cognitive to humans alone (Kumar, 2023). Artificial Intelligence is the revolution, which continually pushes its boundaries of what machines can achieve and it is developing a future where technology and human intelligence is integrated. Among a very long list of applications, for example, AI is used in healthcare (Paul et al., 2020), finance (DMahbub, 2023), transportation (Frank & Frank, 2023), entertainment, manufacturing, and lots more (Simplilearn, 2023). Artificial intelligence has significant impact on numerous facets of corporate operations and strategy (Ditty, 2023), innovation and product development, decision-making and insights-seeking (Haleem et al., 2021), customer engagement (Rafalski & Netguru, 2023), and market position, positioning and competitiveness (AI-powered Marketing, 2023). The product life cycle of offerings will highly likely be shortened significantly.

In addition, AI provides opportunities for enhanced quality of life (Ali et al., 2022), augmented decision-making (Gülen, 2022), economic growth (The Economic Potential, 2023), socio-economic development (Atske, 2022), global competency, and fosters conservation and sustainability. Artificial intelligence creates challenges too. Automation leads to job displacement. AI automates normal and repetitive operations, displacing workers in industries such as manufacturing, data input, and customer support. Predictive maintenance powered by artificial intelligence eliminates the need for human inspections and maintenance chores, affecting jobs in conventional maintenance industries (Bangalore, 2023). If potential customers do not have adequate income, market size can dwindle. After all, a prospective customer needs to be aware of the product, prefer the product, and most importantly have the financial resources to buy the product.

AI needs workforce upskilling and reskilling to adapt to new tasks that require digital literacy, data analysis, and AI-related knowledge (Elephant, 2023). Automation and robotics are reshaping manufacturing jobs, with an emphasis on AI monitoring and maintenance (Bajwa et al., 2021). To prepare the workforce for AI-related professions, governments and companies should engage in education and training programs. To address the changing nature of employment and preserve employees' rights in the AI era, appropriate labor rules and regulations must develop. AI is highly likely to cause job displacement (Brookings, 2022), ethical concerns (Brookings, 2023), excess dependency on AI and destruction of individual critical skills (Marr, 2023), economic disparity between countries (IMF, 2020), and security risks such as hacking and stealing of confidential information.

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RETENTION STARTS WITH ENGAGEMENT: THE FACULTY FACTOR IN MARKETING EDUCATION

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POSITION PAPER

Student retention remains a critical challenge for most universities. Student retention has been a major focus of higher education research since the 1960s (Nieuwoudt & Pedler, 2023). To make matters worse, higher education institutions also face a steady decline in new students, contributing to the enrollment cliff. The enrollment cliff is caused by declining birth rates in the U.S., resulting in fewer traditional college-aged students starting in 2025 (Homan, 2024).

Many colleges have intensified recruiting to reach new student groups. Other colleges have turned to income-based repayment plans. No matter how they are implemented, these recruiting tactics face a hard truth: recruitment is a zero-sum game with fewer young people unless it draws in students who wouldn't have attended college otherwise (Grawe, 2021).

Student-focused retention efforts can help offset the decline in prospective students. Retention initiatives drive higher enrollments by encouraging more students to return. While these efforts are not new, they have become increasingly important as the pool of prospective students continues to shrink (Grawe, 2021).

In their study of 578 current university students, Nieuwoudt and Pedler (2023) found that most participants had considered leaving university before completing their courses. Several factors, including family responsibilities, financial pressure, time management challenges, heavy study loads, and work commitments influenced this. Likewise, several factors influenced participants' decision to remain at university, the most common being their commitment to personal and career goals and the social support they received.

As universities strive to enhance retention, there is growing recognition that faculty engagement is pivotal in fostering student success. Research consistently shows that faculty support, involvement, mentorship, and relationships significantly enhance student retention across various educational settings.

In nursing programs, students who perceive higher levels of faculty support are more likely to persist in their programs. This support includes psychological encouragement and functional assistance, which help students feel competent and achieve academic success (Shelton, 2003).

In online learning environments, faculty involvement plays a vital role (Gao, 2023). Faculty actively engaging with students boosts student participation and improves retention rates. Faculty who use active and collaborative learning techniques involve students in higher-order cognitive tasks and maintain positive interactions significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, contributing to higher retention rates (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Mentorship programs boost academic performance and retention. Students with mentors often achieve higher GPAs, complete more courses, and are less likely to drop out compared to those without mentors (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Positive teacher-student relationships enhance engagement and retention, leading to better academic performance and attendance (Quin, 2017).

Faculty engagement plays a vital role in student retention. Through support, high-impact practices in the classroom, and building strong relationships, faculty can significantly improve students' academic persistence and success. The authors posit that institutions should prioritize faculty development, support, and belonging to maximize these benefits.

This study aims to explore how faculty development, support, and belonging influence student retention, with a specific focus on business and marketing undergraduate programs. By identifying key drivers of retention and engagement, the research will provide actionable insights to inform institutional policies and strengthen student retention across diverse populations.

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AIRPORT HOTELS RESPONSE APPROACH TO NEGATIVE ONLINE REVIEWS ON THIRD-PARTY BOOKING PLATFORM

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POSITION PAPER

Airport hotels offer proximity advantage for overnight layovers, long transit connections, business travellers with short turnaround and airline crews. Recent hospitality studies tend to concentrate on online customer reviews, specifically the types and frequency of response in luxury hotel brands. This paper explores the airport hotels' response approach to negative online reviews on third-party booking platform.

Negative online reviews response basically revolves around two major approaches. Problem-solving approach perceives online reviews as a catalyst for prompt, efficient and discrete resolution of customer complaints. The aim of this approach is to protect the hotel's reputation and assure service recovery through quick, corrective actions. The strategic approach focuses on customer engagement to enhance a hotel's operational effectiveness. The goal is to generate co-value by aligning the hotel's offerings with customers' expectations with the hope of retaining and attracting customers in the long term.

The data comprised of publicly available information on Booking.com among unhappy guests who posted their reviews from their most recent stay in Dubai's major airport hotels. Content analysis was conducted on the responses posted by 13 airport hotels, until data saturation was reached.

Based on the most recent replies by hotel management, it was discovered that no specific negative response approach dominates. Hotels that pay attention to problem-solving approach often offered personalized responses within 24 hours. Some hotels had no undefined timeframe of promised corrective action. Hotels adopting strategic approach followed standard service recovery strategies. This paper encourages airport hotel management to share the actual improvement or actions they had accomplished with dissatisfied guests through email as a step towards customer service innovation.

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NAVIGATING COMMERCE AND COMMUNITY: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF IN-STORE SHOPPING PREFERENCES OF BLACK CONSUMERS AT BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

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POSITION PAPER

Black-owned businesses play a significant role in their communities, but they face unique challenges and opportunities in attracting and retaining Black consumers (Fairlie & Robb, 2008; Leppert, 2023; Perry, Seo, Barr, Romer, & Broady, 2022). The historical and socio-economic context of Black-owned businesses in the US is complex and deeply intertwined with issues of racial equity and community development (Cox & Edwards, 2022). While there is a growing body of literature examining entrepreneurship among Black business owners, there remains a gap in understanding the consumer behavior of Black shoppers within these establishments (Bates & Robb, 2014). Despite shifts in the retail landscape, fueled by the surge of online shopping, in-store experiences remain crucial for many consumers. Black-owned businesses often serve as cultural and economic anchors in their communities (Bates & Robb, 2014; Leppert, 2023; Perry, Seo, Barr, Romer, & Broady, 2022). Understanding the shopping preferences of Black consumers at these businesses can provide insights into how these enterprises can thrive.

Previous research has indicated that consumer behavior is often driven by cultural identity and the desire to support businesses that align with personal and community values (Thomas & Carpenter, 2013). For Black consumers, this may include a preference for products that cater to their needs and a shopping environment that reflects their cultural heritage (Harris-Lacewell, 2004). Despite the importance of Black-owned businesses, there is limited research on the in-store shopping preferences of Black consumers within these spaces (Washington, 2018). These studies focus on quantitative data regarding shopping experiences and what consumers are looking for, but there is a gap in understanding the nuanced, qualitative aspects of Black consumers' shopping experiences, specifically at Black-owned businesses. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a deeper understanding of the qualitative factors that influence Black consumers' choices and satisfaction when shopping at Black-owned businesses.

The shopping preferences of Black consumers at Black-owned businesses reflect cultural, economic, and social dynamics. Understanding these preferences is crucial for Black entrepreneurs, policymakers, and marketers aiming to create more inclusive economic growth. This literature review explores the themes that have emerged in the literature, including cultural relevance and identity, customer service, product assortment, store environment, community engagement.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of cultural relevance in attracting minority consumers (Darko, Lyn, Prince, & Stewart, 2022; Seock, 2009). In a report conducted by partners at the McKinsey Institute for Black Economic Mobility, Aboagye, Burns, Lyn, Muvezwa, Prince, & Sibanda (2023) found that Black shoppers are more likely to patronize stores that reflect their cultural identity and offer products that cater to their specific needs. Similarly, Burns, Darko, Luckie, Stewart III, and Zegeye (2023) highlighted that the cultural connection between Black consumers and Black-owned businesses can foster a sense of community and loyalty.

The quality of customer service is a significant factor in the shopping preferences of Black consumers. Noel, Prince, Providence, Stewart III, Rikuda, and Zegeye (2021) revealed that personalized and respectful customer service is highly valued and can play a role in the decision to shop online instead. Moreover, Pittman (2020) noted that Black consumers often seek a shopping environment where they feel welcomed, valued, and understood, which can be more prevalent in Black-owned businesses.

Product assortment is another critical aspect of in-store shopping preferences. Burns et. Al (2023) found that Black consumers prefer stores that offer a wide range of products that cater to their specific preferences, including hair care, beauty, and fashion items that are culturally relevant. This preference underscores the need for Black-owned businesses to carefully curate their product offerings to meet the expectations of their clientele.

The ambiance and layout of the store can also play a role in attracting Black consumers. Although research on Black American consumers is limited in this area, previous research such as studies conducted by Dabija & Babut (2014) identified that a well-organized, and aesthetically pleasing store environment is important to shoppers. Additionally, the inclusion of cultural elements in the store design can enhance the shopping experience and create a welcoming atmosphere.

Black consumers often view their patronage of Black-owned businesses as a form of community support. Burns et. Al (2023) and Darko et. Al (2022) found that consumers are more likely to shop at businesses that actively engage with and give back to the local community. This engagement can take various forms, including hosting community events, supporting local causes, and providing a platform for local artists and entrepreneurs.

The literature suggests that Black consumers have distinct in-store shopping preferences when it comes to Black-owned businesses. Cultural relevance, customer service, product assortment, store environment, and community engagement are key factors that influence their shopping behavior. However, the existing research examines this from the context of quantitative data. Qualitative studies that examine shopping preferences of Black consumers, such as Pittman (2020), do not include Black-owned businesses and address the shopping experience from a discriminatory context. These preferences are not merely a reflection of consumer behavior trends that span across different demographics but are distinct and require a nuanced approach to be effectively addressed by Black-owned businesses. The position advocated here is that Black-owned businesses need qualitative research to uncover these preferences and implement strategies that resonate with the Black community to foster a supportive and loyal customer base.

The study will employ a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups to collect data from Black consumers. Participants will be recruited through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of Black consumers in terms of age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately participants to gain in-depth insights into individual experiences and preferences. Focus groups will be organized with 4-5 groups of 8-10 participants to facilitate discussions and identify common themes and differences in opinions among Black consumers. Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data. This will involve coding the data, identifying patterns, and grouping codes into themes that emerge from the interviews and focus groups.

The research is expected to reveal key insights into the shopping preferences of Black consumers at Black-owned businesses. It will identify the elements of the in-store experience that are most valued by this demographic group, including aspects related to customer service, product assortment, cultural relevance, and store ambiance. Insights that could help Black entrepreneurs and Black-owned businesses enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty when targeting the Black consumer market would also be captured in this study.

The findings of this study will be valuable for Black-owned businesses seeking to improve their in-store experience and align their services with the expectations of their target market. Additionally, the research will contribute to the broader understanding of Black consumer behavior within the context of Black entrepreneurship and Black business ownership, potentially informing future studies and business strategies.

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MAINTAINING INTELLIGENCE IN DIGITAL MARKETING DURING THE RISE OF AI

Christopher Wilkey, Ball State University
Austin Hostetter, Ball State University

PANEL POSITION PAPER

The rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) presents profound challenges and opportunities for marketing education. This panel session explores the dynamic intersection where AI is reshaping both industry practices and academic curriculum in marketing. As AI technologies advance, traditional marketing principles face scrutiny: do they still hold true in the era of predictive analytics and automated decision-making? This session examines industry examples to illuminate how AI is transforming consumer behavior analysis, campaign management, and customer engagement strategies.

In the academic realm, the panel discusses strategies for real-time integration of AI advancements into marketing courses. How can educators effectively teach about AI-driven marketing practices as they unfold? What pedagogical innovations are necessary to prepare students for careers where adaptability and technological fluency are paramount? Insights are shared from the Center for Professional Selling at Ball State University, where an AI innovation initiative has been implemented to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Attendees will gain practical insights into navigating the dual challenges of updating marketing curricula to reflect AI advancements while preserving core marketing principles. The panel encourages a forward-looking discussion on fostering a learning environment that equips students with the agility and critical thinking skills essential for navigating the evolving digital landscape.

This abstract outlines the panel's focus on not only understanding the impact of AI on marketing but also on exploring proactive approaches to teaching and learning that empower educators and students alike to thrive in an AI-driven marketing ecosystem.

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PREPARING FUTURE MARKETERS: BALANCING HUMAN CREATIVITY AND AI-POWERED INSIGHTS

*Hannah Walters, Northern State University
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PANEL POSITION PAPER

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming marketing through data-driven decision-making and personalized engagement. High-exposure AI jobs are often in well-paid fields requiring a degree, highlighting the need for marketing students to master these tools (Kochhar, 2023). However, marketing thrives on human creativity, crafting narratives that connect emotionally. As AI automates analysis, marketers must balance technology with creative ingenuity. This paper explores strategies to prepare future marketers for this balance.

In Deloitte's 16th annual Tech Trends report, AI is the common thread of nearly every trend (Raskovich, 2024). While AI has enhanced multiple areas within organizations, marketing stands to benefit the most (Kumar et al., 2024). The rapid adoption and evolution of generative AI have impacted marketing education and practice (Sihi & Ryan, 2024). A key challenge in adapting marketing education to AI advancements is the rapid pace of change, making it hard for educators to stay current (Oteyi & Dede, 2025). Structural challenges also arise in determining when and how to use these technologies effectively. Clear yet adaptable policies are needed to guide implementation (Adeshola & Adepoju, 2024). Additionally, educators must trust that new tools enhance learning outcomes, a process that takes time (Kizilcec, 2024).

While AI presents challenges, it also offers opportunities to enhance marketing education. Integrating new technologies equips students with essential skills for their careers and graduate studies (Guha et al., 2024). Educators are already using AI for brand campaigns (Yang, 2023) and role-playing in sales courses (Milovic et al., 2024), with more innovations emerging. Below are more ways instructors are integrating technology into their curricula.

Initiative 1-Developing a Questionnaire (in a marketing research course). A valuable classroom exercise involves having students first manually draft survey questions for a research study, focusing on clarity, neutrality, and alignment with research objectives. Then, students use AI tools such as ChatGPT to generate an alternative set of survey questions, allowing them to compare and analyze differences in wording, structure, and potential biases. By refining their original survey questions based on AI-generated suggestions, students learn to critically assess and improve their question design. This exercise cultivates essential research skills, equipping future marketers with the ability to leverage AI as a supportive tool while maintaining the human judgment necessary for collecting meaningful consumer insights.

Initiative 2-Sentiment Analysis (in a marketing management course). In this practical classroom exercise, students use AI-driven sentiment analysis to evaluate real-world product reviews. They collect 25 reviews from platforms like Amazon or Yelp, then use AI tools to assign sentiment scores and categorize them as positive, neutral, or negative. AI-generated word clouds help visualize recurring themes, highlighting consumer perceptions. This approach enhances students' ability to interpret AI-driven insights while emphasizing the importance of human intuition in contextualizing data. Ultimately, students develop a balanced skill set for strategic marketing decisions..

Initiative 3-Email Marketing (in a digital marketing course). As AI automates repetitive tasks, more class time can be devoted to developing students' creativity and critical thinking. In digital marketing courses, email marketing traditionally involved drafting an initial email from scratch, but AI and templates now generate strong foundational drafts quickly. To enhance learning, students first analyze information about an unfamiliar B2B product before refining an AI-generated email to ensure it effectively conveys value. This approach shifts the focus from basic drafting to strategic content enhancement, deepening students' understanding of both the product and effective communication.

Initiative 4-Cases (across different courses). Cases are a staple in business education, helping students analyze challenges, interpret data, and develop informed recommendations. However, the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT, which can generate case solutions, has raised concerns about their effectiveness. Despite this, Harvard Business Publishing reaffirms the importance of case studies in fostering critical thinking (Lafkas, 2024). To adapt, a revised approach now has students focus on identifying key problems and relevant data rather than formulating solutions. They approach the assignment like a detective solving a mystery. This shift prioritizes analytical reasoning, ensuring students engage deeply with the material before collaborating on recommendations in class.

In conclusion, marketing students will benefit from a curriculum that equips them with an understanding of AI's impact on marketing strategies, processes, and activities, preparing them to navigate the AI-driven marketing landscape with confidence (Walters & Hammond, 2025). However, in the face of advancing AI, technology, and automation, certain human skills remain irreplaceable. Creativity, emotional intelligence, and adaptability are key skills that are resilient to AI and automation. Marketing educators must integrate AI-related topics into their courses, ensuring students develop both technical proficiency and a strategic understanding of AI's role in marketing. While technical skills are important, educators must emphasize creativity, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and ethical decision-making. Case studies, experiential learning, and simulations can help develop these skills.

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AI AND THE INNOVATIVE MARKETING EDUCATOR: INTEGRATING AI INTO DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING EDUCATION

Ada Leung, Penn State University Berks
Sarah Hartman-Caverly, Penn State University Berks
Sharmin Attaran, Bryant University
Elizabeth Price, James Madison University
Theresa Clarke, James Madison University

PANEL POSITION PAPER

This panel explores how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing digital marketing education by enabling hands-on, real-world applications in the classroom (Ding et al., 2024; Guha et al., 2024). The discussion will focus on how educators can integrate AI tools into digital and social media marketing assignments and client projects, ensuring that students gain practical experience while understanding the strategic use of AI in different marketing tactics. The session will also cover best practices for using AI ethically and effectively in marketing education.

Prompt Engineering. Prompt engineering, or prompt design, is the process of creating inputs for generative AI (genAI) to produce outputs. The PROMPT Design Framework is a mnemonic guide to creating effective and efficient genAI prompts during AI literacy instruction. It includes six elements: Persona, Requirements, Organization, Medium, Purpose, and Tone. PROMPT extends Lo's (2023) CLEAR Framework for prompt engineering and incorporates the perspective of a student-entrepreneur (Gupta, 2024; Hartman-Caverly, 2024).

PROMPT is implemented in classroom learning activities, such as Think-Pair-Ask AI-Share, in which students prompt genAI for marketing research tasks, refine their prompts using the framework, and evaluate the outputs (Hartman-Caverly, 2024). PROMPT encourages students to assess the needs for genAI output and to optimize their prompts for better results, which is important for genAI sustainability as energy and water consumption, occur primarily in the inference phase (Luccioni, Jernite, & Strubell, 2024). Students also critically evaluate the outputs for evidence of hallucination and bias (Al-Sibai, 2025). Apart from building students' procedural knowledge of genAI, PROMPT also fosters students' disposition for AI ethics (Hartman-Caverly, 2024).

Integrating AI into Digital and Social Media Marketing Assignments. Faculty can incorporate AI tools into the digital and social media market curricula for tasks such as SEO research and automated content creation, bridging classroom learning with real-world application. Panels present actionable assignment ideas that enhance student engagement, foster critical thinking, and prepare students for the AI-driven marketing workforce.

One example assignment involves using various AI tools (e.g., Image Caption Generator, HubSpot AI assistant, Gemini, Copilot, ChatGPT, etc.) to create an engaging and attention-grabbing caption for a social media post, using the infographic image the students developed in the previous assignment. The students are to review all generated captions (with varying tones as well), choose one for their infographic, and make edits to make the caption more appropriate, creative, and engaging. Lastly, the students are to write a reflection about their experiences of working with AI tools as a social media marketer who needs to generate captions often.

Ethical and Effective Use of AI in Marketing. Educators integrating AI tools into their course assignments should check with their information technology office and library to ensure that a proposed use is permissible. For instance, Virginia has issued guidance on AI use in higher education. Microsoft Copilot with commercial data protections is endorsed for instructional use at Penn State and James Madison University.

Educators should also be aware that AI prohibitions in library licensing agreements with vendors like Mintel Group Ltd. And LexisNexis, which restrict uploading their data into AI systems. Educators should enlist librarians to

help their students understand how information can or can't be used in AI-incorporated assignments (Price, 2025). These restrictions are in place to protect data companies' profitability and their closed-loop AI systems. AI tools require vetting due to potential malware risks (McMillan & Krouse, 2025) and contribute to AI's energy footprint, with a ChatGPT request consuming 10 times the electricity of a Google Search (*AI Has an Environmental Problem. Here's What the World Can Do about That*, 2024).

The cost of AI tools may also exacerbate the digital divide between wealthy and low-income students" (Davidoff, 2024). The difference between free and paid AI models can be significant. Prioritizing institutionally endorsed tools can help mitigate this inequality (Somers, 2024).

Integrating AI into digital and social media marketing education offers innovative opportunities for enhancing student learning and career readiness. However, it is crucial to emphasize the ethical use of AI for societal benefit and to raise awareness about the environmental impact of large-scale AI implementation, ensuring sustainable practices are adopted.

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ANALYZING CONSUMER FINANCIAL DISCUSSIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: INSIGHTS FOR BRAND MANAGEMENT

Bo Liang, Nevada State University

PANEL POSITION PAPER

This study explores consumer discussions surrounding financial topics on social media by employing content analysis. Using the Apify web scraping tool, we collected 93,725 posts from October 2022 to February 2023, focusing on keywords such as "Living cost," "food cost," "salary," and "debt." To ensure meaningful insights, data collection was limited to the latter half of each month, aligning with common financial decision-making periods. The extracted data underwent text analysis using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) tool, allowing us to categorize discussions into key financial and psychological themes.

Through LIWC analysis, we examined the prevalence of specific categories, including Financial (money), Employment (job), Recreation (leisure), Living (home), Cognition (cogmech), and Emotions (negemo, posemo). We utilized confidence interval comparison at a 95% level to determine the percentage differences in each LIWC category for the terms "debt," "food cost," "living cost," and "salary". Our results indicate that job-related terms were most frequently mentioned in discussions about salary, followed by debt-related conversations. Money-related terms appeared most frequently in posts about debt, with decreasing frequency in discussions on food costs, salary, and living costs. Additionally, discussions about living costs frequently included terms related to leisure and home, whereas cognitive mechanisms were most emphasized in debt-related posts, reflecting strategic financial planning behaviors.

Emotional analysis revealed that negative emotion-related terms were predominantly used in discussions about food costs and living costs, indicating financial stress associated with these expenses. In contrast, positive emotion-related terms were more commonly found in posts about debt compared to salary, suggesting a relatively optimistic outlook in debt discussions. These findings shed light on how consumers frame financial challenges and their emotional responses to different aspects of personal finance.

The insights derived from this study have significant implications for brand managers and marketers. Understanding the interplay between employment, financial concerns, and lifestyle preferences allows brands to tailor their messaging and engagement strategies effectively. Financial service providers, job platforms, and investment firms can leverage these insights to position themselves as thought leaders by offering educational content on salary trends, debt management, and financial planning. Additionally, retail and subscription-based brands can focus on affordability and value-driven marketing strategies to address consumer concerns about budget constraints.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of social listening and engagement in brand management. By continuously monitoring financial discussions on social media, brands can adapt their messaging in real-time to address emerging consumer concerns. Collaborations with influencers and community-driven marketing strategies can further enhance brand credibility and outreach. Moreover, data-driven personalization based on consumer financial discussions can optimize loyalty programs, targeted promotions, and personalized product recommendations, fostering stronger consumer relationships.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of financial discourse on social media, offering valuable insights for both researchers and industry professionals. Future research can expand upon these findings by integrating additional financial variables and exploring longitudinal patterns in consumer sentiment and behavior.

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NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA USE THROUGH SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT

Ursula Sullivan, Northern Illinois University

PANEL POSITION PAPER

In this panel presentation, I consider the various ways in which supply chains are being managed via social media interactions. Often, the use of social media is for connecting with a myriad of friends, colleagues, and followers. But what happens when those followers are customers or suppliers? What are the expectations of the personal interactions on behalf of the company and how does that affect relationships within the supply chain?

I will review some of the literature that speaks to social media use in the supply chain and present some new ideas for content that can be shared on behalf of companies that helps with promotion rather than undermining any relationships among buyers and suppliers.

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BEYOND THE GAME: EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF MARKETING, SPORT, AND WELLNESS

D. Jason Knowles, Northern State University

Kelsie Roberts, Northern State University

Chelsee Shortt, Northern State University

Hannah Walters, Northern State University

SPECIAL SESSION PAPER

More than a decade has come and gone since Fullerton & Merz (2008) stated that “there is no consensus as to exactly what is meant by the term sports marketing” (p.90), most sport scholars would still believe this to be true. Sport marketing is a vast and complex segment within the sport industry, and therefore scholars have continued to create longer and more comprehensive definitions. No matter which definition of sport marketing you subscribe to, at the intersection of marketing and sport we generally always find two paths. The first is the marketing *of* sport and the second is marketing *through* sport. Both paths have been “well-traveled” for the last 100 years and have continued to evolve and gain momentum as an important and lucrative industry.

Sport itself is a unique and distinct industry. Some key characteristics that make sport a unique product include but are not limited to sport being intangible & ephemeral, involving strong emotions, being subjective and heterogeneous, generally socially consumed, inconsistent and unpredictable, and being perishable (Dees et al., 2022). As such, psychographic segmentation is often used by sport marketers. Sport teams, sport products, and even participation in sport and fitness oftentimes become a major part of an individual's identity. There are few if any other industries where individuals experience such strong levels of identification and loyalty to a product or organization. While consumers of sport, as participants or spectators, generally both exhibit strong emotional and psychological connections to their team/sport, it's important to remember that their motivations for watching or participating in those sports tend to vary vastly. Therefore, just as with any type of marketing, sport marketers need to understand current and future consumer behavior to better develop marketing strategies.

From trending data, the health-conscious consumer can be characterized by middle to high socio-economic classifications, predominantly female, and college-educated (Clarke et al., 2015). Their consumption behavior is targeted toward the health effects of food or products, activities or products that increase the quality of life (e.g., reduce time or stress), and result in a positive feeling (e.g., pride) (Hayakawa, 2017). American culture has normalized the recreational athlete (Harrison & Smith, 2016). With the growing adult population increasing activity behaviors, trends emerged in holistically healthy behaviors such as nutrition and stress management (Clarke et al., 2015). Consequently, the health-conscious consumer emerged with increasing trends in exercise, nutrition, and holistic health.

Educational institutions must adapt and integrate their curricula to explore sport marketing, health promotion, and consumer behavior. Practical experiences such as internships with sport teams, fitness companies, or marketing agencies specializing in wellness can offer valuable real-world insights and skill development. As technology continues to play a crucial role in these industries, incorporating courses on digital marketing strategies, data analytics, and emerging technologies can ensure that students are equipped with the latest tools and techniques. By embracing the interdisciplinary nature of marketing, sport, and wellness, universities can better prepare students to thrive in careers that span these exciting fields.

At a regional state university in the Midwest, students enrolled in integrated marketing communications, sport marketing, or graphic design collaborated on an integrated marketing communications plan for the 2024 USTAF State and Regional Meet. Logistically, coordinating schedules, aligning goals, and facilitating communication between the classes and the client was essential. Students were able to gain real-world experience and develop teamwork and collaboration skills. The diverse skill sets brought by each discipline resulted in comprehensive integrated marketing communications plans that addressed various aspects of promotion, event planning, and design. That said, managing

expectations, balancing the workload across the classes, and ensuring consistent messaging and visual identity throughout the project was challenging.

An ongoing example includes the implementation of a new Sports Media Minor through the collaboration of the university's Art/Digital Media program with the Sports Sciences department. Part of this includes the design of a new prototype Video Journalism & Sports Webcasting/Streaming course which consists of establishing different frameworks for different types of time-based media productions while allowing students the freedom to select and produce content within these formats. The goal is to make the course 100% student-run and produced. This curriculum has resulted in continued student production of the *Wolves Pregame* TV show, aired at the start of every home football and basketball live stream, which reviews prior university sporting events. Additionally, the *Behind the Pack* podcast, currently published via Spotify and YouTube, provides weekly interviews with current university athletes. This prototype course also incorporates video field journalism as individual assignments that cover athletics and general news both on campus and across the community. These news stories make up a more extensive television newscast, segmented by commercial breaks consisting of students' video advertising and promotional spot assignments. The professor and students anticipate adding multi-camera sportscasts of university home soccer events.

The intersection of marketing, sport, and wellness brings both opportunities and challenges. Brands can leverage the aspirational nature of sport and wellness to inspire and motivate consumers toward healthier lifestyles. Advancements in technology provide innovative ways to track, measure, and personalize marketing efforts, enhancing consumer experiences. Overall, effective marketing at this intersection requires a deep understanding of consumer behavior and a willingness to embrace innovation. One challenge is navigating the diverse consumer landscape, where individuals have varying fitness goals, interests in sport, and wellness preferences. Crafting targeted messaging that resonates with these different segments while maintaining authenticity is key. Additionally, the fast-paced nature of sport and wellness trends requires marketers to stay agile and adaptive to remain relevant.

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TOTAL ECLIPSE OF MARKETING: A BRIGHT JOURNEY INTO IMMERSIVE EDUCATION

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SPECIAL SESSION POSITION PAPER

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital marketing, the need for experiential learning has never been more pronounced. Traditional classroom settings often struggle to adequately prepare students for the dynamic challenges and whirlwind scenarios they will face in the real world. Immersive learning, particularly through capstone courses, presents a profound opportunity for students to consolidate theoretical knowledge into tangible projects with real-world implications and client deliverables. As the culmination of their academic journey, capstone projects serve as a bridge between classroom learning and professional application, offering students a platform to demonstrate their critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Engaging in such immersive experiences enables students to confront the complexities and ambiguities inherent in project management, collaboration, and client interaction.

Moreover, the capstone journey is not always linear; it often involves unforeseen challenges, setbacks, and pivots. By navigating the project trajectory with both the client's objectives and learning outcomes in mind, students can thrive, innovate, and emerge as proficient professionals equipped to tackle real-world challenges head-on.

The development of the digital marketing minor program at Ball State University represents a strategic response to the evolving landscape of marketing in the digital age. At the pinnacle of this program stands the MKG 490 Digital Marketing Immersive Capstone course, meticulously crafted to serve as the culminating experience for students. Designed to integrate seamlessly with the preceding four classes in the program, the capstone course provides a unique opportunity for students to scaffold their learning process and apply acquired knowledge in a practical, real-world context. Throughout the minor program, students delve into fundamental concepts, tools, and strategies across various facets of digital marketing, including social media, content creation, analytics, and digital advertising. As they progress through each course, they not only expand their theoretical understanding but also develop hands-on skills through practical assignments and projects. The capstone course serves as the nexus where theoretical foundations converge with applied experiences, empowering students to conceptualize, plan, execute, and evaluate comprehensive digital marketing campaigns. By synthesizing and building upon their accumulated knowledge and experiences, students emerge from the capstone course not only with a robust portfolio of digital marketing expertise but also with the confidence and agility to navigate the complexities of the contemporary marketing landscape. Thus, the Digital Marketing Immersive Capstone course epitomizes the program's commitment to fostering holistic and experiential learning, preparing students to excel as dynamic and adept professionals in the ever-evolving digital marketplace.

We delve into the transformative potential of immersive digital marketing education by presenting a case study of a recent Digital Marketing Capstone project, a student-led promotion of the 2024 eclipse viewing in collaboration with a Main Street Inc. organization. The course, initially designed as a digital marketing class, evolved into a dynamic experience where students actively engaged with the community in promoting a large-scale event expected to draw 20,000 attendees.

The session will provide an overview of the course design, detailing the progression from a traditional digital marketing class to an immersive experience centered around the 2024 eclipse viewing. The shift towards community engagement and event promotion will be discussed, highlighting the collaboration with the Main Street Inc. organization as a pivotal element in providing students with a real-world marketing challenge.

The special session will showcase the management of a 20-student class engaged in hands-on marketing activities for a large-scale event. Attendees will gain valuable insights into the outcomes achieved by students, not just in terms

of technical skills but also in terms of project management, teamwork, and community interaction. It will also explore the challenges encountered and lessons learned, understanding the student experience in a high-impact, community-focused learning environment.

Building an immersive class on the fly amidst changing client demands posed a series of formidable challenges throughout the semester. Initially conceived to develop digital assets for small businesses, the project's trajectory shifted abruptly towards promoting the solar eclipse, only to oscillate back to digital assets before ultimately refocusing entirely on the eclipse midway through the semester. This dynamic evolution tested the resilience and adaptability of both students and instructors, as they navigated the turbulent waters of uncertainty and shifting priorities. Amidst the flux, maintaining student organization, ensuring educational value, and managing community partner expectations emerged as paramount concerns. Striving to provide a cohesive learning experience amidst the flux of project iterations, educators grappled with the task of synthesizing diverse concepts and experiences into a cohesive educational framework. Moreover, managing community partner expectations became increasingly challenging as project scopes fluctuated, necessitating clear communication, flexibility, and mutual understanding to sustain collaborative momentum and deliver impactful outcomes. Despite the tumultuous journey, the class served as a testament to the transformative potential of immersive learning, fostering resilience, adaptability, and collaborative problem-solving skills essential for navigating the complexities of real-world projects. These challenges will also be explored during the session.

By drawing on the example of this immersive class, we aim to provide educators with insights into the integration of High Impact Practices (HIPs) in higher education. Participants will explore how experiential learning, community partnerships, and project-based assignments can be strategically woven into a course, enriching the educational experience, and preparing students for real-world challenges.

The anticipated outcomes of this special session include a discussion of the benefits and challenges associated with immersive digital marketing education, particularly when applied to community engagement and large-scale event promotion. Educators will leave with practical insights on implementing similar high-impact practices in their courses, fostering a dynamic and experiential approach to digital marketing education.

The impact of learning from a large-scale immersive learning project extends far beyond the confines of the classroom, offering invaluable insights and opportunities for future research. Through hands-on engagement with complex, real-world projects, students gain a nuanced understanding of the inherent flexibility and fluidity required in project management. They learn firsthand that large projects often entail nebulous, hard-to-define deliverables, necessitating adaptability, creativity, and effective communication to navigate uncertainties and achieve desired outcomes. Moreover, the success of a capstone digital marketing course underscores the efficacy of immersive learning in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application. However, as enrollment in such courses grows, it is imperative to anticipate and address potential challenges, such as scalability issues, resource constraints, and maintaining educational quality amidst increased demand. Future research in this domain should explore strategies for optimizing course design, scaling immersive learning experiences, and leveraging technology to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. By interrogating these complex dynamics and iteratively refining best practices, educators can ensure that immersive learning remains a dynamic and transformative force in higher education, empowering students to thrive in an ever-evolving professional landscape.

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CULTIVATING CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS IN MULTICULTURAL MARKETING: LET'S CONTINUE

Kimberly D. Grantham, University of Georgia

SPECIAL SESSION POSITION PAPER

In 2021 we started a conversation at the Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Conference focused on our responsibility in business school classrooms to facilitate crucial conversations related to diversity and inclusion in the marketplace with and amongst our students. It is through these conversations that we can raise awareness, grow, and become better leaders. Using Procter & Gamble's model of challenging everyday citizens to engage in conversation about difficult topics, we understand our role as educators is to create environments where students can learn to appreciate diversity in the marketplace. It is my hope to continue these conversations at the spring 2024 Marketing Management Association conference.

While we have offered the Multicultural Marketing course in the Terry College of Business at UGA for almost ten years, it was not until this semester fall 2023 that we took the step toward officially opening the course to non-business majors. In addition, this semester we proposed that the course be added to both the Terry College of Business and UGA Cultural Diversity course lists. The Multicultural Marketing course that I teach is designed such that there are two main growth opportunities: 1) an initiative led by me, as the professor, to ensure students are aware of key issues related to diversity in the marketplace (e.g., discrimination in housing, the "model minority", targeting of vice products, etc.), and 2) an initiative led by each student to choose and take ownership of a diversity-related topic that he/she is interested in. To this day, student-led discussions remain a highlight of the course as there are many issues in which peer-to-peer interaction helps facilitate personal growth. I have observed that students are increasingly open to this type of learning, especially students who have had limited exposure to multicultural issues. These discussions that are initiated and led by students result in personal awakening and growth. A part of my role as instructor is to set the tone in the classroom such that each student's opinion is valued. At the start of the semester, we talk about the importance of mutual respect in the classroom, especially given the sensitive topics that we will discuss. We understand that we will not all agree on topics that we discuss. When we disagree, it is grounds for fruitful discussion, so we are mindful to show respect while holding a differing viewpoint.

I have increasingly found that students continue to have a desire to understand, empathize, and advocate for diversity and inclusion. The conversations that were amped up post the social unrest of 2020 must not stop. It is up to us as educators to create spaces where we allow our future leaders to grow, stretch, and learn. This means that we must continue to immerse ourselves in conversations where we will not have all the answers. When we listen, learn, and grow alongside our students, we put ourselves in a vulnerable position. The resulting impact on the classroom atmosphere is powerful, as it signals to the students that we are in this community-building process together. Let us continue to push the boundaries as educators. Students' increasing awareness of these issues challenges us to ask ourselves what our continued role is in making changes to benefit the next generation. Complacency is not an option. We must continue to create spaces to engage in the necessary conversations where we push beyond our comfort zones. As we do, we take another step toward a just and more inclusive society.

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