



**28th International Conference  
on Corporate and Marketing Communications**

## **Conference Proceedings**

*Valuing Diversity in Corporate and Marketing Communications:  
Towards an Inclusive Corporate and Market Environment*

**Editors: Sabine Einwiller and Ingrid Wahl**

Hosted by University of Vienna  
March 26th to 27th, 2024

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## Foreword from the conference organisers

Dear CMC2024 attendees, dear readers of these conference proceedings,

it was a great pleasure to host the 28<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications at the University of Vienna. The 2024 conference theme “Valuing Diversity in Corporate and Marketing Communications: Towards an Inclusive Corporate and Market Environment” brought together great minds – researchers and practitioners – to discuss current issues on diversity, equity and inclusion in our field, as well as other topical issues in corporate and marketing communications.

Valuing diversity in corporate and marketing communications is crucial in today’s globalized and interconnected world. Companies promoting diversity and inclusion in their communication with stakeholders not only demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility; they also benefit in terms of brand reputation, customer loyalty, and employee engagement. In marketing communications, diverse representation and inclusive messaging can help to build stronger connections with a wider range of customers, which may ultimately lead to increased sales and market share. By also acknowledging and valuing diversity in their communications with employees, companies can foster a positive and inclusive work culture in which each individual is respected, thereby creating a sense of belonging. Overall, incorporating diversity into corporate and marketing communications is not only a responsible approach but also a smart business strategy.

These conference proceedings present the latest research on the topics of diversity in corporate, workplace and marketing communications. The volume furthermore addresses a variety of other topical areas ranging from sustainability communication, cultural aspects in advertising, crisis communication and complaining, to AI and platform communication and theory and methods related discussions. The presentations of the various research findings stimulated lively discussion during the conference, and we hope that reading the abstracts of these papers will continue to inspire readers.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all the presenters, attendees and helpers who made this conference a resounding success. Let us continue to foster collaboration, innovation and knowledge sharing to navigate the ever-evolving field of corporate and marketing communications.

With kind regards,

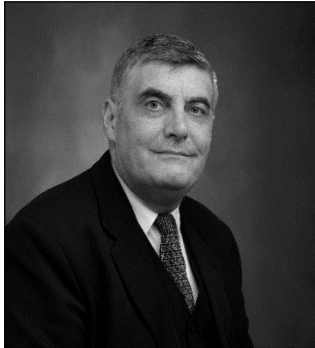
Professor Sabine Einwiller

Dr. Ingrid Wahl

Conference Co-Chairs

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## Note from the conference founder



It is my pleasure in these proceedings to thank Professor Sabine Einwiller and Dr. Ingrid Wahl, for their excellent chairing and organisation of the 28<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications titled: ‘Valuing Diversity in Corporate and Marketing Communications: Towards an Inclusive Corporate and Market Environment’. I am also grateful for the kind permission of the University of Vienna and the Faculty of Social Sciences to host the conference on their beautiful campus, amid the glorious ambience of Vienna. And, of course, for all the keynotes and delegates who have shared their papers and insights with us herein.

The conference began in 1995 at Keele University in England when it seemed to me that there was a great need to bring together those from the marketing and corporate communications disciplines in what was intended to be—and became—a small-scale interactive, friendly, and participative conference. It has been held annually in many universities across Europe since that time. The conference is designed to be low in cost but high in quality. It is likely unique in its structure, organisation, and non-profit nature.

The 2024 conference focused upon valuing diversity in corporate and marketing communications which is crucial in today's globalized and interconnected world. Companies promoting diversity and inclusion in their communication with stakeholders not only demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility; they also benefit in terms of brand reputation, customer loyalty, and employee engagement. In marketing communications, diverse representation and inclusive messaging can help to build stronger connections with a wider range of customers, which may ultimately lead to increased sales and market share. By also acknowledging and valuing diversity in their corporate communications with employees, companies can foster a positive and inclusive work culture in which each individual is respected, thereby creating a sense of belonging. Overall, incorporating diversity into corporate and marketing communications is not only a responsible approach but also a smart business strategy.

As more companies integrate diversity and inclusion in their business and communication strategies, we see an increasing amount of research on this topic, shedding light on the most effective approaches and best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion in the corporate world. Researchers are exploring various aspects of diversity and inclusion, such as the representation of diverse groups in advertising and marketing campaigns, the impact of inclusive messaging on customer perceptions and behaviour, and the effects of diversity and inclusion on employee engagement and organizational performance. While there is still much to learn about diversity and inclusion in the corporate and marketing environment, research already underscores the importance of corporate and marketing communications when it comes

to diversity and inclusion as key aspects of business success and sustainability (see Call for Papers CMC2024).

In an attempt to dimly peer into the future problems that beset the world now, will continue into the future. COVID appears to be at stasis, economic turmoil as a result of the Ukraine/Russia war—and the Palestine conflict war—will continue to impact business growth and communications; consumer needs must be brought to the fore and not (as they are now in many economies) treated with disdain. The economic fallout of current circumstances has yet to be determined. The accelerating European refugee crisis shows no signs of abatement and similarly no sign of solution. In all of this, businesses of all types from multinational to SME will need to become more customer-focused and customer-driven and communications will adapt and change accordingly. We witnessed massive decline in communications expenditure during COVID and now we enjoy complete recovery—and ever-accelerating investment.

In closing these brief words, the widening gap between academic research and business practice has to be narrowed and perhaps even closed. We academics cannot afford to keep incrementally building on the theoretical foundations of past knowledge. Business executives must learn and re-learn the fundamental basic skills of marketing and communications. As we move into the end of the first quarter century in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the essence of marketing as means of creating exchanges that satisfy individual and corporate objectives must become customer-focussed and customer-driven, and marketing communications will continue to be the spearheading force.

I look forward to welcoming delegates to the CMC Conference in subsequent years.

Professor Philip J. Kitchen

ICN-Artem School of Business

Conference founder



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## Organisers

### Organising committee



Prof. Sabine Einwiller, PhD, Professor of Public Relations Research and Head of the Corporate Communication Research Group at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna.

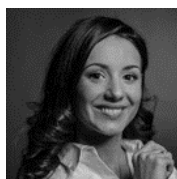


Ingrid Wahl, PhD, Senior Researcher and Member of the Corporate Communication Research Group at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna.



Claudia Koska, Administrator of the Corporate Communication Research Group, University of Vienna.

### Our fantastic team



Neda Ninova-Solovykh is a PhD student at the Corporate Communication Research Group (Department of Communication, University of Vienna).



Jens Hagelstein is a postdoctoral researcher at the Corporate Communication Research Group (Department of Communication, University of Vienna).



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## Keynote speakers

### Silvia Ravazzani



**Presentation topic:** All that glitters is not gold: The subtleties of communicating diversity, equity and inclusion

**Silvia Ravazzani** (PhD) is Associate Professor in Management at the Department of Business LECB “Carlo A. Ricciardi”, IULM University, Italy, since 2019. Previously she held the same position at the Department of Management at Aarhus University, Denmark. Since her PhD research, she has been studying diversity, equity & inclusion in organizations to examine corporate approaches and DEI-related internal and external communication practices. Her research interests also include employee engagement, whistleblowing, risk and crisis communication, social media, and sustainability. Her work has been published in journals such as *Group & Organization Management* and *Business Ethics Quarterly*. She is Senior Project Leader of the Centre for Employee Relations and Communication at IULM University and serves in the editorial boards of *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research* and of *European Journal of Cross-Cultural Competence and Management*.

### Jörg Matthes



**Presentation topic:** Diversity Communication Between Fact and Façade? Learnings from Research on Greenwashing

**Jörg Matthes** (PhD, University of Zurich) is Professor of Communication Science at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Austria, where he directs the Advertising and Media Psychology Research Group (AdMe). His research focuses on digital media effects, advertising and consumer research, sustainability communication, children & media, terrorism and populism as well as empirical methods. He has extensively published on these topics, with more than 200 journal articles. In 2014, he received the Young Scholar Award by the International Communication Association honoring the most outstanding research career worldwide seven years past the PhD. Two years later, he received AEJMC's Hillier Kriehbaum Under 40 Award which honors scholars "under 40 years of age who have shown outstanding achievement and effort in all three AEJMC areas: teaching, research and public service". In 2019, he was honored with the UNIVIE Teaching Award and in 2021, he was elected as a Fellow of the International Communication Association. He was

recipient of an Advanced Grant (2.5 Million Euros) by the European Research Council (ERC) in 2022. Currently, he is Associate Editor of The Journal of Advertising.

## Mirsad Aljusevic



**Presentation topic:** The Power of Diversity to Empower People

**Mirsad Aljusevic** is 'Group Diversity Manager' at Erste Group Bank AG, one of the largest banks in Central Eastern Europe. In his role, he manages the diversity strategy for the banking group in seven countries. He studied Communication Science at the University of Vienna and Communication Management at the FH Wien der WKW. Before joining the Erste Group Bank AG, he worked as a communication professional at Siemens in Austria.

In 2023, Erste Group Bank AG was ranked in 32nd place in the World's Top Companies for Women by Forbes and among the 5 best European companies in regard to Diversity according to the Financial Times.

## About the University of Vienna

The University of Vienna was founded in 1365 and is one of the oldest and largest universities in Europe, made up of 20 faculties and centers, and about 90,000 students. The Department of Communication ranks among the top 10 communication departments worldwide (Shanghai and QS Ranking), and is currently at number two in Europe. Its mission is not only excellence in teaching and research, but also societal relevance, demonstrable impact on world issues, and the support and development of academic talent.

The Department of Communication at the University of Vienna is one of the world's largest departments for communication science. Set up during the 1940s, our Department now has approximately 3,900 students, more than 120 employees and more than 140 teaching staff. Our Department is currently ranked as one of the top programs for communication research in Europe, and our research is supported by numerous funding agencies, such as the European Union or the Austrian Science Fund.

Vienna's geographic and cultural position as well as our international research orientation make us a key hub for numerous top-notch research collaborations around the globe. We have research contacts with many universities from neighboring countries, but also from the USA and Asia. Consequently, our Department regularly welcomes foreign researchers as Visiting Fellows or Guest Professors.

The Corporate Communication Research Group (CCom) is the departmental unit for research in corporate communication and public relations at the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. Our interdisciplinary research is inspired by theoretical and empirical approaches from communication science, psychology, marketing and management in order to generate new insights on the communication challenges companies and organizations are facing in a dynamic environment. Specifically, in our research we address the effects of organizations' communication activities on its stakeholders as well as the influence of stakeholders' communicative actions on organizations and the interaction of the two.

## Social programme

### University of Vienna Guided Tour



The guided tours aim to acquaint tourists and individuals with an interest in history with the renowned building situated along the Ringstraße. Spanning an hour, the tour of the Main Building offers a comprehensive exploration of the University of Vienna's rich history. Commencing in the Aula, the itinerary encompasses the Arcade Court, the principal reading area of the University Library, and, when accessible, the Main Ceremonial Hall adorned with replicas of Gustav Klimt's ceiling artworks.

### Get-Together at Café Landtmann

At the heart of Vienna, by Ringstraße, Café Landtmann dates back to 1873. It is a typical Viennese coffee house that welcomes travelers, locals as well as the Vienna's business community. It is an inviting, vibrant and cosmopolitan yet traditional place to be.



### Conference dinner at Fuhrgassl-Huber



The traditional Viennese Heuriger is one of the best-known wine taverns in Neustift am Walde, located right on the outskirts of Vienna. Conference guests will be greeted with a brief introduction by an official representative of city council, before moving to the hall for a multi-course buffet. "Heuriger" is an abbreviation of "heuriger wine", and as such the term refers to not only the tavern, but that year's new home-grown wine too. This young wine tends to be sold throughout the autumn months and spending cosy evenings at a Heuriger has become a staple of Viennese culture.

### **Guided tour: Queer City Walk**

Do you know the queer history of Vienna? Its personalities, their fates, living conditions, and how they paved the way for our community today? Their lives and loves were often marked by persecution and exclusion - and sometimes by one or another little scandal...



On this queer city walk, we explore the question of how homosexuality was and is viewed in medicine and criminal law. On the way, we meet a rainbow family in Biedermeier and a romantic love between two men at the Burgtheater.

Immediately opposite, the Vienna City Hall is waiting for us, with its legendary and world-famous Life Ball - but also the sad story of AIDS. In front of the newly renovated parliament, you can experience what has happened around homosexuality and legislation here in recent years, before we get through the cozy Volksgarten to Heldenplatz and thus to one of the most dazzling people and his opulent - and maybe gay - life in the baroque time. We end at Vienna State Opera, where we discover some of the queer Stars and famous singers.

### **Guided tour: Their Fate: To be a Woman**

What do women who were exceptional musicians, brilliant scientists, countries' sovereigns, and theater artists have in common with abused girls from the lower classes and "witches" burned at the stake? – They were exploited, but otherwise stripped off their rights and made invisible as much as possible. If they did not submit meekly, they were mercilessly persecuted. How some women still managed to push through, how other women's lives were destroyed, and what was lost to the general public as a result, will be discussed during this tour—a walk through women's history from the Middle Ages to the present.



## Conference programme

Tuesday, March 26th	
08:30 – 09:00	<b>Registration</b> Ground floor
09:00 – 09:30	<b>Welcome address</b> Room SR 5
09:30 – 10:30	<b>Keynote</b> Room SR 5
10:30 – 10:45	<b>Break</b> Coffee at Mensa
10:45 – 12:15	<b>Session 1.1 – Diversity in corporate communication</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 1.2 – Cultural aspects in advertising</b> Room SR 7
12:15 – 13:15	<b>Lunch break</b> Lunch at Mensa
13:15 – 14:45	<b>Session 2.1 – Workplace communication</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 2.2 – Sustainable fashion</b> Room SR 7
14:45 – 15:00	<b>Break</b> Coffee at Mensa
15:00 – 16:30	<b>Session 3.1 – Sustainability communication</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 3.2 – Theory and research development</b> Room SR 7
16:30 – 16:45	<b>Break</b> Coffee at Mensa
16:45 – 17:45	<b>Keynote</b> Room SR 5
18:00	<b>Shuttle bus transfer from Kolingasse 14–16 to dinner location</b>
starting 19:00	<b>Conference dinner</b> Fuhrgassl-Huber (Neustift am Walde 68, 1190 Vienna)
22:30	<b>Shuttle bus transfer from dinner location to Schottentor</b>

<b>Wednesday, March 27th</b>	
08:30 – 09:00	<b>Registration</b> Ground floor
09:00 – 10:00	<b>Keynote</b> Room SR 5
10:00 – 10:15	<b>Break</b> Coffee at Mensa
10:15 – 11:45	<b>Session 4.1 – Employee perceptions</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 4.2 – Communication on social issues</b> Room SR 7
11:45 – 12:45	<b>Lunch break</b> Lunch at Mensa
12:45 – 14:15	<b>Session 5.1 – Crisis and complaints</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 5.2 – Buying behaviours</b> Room SR 7
14:15 – 14:30	<b>Break</b> Coffee at Mensa
14:30 – 16:00	<b>Session 6.1 – AI and platform communication</b> Room SR 5
	<b>Session 6.2 – Young consumers</b> Room SR 7
16:00 – 16:30	<b>Closing session</b> Room SR 5
starting 17:00	<b>Social programme</b>

## Session overview

Session 1.1: Diversity in corporate communication

Session 1.2: Cultural aspects in advertising

Session 2.1: Workplace communication

Session 2.2: Sustainable fashion

Session 3.1: Sustainability communication

Session 3.2: Theory and research development

Session 4.1: Employee perceptions

Session 4.2: Communication on social issues

Session 5.1: Crisis and complaints

Session 5.2: Buying behaviours

Session 6.1: AI and platform communication

Session 6.2: Young consumers

## Session 1.1

# Diversity in corporate communication

### Discovering Diversity Through Storytelling – Narratives on Meaningful Work and Employee Commitment at an Environmental Nonprofit Organization

Tünde Taxner<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Doctoral School of Sociology and Communication Science, Corvinus University of Budapest, Fővám tér 8. 1093 Budapest, Hungary; Email: [tunde.taxner@stud.uni-corvinus.hu](mailto:tunde.taxner@stud.uni-corvinus.hu)*

**Keywords:** *meaningful work, employee commitment, organizational communication, organizational narratives, environmental nonprofit organization*

Storytelling is often used strategically to communicate the mission of an organization (Fischer-Appelt and Dernbach 2023) and organizational narratives contribute to the meaning making of organizations (Rhodes and Brown 2005). However, few studies approach the role of organizational narratives from a critical perspective and acknowledge the variety of narratives that shape and constitute an organization (Schoeneborn and Vásquez 2022). This research is based on previous studies (Cleland Silva and de Tarso Fonseca Silva 2022; Dawson and McLean 2013; Hansen and Lundholt 2019) which suggest that dominant narratives shaped by communication experts and managers may differ from employees' own stories about work, and this can result in incoherent or even oppressive organizational communication.

Nowadays, nonprofit organizations operate in an increasingly competitive, global environment which requires credible and inclusive organizational communication (Beger 2018). Thus, this work-in-progress case study explores the narratives that the members of an environmental nonprofit organization (eNPO) tell about their work. Employees' narratives are compared to the dominant narratives of the eNPO to discover discrepancies between the alternative interpretations of nonprofit work. This research aims to uncover the diverse viewpoints which are present at an organization to provide starting points for creating a more coherent organizational communication.

This study explores two organizational phenomena through the lens of narratives: meaningful work and employee commitment. Finding work meaningful implies beliefs about the significance and the value of work and may facilitate positive affective states and attitudes at the workplace (Allan et al. 2019). Members of NPOs usually experience a high level of meaningfulness and derive the meaning of their work from a greater good and a commitment

to service (Tan et al., 2023). This study adopts the communication-centered approach of Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) which states that organizational actors continuously negotiate what work means for them. Organizational narratives are communicative expressions of this meaning-making process. Therefore, narratives provide an opportunity to discover the different interpretations of meaningful work present at an organization. The research questions are: (1) How do employees of an international eNPO interpret meaningful work through narratives? (2) Do employees' narratives on meaningful work align with dominant narratives of managers in the eNPO?

The level of experienced meaningfulness at the workplace positively correlates with employees' commitment towards the organization (Bailey et al. 2019). According to the widely used framework of Meyer and Allen (1991), commitment can reflect a desire, a need, or an obligation to belong to the organization. A high level of organizational commitment may prevent turnover, absenteeism, and stress in the workplace (Mercurio 2015). Thus, this research also aims to map employees' narratives on their commitment to provide context for their interpretation of meaningful work. The research question is: (3) How do members of an eNPO interpret their commitment towards the organization through narratives?

Participants include employees and managers from three middle-sized European offices of an international eNPO which fights for nature conservation, the prevention of environmental abuses, and heightened environmental awareness. The sample consists of 8 men and 8 women with the mean age of 36 years. Four participants work part time, the others full time, and 15 employees have an open-ended contract.

The data collection was conducted in January 2024 via a mixed-method approach consisting of 40-90 minutes-long, semi-structured, narrative interviews and complementing surveys. The level of experienced meaningfulness at work was measured with the Work as Meaning Inventory (Steger et al., 2012) on a 1-5 Likert scale. The narratives on meaningful work were explored by asking participants about the mission of the organization and stories which show the importance of their work. Employee commitment was measured with the Three-Component Framework of Meyer and Allen (1991) on a 1-5 Likert scale. Interview questions uncovered the main reasons for staying at the organization, narratives showing an emotional attachment to the workplace, and conflict situations where the commitment of participants was challenged. During the interviews, participants were asked to remember certain situations and memorable events to collect their narratives. The interviews will be analyzed with the thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019) and the narrative analysis method (Sharp et al., 2019).

The author expects that the study uncovers alternative and dominant narratives about working for environmental protection and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of narratives as communicative ways of meaning making at NPOs. The results will provide insights for the development of organizational communication about meaningful nonprofit work and employee commitment by embracing the diversity of narratives present at organizations.

**Acknowledgments:** The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of ÚNKP-23-3-I-CORVINUS-36 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Culture and Innovation from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.



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## Exploring Cross-Country Discursive Patterns in Diversity and Inclusion Reporting

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**Keywords:** *Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) reporting, Cross-country dynamics, Discursive patterns, Mixed-methods approach*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting has evolved into a critical component of corporate communication, strategically responding to institutional factors within a company's operational context (Einwiller, Ruppel, and Schnauber 2016). While the profound influence of institutional distance on CSR reporting is well-established (Einwiller, Ruppel, and Schnauber 2016; Matten and Moon 2008), a notable gap persists in our understanding of whether a similar country-of-origin effect is discernible in the context of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) reporting.

Scholars advocating for a country-context perspective on D&I reporting assert that global labor markets exhibit distinct patterns of inclusion and exclusion, profoundly influencing how diversity management is perceived and practiced (Nishii and Özbilgin 2007; Klarsfeld et al. 2016; Pringle Judith K. and Ryan Irene 2015; Klarsfeld et al. 2012; Pringle and Strachan 2016; Egan and Bendick 2003). They caution against the assumption of the global applicability of D&I concepts, emphasizing that such a stance may lead to organizational tensions, ineffectiveness of programs, and, critically, reputational risks.

Despite the recognized risks, there is a discernible void in the literature on explicit country-specific characteristics in the interpretation and application of the D&I concept. Few studies have so far analyzed secondary data sources such as CSR reports, annual reports and/or corporate websites to better understand and describe tendencies of local re-interpretations of D&I discourses across countries in different languages (Barbosa and Cabral-Cardoso 2010; Pinheiro and Gois 2013; Pasztor 2019; Point and Singh 2003; Bellard and Rueling 2001; Guerrier and Wilson 2011; Heres and Benschop 2010). Even less is known on peculiarities and characteristics of D&I reporting in languages such as Italian and Brazilian Portuguese, given that most studies analyze CSR reports in English.

The research project presented here seeks to address this void by adopting a comprehensive mixed-methods discourse analytical approach. This approach is informed by Partington's (2013) suggestions for cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) and Bell's (2013) suggestions for visual content analysis. The primary focus of this study is on Brazil, Italy, and the United States as institutionally distant countries. As studies (Jonsen et al. 2019;



Pasztor 2019) observe an increasingly dominant US-influenced diversity rhetoric in corporate communication, and global standards such as those of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) as well as sustainability policies (e.g., Directive 2014/95/EU) and guidelines could potentially have sped up harmonization, D&I disclosures over multiple years are analyzed and compared. The investigation therefore drills down into the D&I reporting within the banking sector, examining integrated annual and sustainability reports spanning the years 2013, 2017, and 2021 in the respective national languages.

The research design boasts a meticulous approach, incorporating a comprehensive corpus of 44 reports, comprising 1,392 visuals and 1,473,965 work tokens. To ensure methodological rigor, separate corpora for text-only and visuals-only are available for each year, facilitating a nuanced text-based corpus-assisted analysis in AntConc and a visual analysis in atlas.ti. Furthermore, the research integrates qualitative guided interviews with D&I experts from the respective banks, providing valuable context for the interpretation of language-based results. Interviews have been conducted with two Italian and two Brazilian banks thus far, with additional interviews slated for the future.

The initial results from the visual analysis of D&I reporting reveal a prevailing use of a corporate cliché termed as "happy diversity" (Swan 2010; Ahmed 2007). Standardized and generic "feel-good" photographs are strategically employed to convey a sense of workplace inclusivity, yet these visual representations lack consideration for the diverse local contexts. Similarly, the verbal analysis indicates a tendency toward a globalized discourse, with language across reports demonstrating more similarities than differences. Despite this, nuanced variations emerge in the semantic fillings of diversity labels, suggesting diverse interpretations of these terms across countries. Contrary to expectations, the extent of country-specific adjustments in D&I reporting appears to be lower than assumed in the literature. The persistence of the U.S.-style D&I concept raises questions about the effectiveness of corresponding measures and prompts a reevaluation of whether the country-context perspective has genuinely permeated the corporate environment.

Initial findings from the interviews conducted with D&I and CSR experts working in the banks of the sample allow first attempts of explanation regarding the apparent prioritization of harmonization and standardization over localized adaptations in D&I reporting. Insights gleaned from representatives of Italian and Brazilian banks engaged in D&I disclosure preparation underscore a pronounced emphasis on catering to rating agencies and investors. Notably, banks appear to target the same ESG rating agencies across diverse national contexts. Experts stress the importance of tailoring content styles and language to align with the criteria of these agencies, thereby optimizing their rankings based on disclosed information. Consequently, an emphasis on country-specific characteristics in interpreting and applying the D&I concept may run counter to the objectives of those tasked with preparing the disclosures.

In summary, this research contributes substantively to the evolving discourse on global D&I reporting. By offering nuanced perspectives and unpacking the intricacies of language and

visuals in D&I reporting, this study provides valuable insights that can inform corporate strategies.

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## Inclusion of Disability in Corporate Diversity Communication: An Exploratory Study on Employer Brands in Turkey

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**Keywords:** employer branding, diversity and inclusion (D&I), diversity communication, disability, Best Employers of Turkey

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) have become a fundamental aspect of stakeholder engagement of the organizations. The two concepts differ but at the same time complement each other. Diversity indicates acknowledging all differences regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability and socioeconomic status; and inclusion refers to actions for valuing and supporting diversity (Bernstein et al., 2020). Corporate communication embraces diversity management for developing positive image and building a strong reputation in society, especially among employees. In current unstable labor market, employee loyalty and satisfaction has become a greater issue for the corporates urging them to implement human resources (HR) and communication strategies for attracting, recruiting and protecting the talented workforce (Kim and Kim, 2023). Employees seek a sense of belonging to the organization, therefore corporate communication strategies involve maintaining employee identification with the corporate brand (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007). In this respect, many corporates involve in employer branding activities to develop an image of a preferable workplace environment.

Employer branding refers to the “process of communicating employment relations through instrumental and symbolic attributes to both prospective and present employees” (Deepa and Baral, 2022, p. 110). There is an extensive literature on employer branding investigating its impact on brand loyalty (Punjaisri et al., 2009), the role of internal communication satisfaction (Špoljarić and Tkalac Verčič, 2022), effectiveness of integrated communications (Deepa and Baral, 2022), relationship between social networking of employees and brand equity (Hesse et al., 2022), the link between employee engagement and internal branding (Suomi et al., 2021). From a corporate communication perspective, literature includes studies examining employer branding regarding D&I. Jonsen et al. (2021) suggest that D&I messages are utilized for attracting talent, promoting the company as an employer brand, and for emphasizing different diversity dimensions. Kele and Cassell (2023) argue that diversity is used as a marketing tool rather than inclusion of disadvantaged people. Confetto et al. (2023) demonstrates that the most relevant aspects of D&I communication are gender and sexual orientation. However, research in diversity communication shows limited focus on inclusion of disability (Gould et al., 2020).

This study aims to understand the extent of which corporate communication of employer brands represent disability in their D&I messages. The research focuses on carrier and community oriented social networks, LinkedIn and Instagram. With this aim the study addresses following questions:

RQ1. How do organizations recognized as employer brands communicate diversity and inclusion on social networks?

RQ2. To what extent do employer brands include disability in their diversity messages on social networks?

To reveal an understanding on employer brands' inclusiveness of disability on social networks, qualitative content analysis was used. With an inductive approach, qualitative content analysis enables to "create a picture of a given phenomenon that is always embedded within a particular context" (White and Marsh, 2006, p. 38). Sample of the study consisted of the companies listed in Best Employers of Turkey 2023. Best employer surveys are conducted by the Great Place To Work® in 170 countries along with many other lists published nationally and globally aiming to empower workplace excellence (<https://www.greatplacetowork.com>). Best Employers of Turkey 2023 list has six clusters sorting organizations by number of employees ranging from small (10 to 99) to large (500 to 1000+). According to the labor law in Türkiye, companies with 50 or more employees in the private sector are required to employ three percent of their employees with disabilities. Therefore, the sample was formed from the best small (employee numbers 50-99), best medium (employee numbers 100-249 and 250-499) and best large (employee numbers 500-999 and 1000+) companies (N=130). The top ten companies in each group were included in the study sample (n=50). The unit of analysis is identified as the content on LinkedIn and Instagram profiles of the selected employer brands. It is known that job applicants often obtain information about the employers via social media. Being a carrier-oriented platform, organizations use LinkedIn to seek, attract and find talent (Confetto, 2023). Instagram, the leading social network in Türkiye (Statista, 2023), has been attracting brands to create visibility and engage with communities (Kim, Hong and Lee, 2021). Content analysis was performed on the textual content of the companies posted in 2023. Preliminary finding of the study point out that employer brands' online messages include environmental, economic and social issues, whereas they rarely communicate about diversity and inclusion. Moreover disability has a very limited space in their diversity messages. In this ongoing research, data analysis will enable to compare employer brands in terms of their approach to diversity communication and inclusiveness of disability in their messages.

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## **Making diversity an organisational imperative: Developing inclusive emergency communication through co-creative storytelling with CALD communities**

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**Keywords:** *diversity, co-creative storytelling, inclusive emergency communication, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), community*

As a powerful communication strategy, storytelling has recently been used by different types of organisations (e.g., private, public, and not-for-profit sectors) for marketing branding, internal/employee communication, corporate social responsibility, and reputation management (e.g., Gill 2015; Seiffert-Brockmann et al. 2021; Lane 2023). As Lane (2023) defines, organisational storytelling refers to a deliberate process of developing and disseminating an organisation's key message through narration involving people, the organisation, the past, and visions for persuasive purposes. Storytelling mainly benefits organisations through differentiating constructive communication from the 'mundane message overflow' associated with conventional information delivery (Gill 2015). Especially with the emergence of corporate newsroom, storytelling has become the core of communicative efforts, or in other words, organisations are essentially storytelling systems (Seiffert-Brockmann et al. 2021). However, in addition to using stories for self-interest or orienting stakeholders with organisational agendas, the social impact of storytelling to foster a just and diverse society through inclusive organisational communication is under-explored.

Emergency communication makes diversity even more imperative for organisations as emergencies may pose life-threatening challenges to everyone, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. In emergencies, CALD communities, referred to as ethnic, multicultural communities from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Sawrikar and Katz 2009), have been identified as vulnerable groups to hazards, risks, and catastrophic consequences. The increasingly frequent and intense emergency events, ranging from global pandemics, natural hazards, organisational mismanagement, and human-induced disasters, could impact CALD communities severely given pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities,

language and cultural barriers, and lack of social networks (Uekusa and Matthewman 2023). Ignoring CALD communities' needs and wellbeing during emergencies may incur backlash and ethical scrutiny over organisations. It is, therefore, crucial to develop inclusive emergency communication that not only addresses CALD communities' diverse needs but also leverages their capabilities and potentials for collective resilience building. Diversity needs to be well integrated into organisational emergency communication strategies and processes (Young and Jones 2019).

To meet the above pressing need, this study explores how co-creative storytelling, as a way to engage CALD communities and elicit their creative input, can offer alternatives to enhancing the inclusivity of organisational emergency communication. We build on a theoretical promise that co-creative storytelling offers a platform to not only allow for diverse ways of seeing, sense-making, and experience-sharing from CALD communities, but also enable emergency managers to identify common threads that bind CALD communities to a shared vision (Goldstein et al. 2015). From this viewpoint, involving co-creative storytelling in emergency communication is less about prescribing response strategies but more of providing a vehicle for CALD communities to create shared values that are, in turn, weaved into organisational strategies to develop a coherent narrative (key messaging). Therefore, CALD communities in this study are positioned not as an object of social representation (e.g., not about diverse representation of CALD communities in stories), but as a subject of diverse storytelling who contributes to the development of inclusive emergency communication.

Specifically, this study targeted Australia's three representative CALD communities: Chinese, Japanese, and Indonesian, who have been reported largely impacted by various emergencies (e.g., natural hazards, COVID-19) but do not actively access and engage with official information, resources, and services due to their preferred living within geographic and cultural enclaves (Macnamara and Camit 2017). But on the other side, these cultures are featured by a historical tradition of using stories for emergency education and communication. With the facilitation of multicultural service organisations, we recruited 16 participants from the three CALD communities, each participating in one-hour narrative inquiry, a method to draw on personal narrative accounts of lived experiences to make inquiries into a focal issue (Rahiem et al 2021). When narrative inquiries were not conducted in English (half sessions done in English), we hired a cultural facilitator to assist the researcher with story/data collection. This study was reviewed and approved by our University Human Ethics Committee.

We find that these CALD communities tell culturally diverse and creative stories reflective of their use of cultural heritage, symbols, rituals, and tools for community learning and inter-generational education about emergencies. For example, Chinese prefer using historical events or oriental legends (e.g., Emperor Yu tames the flood) to learn about emergency responses, while Japanese seem inclined to comics for accessible emergency communication and Indonesian show faith in religions in the face of emergency events. Such diverse storytelling articulates the heterogeneous needs and preferences across different cultural groups, and also explains the social ties that link the more vulnerable members within an ethnic community (e.g.,



the elderly who are likely to disconnect from conventional emergency communication) with the ‘circuits of care’ (e.g., family, peer, and community support). Collectively, these stories provide important clues for organisational emergency/crisis managers to diversify communication strategies, with a focus to pursue the balances of providing actionable instructions and relatable cultural appeals, direct/repetitive messaging and appealing stories, organisation-driven narratives and community-led storytelling.

Overall, this study contributes refreshing insights to promoting diversity in organisational communication through the lens of co-creative storytelling with one of the least accessible and hardest to reach sections of society—CALD communities—in the context of emergency communication. Instead of using storytelling as another one-way marketing, publicity, or promotion as criticised by many scholars (e.g., Gill 2015; Lane 2023), this study has heightened its social impact on diversity building by engaging CALD communities not as an object of social representation but a subject of diverse sense-making. The co-creative storytelling concept used in this study contributes to developing, what Seiffert-Brockmann et al. (2021) call, an ‘outside-in’ approach to weaving narrative elements from diverse sources into organisations’ inclusive and cohesive storytelling even during emergencies. Methodologically, this study provides useful guideline to partner with CALD participants and cultural facilitators as intermediaries who assist with authentic storytelling. In addition, the culturally featured examples covered in this study offer practical implications for developing inclusive organisational communication beyond emergency contexts.

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## Session 1.2 Cultural aspects in advertising

### Decontextualisation in Advertising: the Cultural Implications of a Creative Technique

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In this paper we consider the cultural consequences of a technique of creative advertising we call decontextualisation. The concept was singled out by Neil Postman (1986) in his work *Amusing Ourselves to Death* as an especially corrosive and damaging aspect of electronic communication. He maintained that it manifested, normalised and popularised a cognitive style that is anathema to critical thinking and rationality, and he contrasted it with the earlier ‘typographic’ political culture in which citizens were accustomed to attending to and/or reading complex political arguments. We explore manifestations of the technique of decontextualisation in advertising, and we speculate on its influence on political communication and contemporary communication culture. We then discuss some suggestions on how the potentially damaging cultural effects of decontextualisation might be mitigated.

Neil Postman (1986) highlighted the potential for the technique of decontextualisation to destabilise cultural meaning in his book ‘*Amusing Ourselves to Death*’. Put simply, decontextualisation refers to communication content that has the original context that gave it meaning stripped out. It is a common technique in advertising and branding, seen for example in Nike’s use of a Greek myth in their branding, or Starbucks’ use of the myth of the Siren, and it is a feature of advertisements that use intertextuality, such as the 2023 Aldi TV ad featuring Kevin the Carrot<sup>1</sup> with its implicit intertextual reference to the movie *Wonka*. Decontextualisation, in effect, facilitates cognitive shortcuts by creating new symbolic associations that are not rationale or grounded in empirical fact.

According to Postman (1986) it was not only the style of communication that created a sense of decontextualisation but also its pace and discontinuity. A news item, for example, might be given context by a headline, an image and a few lines of copy- and then it’s on to the next item before the viewer’s attention wanes. The items often have no logical connection- it might be a story about mass starvation in Africa, on to one of a domestic murder, then on to how a cute kid won the local spelling bee. The ‘peek-a-boo world’ (Postman, 1986, p. 89) of television

with its truncated items of content that have no logical continuity or connection, are fragmented across time and geography, and are presented with little or no context to establish the antecedents or consequences of the item, is superficially, but intensely, entertaining, but also deeply incoherent. Content enters and leaves the news cycle depending on the whims of editors' priorities and public interest. It is easy to see how the kinetic character of mediated content is vastly accelerated today through digital media, for example when we scroll through social media newsfeeds.

Postman (1986) focused his critique on television, but he was particularly critical of advertising, commenting that "The fundamental metaphor for political discourse is the television commercial" (p. 146). For Postman (1986), the technique of decontextualisation, encountered hundreds of times every hour by media audiences, would have the cumulative cultural effect of normalising the contrivance of meaning. The sense of, and need for, context in understanding, would eventually be lost, and audiences would be adrift in a world of disconnected meanings without the information needed to anchor them to reality. Postman (1986) alluded to a previous era he called a typographic culture, in which political discourse entailed reading long tracts and attending to hours-long political arguments. This culture demanded intellectual skills, such as the capacity for prolonged and focused attention, the breadth of knowledge and intellectual flexibility to grasp allusions, and the discernment of nuance and fine distinctions in argumentation, all of which, Postman (1986) argued, are rendered redundant by television and its use of decontextualisation, with catastrophic whole-population effects for public education and political engagement. Postman (1986) suggested that what he called the epistemology of television leads to the consequence that "...cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, (when) serious conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act." This, he speculated, would lead to "culture-death" (p. 181) as people gradually lost the skills of, and the patience to engage in, critical thinking and reasoning, through over-exposure to decontextualised forms of mediated communication.

Decontextualisation has been a feature of print journalism since the invention of the 'headline' which distils a story into one phrase, and it is a feature of most mediated content. Take, for example, 'clickbait' headlines in social media news that are either ambiguous, requiring the user to click and read the story to establish the truth, or are strategically misleading, with the same motive, to earn a user click. Another striking example is the contemporary success of arguably meaningless political taglines such as Make America Great Again and Get Brexit Done which have had such profound effects on world politics.

Decontextualisation is especially prevalent as a technique of creative advertising. Creative advertising takes idioms, values, ideas, myths and symbols from non-commercial culture and then juxtaposes them with brands to reconstitute their meaning in the service of capital. Through this process, brands achieve cultural salience. Decontextualisation in advertising is often accompanied by recontextualization, whereby the now meaning-less, abstracted content has a new meaning constituted through the application of a new context.

Decontextualisation/recontextualization can be seen in the iconic Marlboro Man campaigns. Marlboro (originally positioned as a brand for women) shifted their brand positioning by using a tough, independent, aloof model of masculinity. For Holt (2004), iconic brands resolve ideological dilemmas, and he suggests that Marlboro advertising allowed American men to express a traditional myth of unreconstructed masculinity at a time in the 1960s and 70s when their sense of masculine identity was being challenged. They were being asked to take part in childcare, to express emotional empathy, or even to help with household chores (heaven forbid), and such attitudes ran counter to patriarchal ideology. In the ads, the visual cues of the cowboy, the rugged outdoors, the handsome, weather-beaten face, the horse, the cowboy hat, the absence of women, children and domesticity, and the implied values of a mythical America forged by fearless frontiersmen, were appropriated and applied to an inanimate object, a cigarette. They were taken out of their original cultural context, in contrast to, say, factual historical accounts of the lives and times of American cowboys which paint a very different picture. The cigarette is presented within the assembled decontextualised images and implicitly connected to them with a distinctive brand name and a strapline (“Come to where the flavour is. Come to Marlboro Country”). In effect, a powerful American myth of masculinity (Holt and Thompson, 2004) was reconstituted symbolically as a cultural practice- namely, smoking a Marlboro cigarette, through the creative technique of decontextualisation/recontextualisation. Rationally, the idea that smoking a cigarette can enhance one’s masculinity by evoking a myth is absurd, but the suggestive juxtaposition of symbols in advertising conveys associations implicitly, rather than explicitly, and hence they are unconsciously accepted.

In another famous example, in 1947, a copywriter named Frances Gerety at Philadelphia advertising agency N.W. Ayer coined perhaps the most successful tagline ever, *A Diamond is Forever*<sup>ii</sup>. This grammatically incorrect line appeared in De Beer’s advertising and, it turned out, changed the cultural meaning of diamonds for future generations. A diamond might indeed last forever, or almost, since they are hardwearing objects, but the advertising, with the tagline, was taken to mean that a diamond was a metaphysical expression of love, and perhaps commitment. The notion of forever was decontextualised from its usual temporal references and re-framed as an expression of emotional commitment in the advertising, inscribing meaning into the primary text of the brand (Hackley and Hackley, 2019). By association, the commodity also became such an expression, rather than a store of value or a symbol of extravagant wealth. The tag line makes little sense, other than as an advertising tagline.

In the presentation, we explore further examples of decontextualisation in advertising, we speculate as to the cognitive style thus propagated and its cultural implications, and we refer to Postman’s (1986) comparison of the contrasting visions of cultural prison from George Orwell and Aldous Huxley in speculating as to which better suits the work that advertising and mediated entertainment have created.

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Aldi Christmas 2023 TV ad <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdouFRNeJyc>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cleanorigin.com/blog/the-iconic-a-diamond-is-forever-slogan/>

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## **Examining the effect of gender on advertising on ad and brand attitude: Through the lens of Japanese consumers.**

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**Keywords:** *gender, advertising, ad attitude, brand attitude, ad color, hedonic product*

In October 2018, Sofitel Brisbane found itself in a predicament, necessitating an apology and the withdrawal of a print advertisement that featured a couple reading and having breakfast in bed. The ad faced criticism from netizens who denounced its insensitive portrayal of gender roles (Sullivan, 2018). Similarly, Gillette's #MeToo-inspired campaign, launched to address social issues, encountered substantial backlash. The YouTube ad associated with the campaign received twice as many dislikes as likes, prompting calls for a boycott (Smith, 2019). In Japan, Nike also faced a comparable situation with their New Girl ad, which shed light on the disparities in opportunities between men and women in the country.

The influence of advertisements on consumer behavior has been a subject of various studies (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). These studies explore how ads can shape favorable reactions towards both the advertisement itself and the associated brand (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Lee, Byon, Ammon, & Park, 2016; Phelps & Hoy, 1996; Varnali, 2014).

The rise of social media has intensified the scrutiny on brands, leading to significant online backlash for ads deemed insensitive and offensive. Such advertisements often face criticism for their portrayal of cultural, gender, and diversity issues (Hosie, 2017; Slawson, 2018). Despite the apparent widespread backlash, reactions to these ads tend to be mixed, with some individuals condemning the brands and others coming to their defense (Margan & Lackey, 2018; Miller, 2018; Toppings, Lyons, & Weaver, 2019). This dynamic has underscored the importance of research focused on examining advertisements dealing with sensitive societal issues.

This research aims to investigate the impact of different advertising factors, specifically focusing on color and gender representation, on eliciting positive attitudes toward both the advertisement and the associated brand in the category of hedonic products. To explore this, cosmetics and cars were chosen to represent feminine and masculine products, respectively. The study adopts a between-subjects factorial design (3 x 2 x 2), where gender ("male", "female", "both male and female") is combined with product type ("cosmetics" and "cars") and ad color ("feminine" and "masculine"). A total of 360 participants took part in the study. The

outcomes of this research are anticipated to provide valuable insights for brands, aiding them in the development of ads that garner more favorable attitudes from consumers and the wider community.

Table 1. Summary of MANOVA Test results.

Variable	Attitude towards Ad			Attitude towards Brand		
	Mean	F	Sig	Mean	F	Sig
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	3.679	.540	.006	3.540	0.350	.725
Female	3.687			3.452		
<b>Product Category</b>						
Cosmetics	3.547	.452	.017	3.481	0.605	.271
Cars	3.417			3.286		
<b>Ad Color</b>						
Feminine	3.543	.313	.003	3.481	0.472	.008
Masculine	3.429			3.286		
<b>Gender*Product Category* Ad Color</b>	2.150	.023		3.276	.194	
Male* Cosmetics* Feminine	3.312			2.843		
Male* Cosmetics* Masculine	3.474			2.928		
Male* Cars* Feminine	3.537			3.486		
Male* Cars* Masculine	3.600			3.726		



Female* Cosmetics* Feminine	3.792			2.593		
Female* Cosmetics* Masculine	3.604			2.637		
Female* Cars* Feminine	2.910			3.467		
Female* Cars* Masculine	3.311			3.306		

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## Navigating The Future: Emerging Chinese Marketing Trends To Boost Digital Advertising and Economy

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**Keywords:** *Digital advertising, IMC, internet, marketing ecosystems*

Since the year 2000, “digitalization” has become the most significant transformation in the field of advertising and marketing. Post-2020, the forefront of the advertising industry has entered the era of digitization, giving rise to a broad digital advertising ecosystem and industry structure, with the internet economy as its core. This paper is the one of the first to explain the major trends and transformations in the field of advertising and marketing in China after 2000, from mass communication to the Internet era, through the theoretical perspective of digital advertising.

Currently, the observed trend of overall digitization in the advertising market originated primarily from the initiatives of search engines and the online advertising market. After the widespread adoption of social applications on mobile smart devices, it entered the golden stage of digital advertising and programmatic development. According to the China Advertising Development Index released by the State Administration for Market Regulation, the total advertising revenue in China in 2021 was 11,799.26 billion yuan, a year-on-year growth of 20.38%, with digital advertising revenue exceeding 1 trillion yuan. In the same year, China's GDP totaled 108 trillion yuan, marking the first time that the advertising industry's share of the national GDP exceeded 1.1%. Internet advertising has deeply penetrated the future of digital societal transformation, consumption growth, and business innovation. However, the revenue figures for the Chinese advertising market released by the international 4A advertising group are significantly lower than the statistics from the State Administration for Market Regulation. Behind the differences in statistical methods lies a shift in the dominant forces driving the development of the advertising industry in China.

From a market competition perspective, today's advertising giants have shifted from the traditional agency industry to the Chinese internet industry. The traditional advertising industry has undergone a rapid transformation over the past decade to address the challenges posed by the transformation of the digital advertising market. The fundamental strategies employed by the traditional advertising industry to cope with the internet revolution are centered around

adapting to the planning process of new media, technological innovation, process innovation, and content product innovation. Meanwhile, the real digital advertising market is rapidly expanding. Digital advertising, as a pioneer in the comprehensive digitization of human business civilization entering the digital market transformation, occupies a leading position in guiding the digital market. Digital advertising has driven the innovative transformation of digital marketing in the internet economy, initiating the digitization of the internet, media, marketing, and enterprises, ultimately leading to a strategic transformation of the industrial chain into a digital economy and the country's digital production elements.

The classic function of advertising is to use mass media to efficiently disseminate creative content to persuade audiences. Today, after experiencing the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution and innovation in internet technology products, innovations in advertising products that cater to the digital lifestyle of consumers continue to be unearthed. Digital advertising aims to utilize the more efficient information exchange of the internet to create a new economic marketing supply and demand platform distinct from traditional media society. Digital productivity arises from higher-dimensional technological and market innovations, revolutionizing the way suppliers and consumers connect in terms of demand. Various new forms of advertising products such as live e-commerce, app downloads, social e-commerce, etc., have been created and are well-received by the public.

In summary, the productivity explosion brought about by digital technology has made advertising a genuine production element of the digital age. The current digital national economy in China has been created by the digital upgrade of goods and services in various industries. Digital advertising has become the foundation infrastructure and technological upgrade of the digital market on the internet. On the one hand, digital advertising directly benefits from the development of information science and technology in the internet age; on the other hand, the continuous innovation of digital advertising products guides consumers' demands for data, information, content applications, and business to shift to the internet digital world, converging into a highly digitalized society that leads the trend of digital social and economic development.

Digital advertising has systematically created a new market for the digital advertising space (commodities), which, through the new forms of digital advertising space products, creates the "ultimate consumer demand" market for emerging digital social life applications. Digital advertising space greatly satisfies the conditions for producers to supply consumer demand in the market.

The digital economic environment provides boundless growth space for "Pan- advertising," surpassing the 4A professional advertising market established by U.S. that first entered modern society in the 20th century, defining "lanes" for mass manufacturing, channel superiors, and mass media. The rules of the market game have changed, and digital advertising has become interlinked with the innovation of the digital economy. Finally, the drastic changes in the advertising technology market have also led to the contraction and even disappearance of some

traditional information distribution markets. The impact of the global pandemic and economic uncertainty has accelerated this anticipated outcome.

This paper explains the digital advertising ecosystem, primarily addressing the development strategy of the diffusion and extension of digital advertising into digital marketing under the backdrop of digital economic and industrial transformation. It aims to construct a business support ecosystem for digital advertising in the digital age and various enterprise marketing ecosystems.

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## Session 2.1 Workplace communication

### Managers in the Subordinates' Eyes: Implicit Bias from a Communicative Perspective

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**Keywords:** corporate diversity, implicit bias, network analysis, communicative perspective, subordinate perception

Diversity and bias constitute aspects of human experience and can be observed in a broad spectrum of settings including public sector (Moon and Christensen 2022), business settings (DiTomaso 2023) and academic institutions (Harrison-Bernard et al. 2020). Bias and diversity have a complex relationship that negatively influences each other. With the establishment of a cause-and-effect relationship between the reduction of implicit bias and the fostering of genuine diversity, their interdependence highlights the critical role each plays in influencing the other (Varona and Suárez 2022). This mutual dependency is particularly evident in the context of decision-making, where, decision-makers' biases can even lead to biased patterns that hinder the promotion of real diversity, which is aimed at being eliminated (Portocarrero and Carter 2022, and Triana et al. 2021). A recent study published by researchers at Florida University, as featured in Forbes, supports this idea, and highlights the severity of the situation. Using the virtual laboratory tool Project Implicit to examine implicit biases, the data of over 5 million individuals from 22 different occupational groups were analyzed. The researchers revealed that the levels of both explicit and implicit biases towards marginalized groups were significantly higher among managers compared to non-managers (Forbers 2023).

The prejudice (as behavioral inclinations) that employers intensely grapple with to promote diversity (Axelrad et al. 2023) is a complex topic in the context of modern research. The concept, as articulated by Allport as early as 1958, is considered a natural phenomenon and

defined as "Prejudice is ...is simply an aspect of mental life that can be studied as objectively as any other" (p. 516). A person's conscious thoughts and beliefs (explicit biases) may not always align with spontaneously formed, ingrained associations (implicit biases) (Meidert et al. 2023). This situation can lead to contradictory behaviors in expression and action, negatively impacting both employee well-being and organizational success (Jones et al. 2017). Therefore, the concept, due to its contradictory nature and potential impact on the organization, constitutes a significant motivation for examination.

This study is based on the relational approach, beyond formal approaches such as the trust-based manager-subordinate relationship, relational investments, and friendships, where interactions are at the forefront, as explained in Byington et al.'s individual theories context (2021). When referring to an organization, any form of interaction among individuals within the organization transforms into a relationship over time. These relationships, with the beliefs and values they create within the organization, have a function of either reinforcing or mitigating bias. According to Axelrad et al. (2023), creating opportunities for interaction between groups and the social accountability arising from the need to present oneself positively in front of others are effective in the context of organizational diversity. Hence, the second focus of the study revolves around the relationship between managers and their subordinates, aiming to answer the following question: What is the collective understanding of managers' relational qualities?

The study also focuses on the assumption that open communication and constructive dialogue (Men et al. 2023) can be effective in combating biases. Internal strong and two-way communication, involving leaders and subordinates, facilitates the transmission of organizational values (Welch 2011), creates an inclusive climate (Nishii 2013), and ensures sincerity and trust (Men, Qin, Mitson, and Thelen 2023), all with the potential to prevent biases with their impact. Beyond its function in reducing bias in group dynamics (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006), communication also has a function in terms of collective perception. Implicit bias can manifest collectively within a group. In such cases, bias is considered a social phenomenon that consistently exists in their situations rather than residing as a structure in individuals' minds, and scientific studies support the idea that bias generally originates more from the context than individual qualities (Payne et al. 2017). As a result, the communication function, which cannot be considered independently from the context (Huang 2011), holds the potential to support the organization's diversity commitment. This constitutes another important focus of this study and raises the related question: What is the collective understanding of managers' communication qualities?

Another aim of this study is to present an intersectional approach, widely indicated in the diversity literature as a potential contribution (Colak et al. 2023; Kalev et al. 2006; Solanki and Saxena 2016). Considering that there are multiple dimensions shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors, an intersectional approach, taking into account factors such as age, sexual orientation, educational background, experience, and the organization's field of activity, should be adopted instead of a single demographic plane like gender. This enables a holistic



perspective to address all dimensions representing the roots of attitudes and behaviors that facilitate or resist potential bias acceptance within the organization. Moreover, building on the finding that the similarity between supervisors and subordinates creates differences in supervisors' attitudes toward subordinates' behaviors (Tsui et al. 2002), it is hypothesized that the more similarity exists between subordinates and leaders, the more likely there will be differences in bias exhibition. Do supervisors exhibit implicit bias more positively towards those who share demographic characteristics with them compared to those who are different?

In the context of the relationship between managers and diversity, another suggested future research opportunity in the literature is the interaction between teams shaped within the framework of tasks and roles within the organization and the manager of that team (Calaza et al. 2021). Building on this, the final aim of the study is to determine whether there is a relationship between team performance, the perceived attractiveness of the team, and the manager's a) communication b) relationship quality within an organization. Taking inspiration from Grunig's (2013) excellence management approach, the effort to achieve excellence in team spirit within the organization inherently brings about a tendency to embrace diversity and exhibit a positive attitude towards it in the realm of management concepts. The harmony within the group may emerge not only from the organization's adopted philosophy but also from the synergistic power created through group interactions (Lowe, Levitt, and Wilson 2008), thereby serving as a compelling force on the manager to break down diversity barriers. Accordingly, it raises the question: Is there a statistically significant relationship between team performance and the manager's a) communication quality b) relationship quality within an organization?

The explanation for the methodology in this study is provided lastly. It involved a sample of 186 employees working under both male and female managers. In the study, the researchers utilized semantic network analysis to uncover collective meaning and descriptive statistics to acquire demographic and relational information. Participants were selected using convenience sampling method. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted for one month at the end of 2023. Interviews lasted an average of 10-15 minutes. In the interviews, the participants were asked to express their opinions about their managers' communication style and relationship quality by free association means.

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## How does an ideal candidate look like? Hidden gender biases in job advertising: a pilot test

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Although the Equal Treatment Authority ensures that no explicitly discriminatory references appear in job advertisements (e.g., we are looking for a female), implicitly signalled gender biases implemented into language may, in fact, alter the social cognition of job seekers (e.g., good communication competences in case of females). The objective of this paper is to showcase the first phase of a pilot test, exploring whether implicitly (not consciously) perceived gender biases encoded into language differ in case of male and female social perception when encountering a job advertisement.

Implicit social cognition refers to the automatic, unconscious processes that underly judgments and social behaviour (Gawronski and Payne, 2010). Research suggests (Gaucher et al. 2011; Heilman, 2012; Hilton and von Hippel, 1996, Vámosi and Kovács, 2022) that male and female social cognition fairly differs when reading the content of a job advertisement. A study of Wille and Derous (2018) showed that qualified women were more likely to apply for a job, if the job description contained negatively formulated, trait-like wording about them. These different perceptions are evoked by so-called gender cues that are subtle, not conscious signals that make reference to a specific gender (Formanowitz and Hansen, 2022).

Derous and Decoster (2017) conducted research on resumes and tested the perceived implicit age cues (old-sounding names) recruiters could detect from the applicant's name. They found evidence that recruiters do, in fact, make inferences about a candidate's age based on implicit age cues detected in resumes, especially in the absence of explicit age cues. If we convert ageism into gender dimension, an implicit age cue becomes implicit gender cues, which refers to all the subconscious, 'hard-to-fake' signals that carries reference to a specific gender. On one hand, a cue is 'hard-to-fake' from the sender point of view, because signalling happens beyond one's conscious control based on the individual's acquired qualities. On the other hand, cues are 'hard-to-resist', since recruiters constantly look for cues, candidates embed in their resumes as valuable information.

“Language can be considered one of the subtle means of maintaining traditional gender arrangements, as language is an important vehicle for the transmission and maintenance of stereotypes” (Maass and Arcuri, 1996: 2). As a matter of fact, gender linguistics provides

evidence to such stereotype maintenance, in fact, in numerous ways. One of the salient features of language (especially of English language) is the masculine form used as generic (Formanowitz and Hansen, 2022). Consider the word *policemen* – the term is built on a masculine form, which results in women feeling excluded when encountering such texts in a job-related context (Stout and Dasgupta, 2011).

Those words that are either masculine or feminine-themed words that are associated with gender stereotypes are called *gendered wording* (Baxter et al., 2022). Stereotypically male-directed words include attributes such as ambitious, assertive, competent and are called *agentic wording*. On the other hand, female-directed words that include emotional, sensitive, kind, or compassionate are called *communal wording*. Evidence suggests that although today there are social changes in the way women and men are expected to behave, it is still believed and scientifically justified that communal traits are more frequent at females and agentic traits are more likely to fit males. Hentschel et al. (2021) examined how female students react to stereotypical gendered wording in job advertisements. They found that women did not like the content of the job ad when wording was agentic. Such studies highlight the importance of providing much more attention to the equal job fit for both men and women.

The cognition of a job advertisement marks only the very first phase of the recruitment process. Research suggests (Nagy, 1997; Vokić et al., 2019) that perceiving a job ad is only a stepping-stone towards gender segregation at workplace. The traditional employment gender segregation suggests that women are still less likely to be engaged to paid work than men, which only increases the gender pay gap (Vokić et al., 2019). On the other hand, tokenism refers to the unequal hierarchical division of male and female employees within an institution (Nagy, 1997). Consider the relationship of a leader and the secretary – as we imagine it, the frequent gender stereotypical representation offers the image of a male leader and a female secretary, the former being superior to the latter. Such concerns draw attention to take further steps in examining the primary phase of recruitment, which may be one of the gatekeepers of gender equity.

This paper presents a pilot test – as the first step of a large-scale research – aiming to assess whether unconsciously perceived gender biases encoded into language vary across male and female job seekers. Based on Konnikov et al. (2022) BIAS Word Inventory, the analysis is predominantly focusing on the main parts of a job ad, namely job and role description, psychological cues, and work-life characteristics. By building on gendered wording theories introduced by Gaucher et al. (2011) and Baxter et al. (2022), the researcher created three Hungarian job ads with three different gender biases (masculine, feminine, neutral) respectively. For the sake of avoiding bias in job attraction, the created job ads are for a project assistant position, which is considered relatively gender neutral. The job ads will be tested with a couple of university students with the intention of examining the relationship between the ads and their thoughts about who they think the ad is addressing, moreover, whether the unconscious signals do, in fact, affect their cognition about an ideal candidate. Nevertheless, theory-testing is also a crucial purpose in the pilot test phase, which helps the researcher to make sure the job advertisements are clearly and adequately built for further analysis. The

continuation of the pilot test covers an experiment with career entrant university students (between the age of 18-24), who are expected to examine as well as evaluate the four main part of randomly assigned job advertisements.

The author expects that the research will yield scientific underpinning for male and female cognition to considerably differ when the content of the given job ads contains varying psychological cues and job descriptions. The analysis uniquely intertwines job advertising as employer branding, the psychological effects of social cognition and the gender dimension of labour market inequality, which carries the possibility to offer a practical solution to a more inclusive, discrimination-free recruitment communication. A possible practical implication would be that recruiters should be sensitive and careful with the implemented wordings in job advertisement, which can directly attract or push away well-fit applicants.

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## **Sustainability (Communication) Manager as Curator of Change. A typology of job profiles in the field of Sustainability, CSR, DEI and ESG Management related to required communication competences, green skills and agency.**

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**Keywords:** *sustainability, transformation, green skills, communication competences, profession, typology, green jobs*

### **Purpose / Objectives**

Sustainability and climate protection are becoming increasingly important for companies, as well as political institutions, NGOs, educational and cultural institutions. This constant change in our society also impacts the job market. In recent months and years, numerous new professional roles have emerged, and sustainability and DEI (diversity, equity & inclusion) management, as well as environmental, sustainability, CSR or ESG reporting, is no longer solely located in the communication department but has reached the ‘C-Suite’, attaining a strategic and management level. But what exactly defines these professions where environmental and climate protection, sustainability, innovation, and transformation play a significant role? What qualifications are expected for these new job profiles, what role do communication and green skills play and on which management level are they institutionalized?

### **Background / Conceptualization**

In the project at hand, we address these questions from a communication perspective, conceptualizing Sustainability, CSR, DEI and ESG Managers in business settings as communicators who enact communication. In the literature, doing communication is mostly related to the training in one of several fields such as marketing, business communication, advertising, sales, writing, text production and journalism, or public relations (Beeler et al., 1983; Verhoeven et al., 2012). At the same time, communication as professional practice is linked to a certain organizational and therefore ‘communication facilitating’ structure, like a public relations agency or communication department in a company. These organizational and structural settings usually determine the communicator’s role – as well as professional skills,



education, and ethics (Hagelstein et al. 2021, Andersson & Rademacher 2021). Yet little attention has been paid to role modifications and new emerging communicator roles – which aren't necessarily labeled as *communicator roles* (Weder & Weaver, 2021).

To map the new professional roles in the area of Sustainability, CSR, DEI and ESG management, the theoretical concept and framework to identify curators of change and the agency for communication they feel within certain organizational structures (Weder et al., 2022) is applied to the field of green jobs.

### **Study Design / Methodology**

The first guiding research question (RQ1) for the project was the following: what (new) professional roles are definable in the field Sustainability, CSR, DEI and ESG (management)? Secondly, we asked for the communication competences and skills that are required for these new emerging roles related to social, economic, and environmental transformation and development (RQ2). Thirdly, we asked for the responsibility and agency they feel for change, particularly in a crisis narrative (climate change, political instability etc.) (RQ3).

With two methodological approaches we were able to answer the research questions, delving into the Austrian market and, furthermore, in the European neighboring countries, including Germany, France, Switzerland, Poland, Romania, Croatia, the USA and Australia/NZ. The empirical analysis is based on a data set of actual job advertisements from the largest job portals as well as LinkedIn in two languages (English & German) (Nov./Dec. 2023) and the full greenjobs.de-database (2014-2023) to study changes over time. The data sets and rather quantitative analysis is complemented by a series of interviews with role holders (n = 25 per country), conceptualized as semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016, Schmid, 2004). A sample of the job ads and the interviews have been treated as text material that we analyzed with an inductive category formation. We chose this question-led approach used in qualitative content analyses using the open access analysis web-tool QCAmap (Mayring, 2019; Fenzl & Mayring, 2017).

### **Findings**

For the CMC conference in 2024, we will be able to present the first results based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected job ads (n = 756) and a descriptive analysis of the data provided by greenjobs.de (n = 13.500), reflected with the insights from the deep dive into the actual doing of Sustainability, CSR and ESG managers with the first set of interviews (n = 15, Austria, Germany, Australia). The job announcements give a clear picture of how sustainability management emerged as new profession over the years (2014-2023) and how it moved from communication departments to strategy, innovation, and management departments. However, green skills and communication competences are increasingly articulated as requirements for all kinds of transformational and particularly DEI management roles in organizational contexts. This enables the creation of a typology of the job profiles which will be presented at the conference.

## Originality of the paper

To drive transformation and to communicate diversity, inclusion, and equality issues in particular, well-educated professionals are needed. Consequently, there is a growing interest in specific skills related to ecologically sustainable, economically responsible, and diverse business. Roles like ‘Chief Sustainability Officers’, ‘Sustainability’ or ‘Diversity Manager’ as well as other ‘green jobs’ show the variety of roles related to what is called sustainable development, societal transformation, and global change. The paper complements the debate around skills and professionalization in business and corporate communication and adds to broader discussions about role responsibility, agency, and authorship related to public conversations in an age of social change, global crises, inequality, and social injustice and a massively changing environment. Thus, the study answers the core question of what role communication competences play in these emerging new roles and shows that it’s crucial to adapt education and training programs at universities, colleges, and academies in the future.

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## The inner conflict of female subordinates: A non-Anglo-Saxon perspective on gender diversity

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**Keywords:** Corporate diversity, implicit bias, network analysis, female subordinates, male managers, Non Anglo-Saxon perspective

Creating an ideal working environment aims to enhance inclusivity and foster a balanced atmosphere in terms of diversity (Philip and Soumyaja 2019; Ortlieb and Sieben 2014). The most frequently examined and scientifically addressed aspect in this field often pertains to 'gender diversity' (Bhattacharyya and Ghosh 2012; Pidani, Mahmood, and Agbola 2020). Studies in the literature emphasize a strong correlation between gender diversity in workplaces and critical factors such as corporate success (Kasinathan, Mallu, and Bozinski 2023), innovation (Colovic and Williams 2020), and creativity (Hoever et al. 2023). Focusing on gender diversity in workplaces not only ensures a fair distribution of the workforce but also supports the synergy arising from the convergence of diverse perspectives and talents (Zhang and Hou 2012). This can assist companies in gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage (Urbancova et al. 2020).

Discrimination and diversity in the corporate context, despite being fundamentally distinct concepts, can be better understood from a broader perspective when they are interconnected. Discrimination, as a factor that impedes the creation of an inclusive work atmosphere, serves the promotion of inclusivity and consequently diversity by reducing attitudes and behaviors related to discrimination (Arthur Jr and Doverspike 2005). At this point, evaluating discrimination and diversity together can assist organizations in understanding the dynamics between these two crucial phenomena and in developing more effective strategies.

Despite efforts by organizations, particularly in Continental Europe and the United States, to make special endeavors towards achieving gender diversity (Šefránek and Mikle 2022), it is still possible to argue that there is a considerable distance from the desired balanced level in this regard. For instance, figures such as 85% of CEOs in companies listed in the Fortune 500

being male and the projection, according to the Global Gender Gap Report announced by the World Economic Forum, that the gender gap will close in 131 years as of 2023, bring this reality to the forefront. Especially during the COVID-19 process, the increased burden of social roles, primarily motherhood, on women has negatively affected this group even more post-pandemic (Calaza et al. 2021). Consequently, the existing gaps have led to a further increase in unemployment, especially among women (Bagheri and Yates 2022).

The current landscape of gender-based discrimination, as indicated by all these data, may have both institutional reasons and personal-social sources. To put it more clearly, if the perceptual differences that arise in the minds of individuals, shaped by culture, and turned into societal common beliefs, do not change, it is not possible to achieve positive tangible developments (Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle 2020). Moreover, the fact that perceptions often shape behavior unconsciously (Greenwald and Lai 2020) is a separate threat and a separate challenge for the necessary change/transformation process in question. This situation is frequently examined in the literature, especially with approaches such as implicit bias and unconscious bias. Contemporary individuals often strive to align their behavior with the expectations of the modern world, avoiding discriminatory attitudes towards the established rules and values of entrenched institutional structures. However, these efforts may remain at the level of expression and may not necessarily translate into actual behaviors; in fact, individuals may not even be aware that they are consciously practicing this discrimination. Due to the influence of subconscious biases, even though these attitudes do not involve conscious discrimination, individuals may be entirely unaware of these tendencies (Konrad 2018; Onyeador, Hudson, and Lewis Jr 2021). This situation can complicate the effective elimination of biases that contradict contemporary world norms in individuals' social and professional lives.

Therefore, when evaluating inclusivity within the organization, especially in the gender context, it is not accurate to act independently of institutional approaches to discrimination as well as the individual approaches of the members of that organization. The literature on sexual orientation that could be expressed in the context of an individual's understanding of oneself, and others addresses various aspects through different theories. Social cognition, identity, image, interpretive, normative, micro-HR, career, and relational theories examine these aspects from different perspectives. For example, interpretive approaches focus on the subjective interpretations and discourses of different actors in a socio-historical framework. Image theories, on the other hand, examine how individuals understand and evaluate others, and the impact of these perceptions on behavior (Byington, Tamm, and Trau 2021). In this study, gender schema theory and relational approaches will be utilized as a conceptual framework. Gender schema theory explores how individuals shape their perceptions of themselves and others through the frames (schema) they develop about genders. Furthermore, it explains why these perceptions conform to societal expectations and rules due to experiences such as observation and imitation, focusing on individuals' relationships with role models (Yanxia 2023). Since gender patterns observed in the environment and internalized throughout life can lead to the formation of subconscious biases (Woodington 2010), it is believed that the theory

is suitable for explaining the findings in this study. The study will also benefit from relational theories. These theories are believed to be able to make sense of the data obtained through various factors such as context, quality, and process in human relationships, which constitute the complex ecosystem in the workplace, including manager-employee interaction, and interpersonal relationships within and between genders (Byington, Tamm, and Trau 2021).

The sample for the research consists of female employees working under male managers. The methodology involves utilizing semantic network analysis, allowing exploration of shared meaning through connections between words (Doerfel and Barnett 1999), and descriptive statistics (survey). Face-to-face interviews and surveys are carried out with 93 women living in Izmir using a convenience sample method for one month (at the end of 2023). These interviews last 10-15 minutes on average. In the interviews, participants are asked to express their thoughts through free association method. This study aims to shed light on corporate diversity and implicit bias by addressing the following five critical interrelated questions.

- a) What is the shared meaning, if any, regarding the perception of discrimination, and what do female employees associate with this perception?
- b) What is the level of job satisfaction among female employees?
- c) In an ideal work environment (assuming they have the choice), what is the shared meaning regarding *managerial* qualities in the context of diversity, and what do female employees associate with this perception?
- d) In an ideal work environment (assuming they have the choice), what is the shared meaning regarding *employee* qualities in the context of diversity, and what do female employees associate with this perception?
- e) Is there a statistically significant relationship between the parameters (a and c) and (a and d) defined above?

As a result, this study goes beyond merely identifying associations related to discrimination; it also aims to determine whether women, predominantly identified in the literature as experiencing discrimination, exhibit an intention for inclusive behavior in the context of diversity when given a choice, influenced by the accumulation and experiences in their subconscious. The findings to be obtained will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of women's intentions and attitudes in this area, making a significant contribution to the literature. The fact that the study is conducted within a non-Anglo-Saxon geography will bring a different perspective to the prevailing views in the literature.

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## Session 2.2 Sustainable fashion

### Sustainable Fashion: Is this the new norm for Generation Z? Results from a Systematic Literature Review

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**Keywords:** *well-being, co-creation, fashion, systematic review, environmental sustainability, systematic literature review*

### Introduction

Co-creation, entails a collaborative effort between companies and consumers to generate value collectively (Chatterjee et al., 2022), ensuring that it aligns with their expectations (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Well-being motivations play a role in influencing and challenging green attitudes, with many consumers viewing adherence to green trends as an expression of their self-perception (Tang et al., 2020). However, there exists a gap between awareness of green attitudes and actual behavior. Some researchers posit that customers express concern for sustainability and believe their actions positively impact the environment, but this awareness does not necessarily translate into their purchasing decisions (Soyer et al., 2021). Consumer involvement is a complex process encompassing spiritual, emotional, and communicative dimensions, where spiritual and emotional aspects serve as internal stimuli driving consumer engagement (Zhao et al., 2019).

Of course, social/earned media are the ideal means of attracting Generation Z consumers to this process. Research centered on Generation Z is gaining substantial relevance in contemporary



times, primarily due to this demographic's emergence as a robust and evolving economic segment, prompting the need for adjustments in their attitudes and behaviors (Dabija & Băbut, 2019). This transformation carries significant weight and serves as a pivotal driver for businesses to better communicate products' sustainable characteristics (Kusá et al., 2020). By using earned media within the fashion sector, the co-creation of ecologically friendly fashion undoubtedly has the potential to bridge the gap between environmentally mindful and environmentally ignorant consumers. It establishes a common ground by highlighting shared ideals, collaborative processes, and the positive impact of sustainable behaviors on one's well-being. Co-created sustainable initiatives offer a pathway to promote a more harmonious approach to environmental challenges by focusing on communal well-being and shared values.

### **Preliminary results of the Systematic Literature Review**

The study seeks to find techniques that guide this generation toward a more sustainable attitude, resulting in a paradigm shift in which sustainability becomes a natural and common goal, bringing together Generation Z in the quest for well-being and environmentally responsible conduct. Inspired by prior systematic reviews in the marketing field, the researcher commenced the exploration by utilizing EBSCOhost and SCOPUS as the main databases (Vrontis, Christofi, & Katsikeas, 2020). Following the methods advised by Sousa et al. (2008), we resulted in a total compilation of 71 articles. The preliminary results of the review are categorized in three distinct groups:

#### *Sustainability and Well-being of Generation Z*

As marketing adapts to evolving landscapes, Balderjahn et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of segment accessibility and identification. Incorporating personal well-being, environmental benefits, and societal welfare into economic standards of living is a path for investigation, leading to strategies that encourage sustainable lifestyles. In the realm of tech-savvy Generation Z, Casalo et al. (2021) underline research gaps in social media co-creation. Examining generational differences in social media interactions, the influence of emotions on behaviors, and the role of creativity warrants exploration. Taheri et al. (2021) suggest investigating contextual variables' influence on co-creation and braggart Word-of-Mouth (WoM), while Bazi et al. (2020) propose quantitative testing of findings related to luxury brand engagement motivations.

#### *Co-creation and well-being*

In the realm of marketing literature, marketers strive to effectively fulfill consumers' needs. Mingione et al. (2020) discovered that pleasurable and emotional advantages emerge during co-creation, prompting researchers to explore the cognitive aspect of brand value co-creation. During the co-creation of experiences, emotions, and well-being play a central role. According to Nadeem et al. (2021), experiential value positively contributes to consumer engagement in co-creation processes, which correlates with brand loyalty and satisfaction, ultimately leading to the emergence of value co-creation. Within the context of sustainability co-creation, Chou et al. (2022) observed that engaging in sustainable actions amplifies well-being and cultivates

positive emotional states, exemplified by heightened enjoyment, gratitude, and life satisfaction. They advocate for forthcoming research to delve into other personal outcomes like optimism or confidence, as well as vital service attributes such as fostering a sense of safety, which are pivotal determinants of sustainable behavior.

#### *The influence of earned media*

Within sustainability considerations, Lee et al. (2021) attempted to expand the spectrum of participatory activities, suggesting further investigation into actions like pledging, donating, volunteering, and more. eWOM and digital communication are potent tools for Generation Z. Chen et al. (2020) suggest that companies actively involve consumers in a collaborative process aimed at green product innovation, fostering creativity and knowledge exchange.

The literature highlights the potential of social media to contribute to sustainability initiatives by influencing and shaping consumers' behaviors. Kamal et al. (2022) delve into the circular economy, focusing on immediate return. They develop a framework facilitating the exchange of product return information from businesses to consumers, tailored to support sustainable practices in small and medium enterprises. This framework sheds light on the crucial role of return information and message framing in fostering intentions for immediate returns, thereby contributing to sustainable manufacturing practices.

#### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the study not only advances theoretical knowledge and practical insights into sustainable fashion, earned media, and consumer behavior but also provides a foundation for understanding and addressing diversity among environmentally friendly and indifferent consumers. By recognizing the diverse motivations and preferences within Generation Z, the research contributes to a more holistic and inclusive approach to sustainability, where businesses can tailor their efforts to engage and appeal to a diverse consumer base.

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## Embracing Circular Thinking: Paving the Way for Sustainable Actions in a Green Fashion World

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**Keywords:** *thinking green, acting green, circular fashion, principles*

Circular fashion is a new approach to clothing production and consumption, that aims to close the loop in the fashion industry by reducing waste and reusing resources. Fashion industry unfortunately is the second more polluted industry with a high environmental impact (Jacometti 2019). “Throwaway consumer culture attitude” proliferates among consumers (Kozłowski et al. 2016) influenced by fast-fashion (creating cheaper clothes at lower cost) (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007).

Moser (2015) shows the need of researching the attitude-behaviour gap in green attitudes, which is the base of this study. It is no longer just about green items themselves; rather, products might be green or not as a result of the consumption strategy chosen by their consumers (Testa et al. 2021). Therefore, this research aims to investigate the link between thinking green and acting green to address the gaps in the literature.

The 9R in circular fashion are *Recover, Recycle, Redesign, Restore, Refurbish, Repair, Reuse, Reduce* and *Rethink*. Prendeville et al. (2014) remarked that *Reduce, Reuse* and *Recycle* (3R) principles are a more widely known solution to reduce pollution levels, although they are not the only and most environmentally friendly way of adopting circular measures. Thus, consumers might be less familiar with some Rs. The following hypothesis was formulated: *H1a: Awareness of the principles of circular fashion has a positive impact on thinking green.*

Shen et al. (2013) define eight categories of sustainable fashion, which are: recycle, organic, vintage, vegan, artisan, locally made, custom and fair trade certified. Among these categories, recycling and organic apparel products are those items more fashionable among consumers. Galbreth and Ghosh (2013) encompass that consumer behaviour can be affected by greenness performance in a market-driven environment, where the use of eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton raises the greenness level of fashion products. The following hypothesis is thus

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proposed: *H1b: Applying the principles of circular fashion has a positive impact on the use of green products.*

Existing studies have shown that using green products improves consumer experience, even if the consumer has not chosen or used deliberately the green product (Tezer and Bodur 2021). Thus, prior to thinking green, consumers should be fully informed and aware of the variety of green products in the market. Kamalanon et al. (2022) posit that consumers usually have imperfect knowledge of the true value of a green product and affect negatively actual sales. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed: *H2: Awareness of green fashion products has a positive impact on thinking green.*

With increasing environmental concerns, the use of green products has become more common in recent years. Moser (2015) states that the relation between attitude versus green products and real purchase behaviour is still unclear. Thus, we hypothesise: *H3: Thinking green has a positive impact on the use of green products.*

The data used in the empirical part of the work were collected through a closed questionnaire based on Carvalho et al. (2020). The dependent variables of the survey refer to the two aspects studied in the paper, thinking green and acting green. The independent variables refer to the factors that make people think green and use green products daily.

Through the use of the STATA 16 software, structural equation models have been estimated. Regarding the determinants of thinking green, it can be observed that women think green more than men. However, contrary to what might be expected, university students think green less than those that are working.

Likewise, whereas being aware of the basic principles of the circular economy related to *Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle* has a positive effect on thinking green, being aware of the rest of the principles has no significant effect on thinking green. These results support H1a according to which being aware of the principles of circular economy has a positive impact on thinking green. Moreover, being aware of both categories of green products in the market fashion knowledge of both types of products has a different impact on thinking green. Concretely, being aware of products made from recycled plastic, recycled denim and sustainable cotton contributes to thinking green, a result that is in line with H2, while being aware of products made from waste fibres, liquid leather raw materials or bags made from grape waste does not help to think green.

As for the determinants of the use of green products the results show that whereas applying the principles of circular economy of *Reduce, Reuse and Recycle* has no significant impact on the use of either type of green products, applying the other principles has a positive impact on the use of green products. Then, H1b according to which applying the principles of circular economy has a positive impact on the use of green products is accepted only for 3R-principles for both kinds of green products. Thus, while thinking green has a strong impact on the use of green products made from recycled plastic, recycled denim and sustainable cotton, thinking

green has only a slight impact on the use of products made from waste fibres, liquid leather raw materials or bags made from grape waste, results that support H3. Table 1 shows the results.

**Table 1.** Determinants of thinking green and acting green

	Thinking green		Use of recycled and sustainable cotton products		Use of organic, liquid and waste of grapes products	
Awareness of 3R-principles	0.317	*	0.135			
Awareness of 9-3R-principles	-0.247		0.151			
Acting in 3R-principles			0.135	0.100	-0.110	0.104
Acting in 9-3R-principles			0.340	***	0.095	0.531 ***
Awareness of recycled and sustainable cotton products	0.257	**	0.093			
Awareness of organic, liquid and waste of grapes products	0.079		0.086			
Thinking green			0.152	**	0.058	0.105 +
Female	0.460	**	0.158		0.120	-0.147
Age	-0.008		0.007		-0.013	*
Studying at the university	-0.405	+	0.240		-0.045	0.179
Constant			1.132	*	0.556	0.266

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05; + p < 0.1

This study provides insights into thinking and acting green and contributes to a better understanding of the circular fashion and attitudes of consumers. It also offers insight into the process from thinking to acting green, which is the ultimate goal and thinking is not enough to change versus circular fashion.

Gazzola et al. (2020) remarked on the existent difference among gender in generations, which is consistent with our results. Conversely, education seems not to be a condition to act greener. Sharma and Foropon (2019) also found that education does not impact on conditional and unconditional purchases.

Nevertheless, another challenge is the need for cultural and behavioural change among consumers, who are accustomed to fast fashion and disposable consumption patterns (Harris et al. 2016). This requires education and awareness-raising campaigns that highlight the environmental and social impacts of fashion consumption.

Consumers may perceive circular fashion products as functionally unclear and delay purchases as a result of the usage of discarded materials or products and a unique production process (Kim et al. 2021). This concept is aligned with our results. Depending on the green product, awareness is different as well as how to apply whether 3 R or 9-3R principles. Both studies identify uncertainty as a part of the green fashion products.

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## The concept of slow fashion through the eyes of young consumers

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**Keywords:** *Slow fashion, generation Z consumers, Czech Republic, Cyprus, exploratory research*

Several authors (e.g., Adamczyk, 2014; Jung & Jin, 2014; Lee, 2017) agree that the concept of slow fashion is based on a focus on sustainability, quality, local production, ethics, and design. In the last couple of years, especially the perceptions of Gen Z consumers regarding slow fashion have raised heightened attention. These consumers seem to be the promising generation that will change the shopping habits of consumers because they show high interest in sustainability, and yet, in many regions, these results contradict with findings about purchase intentions of sustainable fashion by the very same generation (e.g. Trueman, 2022; Schindler, 2023). Husson & Kodali (2023) claim that Gen Z consumers do not really fit the profile of the average European “active green” consumer who cares for sustainable issues. According to them, they should be called instead “convenient greens”, since even though they share an interest in sustainability, they tend to prioritize convenience and price in their shopping decisions. Similarly, a study carried out in 2023 in the UK and US among 2,000 Gen Z and Millennial consumers engaging in sustainability, showed that ‘cost’ is “*a major concern and barrier to sustainable consumption*” (33\_Zero, 2023, p. 15).

The abstract presents the findings from a pilot exploratory research of Generation Z perception of slow fashion, delving into their shopping habits and preferences, and barriers to more sustainable shopping for clothes. The research was conducted in two European countries to investigate, whether their perceptions, expectations and behavior have any similarities or are different.

### Research methodology

Primary data was obtained through an online questionnaire shared with Gen Z (consumers born between 1995 and 2010) (Bassiouni & Hackley, 2014; Kardes et al., 2015; Priporas et al., 2019). We used a convenience sample which consisted of 212 respondents (103 from Czech Republic,



mainstream fashion, respondents are willing to pay premium prices for sustainable clothing, however, prices should not be higher than 10–30%.

The ‘high prices’ and ‘low level of awareness’ of sustainable fashion were perceived to be the key barriers to buying sustainable fashion brands. This is confirmed by the correlation between the variable ‘high product price as a barrier to purchase’ and the variable ‘willingness to purchase sustainable fashion after barriers are removed’. There is a visible difference among the Czech and Cypriot participants; whilst for the Czech participants the correlation coefficient is 0.46 and, thus, we can talk about a medium dependence; for the Cypriot participants this coefficient is 0.28, which is a weaker dependence. For the variable ‘low awareness’ there is a statistically significant correlation only for Cypriot participants, with a correlation coefficient of 0.31. Respondents also stipulated that the ‘low availability of products’ and ‘lack of promotion’ are additional barriers to purchasing sustainable fashion brands. These two factors are again rated as major barriers by Cypriot participants (see Table 1). The study’s findings indicate that both groups are willing to buy sustainable fashion brands if the prices are similar to non-sustainable fashion brands.

Table 1. Perceived barriers in buying sustainable fashion brands

Factor	Average			Mode	
	CZ+CY	CZ	CY	CZ	CZ
Limited choice in options (size, colour, cut)	2.76	2,56	2.95	3	3
Not enough promotion	3.16	3,03	3.29	4	3
Insufficient breadth of assortment	2.85	2,90	2.80	3	3
Low availability limited to specialized stores	3.29	3,13	3.45	3	3
Low awareness of sustainable fashion	3.49	3,52	3.45	5	4
Services of sustainable fashion sellers are unsatisfactory	2.82	2,62	3.02	3	3
Sustainable fashion does not follow current trends	2.56	2,44	2.67	3	3
The high price of sustainable fashion	3.54	3,63	3.45	5	4
I don't see any obstacles	2.19	2,09	2.30	1	3

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2023, n = 212

## Conclusion

Gen Z consumers living in Czechia and Cyprus share the perception that ‘slow fashion’ is associated with sustainability and quality. ‘Price’ is perceived to be a deterring factor in adopting slow fashion, which corroborates with the existing literature (Husson & Kodali, 2023). The ‘low awareness level’ regarding sustainable fashion is the second factor that discourages Gen Z consumers from favoring sustainable brands. The study has both theoretical and managerial implications and sheds light on the perceptual and behavioral world of this diverse consumer segment, which values diversity, inclusion, and the environment.

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## The moderate effects of social identity and functional attitude between customer engagement and purchase intention - Athletic Apparel Industry as an example

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**Keywords:** customer engagement, purchase intention, social identity, functional attitude, athletic apparel

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has made people pay more attention to personal health, and people's health consciousness has been greatly improved. During the quarantine, people's sedentary time increases with social distance, which may lead to health problems. In the post-pandemic era, there is an increasing emphasis on keeping fit, and what follows is the vigorous development of athletic apparel marketing. The research found a notable result regarding the relationship between gender when examining consumer behavior females have relatively higher levels of customer purchases, customer influence, and customer knowledge than males (Gligor, Bozkurt, Welch, and Gligor, 2023). Another phenomenon identified by the Institute of Practitioners of Advertising (IPA) in 2023, a prominent professional institution in the United Kingdom reported "consumer rebellion" as the latest trend that people tend to against perfection and question established norms (The IPA and Foresight Factory, 2023). However, most current research on athletic apparel focuses on the performance and quality of the apparel itself and the consumption of athletic apparel. In the research on the factors affecting athletic apparel purchase intention, brand image perception, marketing, and advertising are frequently mentioned. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the effect of customer engagement and purchase intention of athletic apparel. This research aims to understand the relationship and

moderators between customer engagement and purchase intention in the athletic apparel industry. The social identity and the functional theories of attitude are important variables that might affect the relationship.

### **Literature Review**

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed that purchase intention is the subjective probability that an individual will decide to make a purchase. Since then, the elaboration on purchase intention has centered around the subjective willingness of consumers. Early research on purchase intention focused on offline platforms, concentrating on linking it to audience's own characteristics. With the development of the Internet, research on consumer willingness has gradually shifted its focus from offline shopping to online shopping, and at the same time, research on purchase intention for different Internet products and marketing modes has been generated. The concept of engagement was introduced into the marketing literature in the early 2000s. It is often defined as the strength of the behavioural tie the customer has with the company, which surpasses purchases and repurchases of a product and service, ensuring different motivations of the individual (Van Doorn et al., 2010). Although customer engagement is frequently measured in the marketing research and study industry, the academic conceptualization of this concept as an integrative construct is limited. Some researchers define customer engagement behavior as behaviors that go beyond transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioral manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivation drivers (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Moreover, some studies also found psychological factors. Social identity plays an important role throughout the whole process. Aiming at reducing social uncertainty and feeling better about themselves as individuals, people usually identify themselves with some specific groups (Johnson et al., 2012), and this has been called "social identity". In recent research, it has also been tested that the length of stay in a specific place would contribute to forming affective links (Belanche et al., 2017). The term could be understood as an intrinsic motivator. Social function states the role an attitude can play in facilitating social interaction and enhancing cohesion among members of a social group. Kim, Baek and Choo (2017) verified self-expression and self-presentation as part of the functional attitude for measuring human behavior in social media. The proposed model of the relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention is explored with the moderate effects of social identity and functional attitudes. Consistent with the foregoing discussion, a proposed model (Figure 1) has arisen:

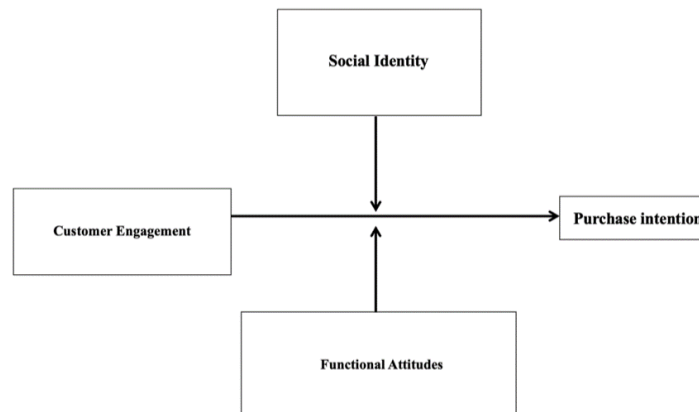


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

## Methodology

This study applied purposive sampling as the method. Samplings were selected to be sports groups with experience or knowledge of fashion and athletic apparel. After filtering the data, the investigation conclusively established a sample size of 170, comprising exclusively female participants within the age range of 18 to 25. Pearson correlations were analyzed to examine relationships between the variables. The scale items measuring four variables were adopted from the previous study.

## Results and Discussion

Utilizing SPSS for analytical validation, it is found that significant positive correlations were observed between customer engagement and purchase intention, indicating that higher levels of engagement are associated with increased purchase intention, which provided results that led support for hypothesis 1. When customers actively engage with these brands on an attitudinal level, it reflects their high involvement, sense of belonging, and connection to the brand. Consequently, positive attitudinal engagement plays a crucial role in promoting their purchasing and sharing behaviors towards the brand's products. Similar findings from studies conducted by Van Doorn et al. (2010) and Harrigan et al. (2017) also suggest that customers' interactive experiences with fashion athletic apparel brands can foster a strong sense of connection with the brand's community which has a significant impact on customer loyalty to the brand and stimulates repurchase intentions. The exponential expansion of the internet has ushered in a plethora of interactive channels through which customers can engage with brands. This proliferation of digital platforms and online communication channels not only simplifies and enhances the process of attitude formation and change, but also exerts a profound influence on consumers' purchasing behavior.

Additionally, the study identifies social identity and functional attitudes as moderators in this relationship. Social identity, encompassing cognitive and affective dimensions, negatively moderates the relationship between customer engagement and purchase intention. Cognitive



social identity emerged as a more influential moderator, suggesting that individuals prioritize personal choice over group identity in purchasing decisions.

Functional attitudes, including self-expression and self-presentation, similarly exhibit a negative moderation effect, indicating a rebellion against mainstream trends and a desire for uniqueness among consumers. It can be explained by consumer rebellion that people are feeling rebellious, questioning norms, and defying authority in various aspects of life, including well-being, shopping, and identity-building (The IPA and Foresight Factory, 2023). A key aspect of this rebellious mood is the belief that looking different from others not only gains acceptance from peers but also involves resisting the purchase of mainstream products. Especially when the trends are wearing a certain brand with huge exposure to the brand's logo, people refuse to purchase that brand since they want to express their uniqueness.

### **Implication & Limitations**

The study extends existing models of purchase intention by incorporating moderators such as social identity and functional attitudes, providing a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in the athletic apparel industry. Practically, the study offers valuable insights for athletic brands seeking to enhance customer engagement strategies and leverage female-focused customer engagement strategies. However, limitations such as the cross-sectional nature of the study and the sample's homogeneity call for caution in generalizing the findings. Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies and diversifying the sample population to enhance external validity.

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## Session 3.1 Sustainability communication

### Building environmental reputation: Considering the interplay of green advertising receptivity, perceived greenwashing, and consumer skepticism

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**Keywords:** *receptivity to green advertising, greenwashing, consumer skepticism, environmental reputation*

Companies are repeatedly incorporating sustainable solutions into their business practices to appear more environmentally friendly. Accordingly, academic research has recognized the benefits of a company's environmental reputation (Morales-Raya et al. 2018), which is defined as "a set of perceptions of a brand in a consumer's mind that is linked to environmental commitments and environmental concerns" (Chen, 2010, p.309). Environmental reputation has been identified as a key purchase driver for sustainable products (Carter et al. 2021). Given this prominent role, the goal of this study is to examine the basis on which consumers perceive companies' environmental reputation.

Increasing consumer demands for greener products and services have prompted companies to respond with diverse environmentally friendly offerings. However, while some are genuinely committed to green practices, others merely claim to be. The latter is also known as greenwashing. This refers to tactics that mislead consumers about a company's environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product/service (Parguel et al. 2011).

Although the importance of communicating green practices has been emphasized in many studies (Sheehan and Atkinson 2012), not all consumers care about the environment or respond to environmental claims. Furthermore, individuals may have different levels of receptivity to pro-environmental advertising claims. This proposition has been introduced by Bailey et al. (2016). They defined receptivity to green advertising (REGRAD) as “the extent to which consumers pay attention to and are favorably disposed and responsive to advertising that uses green messages in the marketing of products or a company itself”. The authors pointed to another relevant factor that could explain consumer responses to companies’ green marketing initiatives: consumer skepticism.

Given the lack of understanding of what influences consumers' perceptions of environmental reputation, our study conflates REGRAD and the perceptions of greenwashing as antecedents of environmental reputation, while consumer skepticism plays a moderating role (see Figure 1).

When greenwashing occurs, the company sends misleading signals to customers that may result in their expectations not being met (Gatti et al. 2021), affecting customer emotions and brand evaluation. However, consumers are differently receptive to advertising messages, so some consumers may be more receptive to green communication than others (Bailey et al. 2016). Hence, we hypothesize:

H1: Perceived greenwashing is negatively related to perceived environmental reputation.

H2: Receptivity to green advertising is positively related to perceived environmental reputation.

Consumers are also becoming more cautious in evaluating companies' CSR practices because they feel that companies are being hypocritical, as their claims do not match their actions (Rahman et al. 2015). Skepticism can also influence the relationship between different antecedents and CSR perceptions (Ramasamy et al. 2020). Therefore, we propose:

H3a: Consumer skepticism toward CSR strengthens the negative relationship between perceived greenwashing and perceived environmental reputation.

H3b: Consumer skepticism toward CSR weakens the positive relationship between receptivity to green advertising and perceived environmental reputation.

Reputation is also introduced as a determinant of brand trust, but this relationship is considered a conceptual replication of previous studies.

To test the conceptual model, we collected data online in collaboration with a market research agency. We surveyed 1272 participants from a Central European country. The participants’ age ranged from 16 to 81 years and 50.3% of them were female. We compiled a list of the 48 largest corporate brands and randomly assigned one of these brands to each participant for evaluation.

We relied on validated multi-item scales to measure all constructs of the conceptual model: brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), environmental reputation (Alvarado-Herrera et al.

2017; Markovic et al. 2018), REGRAD (Tewari et al.2022), greenwashing perceptions (Chen and Chang,2013), and consumer skepticism (Connors et al. 2017).

The evaluation of our measurement model indicated an excellent model fit ( $\chi^2(df=160) = 382.74$ ; CFI = .99; NNFI = .98; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .02). Further analysis confirmed the validity and reliability of the constructs used. Next, we estimated the proposed structural model. The analysis conducted in AMOS showed good model fit ( $\chi^2(df=282) = 764.00$ ; CFI = .98; NNFI = .97; RMSEA = .03; SRMR = .02). The model also explained substantial variance in the endogenous latent variables (Rbrand trust = .532; Rreputation = .315).

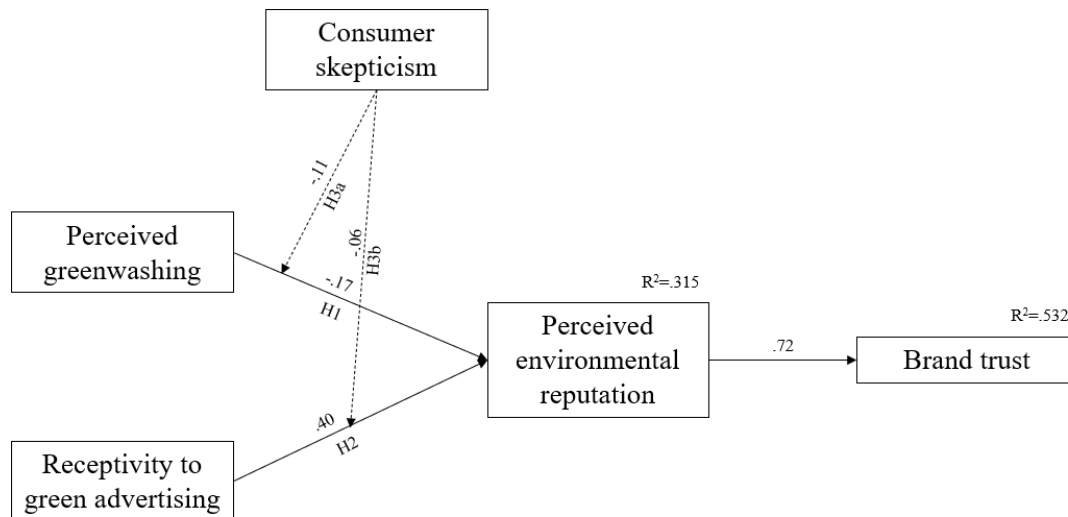
Hypotheses testing confirmed H1, i.e. the negative effect of perceived greenwashing on perceived environmental reputation ( $\gamma = -.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We also found support for H2, as REGRAD and perceived environmental reputation were positively related ( $\gamma = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). To test H3, we generated product terms between the indicators of perceived greenwashing, REGRAD and consumer skepticism. Consumer skepticism moderated the relationship between perceived greenwashing and environmental reputation, as well as between REGRAD and environmental reputation (H3b:  $\gamma = -.06$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the process on which consumers perceive corporate environmental reputation, which in turn drives trust in corporate brands. We have confirmed the role of two antecedents of environmental reputation, namely the extent to which consumers pay attention to green advertising and their perceptions of greenwashing. Hence, we contribute to recent research which examined the relevance of greenwashing in consumer perceptions (Ioannou et al. 2023; Szabo and Webster, 2021) and extend their insights with a more novel, complementary construct, i.e. REGRAD. Furthermore, we consider the interaction between the two reputation's antecedents and consumer skepticism and thus provide additional insights into the moderating role of consumer skepticism in other conceptual relationships (e.g., Hou and Sarigollou, 2022; Shukla et al. 2023).

Our study also provides recommendations for managers. Undoubtedly, not misleading with environmental claims or green advertising (Peattie and Crane 2005) that could undermine environmental reputation is an expected recommendation. Conversely, targeting corporate communication efforts to more receptive consumers should result in higher environmental reputation scores and thus brand trust.

Despite valuable insights, some limitations also apply. While our findings suggest strong effects between antecedents and environmental reputation, an experimental design would provide stronger evidence for causal inferences. In addition, we use a cross-sectional research design, while a longitudinal approach might also be relevant.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model with standardized path coefficients.



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## Communication for Sustainability in Diversity and Inclusion: Good and Poor Practices from Türkiye

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**Keywords:** *communication for sustainability (CfS), communication of sustainability (CoS), diversity and inclusion, sustainable development goals (SDGs)*

The United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda emphasize the need for urgent action for climate change, human rights, and combatting inequalities. With the rising interest in sustainable development goals promoted by the UN, corporations have been committing to diversity and inclusion policies and strategies. Diversity and inclusion are related values for the organizations those are supportive of different groups of individuals from different genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, races, religions, and abilities. Bernstein *et al.* (2020) suggest that diversity refers to the recognition of these groups while inclusion indicates taking actions about diversity. Through adopting diversity and inclusion policies, the organizations can strengthen their reputation in the long term. Companies are required to both implement and communicate diversity and inclusion activities to demonstrate their commitment to valuing diversity and inclusion, thereby enhancing stakeholder engagement and corporate reputation. In this regard, effective communication within the context of sustainable development is necessary to raise stakeholders' awareness and encourage their active participation in promoting sustainability.

Sustainability communication involves a process of shared comprehension centered on a vision of sustainability for the future of society (Godemann and Michelsen, 2011). Strategic approaches of companies towards sustainability can be transmitted to their stakeholders via communication. Therefore, sustainability communication can be defined as companies' involvement in sustainability activities and dissemination of the messages about sustainability. Newig *et al.* (2013) propose a framework that categorizes various types of sustainability communication. Accordingly, communication of sustainability (CoS) involves one-way, sender-oriented information on sustainability. This is often observed when companies share their sustainability practices in sustainability reports and corporate websites (Newig *et al.*, 2013). Communication about sustainability (CaS) points out more dialogue-oriented awareness-raising initiatives. The third type is defined as communication for sustainability (CfS), which embraces a strategic approach to sustainability communication advocating



societal transformation. Organizations incorporating communication for sustainability take strategic and measurable actions to create economic, environmental, and social impact in the local communities or at the global scope. According to Newig *et al.* (2013), sustainability communication should now take a comprehensive approach to sustainability with the goal of bringing about a social transformation, rather than just increasing awareness.

This study aims to examine how companies in Türkiye contribute to diversity and inclusion. It is intended to reveal good and poor examples of practices and communication on diversity and inclusion. With this aim, UN sustainable development goals (SDG) were examined and the goals related to diversity and inclusion were identified. UN Global Compact Türkiye Diversity and Inclusion Working Group includes SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) to guide companies on diversity and inclusion (UN Global Compact Türkiye). To and Håkli (2021) consider good health and well-being (SDG 3) as part of diversity. Moreover, the UN defines peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) in terms of inclusiveness (UN Global Compact). In this respect, this research includes all these SDGs in examining companies' sustainability practices and communications in the scope of diversity and inclusion.

The study utilizes content analysis with a qualitative approach to investigate sustainability actions and communications of the companies listed in BIST Sustainability Index 2020 (N= 61). BIST Sustainability Index conveys information about the sustainability policies of companies to responsible investors in Türkiye (BIST Sustainability Indices). The typology of sustainability communication processes (Newig *et al.*, 2013) is employed to reveal an overall picture of the companies' approach to sustainability communication. In the first phase of the research, sustainability reports of BIST companies in 2021 were overviewed, and their diversity and inclusion efforts were coded according to the typology of sustainability communication (Newig *et al.*, 2013). The second phase includes distinguishing between good and poor cases by categorizing the qualitative data derived from the sustainability reports, websites, news, and social media accounts of organizations. The research findings reveal primary characteristics of the good and poor cases. Out of 61 companies examined, the first national bank of Türkiye emerged as a good case, since it has been embracing SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, and SDG 10 with a holistic perspective. The banking company incorporates diversity in its vision statement and reflects this vision into its business and communication strategies. The company highly focuses on the major issues of Türkiye on diversity, specifically gender equality. Women empowerment, equality in education programs, and the communication for these issues stand out from other analyzed companies. These ongoing and cooperative initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion are sustainable over the long term. The case depicts that communication for sustainability can be managed strategically to stimulate stakeholders for diversity and inclusion. Meanwhile, the attributes of poor practices have been identified as incomplete, predominantly tactical in nature, and exhibiting limited communication. In these cases, it is observed that companies profess support for diversity and inclusion, yet their claims are not substantiated by their actions and communication. This study examines how the good case can

serve as a model of best practices for other organizations, and how the key learnings gained from this case can be applied to improve other organizations.

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## A theoretical review of the diversity of behavioral factors, influencing sustainable consumption at the nexus with impulsive buying behavior

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**Keywords:** *sustainable consumption, green consumption, degrowth, voluntary simplicity, ethical consumption, impulsive buying behavior, factors influencing sustainable consumption*

This article presents the outcomes of a literature review investigating the intersection of impulsive buying behavior and sustainable consumption. Answering a strong scholarly call for research on sustainable consumption predictors (White, Habib & Hardisty, 2019), the study is the first to review this intersection, emphasizing behavioral factors that extend the boundaries of sustainable consumption and initiate a distinct research stream at the nexus with impulsive buying behavior.

Academic research agrees we cannot consider economic growth without considering its adverse consequences such as resource scarcity (Baland, Platteau, 1996), climate crisis (Boston, 2022), loss of biodiversity (Folke et al., 2016), and social inequalities (Akbulut et al., 2019). Continuous economic growth leads to environmental degradation as we are witnessing now could not be considered sustainable, and therefore economic system needs to be changed (Daly, 1996). Academic research not only supports the view that most individuals in the developed world currently consume beyond sustainable levels but reveals that individuals who regard themselves as environmentalists and conscious consumers still make unsustainable choices (Chitnis et al., 2013) which is referred to as the attitude-behavior gap (O'Rourke, Lollo, 2015). Furthermore, academic research suggests up to 90% of consumers are impulsive purchasers, and up to 80% of individual consumption is based on impulsive buying behavior (Miao et al., 2020) which means we tend to consume unnecessarily. Impulse buying is defined as episodes in which “a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately” (Rook, 1987, Iyer et al., 2020).

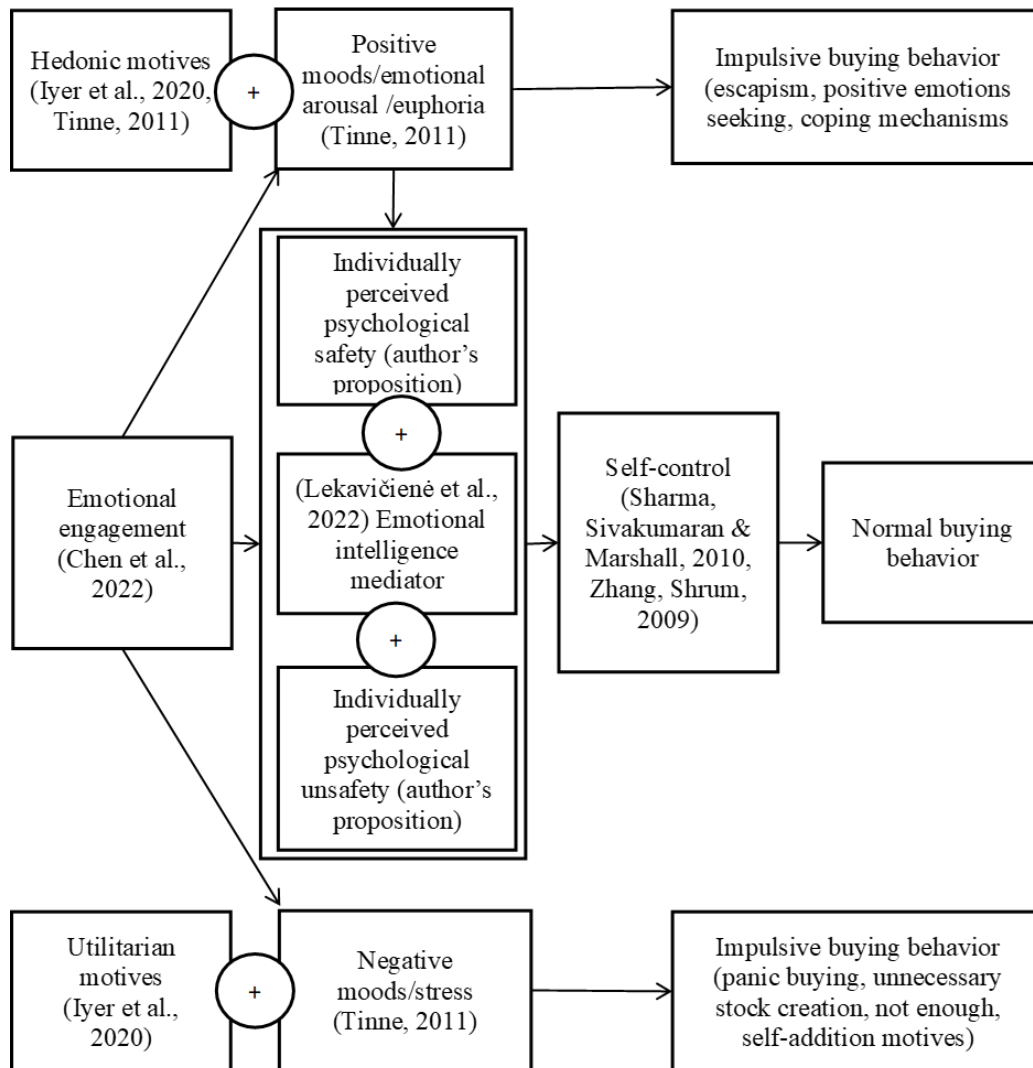
Prior literature review reflecting three distinct trends. Firstly, previous research studies suggest that overconsumption is not good (Sharma, Sivakumaran & Marshall, 2010) so it is better to emphasize the benefits of reduced consumption on human well-being (Markauskaitė, Rūtėlionė, 2022), environmental benefits of individual green purchasing behavior, educate customers about the negative aspects of impulsive buying (Upadhye et al., 2021), and directly reduce impulse buying and improve sustainable consumption.

Secondly, previous research work clearly shows that impulse buying behavior is essential for the long-term success of many retailers (Spiteri Cornish, 2020), therefore there is a need to encourage impulsive purchases, create an urgency that motivates customers to place their orders immediately (Lee, Wan, 2023) and design a positive social climate to arouse impulse buying (Zafar, Qiu & Shahzad, 2020).

Thirdly, there is no consensus on what is sustainable consumption within considered academic literature and there is a plethora of different sustainable consumption types offered such as responsible consumption, green consumption, voluntary simplicity, or anti-consumption, that makes discussion on sustainable consumption and behavioral factors influencing it unique and appealing both diverse and inclusive. That makes sustainable consumption topic appealing very diverse. This research focuses on micro-level individual consumption and reveals a complex interplay between sustainable consumption understanding and academic propositions for marketing actions and communications.

The study undertook an extensive, two-stage process, to identify relevant extant research, and filter the corresponding papers based on explicit extraction criteria. It has been identified over 300 factors influencing sustainable consumption at the nexus with impulsive buying behavior. The pertinent and significant sources were then systematically analysed to reach findings of theoretical and practical value, that are comprehensively incorporated into a single provisional theoretical framework of factors, influencing sustainable consumption as per Figure 1:

**Figure 1 Preliminary conceptual theoretical framework of factors, influencing sustainable consumption (Own depiction)**



The empirically validated framework would represent a significant step towards investigating the behavioral factors of sustainable consumption and deepen connection between economic values, targets, warnings and limitations. We have planned the next step of our work based on this target.

*Theoretical contributions* include this framework and also encompass multiple types of sustainable consumption grouped by main drivers as shown by Table 1:

**Table 1. Sustainability-driven consumption grouped by the main driver (Own depiction)**

Main driver	Consumption group	Samples of sustainable consumption types discussed
Environmental protection and degrowth	Voluntary simplicity-like types of consumption	Voluntary simplicity, anti-consumption, sufficiency, frugality, minimalism
Socially-driven, consumer centric, transformative consumption	Consumer transformation for justice, equality & diversity-based consumption	Responsible, ethical, sharing, mindful, conscious, social
Growth by green, environmentally friendly products	Economic growth-based consumption	General sustainable, green, healthy

Graphical representation of sustainability-driven consumption types grouped by main drives presented at the Appendix A.

Furthermore, this study makes a special contribution to the Experience economy, where experiences are *transformative products* decoupled from material resources (Shobeiri et al., 2016), contributing to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 12 as new type of consumed units, thus adding new economic value.

*The practical implications* encompass academic practical propositions highlighting new *consumer-centric transformative consumption* cluster arises making it inevitable to understand related practical applications. To enhance the accessibility of this toolbox for inclusive customer segmentation and marketing communication, we have divided it into six distinct themes: culture and education, energy and environment, finance, growth and business, governance and policy, and science and technology. Summary of practical applications' themes and goals are presented by Table 2:

**Table 1. Summary of practical applications' themes and goals (Own depiction)**

Themes	Goals
Culture& education	Connect, inform, educate Empower (customer-centricity)
Growth& business	Increase sales& IBB
Government& policy	Advocate for sustainable consumption Measurement& control
Science& technology	Innovate More research
Energy& environment	Mitigate environmental& social pressure Restrict marketing actions which don't support sustainable consumption
Finance	Finance empowerment

Notably, the significant part of marketing objectives proposed to focus on these themes and goals do not suggest focus on trending *greening products* but are associated with *cultural change, education, and consumer transformation through empowerment*. Governance and policy take the next place, followed by science and technology. Restriction practical propositions concentrated on environment and anti-sustainable marketing practices, finalised by finance empowerment. Iceberg model representation for proposed *marketing objectives* shown by Appendix B.

To conclude, the study reveals that growth-degrowth nexus of economic views may not suffice as notable segment of *consumer-centric transformative consumption* opens the door to an alternative sustainable consumption pathway. Further theoretical enrichment, in-depth research and understanding of driving behavioral factors are crucial to establish a robust foundation for this emerging consumption cluster.

This research advocates for a nuanced understanding of sustainable consumption, acknowledging the diverse solutions required for complex situations. This review contributes to both theory and practice, offering insights into behavioral factors influencing sustainable consumption and proposing actionable recommendations for managers seeking to align their brands with sustainability.

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## Session 3.2 Theory and research development

### In between egoism and altruism – Viewing CSR as gifts sensu Marcel Mauss

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**Keywords:** CSR, responsibility, motives, egoism, altruism, reciprocity

*Valuing diversity in corporate and marketing communications* – should such actions be evaluated as commitment to social responsibility or as “just” a smart business strategy? In this extended abstract and the accompanying presentation, I try to give an answer to the almighty question: *Should practices of CSR be evaluated as an act of self-interest (egoism) or a generous concern for others (altruism)?* My suggestion of an answer constitutes itself out of a theoretical reference to Marcel Mauss’ essay *The Gift*.

For corporations, applying any action of CSR (regarding diversity shall count as such), the answer (as also the call suggests) seems easy: It is both. A smart business strategy, that is at the same time a commitment to social responsibility. For consumers however, the answer is not that easy. Often, consumers are accusing certain companies for valuing diversity *only* because it grants them sales or a favorable reputation. This appears to be especially true, since consumers tend to be skeptical towards any form of CSR communication (Skarmas & Leonidou, 2013), accusing companies for example of *hypocrisy* (Christensen et al., 2013, 2020, 2021).

Public debates about CSR tend to focus on motives. Separating between companies that “really” mean their diversity endeavors (e. g. Ben & Jerrys) and others, who seemingly don’t (e. g. BMW). However, evaluating “real” motives of actions is a quite complex task, especially when evaluating motives of a collective. So, as a Ortmann (2023) outlines: One cannot declare, whether someone (like a company) “really” is committed to a certain cause (e. g. diversity) or not, by just observing their behavior. Independent of how much they do seem to care about a topic and independent of how many actions they seem to undertake. Moreover, as observers we are casually tricked by the number of actions that at least *seem* to show motives of actors, which they inherently cannot. Observers can never be fully sure, whether a company really meant what they communicated. They can just observe, when a company failed to live up to their promises or when they change behavior (Ortmann, 2023).

While for companies the discrepancy between valuing diversity as a social responsibility or as a business strategy is of secondary interest, consumers usually rely on evaluating motives, which is nearly impossible. Scientists however, should find an answer to this discrepancy, especially since scientists may offer orientations, by which society can evaluate their social surroundings.

So, what answers does “science” has to offer?

Of course, the pool of answers is diverse. In his dissertation, Preusse (2016) declares, based on systems theory, that corporate communications is always bound to corporate goals. Those will always overshadow external goals. Social responsibility will thus only be cared about by companies, if it can be aligned with corporate goals.

One of corporate communications (especially public relations) most cited contributions, the so called *excellence theory* (Grunig, 1992) declares corporate communications to reach for symmetrical communication and mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and stakeholders. However, this approach is criticized regularly for offering only a normative guideline (e. g. Kenny, 2017). Similarly, dialogical approaches to corporate communications (e. g. Kent & Taylor, 1998), who declare companies to aim for *genuine* communication, by being for example *empathetic*, *open* or *transparent* (Yang et al., 2015) get criticized for being merely normative.

My argument regarding this debate is twofold: First of all, scientific discussions would profit from rejecting arguments focusing on motives. It is nearly impossible, to observe or measure, whether certain companies *really* care about diversity or not. What corporate communication scientists can do, is evaluating structures, attitudes or measures undertaken, to illustrate, how companies tackle the topic of diversity. Rejecting motives, will help consumers to get a more profound understanding of evaluating diversity measures and communication of companies. It could even help in reducing skepticism and cynics regarding diversity communication.

My second argument declares corporate communication scientists to regard the work of sociology scholar *Marcel Mauss*, who is completely overlooked in corporate communications, although his work is highly regarded in sociology (Caillé, 2006) and offers ideas of high importance for corporate communications, which I discuss in my dissertation project.

In 1925 Marcell Mauss published the essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, which is read by different scholars as a key work thematizing *reciprocity* (Giesler & Pohlmann, 2003; Stegbauer, 2011).

In that essay, Mauss discusses *gifts*. Acts of gifting are, in terms of Kolm (2008, p. 2), "freely chosen by an actor at some cost for herself, and it benefits someone else. They can in fact be transfers, help, aid, respect, favouring, being fair towards someone, and so on."

Acts of CSR can be considered such gifts (Bruni, 2020). Mauss discusses that such gifts own the obligation to be *given*, to be *accepted* and to be *repaid* (Mauss, 1968). People that give gifts,

may desire to get them repaid in some way, however they can never be sure as to whether they will be repaid in any way, since along the obligation to give, accept and repay them, Mauss grants gifts to own a level of voluntariness as well.

The giving of gifts usually gets either labeled as *do ut des*, as a giving, which is done *just* to receive as well (Ortmann, 2023), indicating egoistic behavior; or as genuine altruistic behavior, where one gifts without the expectation (or even possibility) of getting something in return (Greenwood, 2010).

Mauss gifts however, can be labeled as *do et des*. Do et des does not indicate giving *for* receiving, but giving, while *expecting* to receive (Ortmann, 2023). Viewing acts of CSR as gifts sensu Mauss, means viewing it as something in between egoism (*conducting diversity communication as a business strategy*) and altruism (*doing it due to social responsibility*) (Caillé, 2006).

Caillé (2006) declares that, many arguments in social science may be revised in the light of Marcel Mauss work. Same holds true in regarding the evaluation of CSR. Companies regard towards social responsibility (and their communication about it) should be viewed as being inherently both: Egoistic and altruistic (Ortmann, 2023). Moreover, neither of the two motives are needed sensu Mauss. Discussing this view inside and outside academia, strengthens our understanding of how to evaluate organizational commitment to diversity and their communication about it.

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## Religions and Integrated Marketing Communications - Bosom Buddies or Uneasy Bedfellows?

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### Introduction

Ideas in marketing come from many diverse disciplines and are extended to other areas of academic relevance and practitioner applicability (Kitchen, 2004; 2017). Every business and organisation - whether wittingly or unwittingly - has to interact with its surrounding environment and communities – locally, nationally, internationally and some cases globally. However, it may not enough just to exist. As aptly coined by Peter Drucker (2004; cited in Kitchen and Sheth, 2016): “the business (proxy for other types of organization) that keeps on doing what it is doing now - will fail.<sup>1</sup>”. This is because environments, including the all-important life blood of any organisation – customers and consumers – adherents, converts, members and lapsed members, continue to change. Every organisation or movement, religious or otherwise, has to take its position in the modern world, the world of today *and* tomorrow. Recently, in 2022, for example, the Journal of Advertising published a special issue on ‘religion, spirituality and advertising’ (Waller & Casidy, 2022). Of 37 papers submitted for consideration to this issue, just 5 appeared in the final version. Papers were submitted – almost from every corner of the globe. One could say that here is a remarkable thing inasmuch as the Journal of Advertising has only ever published a mere handful of articles, focused on this topic.

Undoubtedly, Christianity (in all its shapes and manifestations), and Islam, form the two greatest bastions, not only of proselyting openly for adherents, but also assiduously engaged in trying to retain or restrain backsliders.

Meanwhile, a managerial concept that has taken significant root in 21<sup>st</sup> century marketing practice is that of integrated marketing communications (hereinafter IMC). Just thirty short years ago, books on marketing by all authors included chapters approaching communication or elements of promotion in a separatist manner. For example, advertising was once and still is the spearheading force leading the charge in business-to-consumer organisations. It is estimated that roughly 70% of communication expenses in the early 1980’s went into advertising, and 30% went on other promotional mix variables such as sales promotion, marketing public relations and direct marketing. Given continuous technological changes, the demassification and splintering of markets, the aegis and inroads of digital marketing, much more aware consumers, and the associated needs of modern business, it makes no economic or communication sense to continue to throw money into the bottomless pit of broadcast of broadscale media (Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen and Tourky, 2022). Hence the growing use of the term narrowcasting, which appeared in dictionaries in the 1920s, but has become more widely

used only since the advent of online marketing, social marketing, and media fragmentation. The tools and even the strategies of marketing communication need to be adapted accordingly.

Moreover, religious organisations do seem to be flexing their own fair from undeveloped marketing communication muscles in what appear to be fairly unspiritual domains. While at the level of religion itself, such communications are unnecessary; at the next level, they manifest ever greater import. Spiritual and religious appeals via advertising and the whole gamut of related promotional outputs, architecture and iconography, and indeed what ministers do and not do, can and does impact consumer perceptions and behaviour. And in the marketing literature, there are many references to research on the use of religious symbols in advertising (see Fam et al., 2004; Bilewicz and Klebaniuk, 2013; La Barbera and Gürhan, 1997).

This paper attempts to align and bring together these seemingly disparate subjects. There is no desire to take issue with spirituality perse, as we assume this may well be innate to all sentient beings, irrespective of religious affiliation or non-affiliation. There is also no reason to assume that a specific religious body (or its leaders) has a greater grasp on spirituality than any other group of men or women. Thus, the focus is upon religions in general and not upon specific organisation, doctrine or creed.

We commence with the need for communication (a.k.a. advertising in its broadest sense), in the context of religion, before pressing deeply into on into the murkier waters of applicability to religions perse. Then, the subject of IMC is addressed in terms of the now well-known four stages of development. At this time, there is no evidence of IMC's applicability except at the most basic and crudest first stage, a level akin to a type of sales orientation that has been out of fashion for some decades. However, that may worked and even still works ... for now ... but as markets change and evolve and consumers question and quibble, so slow moving religious organisations are inexorably drawn into business practice, including marketing and marketing communications. What ostensibly works in business has also to be made to work for religions.

Admittedly, on the one hand religion and advertising make uneasy bedfellows, yet on the other, pressing needs must inexorably lead to change, and in some cases, the world of business communications has been wholeheartedly embraced even by ostensibly spiritually-motivated organisations.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The same idea was even found earlier in Drucker's works, as he wrote: "The executive who keeps on doing what he has done successfully (...) is almost bound to fail." (Drucker, P.F., *The Effective Executive*, 1967).

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## The impact of aesthetics and symbolism in visual design on the perception of the advertised product

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**Keywords:** advertisements, visual design, aesthetics, symbolism, preference.

In the contemporary digital landscape, the significance of visual design in advertising cannot be overstated. Consumer perceptions of visual design not only hold sway over the efficacy of product communication but also enhance the influence of accompanying textual messages (Ye et al., 2019). Visually appealing content design plays a pivotal role in attracting and retaining audiences, shaping consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Negm and Tantawi, 2015). In this dynamic marketing milieu, the visual elements utilized in advertisement design wield substantial influence over consumer preferences.

Drawing inspiration from human-centric principles often applied in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), this paper delves into the intricate relationship between the aesthetic appeal and symbolic value of visual design in advertisements, exploring their potential effect on consumer preference for advertised products. We argue that beyond the rhetoric and content of advertisements, design elements (e.g., colors, layout, and visual complexity) shape the perceived value of aesthetics and symbolism in the visual design of advertisements. By doing so, they communicate messages to consumers that affect the perceived quality of the advertised product, consequently influencing its preference.

Research findings indicate that visual design not only captures consumers' attention but also fosters positive associations with promoted products, potentially enhancing their preference (Dagalp and Södergren, 2023). The interplay of design elements, such as color schemes and layouts, significantly contributes to the overall aesthetic appeal of an advertisement. The symbolic value of elements in the design evokes memories and emotions, identified as pivotal factors in influencing consumer preferences. Well-designed, aesthetic advertisements have been shown to elevate the perceived quality of the advertised product (Margariti et al., 2022). Cultural relevance, mediated through symbolic value, increases the relatability of advertisements to diverse consumer segments, consequently enhancing consumer preference for the product at hand (Ruanguttamanun, 2023).

Building on Eytam (2023), our analysis suggests that the influence of aesthetics and symbolism on the acceptability of digital user interfaces can be extended to consumer preferences for advertisements. We contend that an increase in the aesthetic and symbolic value of visual design

correlates with a simultaneous elevation in the perceived value of the featured product. This correlation stems from the notion that design elements transcend the explicit messaging of an advertisement, conveying implicit sensory and symbolic meanings that significantly shape the overall perception of the product.

Visual design operates on multiple layers of analysis, starting with a visceral level that creates either positive or negative experiences. Subsequently, a reflective analysis takes over, drawing upon memories, associations, and meanings evoked by the visual design to create a lasting impact on the audience (Norman, 2013). Semiotics emerges as a key player at this level of analysis, with visual elements serving as signs aiding potential consumers in deciphering the visual language of advertisements and extracting meaning from it. The visual aesthetics and symbolic value in the design significantly contribute to the construction of brand narratives, positioning advertisements as visual narratives where design elements become the language of brands (Abduvafo o'g'li and Zamonbekovich, 2023). This meaning, in turn, influences the symbolic value communicated through the advertisement.

The interplay of design elements and principles significantly shapes experience and product perception. Mullet and Sano (1995) highlighted the communicative power of visual elements—such as point, line, volume, and plane—in guiding user interaction and conveying the inherent qualities of a product. Eytam (2023) further explored how these visual representations impact potential users' perceptions, emphasizing the role of formal qualities (e.g., size, color) and high-level design factors (e.g., symmetry, balance) in the overall aesthetic and functional appeal of a design.

Colors and contrast emerge as critical dimensions enriching the sensory experience of sight (Miniukovich and De Angeli, 2014). While color can delineate content and structure information, contrast enhances visual usability, making the design more navigable (Silvennoinen et al., 2014). Symmetry and grouping, as Gestalt principles, simplify designs by organizing information into coherent units, making the design more comprehensible (Johnston et al., 2022). In addition, colors also convey symbolic significance, eliciting emotions and contributing to positive or negative brand associations. The overall visual design complexity of the design influences perceptions of the advertised product or service, enhancing its symbolic value (e.g., Mollerup, 2006). Thus, the visual design contains intricate codes embedded in advertisements, dissecting how these visual elements convey meaning that transcends the rhetoric of the advertisement (e.g., Dagalp and Södergren, 2023).

The intricate balance between simplicity and complexity of a design (Eytam, 2023; Miniukovich and De Angeli, 2014), plays a pivotal role in perception and preference. Theories such as the Kolmogorov complexity and other quantitative and qualitative measures attempt to capture this balance, suggesting that the organization, number of parts, and clarity in the function-action mapping of a design influence product preference.

The research model explains that visual elements in the design affect preferences towards the advertised product through the aesthetic and symbolic value of the visual design of the

advertisement (see Figure 1). The visual design affects the perceived value of the advertised products in two manners. Firstly, it enhances the aesthetic and symbolic value of the design. By creating a positive emotion and evoking positive associations, it may directly affect preference for the product. Secondly, if congruent with the textual message, it amplifies the effect and again enhances preference for the product. We hypothesize the following:

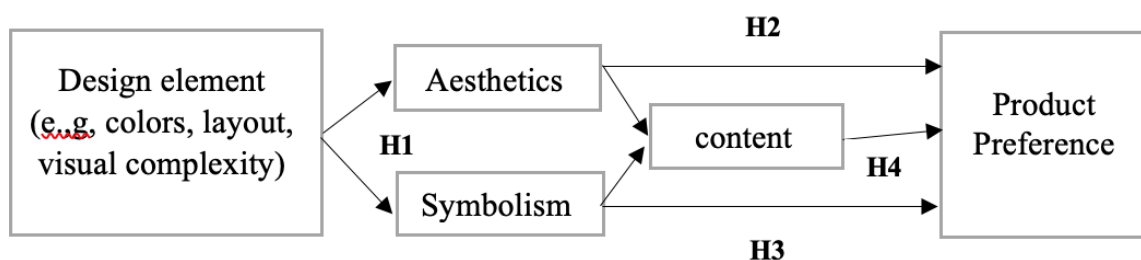
H(1): Visual elements (e.g., colors, layout, visual complexity) in advertisement design correlates with consumer perceptions of the quality and sophistication of the advertised product. This hypothesis explores the idea that visual elements can signal product quality and innovation to consumers, affecting their preferences.

H(2): The aesthetic appeal of visual design in advertisements positively influences consumer preferences for the advertised products. This hypothesis posits that consumers are more likely to prefer products that are presented in visually appealing advertisements, due to the positive emotions and aesthetic satisfaction these designs evoke.

H(3): The symbolic value embedded within the visual elements of an advertisement enhances consumer identification with the product, leading to a higher product preference. This suggests that when consumers perceive relevant symbolic meanings in advertisement designs (e.g., cultural symbols, lifestyle imagery), their affinity for the product increases.

H(4): Congruence between the visual design and the textual message of an advertisement amplifies the emotional response and, consequently, the preference for the product. This hypothesis posits that when the visual and textual components of an advertisement are harmonious, they work together to enhance the viewer's emotional response, leading to a stronger preference for the advertised product.

Figure 1. The research model.



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## Session 4.1 Employee perceptions

### Constructing a New Scale for Measuring Employee Acceptance of Digital Communication Technologies in the Workplace

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**Keywords:** *internal communication, employees, technology acceptance, digital communication, digitalization*

#### Introduction

The rapid and ongoing digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped our economy and society, leading to significant changes in business models and their societal impacts (e.g., vom Brocke, Becker, and De Marco 2016). Changes in organizational structures and processes result in changes for individuals who need to adapt to new ways of working, which imply more flexibility in timing and place of work and the support of digital communication (Demerouti et al. 2014). Driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations greatly increased the adoption of new ways of working including the introduction of an array of new digital tools that are meant to support employees in their work, collaboration and communication. Digital communication technology (DCT) in the workplace, encompassing a range of tools from email systems to complex collaborative platforms, is reshaping how employees interact, collaborate, and perform their jobs. DCT is particularly relevant for “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organizations” (Welch and Jackson 2007, 183), that is for internal communication between employees and between employees and their organization.

Researching the use and effects of DCT in the context of internal communication is instrumental to facilitate informed decision-making and for tailoring digital solutions to employee needs to enhance overall adoption rates. To successfully conduct research in this area reliable and valid scales are needed. While scales for technology acceptance in general have been developed (e.g., Davis 1989; Venkatesh et al. 2003), a measurement instrument focusing on the acceptance of technology for digital internal communication in particular is missing. The aim of the current research is to construct a new scale for measuring employee acceptance of DCT for internal communication in the workplace and to answer the following research question: *How do employees perceive and accept digital communication technologies in their work-related communication, and what are the primary factors influencing this acceptance?*

### **Literature review**

The digital era has significantly transformed internal communication, requiring more than just the addition of digital channels, but a holistic approach integrating employee preferences. Current research suggests examining the sociotechnical and communication aspects of digital internal communication to understand this disparity in digital application within organizations (see Tkalac Verčič et al. 2024). Recognizing that employees' overall feelings about technology can influence perceptions of specific technologies, there is a clear need for more research into employee attitudes towards technological change. This is particularly important when analyzing the significant shift in how employees interact and collaborate. As workplaces become increasingly reliant on DCT, understanding how these tools are perceived and utilized by employees is crucial.

Various models have been developed to understand the factors influencing an individual's choice to embrace new technology. Among these, the widely recognized Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Davis in 1989, suggests that two main factors – perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) – drive the likelihood of technology adoption. The model was later expanded (TAM2) to include aspects like subjective norms and specific technology usage (e.g., Venkatesh and Davis 2000). Building on this, Venkatesh et al. (2003) introduced the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The theory has been broadly validated, primarily using student and technology-focused groups, with common moderators like age and gender (Lee, Kozar, and Larsen 2003). However, its application in workplace environments is less common (King and He 2006; Chuttur 2009; Venkatesh et al. 2016), and with varying results. Considering this, it is important to apply this theory to internal communication to better understand how employees use and think about digital communication tools.

### **Scale development**

To develop the scale, we followed a four-step procedure: First, the concept and scope of employee acceptance and DCT were clarified. DCT for internal communication was defined as the use of digital signals and electronic devices to transmit and exchange information between individuals or systems within an organization. It encompasses various technologies and

protocols that enable the transmission and exchange of data, voice, images, and other forms of media over digital networks. In the second step, we derived items for our scale from the existing literature, and then asked 23 specialists in corporate communication to examine the proposed definitions of each dimension and its individual indicators. After receiving 59 items organized into six derived factors we then pilot-tested the initial questionnaire in the third phase. A factor analysis showed that indicators associated with each of the dimensions of the construct were clustering into the a priori theoretical dimensions. We finally executed a large survey with 59 items on 249 respondents and after two factor analyses we concluded with a 24 item scale structured into six dimensions: 1) interaction facilitation, 2) apprehension, 3) effort expectancy, 4) performance expectancy, 5) facilitating conditions, and 6) social influence (for access to the full scale, please contact the first author).

The final scale demonstrated strong measurement invariance across gender, age, company size, student and employment status, ethnicity, country of birth, country of residence, nationality, and language. Sociodemographic variables were not found to be statistically significantly related to either the total instrument or its six dimensions, except for age, which was found to significantly correlate only with one dimension (effort expectancy,  $r = .201$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## **Conclusion**

Understanding employee acceptance of DCT is crucial for successful implementation of the digital transformation and communication in contemporary organizations, for innovation and productivity at work, for job and life satisfaction of employees. The scale for measuring employee acceptance of digital communication technologies in the workplace is crucial to assess and understand how employees perceive and use different DCTs, like e-mail, intranet, internal social media, Google Meet, Teams, Webex, WhatsApp, Zoom etc., to be able to plan and organize various possible communication structures, based on different modes of interpersonal and mediated, and in particular computer-mediated communication.

Creating valid and reliable tools to measure employee perceptions of digitalization is instrumental in facilitating informed decision-making, crucial for tailoring digital solutions to employee needs and enhancing overall adoption rates. Additionally, understanding employee perspectives through such instruments can significantly impact satisfaction and retention, as employees are more likely to embrace changes that consider their feedback and needs. Furthermore, these instruments serve as benchmarks for continuous improvement, allowing organizations to track and adapt to evolving employee attitudes towards digitalization. Lastly, they act as a proactive measure in risk mitigation, identifying potential resistance and issues early in the digital transformation process.

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## Importance, occurrence, and effects of appreciation in the workplace: First insights from an employee survey

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**Keywords:** appreciation, job satisfaction, organisational identification, internal communication, leadership, survey

Organisational psychology and management studies emphasise the importance of appreciation in the workplace, broadly defined as acknowledgement of personal characteristics and performance communicated by supervisors and colleagues (Stocker et al. 2019). As appreciation is a communicative process, previous research has also identified the key role of internal corporate communication in fostering an appreciative work climate (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2023a).

More specifically, qualitative research has revealed that appreciation can address a variety of personal and professional characteristics, qualities, and behaviours, for example competence, experience, and loyalty (Stranzl and Ruppel, 2023b; Stocker et al. 2014). But little is known how employees rate the importance of being appreciated for these different reasons, and how often they actually receive appreciation for them.

Moreover, appreciation may stem from various sources, typically from supervisors, but also from top management, direct colleagues, or employees from other departments (Stocker et al. 2014). Appreciation has been shown to increase several outcomes such as individual job satisfaction and commitment towards the organisation (Elfering et al. 2017; Pfister et al. 2020; Stocker et al. 2010); however, most of this research has focused on supervisor appreciation only. Thus, a differentiated perspective on various sources (i.e., supervisor, colleagues) of appreciation and their respective contribution to these positive individual and organisational outcomes is lacking so far.

The study presented here addresses these research gaps, examining the importance and occurrence of various forms of appreciation and testing associations of different sources of appreciation with employee behaviour.

Thereby, we assume:

*H1: Employees rate appreciation as more important for their work behaviour than for their personal characteristics/qualities.*

*H2: Employees rate appreciation to occur more often for their work behaviour than for their personal characteristics/qualities.*

In line with previous research on the outcomes of appreciation, we pose the following model:

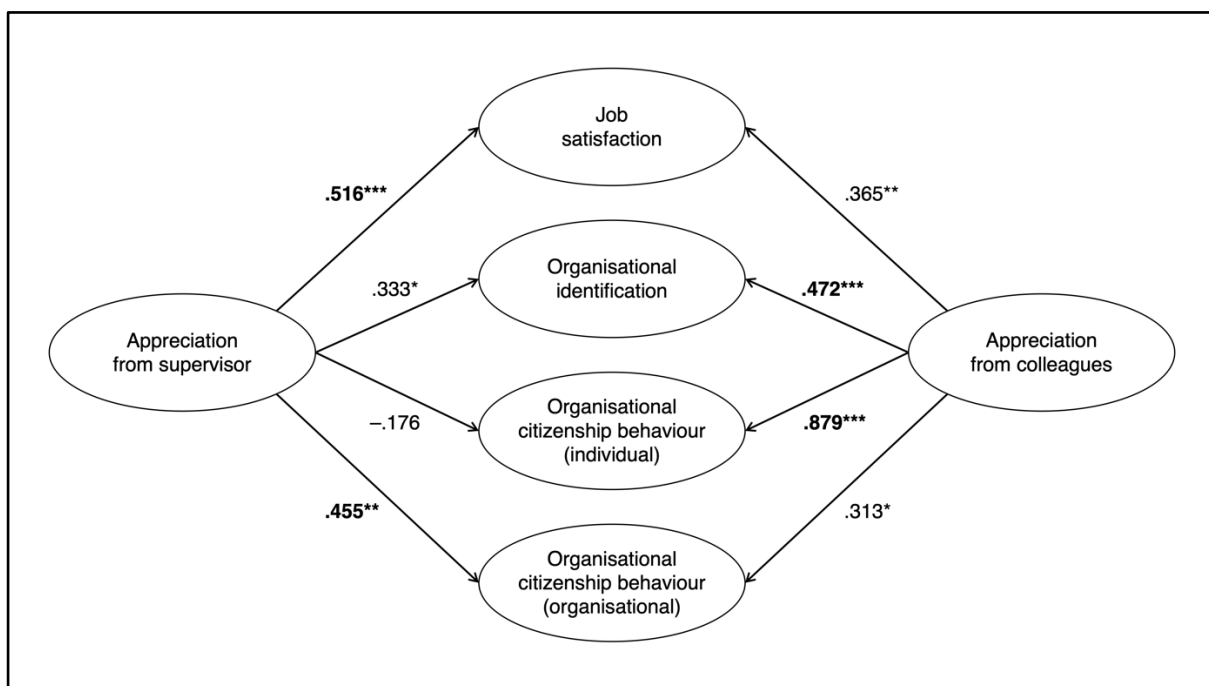
*H3: The actual feeling of being appreciated from (a) supervisor and (b) colleagues is positively related to job satisfaction, organisational identification, and organisational citizenship behavior.*

The hypotheses were addressed in a preregistered online survey<sup>1</sup> among 486 employees who work in Germany in organisations with more than 50 employees (54.7% female,  $M_{age} = 37.6$  years,  $SD_{age} = 10.0$  years). Most of them are employed in profit-oriented companies (68.9%). The majority has been working there for at least three years (80.4%), and two third hold a leadership position (67.1%). Importance and occurrence were assessed with 24 items each, covering different reasons of appreciation concerning both personal characteristics/qualities and work behaviours (e.g., “For my professional competence”; “For my loyalty towards the organisation”; derived from Stranzl and Ruppel, 2023b; Stocker et al. 2014). The feeling of being appreciated was gauged using two scales, each with four similar items, one of which was directed at supervisors ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and one at colleagues ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The items were developed by consulting previous studies (e.g., “I believe that my supervisor/colleagues value(s) me”; c.f. Jacobshagen et al. 2008; Rafferty and Griffin 2004; Sirgy et al. 2001; Weiss and Zacher 2022; White and Bragg 2012). Job satisfaction was assessed with four items ( $\alpha = .91$ ) from Thompson and Phua (2012; e.g., “I really have fun doing my job”). Six items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) measured organisational identification (Mael and Ashforth 1992; e.g., “When someone criticises my organisation, it feels like a personal insult”). Organisational citizenship behaviour comprises two dimensions, both assessed with eight items: behaviour directed at individual colleagues ( $\alpha = .87$ ; e.g., “I support my colleagues in their tasks”) and behaviour directed at the organisation as a whole ( $\alpha = .90$ ; e.g., “I am loyal towards my organisation”; Lee and Allen 2002).

Data was collected in December 2023 and analysed in R. Contrary to H1, reliability ( $M = 5.96$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) as a personal characteristic/quality was rated as the most important reason for appreciation. It was followed by willingness to take responsibility ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) and professional competence ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). Reliability ( $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ) was also the main reason for which appreciation occurred, followed by individual performance ( $M = 5.47$ ,

$SD = 1.49$ ) and solution-oriented working ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ). In line with H2, the latter reasons rather reflect work behaviour than personal characteristics/qualities.

A structural equation model was estimated to test H3 (see Figure 1). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses demonstrated convergent and discriminant validity. The model yielded an acceptable fit ( $\chi^2(512) = 1010.852$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CFI = .921$ ,  $TLI = .914$ ,  $RMSEA = .063$ , 90% CI [.057; .069],  $SRMR = .052$ ). As expected, appreciation from the supervisor has strong positive associations with job satisfaction ( $\beta = .516$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and citizenship behaviour towards the organisation ( $\beta = .455$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and a medium-sized positive association with organisational identification ( $\beta = .333$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Appreciation from colleagues is positively related to all dependent variables, with strong associations regarding organisational identification ( $\beta = 4.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and citizenship behaviour towards individual colleagues ( $\beta = .879$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and medium-sized associations with job satisfaction ( $\beta = .365$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and citizenship behaviour towards the organisation ( $\beta = .313$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Remarkably, strong associations vary between the different sources of appreciation: While supervisor appreciation is primarily related to job satisfaction and citizenship behaviour towards the organisation, appreciation from colleagues predominantly facilitates organisational identification and citizenship behaviour towards individual colleagues.



**Figure 1.** Structural equation model.  $N = 351$ .  $\chi^2(512) = 1010.852$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CFI = .921$ ,  $TLI = .914$ ,  $RMSEA = .063$ , 90% CI [.057; .069],  $SRMR = .052$ . Standardized regression coefficients.  $*** p < .001$ ,  $** p < .01$ ,  $* p < .05$ . Bold: strong associations.

Overall, the preliminary empirical results presented here show that the most important reason for employees is appreciation for their reliability, which they also rated as the most frequently occurring reason. Although employees evaluate appreciation for personal characteristics/qualities as more important, appreciation mainly occurs for work behaviours. Moreover, while appreciation from both supervisor and colleagues increases positive work behaviours, the relations vary in their strength. Further analyses will be conducted and implications for theory will be discussed in the presentation. The study also implies practical advice for internal communicators in organisations (e.g., for enabling leaders to communicate appreciation to their staff).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Preregistration available at: [https://aspredicted.org/C6F\\_S59](https://aspredicted.org/C6F_S59) Minor change to the hypothesized model due to results of exploratory data analyses.

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## Internal Versus External Corporate Social Responsibility Effects on Employees of a Multinational Subsidiary in Russia: The Roles of Morality and Attributions

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**Keywords:** *Corporate social responsibility; organizational identification; corporate motives; attribution theory; organizational morality; transition countries.*

Many multinational companies (MNCs) have expanded to emerging markets as a way to obtain competitive advantage and facilitate future growth (London and Hart, 2004). Despite the opportunities that turning to emerging markets might bring, it can also present a range of challenges, as MNCs are required to operate in multiple, complex, and potentially conflicting institutional environments (Tan 2009; Zaheer 1995). These conditions can influence which Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives are adopted by MNCs in subsidiaries (Marano and Kostova, 2016; Zhao 2012). Indeed, research has shown that discrepancies tend to occur in the CSR performance of MNCs between the home and the host country (Tan 2009).

Relatively little attention has been given to how employees of MNC subsidiaries in emerging markets respond to the adoption of CSR practices. Employees are exposed to the—often inconsistent—norms and standards on business ethics of the MNC for which they work on the one hand, and the country in which they are situated on the other. This, in turn, might influence their perceptions of whether certain CSR initiatives truly enhance the morality levels of the organization. For example, a common assumption in Western views on CSR is that companies will comply to regulations (Crotty 2016). As such, the voluntary engagement in social and environmental issues that goes beyond regulatory requirements is a key standard of CSR (Dahlsrud 2006). Yet, in developing and transition countries—where corruption is common—responsible business conduct is perceived to consist of regulatory compliance, rather than as an effort to invest in activities outside a company’s legal and economic obligations (Crotty 2016; Jamali and Mirshak, 2007).

Not only are employees’ views on CSR in MNC subsidiaries in emerging markets under-investigated, there is also limited research available on CSR in emerging markets in general (Jamali and Carroll, 2017). The current research uses a survey on a Russian subsidiary of an MNC with headquarters located in Western Europe to address this gap. Given that the MNC

has its roots in a developed country, and conducts business in a transition country, it represents a case where the MNC is confronted with contexts in which CSR is differently defined and enacted. Thus, this research provides contextualized insights in how CSR initiatives are evaluated by employees.

The current study aims to examine the psychological mechanisms through which internal (i.e., CSR initiatives that directly benefit employees) and external CSR initiatives (i.e., CSR initiatives that benefit other stakeholder groups) can promote organizational identification among MNC subsidiary employees. First, we investigate whether internal and external CSR might differently contribute to perceived organizational morality (i.e., whether the MNC is seen as honest and trustworthy). Although CSR has been shown to be associated with higher levels of perceived organizational morality in developed markets (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012; Ellemers et al. 2011), not all CSR initiatives are necessarily equal in their perceived virtuousness (O'Mara-Shimek et al. 2015). In emerging markets, where CSR is differently implemented, internal and external CSR initiatives might vary in the extent to which they are perceived to reflect organizational morality. Second, we examine the role of the employees' attributed corporate motives to engage in CSR. Employees can sometimes question the sincerity of CSR, which in turn can impact work-related motives (Vlachos et al. 2017). Below is a list of our theoretical predictions.

**H1.** Perceived organizational morality mediates the relationship between internal

CSR and organizational identification: Internal CSR is associated with higher perceived organizational morality, which in turn is associated with higher organizational identification.

**H2.** Perceived organizational morality mediates the relationship between external

CSR and organizational identification: External CSR is associated with lower perceived organizational morality, which in turn is associated with lower organizational identification.

**H3.** Attributed intrinsic corporate motives mediate the relationship between internal CSR and (a) perceived organizational morality and (b) organizational identification:

Internal CSR is associated with higher attributed intrinsic corporate motives, which in turn is associated with (a) higher perceived organizational morality and (b) higher organizational identification.

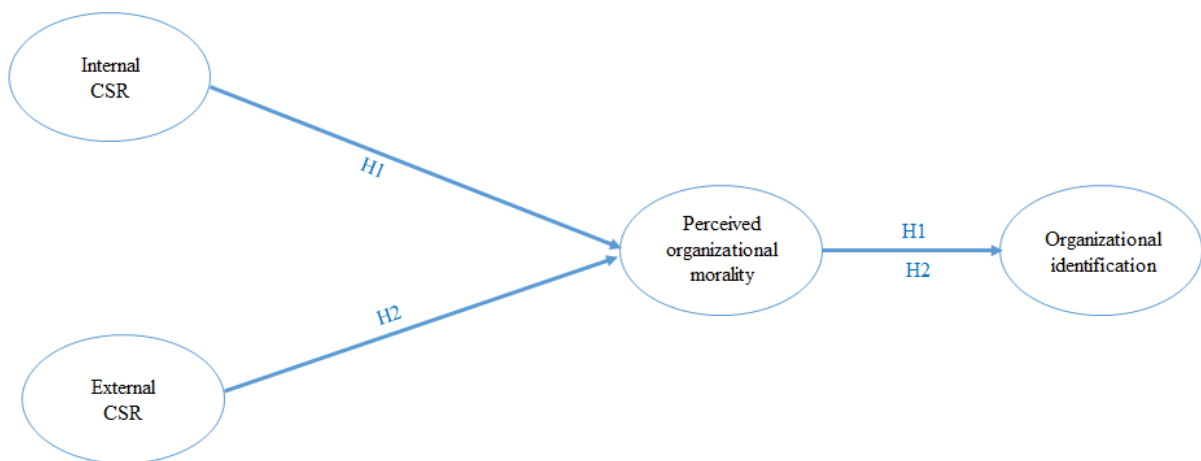
**H4.** Attributed extrinsic corporate motives mediate the relationship between external

CSR and (a) perceived organizational morality and (b) organizational identification: External CSR is associated with higher attributed extrinsic corporate motives, which in turn is associated with (a) higher perceived organizational morality and (b) higher organizational identification.

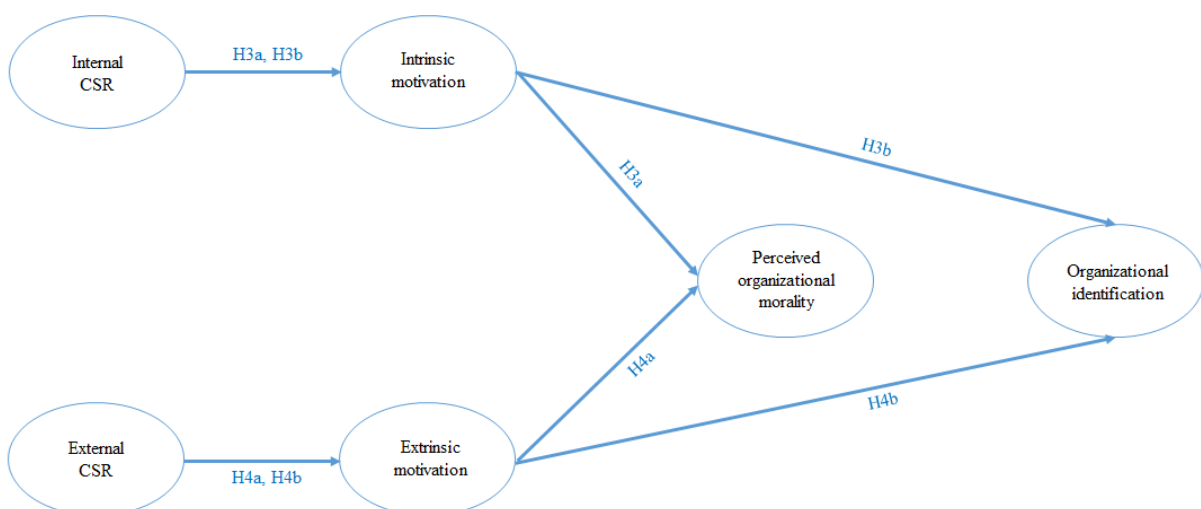
**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Model*

*a) H1 and H2*



*b) H3 and H4*





An online survey was used to collect data among employees of a Russian subsidiary unit of a Western-European MNC in the alcoholic beverages industry. The MNC operates globally and invests in a range of CSR activities (e.g., financial, environmental, societal, employee relations). The brand continued to grow in Russia, and invested in CSR in Russia by focusing on, for example, the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and advocating responsible drinking behavior. Data were collected before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In total, 622 employees participated in the online survey, out of which 481 completed the questionnaire (230 male, 251 female,  $M_{age} = 37.27$ ,  $SD_{age} = 26.80$ ).

Structural equation modeling was used for testing the hypotheses. Perceived organizational morality mediated the effect of internal CSR on organizational identification, which confirms H1. Significant direct effects were observed of internal CSR on perceived organizational morality and of perceived organizational morality on organizational identification. The findings are in support of our prediction that internal CSR is associated with higher perceived organizational morality, which in turn is associated with higher organizational identification.

The results also revealed the existence of an indirect effect from external CSR to organizational identification through perceived organizational morality. This confirms our prediction in H2 that external CSR is associated with lower perceived organizational morality, which in turn is associated with lower organizational identification.

Next, significant mediation effects were observed for attributed intrinsic corporate motives. It mediated the impact of internal CSR on perceived organizational morality, as well as the impact of internal CSR on organizational identification. Hence, H3a and H3b are confirmed.

Furthermore, attributed extrinsic corporate motives were observed to mediate the effect of external CSR on perceived organizational morality, but not on organizational identification. The results thereby confirm H4a, but not H4b. Significant direct effects were observed from external CSR to attributed extrinsic corporate motives and from attributed extrinsic corporate motives to perceived organizational morality. Hence, the findings were only in support of our prediction that external CSR is associated with higher attributed extrinsic corporate motives, which in turn is associated with higher perceived organizational morality. In sum, most of our hypotheses were confirmed, except H4b.

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## Sustainability, Self-Identity and Generations: The Influence of CSR Communication on Employer Brand Attractiveness

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**Keywords:** *CSR communication, employer brand attractiveness, sustainability self-identity*

In the fiercely competitive landscape of talent acquisition, companies face intensified struggles to attract and retain skilled professionals. Amid this competition, the social performance of companies emerges as a pivotal tool in the war for talent (Duarte et al., 2014).

In the pursuit of cultivating an appealing employer brand, HR and marketing experts play pivotal roles. They guide aligning the brand with the company culture and endeavor to comprehend what aspects of the organization as an employer should be effectively communicated to the public. However, understanding how candidates select their future employer and the role of individual personality aspects in this process is equally imperative. Current trends indicate that candidates, particularly the younger generation, prioritize values such as human rights, diversity, and inclusion, offering guidance to companies on shaping their image (Gallup, 2021). A Gallup survey highlights the preferences of Generation Z and Millennials, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership and a diverse and inclusive workplace, indicative of a broader need for ESG (environmental, social, and governance sustainability performance) considerations (Gallup, 2021; Lian Liu & Nemoto Naoko, 2021).

Scholars widely affirm the positive impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) on the employer brand, as supported by research (Alshathry et al., 2017; Biswas & Suar, 2016; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017). This influence, in turn, plays a critical role in the attraction and

retention of employees. Notably, CSR is discussed as a potent signal conveying information about the employer and its managerial practices. Furthermore, it serves as an identifier of a shared social group and values between the organization and potential candidates, marking it as a pivotal factor contributing to employer attractiveness (Bustamante et al., 2021). From a marketing perspective, highlighting CSR initiatives becomes paramount, emphasizing the importance of effectively communicating these socially responsible practices to bolster the overall employer brand.

The goal of this research study is to explore the complex world of perceived CSR and its impact on employer brand attractiveness, exploring the moderating roles of sustainability self-identity and generational differences. Recognizing the pivotal role of CSR in talent acquisition, our research scrutinizes the dimensions of philanthropic, ethical, and environmental CSR activities. The conceptual model of this research study is presented in Figure 1.

An online survey, facilitated through the Qualtrics tool and using non-probability sampling method, was conducted targeting the entire working population in Lithuania, encompassing individuals aged 18 to 65 (the official retirement age in Lithuania). The data collection occurred over the initial three weeks of April 2023. Participants were required to rate sustainability self-identity questions initially. Following this, they were prompted to think of a specific organization they would consider as a potential employer and note down its name to maintain clarity while rating subsequent statements. Subsequently, respondents were asked to evaluate 23 statements, forming two constructs—perceived CSR and employer attractiveness. An attention check question was strategically incorporated to filter out low-quality participation.

The statistical analysis of the results was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. After the removal of incomplete surveys, 201 responses remained for inclusion in the research dataset. It's noteworthy that a significant number of respondents discontinued the questionnaire at the point where they were required to input the name of their potential employer.

The results indicate that while philanthropic and environmental CSR significantly enhance employer brand attractiveness, ethical CSR demonstrates a less pronounced effect. Further, we introduce sustainability self-identity as a potential moderator, probing whether individual values aligning with CSR efforts influence employer brand perception. Contrary to expectations, sustainability self-identity does not emerge as a significant moderator. The outcomes of hypothesis testing are displayed in Table 1.

Additionally, the study investigates generational nuances in the CSR-employer brand relationship, revealing that, despite prevalent stereotypes, different age groups show consistent interest in CSR dimensions. Notably, Generation Z and Baby Boomers, though smaller in the workforce, exhibit comparable engagement with CSR as Millennials and Generation X.

Our findings suggest that companies should strategically prioritize philanthropy and environmental initiatives to bolster employer brand attractiveness. Moreover, the study

challenges assumptions about age-driven preferences, emphasizing the universal appeal of CSR initiatives across diverse generational cohorts.

Regarding the moderating impact of sustainability self-identity on perceived environmental CSR and employer brand attractiveness, the results indicated no statistical significance. This implies that sustainability self-identity does not contribute to this relationship. Prior research suggests that when a company participates in CSR, employees exhibit pro-environmental behavior. Attempting to extend this model to potential employees, van der Werff et al. (2021) explored similar dynamics.

This research paves the way for future explorations into the multifaceted relationships between CSR, employer brand attractiveness, and the complex interplay of individual and generational factors.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model

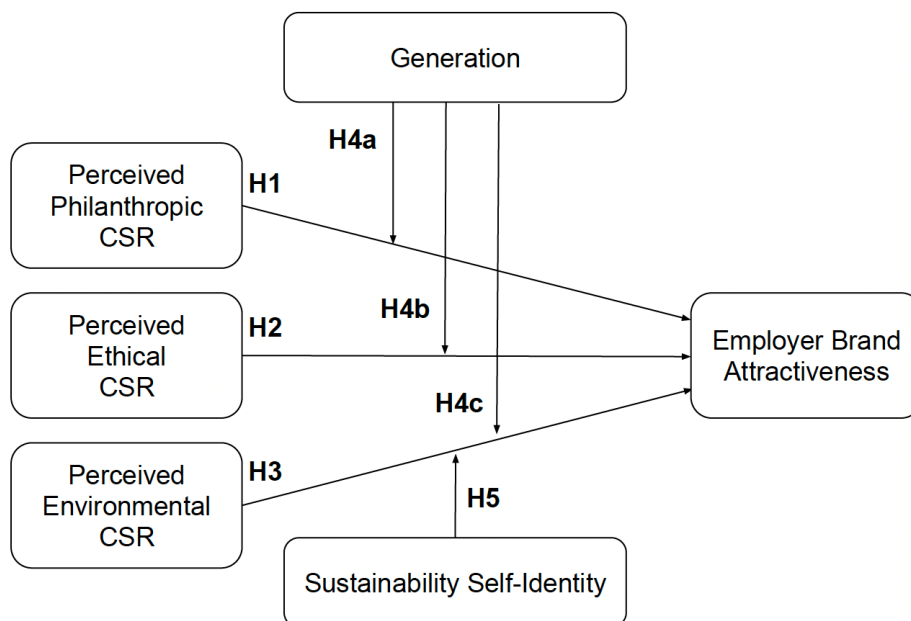


Table 1. Summary of hypotheses testing.

<b>H1</b>	Perceived philanthropic CSR will have a positive impact on employer brand attractiveness.	Supported
<b>H2</b>	Perceived ethical CSR will have a positive impact on employer brand attractiveness.	Not supported
<b>H3</b>	Environmental CSR will have a positive impact on employer brand attractiveness.	Supported
<b>H4</b>	Sustainability self-identity moderates the relationship between perceived environmental CSR and employer brand attractiveness. This moderator is more pronounced in people for whom strong environmental CSR is related to a strong employer brand attractiveness.	Not supported
<b>H5</b>	Generation moderates the relationship between perceived philanthropic CSR and employer brand attractiveness.	Not supported
<b>H6</b>	Generation moderates the relationship between perceived ethical CSR and employer brand attractiveness.	Not supported
<b>H7</b>	Generation moderates the relationship between perceived environmental CSR and employer brand attractiveness.	Not supported

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## Session 4.2 Communication on social issues

### Associations between workplace LGB+ disclosure and discrimination, organizational LGB+ climate, job satisfaction, and mental health: A meta-analysis

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**Keywords:** meta-analysis, sexual orientation, LGB+, discrimination, organizational climate, job satisfaction, mental health

LGB+ employees are protected by labor laws in 81 countries, for example against discrimination at the workplace (ILGA World 2020). Despite these laws, LGB+ employees are still often discriminated against at work (FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020; Statistic Canada 2021; The Williams Institute 2021), rendering the decision whether to disclose or to conceal their sexual orientation crucial. A large-scale study from Deloitte (2023) underscores the significance of this communicative act as it demonstrates that the majority of LGB+ employees considers disclosing their LGB+ identity at work important, while only less than half have disclosed their sexual orientation to all colleagues.

An LGB+ orientation can be considered as a concealable stigma because it must be explicitly disclosed to others (Goffman 1963; Pachankis 2007). Disclosure and concealment can be seen as opposites and are often used as antonyms, including this abstract. Disclosing one's sexual orientation can be conveyed verbally and non-verbally and thus can take various communicative forms.



A scoping review on employee communication regarding LGB+ found that disclosing one's identity, an inclusive organizational climate, and discrimination were the most frequently addressed forms of organizational communication. Job satisfaction and different forms of mental health were the most frequently studied variables unrelated to communication and LGB+ (Wahl, Siegel, and Einwiller submitted). This scoping review, however, did not include a quantitative synthesis of associations between those variables.

Empirical evidence concerning disclosing an LGB+ orientation and work-related aspects is mixed; associations are positive, negative, and in some cases non-significant for (a) workplace discrimination (cf. Corrington et al. 2019; Dhanani et al. 2022; Reed and Leuty 2016), (b) organizational LGB+ climate (cf. Reed and Leuty 2016; Tatum, Formica, and Brown 2017), (c) job satisfaction (cf. Cheung and Chan 2021; Day and Schoenrade 2000; Velez, Moradi, and Brewster 2013; Williamson et al. 2017), and (d) mental health (Cheung and Chan 2021; Corrington et al. 2019; Day and Schoenrade 2000; Dhanani et al. 2022; Griffith and Hebl 2002; Velez, Moradi, and Brewster 2013).

Our meta-analysis is in line with the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews (Page et al. 2021). The initial dataset comprised the 164 records from Wahl et al.'s (submitted) scoping review. First, titles and abstract of these records were screened for reporting on employees disclosing an LGB+ orientation in the workplace. Second, a total of 80 records advanced to full text screening. Third, 39 records reporting on 41 studies ( $N = 12,327$ ) met the eligibility criteria and reported Pearson  $r$ . Thus, sample information and effect size measures (i.e., Pearson  $r$ ) were retrieved from these.

For every outcome (i.e., discrimination, workplace LGB+ climate, job satisfaction, mental health), we estimated four meta-analytical models: an overall analysis (i.e., pooled over all disclosure categories) and separate analyses for the disclosure categories Active Disclosure, General Openness, and Open Behavior. Public Knowledge was only addressed in one study and thus omitted from the analysis. Overall results demonstrate that higher levels of disclosure are associated with higher levels of LGB+ climate in organization, job satisfaction, and mental health. The overall association between disclosure and discrimination was not significant; however, for the Active Disclosure category, this association of a similar effect strength was significant, suggesting that higher levels of explicit disclosure are related to lower levels of discrimination. Orchard plots are depicted in Figure 1 for each overall analysis.

Importantly, the individual results of the studies included in the meta-analyses showed mixed effects, with some studies finding no association, others finding positive associations, and still others finding negative associations. Thus, when combining these initial findings in a meta-analysis, the effects are mitigated or even canceled out (cf. Pachankis et al. 2020).

In terms of discrimination, the non-significant yet small positive relations with disclosure could be twofold: on the one hand, when an LGB+ orientation is disclosed, especially if it was not the employees' decision in LGB+ unfriendly environments, colleagues and superiors might react negatively and discriminate against the employee; on the other hand, when employees decide

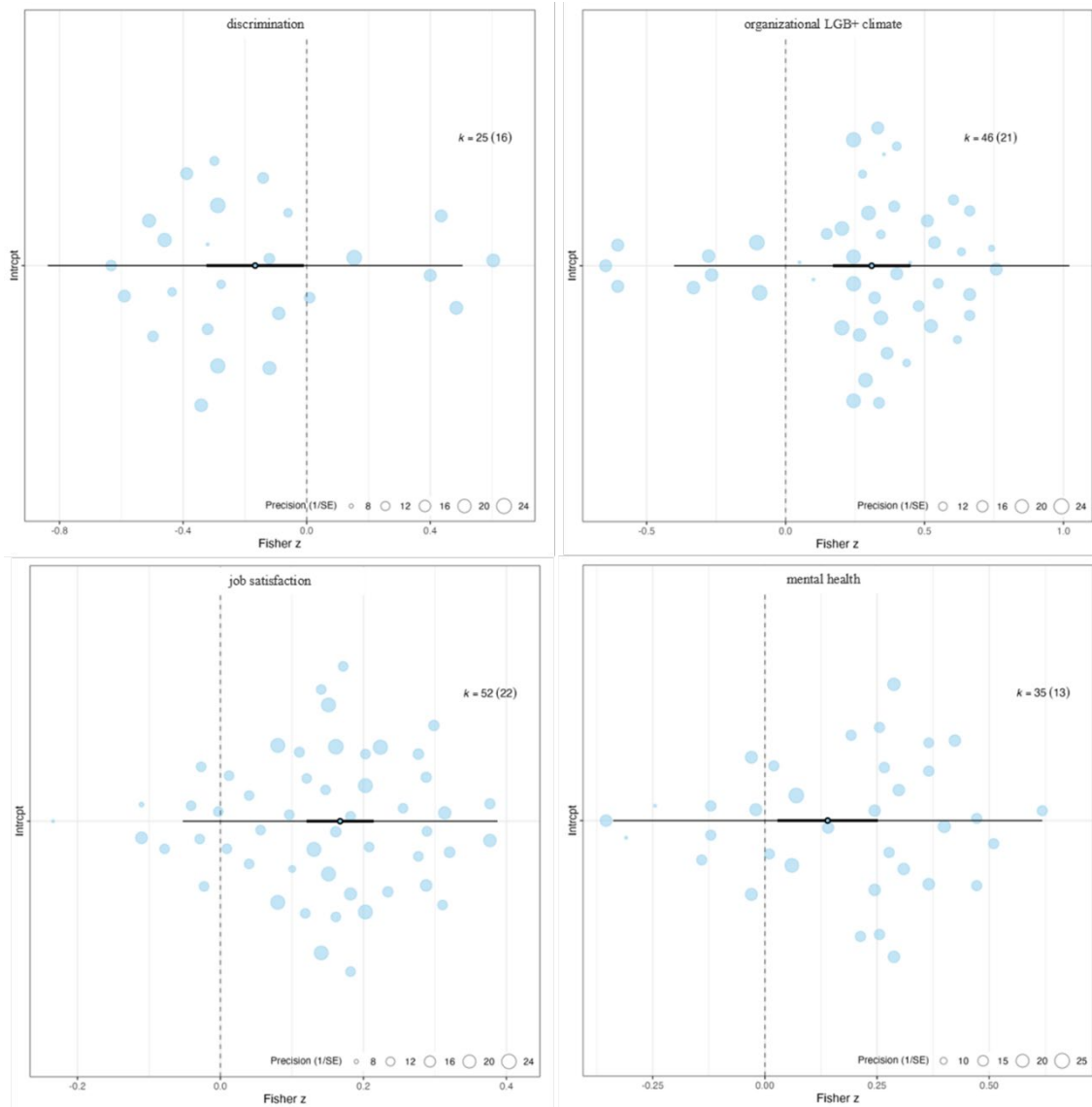
to actively disclose their LGB+ orientation, this might reflect an LGB+ friendly workplace where colleagues and superiors refrain from discrimination.

Strengths of this meta-analysis are firstly, quantifying the results of the most commonly studied variables related to LGB+ and employee communication (Wahl, Siegel, and Einwiller submitted); secondly, focusing on the communicative act of disclosing an LGB+ orientation and its associations with different outcome variables (i.e., discrimination, LGB+ climate, job satisfaction, mental health), as disclosure appears to be the central variable in this regard; thirdly, addressing overall effects and different disclosure categories, recognizing that disclosure can be communicated in various verbal and non-verbal forms.

Limitations concern the limited sample size and the missing inclusion of moderators, such as individual, organizational, and political/global aspects affecting disclosure. Future meta-analyses, thus, should use a broad search string in multiple suitable databases and include participants' age, gender, LGB+ orientation, occupation, prevailing legislative climate, and year of data collection.

In order to reduce discrimination and foster positive work and mental health outcomes in LGB+ employees, organizations should establish positive LGB+ climates through employee communication. In this respect, communication from top management seems to be of particular importance, as the top management represents the organization and its values to organizational members and the outside world (e.g., job seekers).

Figure 1. Orchard plots for overall associations between disclosure and discrimination, organizational LGB+ climate, job satisfaction, and mental health



*Note.* Total effect size calculations are based on three-level random effects models taking into account nesting of effect sizes within studies; blue discs represent sample effect sizes (Fisher z metric) and are stretched on the y-axis for better readability; the size of the discs varies depending on effect size precision; the thick horizontal line represents the 95% confidence interval, whereas the thin horizontal line represents the prediction interval; the black circle represents the mean effect size.

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## Behind the Scenes of CEO Socio-Political Positioning: Perspectives from Communication Practitioners

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**Keywords:** *CEO activism, CEO communication, socio-political positioning*

In recent years, CEOs worldwide have been increasingly vocal about socio-political issues, a phenomenon often labeled as CEO activism (Chatterji & Toffel, 2017) or socio-political positioning (Fröhlich & Knobloch, 2021). This trend, most prominent in the United States, gained especially momentum when global racial justice protests in 2020 prompted previously silent business leaders worldwide to speak out (USC Annenberg Center For Public Relations, 2022).

Despite the recognition of CEOs for their socio-political engagement, debates persist about moral implications (Branicki et al., 2021) and associated consequences (e.g., Rim et al., 2020; Dodd & Supa, 2014). Some critics even dismiss CEO activism as a mere public relations strategy, involving minimal costs (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021).

Starting from this critique, it stands to reason to foreground the communication aspect of CEO activism. Arguably, those best positioned to shed light on this matter operate behind the scenes: communication practitioners.

Communication practitioners are pivotal in crafting and driving communication strategies for CEOs (Zerfaß et al., 2016). Recent findings from the USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations (2022) anticipate their continued involvement in socio-political discourse. Yet many lack comprehensive data on complex societal issues, and only a few follow a playbook on how to deal with them. That said, the question at issue then is whether a CEO's stance on socio-political issues results from "proactive organizational initiatives with planned communication" or is more likely to be "unintentionally spoken by the organizational leadership" (Dodd & Supa, 2014, p. 2). It is precisely here that this research contributes.

This research revisits public relations literature on *role theory*, *issues management*, and *CEO positioning* to examine communication practitioners' contributions to CEOs' socio-political activism, focusing on both their organizational roles and specific strategic efforts, leading to the research question: *How do communication practitioners assume their contribution in the context of their CEOs' socio-political positioning from their own point of view?*

To address this question, the study conducted 15 qualitative guideline-supported online interviews with corporate communication and public relations professionals. Initially focusing on publicly traded companies in Germany and the USA, the scope was expanded to include global experts familiar with activist CEOs from a variety of organizations, recruited through contacts and online networks.

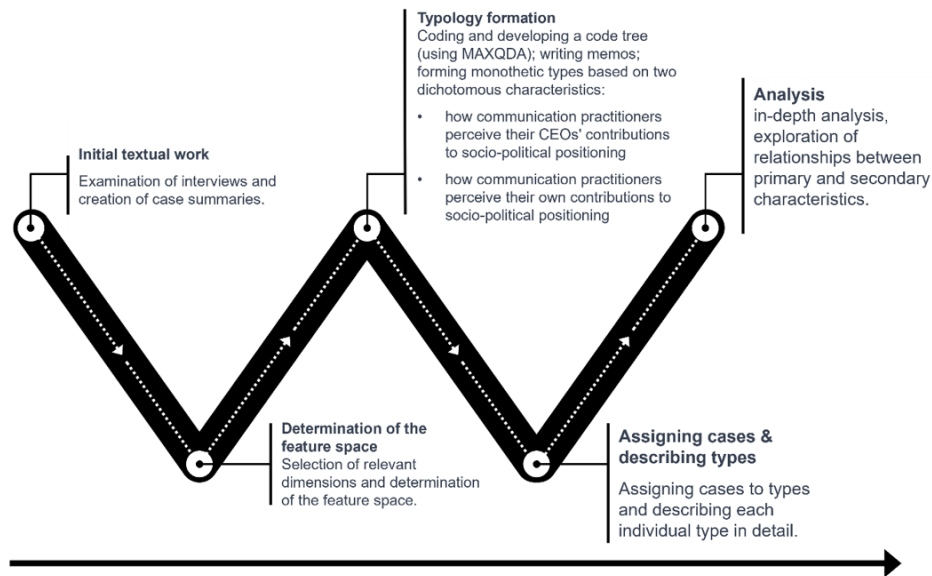
Using qualitative content analysis and qualitative type-building analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022) with MAXQDA software (see Figure 1.), the final analysis revealed four types of communication practitioners influencing CEO socio-political stances: The Mediator, The Circumspect, The Tandem, and The Value Champion, varying from reactive to proactive approaches (Figure 2.).

- 1) **The Mediator** handles post-communication reactions and stakeholder relations.
- 2) **The Circumspect** advises CEOs to take a cautious approach, considering business impacts.
- 3) **The Tandem** aligns company values with the CEO's socio-political stance.
- 4) **The Value Champion** not only supports but also encourages the CEO to take bold stands on socio-political issues.

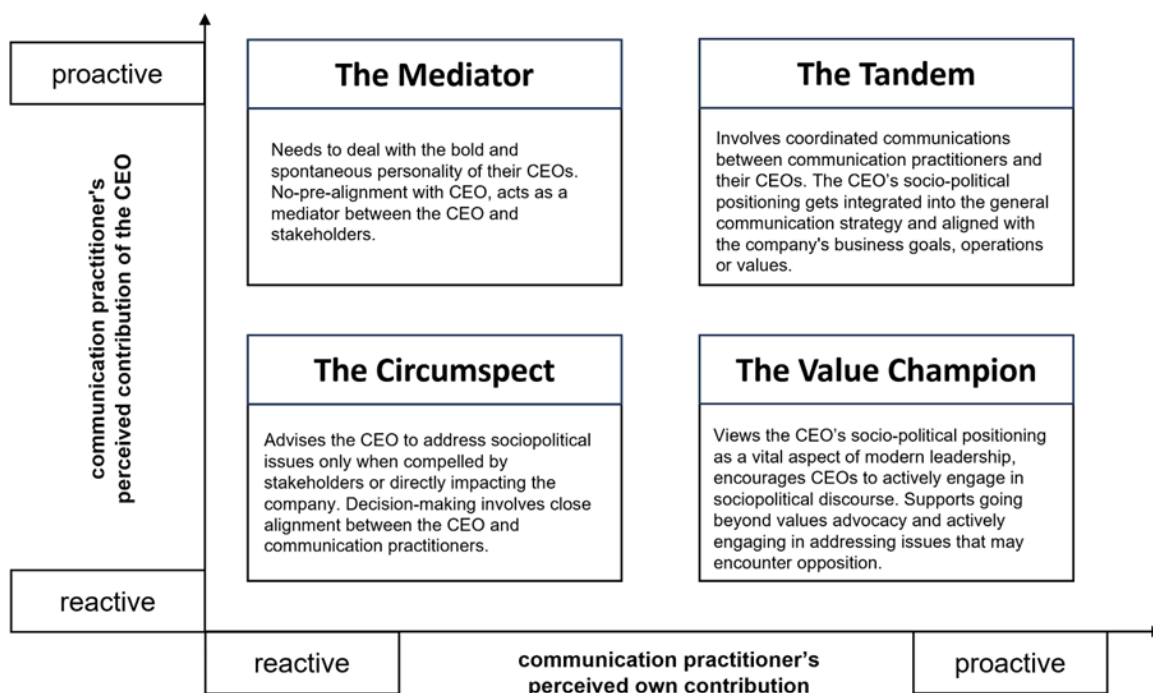
Across all types, nuanced distinctions emerge concerning the management of the issue at hand. Practitioners distinguish issue-mandate, issue-fit, and issue-agency. Although interdependencies exist, a hierarchy appears to govern the effects of these three dimensions: Issue-mandate assesses a CEO's qualification, often supported by a successful business track record lending credibility to their activism. Issue-fit centers on maintaining alignment with the company's identity, paralleling prior research on issue ownership (e.g., Lim & Young, 2021). Lastly, issue-agency highlights a CEO's capacity to drive significant change by utilizing their authority, platform, network, reach, and resources. Grasping these nuances aids in developing effective positioning strategies. CEOs should prioritize their functional roles *before* positioning themselves socio-politically (issue-mandate), align then their beliefs with company values to avoid overshadowing causes (issue-fit), and eventually use their influence to guide social discussions and affirm their role as change agents (issue-agency).

In conclusion, CEO socio-political positioning goes beyond well-crafted messages. It demands communication practitioners to be adept at various roles, positioning strategies, communicative tasks, and skills, including strategizing, advising, and mediating, all grounded in trust.

**Figure 1.** Analysis process (own illustration with reference to Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022, p. 186)



**Figure 2.** Two-dimensional representation of the four types of communication practitioner contributions to CEO activism (own illustration with reference to Wenzel-Cremer, 2005, p. 336)





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## Consumers' responses to public company-directed activism: An experimental comparison of insider and outsider activism

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**Keywords:** *employee activism, activism rhetoric, legitimacy, consumer attitudes, negative word-of-mouth, STOPS, experimental survey*

Since the early 1990s, big companies worldwide have regularly become the target of activists urging for corporate change (Bartley and Child 2014). Expectations towards companies are gradually expanding to encompass greater social and environmental responsibility with pressure from within and outside. Both insiders (i.e., employees and shareholders) and outsiders (i.e., social movement organizations, NGOs, and consumers) can call on companies to change undesired business practices that influence the climate and social well-being (Vasi and King 2012). Activists can adopt different tactics and rhetoric to communicate their grievances, yet insider activism is generally considered less confrontational and contentious. This is explained by the presence of legitimate internal channels and the support of powerful allies like upper-level management representatives (King and Pearce 2010) as well as by the considerable amount of knowledge insiders possess about the target company and, simultaneously, their high dependence on that same company (Briscoe and Gupta 2016).

In recent years a growing number of employees, especially in the US, have started to publicly express their concerns about how their employers handle social and environmental issues. Thereby, they increasingly engage in (communicative) actions typical for outsider activists. From an employee behavior perspective, these tactics are viewed as rather disruptive because they are visible to the public and can generate reputational costs for the target company (Briscoe and Gupta 2021). Accordingly, these new forms of employee activism are also the subject of growing interest among communication scholars (Krishna 2021; Lee 2022; Ninova-Solovykh 2023).

Although there is an ongoing discussion about the reputational threats associated with company-directed activism (Manheim and Holt 2013; Tucker and Melewar 2005), empirical

research testing for possible negative effects is minimal (see van den Broek et al. 2017; Vasi and King 2012). Given this research gap and the subject's topicality, this experimental study examines how consumers respond to public company-directed activism in terms of evaluations of activists' legitimacy, general attitudes, and word-of-mouth intentions toward the target company. Consumers' responses are compared depending on the involved activists and their rhetoric, also considering consumers' situational perceptions of the specific issue raised.

## Hypotheses

We assume that consumers' responses toward a targeted company are related to the extent to which the involved activists manage to gain public support for their cause. If activists lack legitimacy, they can barely pose a substantial reputational risk as they are simply not taken seriously (Coombs 1998). Whether consumers perceive activists as legitimate can be explained by activists' relationship with the target company. As employees are "the quintessential insiders" (Briscoe and Gupta 2016), we suggest:

**H1:** Consumers exposed to insider activism will perceive activists as more legitimate than those exposed to outsider activism.

According to the *activists' dilemma* (Feinberg et al. 2020), although activists – in their pursuit of media attention – are often tempted to adopt tactics with more negative overtones, their legitimacy can suffer from this. Therefore, we propose that:

**H2:** Consumers exposed to aggressive activism rhetoric will perceive activists as less legitimate than those exposed to peaceful activism rhetoric.

While employees are generally assumed to be trustworthy and credible communicators (Lee & Tao, 2020; Opitz et al., 2018), typical (i.e., outsider) activists are often ascribed negative stereotypes such as being eccentric, militant, and annoying (Bashir et al. 2013). The use of aggressive rhetoric by outsiders can reinforce existing negative associations, which, in turn, can undermine their legitimacy even more strongly. Hence, we suggest an interaction effect:

**H3:** Aggressive rhetoric by outsider activists will have a stronger negative effect on consumers' legitimacy perceptions than both peaceful rhetoric by outsiders and insiders and aggressive rhetoric by insiders.

Regarding the influence of activists' legitimacy on consumers' company-related responses, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H4:** Activists' legitimacy will affect (a) consumers' general attitudes toward the target company negatively and (b) consumers' negative WoM intentions positively.

Based on the assumption that consumer attitudes determine consumer behaviors such as searching for information and buying (Ajzen, 2008), we further suggest that this should also apply for consumers' communicative behaviors:

**H5:** The more negative consumers' general attitudes toward the target company, the stronger their negative WoM intentions.

Regardless of whether activists are insiders or outsiders and what rhetoric they use, consumers' communicative actions toward the target company (i.e., negative WoM) also depend on how active consumers are on the issue raised. When consumers are indifferent, activists' issue-centered efforts are less likely to stimulate consumers' communicative engagement against the company. In line with the situational theory of problem solving, we assess consumers' activeness in terms of their perceived problem, involvement, and constraint recognition (Kim and Grunig 2011) and suggest:

**H6:** Consumers' (a) problem recognition and (b) involvement recognition will be positively related to consumers' negative WoM intentions, while their (c) constraint recognition will be negatively related.

As activists themselves are particularly active publics (Grunig, 1992), we argue that, based on perceived similarities, consumers' evaluations of activists' legitimacy will be also related to their issue-related situational perceptions. In particular:

**H7:** Consumers' (a) problem recognition and (b) involvement recognition will be positively related to consumers' perceptions of activists' legitimacy, while (c) constraint recognition will be negatively related.

### **Research design**

This study is a between-subjects, posttest-only online survey experiment, including a 2 (insider vs. outsider activism) x 2 (aggressive vs. peaceful rhetoric) factorial design. Data will be obtained via Prolific among people living in the US ( $N=300$ ). First, respondents will answer questions regarding their general rebelliousness (Goldberg et al. 2006) and issue-related situational perceptions (Kim and Grunig 2011). Next, they are randomly assigned to one of the four treatment conditions presenting the stimulus material about a protest against the climate policy of a fictitious company. The posttest questionnaire includes the dependent variables activists' legitimacy (Meier et al., 2023), consumers' general attitudes (Spears and Singh 2004) and word-of-mouth intentions (Coombs and Holladay 2009) toward the target company, followed by manipulation checks. The final set of questions covers sociodemographics, consumer behavior, and activism-related experiences.

Data collection is planned for February 2024. At the conference in March 2024, results will be presented and discussed.

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## Reputation management falters under inane leadership: Lessons learned from the Abercrombie & Fitch culture of exclusion

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The clothing company Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) was accused of discriminating against full-figured women due to their refusal to sell larger sizes, using discriminatory hiring practices, and implementing offensive sexualized marketing tactics that “sold sex” to children. These accusations were evidenced in 2013 by exclusionary remarks made by the former CEO Mike Jeffries. The discrimination allegations were widely circulated by the media with intensive coverage on the exclusionary goals of the then CEO. The negative publicity had huge consequences for Abercrombie & Fitch and their stock prices fell.

This case study assesses Abercrombie & Fitch’s public relations efforts to repair its badly-damaged reputation. The authors followed the Hendrix Process Model of public relations which applies the mnemonic “ROPE” as a template to evaluate a public relations initiative. ROPE involves four phases. The first phase is Research, which explores the the problem to be solved. The second phase is Objectives, which is a grouping of the desired outcomes of the plan. Next is Programming, which probes into the actions to achieve the objectives. The final phase is Evaluation, which measures the effectiveness of the campaign.

The public relations efforts of A&F seemed to be aimed at the general public, media, current and prospective employees. Unfortunately, the objectives were neither specific, measurable, nor time-bound. The literature suggests that the company attempted to pursue a wide range of objectives. Among these objectives were:

- To generate awareness of Abercrombie & Fitch’s devotion to diversity and inclusion through marketing and advertising activities.
- To create a positive shift in attitudes toward Abercrombie & Fitch’s brand
- To increase the purchases of Abercrombie & Fitch clothing with both in-store and online purchases.
- To raise current employees' awareness of Abercrombie & Fitch’s devotion to diversity and inclusion through hiring practices.
- To increase media awareness of Abercrombie & Fitch’s response to accusations of discriminatory practices made by Mike Jeffries.
- To expand media awareness of Abercrombie & Fitch new welcoming store standards and celebration of diversity and individuality within their brand.

- To encourage positive media outlooks regarding Abercrombie & Fitch’s devotion to diversity and inclusion through marketing and hiring practices.
- To issue an apology statement from the company concerning Mike Jeffries’ comments.
- To generate positive media coverage of Abercrombie & Fitch’s mature and diverse rebranding initiatives.

Abercrombie and Fitch conveyed several messages in their public relations efforts. The most obvious ones were:

- A&F is committed to offering products of enduring quality and exceptional comfort that allow consumers around the world to express their own individuality and style.
- Diversity and inclusion are woven into every aspect of A&F business.
- Embracing diversity in all forms makes A&F stronger.
- A&F works diligently to ensure that each associate and customer feel included, respected, supported, and empowered.
- A&F strives to make a positive impact in the global community.

Abercrombie & Fitch used a wide range of controlled and uncontrolled media to convey messages to the targeted publics. Among the controlled media were the company website (Abercrombie.com) and PR Newswire. The uncontrolled media consisted of press releases, news articles, Business Insider, ABC, CNN, Washington Post, US Magazine, Allure Magazine, social media comments and posts such Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Abercrombie and Fitch employed several effective communication principles to repair the damages caused by Jeffries’ negative comments. Here are some of the principles:

- **Salient Information.** Abercrombie & Fitch’s previous and potential consumers are seeking the brand to become a more diverse and inclusive company. The net worth and stock value of the brand faced major decline after the controversial and insensitive interview of former CEO, Mike Jeffries, recirculated online, proclaiming the brand’s exclusivity. Current CEO, Fran Horowitz immersed A&F into diversity and inclusion campaigns, implemented plus-sized clothing, and partnered with anti-bullying organizations.
- **Rational Appeal.** Abercrombie & Fitch has expanded their clothing options to include size 37 in jeans, along with establishing a curvy line. Their 2020 campaign is known as “Face Your Fierce” and includes a “Fierce Family” modeling cast. The cast is composed of individuals varying in race, disabilities, weight, sexuality, and gender.
- **Virtue Appeal.** Abercrombie & Fitch has partnered with various organizations to ensure the well-being of their employees and their community. The Better Work program ensures that customers feel that they are making an ethical choice by purchasing products from A&F because their employees around the world are being checked on and protected. In 2020, the brand received a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign and Corporate Equality Index for the 14th consecutive year.



- Two-way Communication. Customers are provided access to two-way communication through the use of the Abercrombie & Fitch website. The website allows visitors access to the company's email, social media accounts, phone number, returns and exchanges, shipping information, and order help.
- Group Influence. The fundraising and donations made by the company to several different campaigns and organizations supporting LGTBQ+, the homeless, and other minority groups, are made public on the company website. In 2019, they partnered with The Trevor Project for their #FaceYourFierce campaign promoting their videos, participating in the New York City Pride March, and donating funds. The Trevor Project is the largest suicide prevention hotline for LGTBQ+ youth in the world (Drummond, 2019). Consumers can see the financial and physical attributes made to each of their initiatives by A&F annually.

Abercrombie & Fitch followed the two-way symmetric model of public relations, conducted research and implemented a rebranding campaign. The public relations department retrieved feedback and adjusted their programming to resolve conflict and reflect the desires of the public. The department also instilled open pathways for communication between consumers and the company. Abercrombie & Fitch has partnered with several big-name celebrities and social media influencers to promote their products. Some of these names include Lucy Hale, Taylor Swift, Jennifer Lawrence, Channing Tatum, and Taylor Kitsch.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, the authors note that the outcome of the public relations efforts was as follows: (1) Abercrombie & Fitch generated public awareness about their devotion to diversity and inclusion through their Face Your Fierce marketing team and anti-bullying campaigns, (2) a positive shift occurred in public attitudes toward A&F's brand and signified by being named the biggest comeback of 2018, (3) the purchases of Abercrombie & Fitch clothing and products increased for both in-store and online purchases after the decline in 2014, *and* (4) favorable media coverage of A&F's mature and diverse rebranding initiatives was generated through several different popular news organizations.

The immediate outcome of the campaign did not necessarily signify instant success. However, in 2017 Abercrombie & Fitch was removed as the "most hated brand in America," displaying the advancements the rebranding had been making. The company was named the biggest retail comeback of 2018 by Business Insider and was also ranked number one in gender diversity out of the 55 Fortune 1000 companies. In 2019, A&F placed third on Gartner's top 10 Specialty Retail Brands in Digital.

The CEO Mike Jeffries offered an explanation rather than an apology, claiming that he was misunderstood. Furthermore, he did not mention that he was sincerely sorry for his previous statements. The tone of his public statement was irritating and it did not resonate well with the public. Along with his poor execution and wording, the timing of his explanation was too late. His negative statement should have been immediately addressed with the public and he should have shown remorse for his words.

The net worth of Abercrombie & Fitch in 2007 was \$7.32B but in 2020 it went down to \$1.41B. (Figure 1). Such a sharp drop was due to changes in customers' perceptions of the brand. What once was the brand chosen by teenagers across America became surrounded by exclusive practices and scandals.



Figure 1: Abercrombie & Fitch Net Worth 2006-2020 from Macrotrends

<https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/charts/ANF/abercrombie-fitch/net-worth>

In fact, Abercrombie & Fitch was constantly facing scandal after scandal which generated negative media publicity. The controversial statements made by CEO Jeffries along with lawsuits, discriminatory clothing, not inclusive hiring practices led to an overwhelmingly negative response from the customers.

The authors drew the following lessons for public relations practitioners in rebuilding the reputation of their companies after crises: (1) acknowledge the problem immediately, (2) take full responsibility, (3) express sincere remorse, (4) be aware that incomplete or muddled communication can only act to exacerbate the situation, (5) always tell the truth to minimize the trouble, (6) ensure that regret, restitution, reform and recovery are done quickly, (7) suppress emotional reactions, (8) prepare for social media terror, (9) make reform convincing, and (10) pay attention to changing societal trends and attitudes.

Naturally, the revolving door system for removal of inane or stupid CEOs will always be open for circulation. It is quite remarkable as to how such people rose to their positions of power and prominence in the first place, and then how long it takes before their public speaking persona accelerates damage to the companies they preside over. But, that is research for another day.

## Session 5.1 Crisis and complaints

### Effects of companies' (il-)legitimate webcare requests on consumers' intention to revise negative reviews

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**Keywords:** *complaints, online service recovery, webcare, legitimacy*

Electronic word-of-mouth (WOM) is known to have strong effects on consumers' attitudes and purchasing behavior (e.g., Donthu et al., 2021). Particularly, the sharing of negative experiences, opinions, and feelings about dissatisfying consumption experiences (i.e., negative electronic word-of-mouth, NWOM) is particularly influential on online observers, which include a firm's potential customers. A phenomenon called 'negativity bias'. NWOM has strong detrimental effects for the criticized company such as observers' decreased purchase likelihood and lower trust towards the involved company. The longer negative online comments are available in public, the higher the chances of such detrimental effects. Given the increased availability and amount of critical online statements about companies' service failures, firms are increasingly urged to proactively or reactively manage this kind of negative publicity to limit its deleterious effects. Endeavors to do this are referred to as 'webcare' (van Noort and Willemsen, 2012; Weitzl and Einwiller, 2019).

In this research, we investigate the effectiveness of a specific reactive webcare tactics to persuade complainants to modify their online complaints in a way that benefits the previously criticized company. More specifically, this research investigates the effectiveness of *direct requests* by the criticized company embedded in its online service recovery response aimed at altering the complainants' NWOM message. We are eager to demonstrate whether such webcare requests have the potential to turn criticism into positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) and if so, under which circumstances.

We conducted three scenario-based online experiments with between-subject designs. In study 1, we manipulated the webcare type (explicit vs. implicit request) and used a sample of 293

participants recruited via a French panelist. We chose to describe a situation in which a company's request to change the public review is considered legitimate: The scenario asked respondents to imagine themselves in a long-standing relationship with a bank, with which they had been very satisfied until now, and to imagine the occurrence of a problem leading them to write a negative review. The bank would then contact them to resolve the problem and, in the explicit request condition, would take the opportunity to ask them to revise their initial review. After reading the scenario, participants completed a short questionnaire with multi-item measures of satisfaction with service restoration and the intention to revise their review online.

In studies 2 and 3, we used the same scenario as in the first experiment, this time manipulating two contextual variables: The stability of the problem (Study 2) and the level of satisfaction with webcare (Study 3), respectively on samples of 349 and 424 respondents recruited by a French panelist. In Study 2, the stability of the problem was manipulated by looking at a page of customer reviews that mentioned similar problems with the bank (stable condition) or that mentioned no similar problems with the bank (non-stable condition). In Study 3, the level of satisfaction with webcare was manipulated by varying the type of response from the bank's customer service (unsatisfactory vs. satisfactory vs. delightful). Again, we measured respondents' behavioral intentions and perceived legitimacy with well-established scales.

*Results study 1.* We conducted a chi-square test to study the relationship between the request type (explicit vs. implicit) and the intention to revise one's review. The test revealed a direct positive relationship between the request type and the intention to favorably revise one's review ( $p < .01$ ) such that in case of an explicit request the intention to revise is higher compared to the no request condition ( $M_{\text{Implicit}} = 46.1\%$  vs  $M_{\text{Explicit}} 60.4\%$ ). Hence, H1 (i.e., Compared to implicit requests, explicit requests increase the complainant's willingness to favorably revise the original negative review, when they are perceived as legitimate.) was supported. Thus, we show that explicit requests lead to higher intention to alter the negative review for the benefit of the company as compared to implicit requests. However, explicitness is only accepted when the circumstances are favorable (i.e., unstable failure and resolution of the failure by the company) and legitimate the request.

*Results study 2.* To test the moderated mediation model proposed in H2 (i.e., Compared to implicit requests, explicit requests *increase* the complainant's willingness to favorably revise the original negative review, when the problem appears to be *not stable*) / H3 (i.e., Compared to implicit requests, explicit requests *decrease* webcare's legitimacy which in turn *decreases* the complainant's willingness to favorably revise the original negative review, when the problem appears to be *stable*), we used model 8 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). In this analysis, the request type (explicit vs. implicit) was the independent variable, perceived legitimacy was the mediator, problem stability was the moderator and the intention to revise as dependent variable. We observed significant moderate mediation (index of moderated mediation = -0.23, boot SE = 0.13, 95% BCI [-.53, -.03]), showing that when the problem was not likely to recur, the influence of explicit request on the intention to revise one's review was not mediated by the perceived legitimacy of the request. We only observed a direct positive

effect, which supported H2. On the other hand, when the problem was stable, an explicit request degraded the perceived legitimacy of webcare, which in turn degraded the intention to revise one's review. So, we observed a detrimental indirect effect. This supported H3. We shed light on complainants' reactions to explicit requests in less favorable situations such as occurrence of prior failures. Further, we validate the key role of perceived legitimacy of an instruction (Darling et al., 2007). We transpose this concept from the field of social psychology (e.g., Higgins, 2004) to relationship marketing by underlining that also in this context, legitimacy explains the effectiveness of an explicit request.

*Results study 3.* We also used model 8 in this analysis: Here, the request type (explicit vs. implicit) was the independent variable, perceived legitimacy was the mediator, recovery satisfaction was the moderator (multicategorical) and the intention to revise was the dependent variable. For the dissatisfying webcare condition, the results demonstrated a significant indirect effect of the explicit request on the intention to revise (indirect effect = -0.26, boot SE = 0.09, 95% BCBCI [-.47, -.10]). This indirect effect of the explicit request (vs. implicit request) on the intention was mediated by the effect of the request on perceived legitimacy ( $b = -.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which ultimately resulted in a higher intention to revise the review ( $b = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The index of moderated mediation is significant (indirect effect = -0.267, boot SE = 0.120, 95% BCBCI [.050, .524]). Specifically, the direct effect of explicitation on perceived legitimacy is moderated by service recovery satisfaction such that perceived legitimacy is lower in the Dissatisfaction condition compared to the Delighted condition ( $\beta_{\text{Dissat./Delight}} = .814$ ;  $p < .05$ ). However, there is no significant difference between the Dissatisfaction and Satisfaction conditions and between the Satisfaction and Delight conditions. This provided support for H4 (i.e., In the situation of a stable failure, compared to implicit requests, explicit requests *decrease* webcare's legitimacy which in turn *decreases* the complainant's willingness to favorably revise the original negative review, when complainants are *dissatisfied* by webcare). We shed light on complainants' reactions to explicit requests in less favorable situations such as when companies unjustifiably ask for a review revision after providing dissatisfactory webcare.

Our work empirically confirms that marketers have an interest in making explicit requests for the authors of negative reviews to change their comments. They should ensure that requests for changing online complainants' negative reviews are given in a setting that legitimizes their plea. By making these requests explicit, they benefit from complainants' increased compliance. More importantly, we highlight the boundary conditions that favor the negative review revision or make them highly unlikely. Amongst others, our results confirm that problem stability moderates the positive relationship between the explicitness of the request for a change of review and the perceived legitimacy. Repetitive failures can harm the firm and significantly reduce complainants' willingness to withdraw their public criticism. Hence, marketers should avoid service incidents by, for example, applying proactive webcare.

Our results also emphasize the key role of satisfactory webcare and marketers even have the chance to reduce detrimental NWOM effects when the company is associated with ongoing problems. Conversely, our results confirm the intuition that the opposite effect occurs when

complainants are discontent with the handling of their problem. Here, the explicit request is likely to backfire on the company. Consequently, we recommend that managers ensure that they provide satisfactory webcare before making an explicit request in disadvantageous contexts. However, customer delight is not necessary – at least when the complainant ‘only’ suffers from ongoing service problems.

However, we only focused on the relationship between the customer and the company (i.e. webcare approach). Yet, this research also calls for consideration of the relationship between the author and the audience (Weitzl and Hutzinger, 2017). In particular, the reviewer's intention may be influenced both by the image he or she wishes to present to others and his or her concern to help them. In particular, we can assume that in a stable environment, the desire to protect others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) inhibits the intention to make a revision. This could therefore be an avenue for future research.

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## Employee Perceptions of Crisis Spillover Risk: The Role of Crisis Relevance, Severity, and Corporate Response Strategies

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**Keywords:** *spillover effects, employee perceptions, corporate misconduct, crisis response, crisis management, megaphoning*

Crisis spillover risks refer to the likelihood of events in an external organization creating concern, uncertainty, or perceptions of harm for another organization (Veil et al. 2016). In an age of social media, a crisis spillover effect is of particular importance in increasing the speed by which a crisis can spread from one organization to another (Mehta et al. 2020). When a crisis spillover occurs, a company can be linked to a crisis that is affecting another company such as a competitor in the same industry, and the negative consequences of crisis spillover can be significant when stakeholders make assumptions of guilt by association (Laufer and Wang 2018). While the spillover effect of crises has become an emerging research topic in the field of crisis communication, little attention has been given to how employees perceive the risk of crisis spillover due to a corporate misconduct of another company (Wang and Laufer in press). The risk inherently yields ambiguity and uncertainty in the internal context of an organization, and it can directly or indirectly affect employees' workplace and job security. Therefore, understanding the likelihood of the crisis spillover effect will help unpack the mechanisms underlying employees' judgments of crisis spillover risk, and unravel the effectiveness of different crisis response strategies. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Reputation Commons Perspective, the current research addresses *how crisis relevance, crisis severity, and corporate response strategies affect employee perceptions of crisis spillover risk*.

King, Lenox, and Barnett (2002) asserted that firms in an industry share a "reputation commons". When one firm's misconduct affects the judgements that employees make of another firm or an industry as a whole, a commons arises. The reputation commons intertwines the fates of firms in the same industry. Thus, when one firm is involved in corporate misconduct that damages the industry's shared reputation, other firms can suffer as well (Barnett and King 2008). Pursuing this line of reasoning, we argue that a corporate misconduct of one company



can be perceived by employees from other firms in the same industry to be likely to spillover to their own company. Different crisis response strategies by the employer company may then lead to distinct levels of perceived likelihood of crisis spillover to their own company. Laufer and Wang (2018) argued that when the likelihood of crisis spillover is high, it is important that other companies in the same industry issue a denial to mitigate the spillover risk. In line with this, we predict that when the risk of a corporate misconduct spreading to other companies in the same industry is high, issuing a denial will be perceived by employees from other companies 1) more positively, 2) leading to a lower likelihood of crisis spillover to their own company, and 3) will result in a stronger positive megaphoning among employees from other companies than taking no response. Additionally, we conjectured the role of crisis relevance and severity in the context of crisis spillover in the sense that when a corporate misconduct of another company is more characteristic for the industry or has more serious consequences, the crisis will be perceived by employees to be more likely to spillover to other companies in the same industry.

An online experiment was conducted among employees ( $N = 345$ ) working in the retailer sector in the United States. To manipulate crisis relevance, i.e. whether the misconduct is characteristic for the industry, and response strategies, we created three versions of fictitious corporate misconduct (overcharging customers vs. data leak vs. selling rotten meat) in the supermarket sector, and two versions of crisis response strategy (issuing a denial vs. taking no response) by a competitor company in the same industry. A pre-test ( $N = 360$ ) found that the perceived crisis relevance for overcharging customers was significantly higher than for data leak, and the relevance for data leak was significantly higher than for selling rotten meat.

Our findings revealed a significant effect of perceived crisis severity on crisis spillover risk to other companies in the same industry, and this effect does not depend on the crisis type. On the contrary, the results reveal an insignificant effect of crisis relevance on spillover risk to other companies, indicating that whether the crisis is characteristic for the industry does not significantly correspond to the perceived likelihood of a crisis spillover effect to other companies in the industry. Furthermore, we found a significant interaction effect of spillover risk and response type, implying that the impact of spillover risk on employee perceptions depends on the type of corporate response: When the spillover risk is high, employees perceive issuing a denial more effective than taking no response. With respect to how employees perceive the likelihood of crisis spillover to their own company, we found a highly significant effect of spillover risk on perceived likelihood of crisis spillover to their own company. However, the impact of response type was insignificant, and the interaction of spillover risk and response type was found to be insignificant as well. Interestingly, the results suggest that when employees sense a high spillover risk of a crisis in their industry, they will be very concerned about the spread of the crisis to negatively influence their own company, and this concern is regardless how their company responds to the crisis. In addition, we found that positive megaphoning among employees is significantly higher when the company issues a

denial than when it remains silent, though we could not confirm how positive megaphoning among employees corresponds to the likelihood of crisis spillover risk.

This research provides valuable insights on how the likelihood of crisis spillover affects employee attitudes and help us gain a better understanding of how organizations should respond to spillover crises. Also, our findings point to the importance for a company to track corporate misconduct of their competitors in the same industry, in particular on social media, to identify whether the crisis being described is an industry issue and whether people are speculating about possible spillover effects. This will allow other companies in the same industry to determine which crisis response strategies to take, in order to mitigate the crisis spillover risk on their operations and employee perceptions.

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## Engagement, Identification, and Life Satisfaction of Employees in the Food and Beverage Service Sector during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Keywords:** *engagement, organizational identification, motivation, life satisfaction, stress, Covid-19*

From March 2020 to April 2021, Slovenia's food and beverage service sector faced major disruption, with employees on temporary layoff for nearly 8 months, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Temporary layoffs are important employment retention schemes, implemented to preserve jobs and incomes (Osuna & Garcia Perez, 2022) and they have been used in several EU countries, as well as the UK and Canada – especially in times of crisis. Yet, there is an important lack of research on how long-term temporary layoffs have affected employees, hence this research is focusing on filling this gap while exploring the relationships between several important constructs in the organizational context.

Employee engagement, a key component of effective corporate communication, has become a widely researched concept in the corporate setting. Engaged employees bring a plethora of benefits, such as increased productivity, citizenship behavior, and performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). However, employees cannot remain always equally engaged, and there are many unanswered questions regarding the factors that contribute to fluctuations in their levels of engagement. The objective of this research was to find how factors, such as life satisfaction (under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic), organizational identification, and motivation to return to work, impact employees' engagement. There have been several studies considering employees' engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic, primarily focusing on stress and psychological well-being (Shaheen et al., 2021; Gimenez-Espert et al., 2020; Gomez-Salgado et al., 2021; Blaique et al., 2022, Wang et al., 2021), while the relationship with organizational identification and motivation has been mostly ignored.

Data was gathered with an anonymous online survey between April and May 2021, with 168 usable responses collected. Demographic information, including gender, age, education, and years of employment at the current organization, was diverse, however, most respondents were female, aged between 25 and 34, with a completed secondary education. The unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns, restrictions on movement, health concerns)

presented significant challenges for research data collection and made it difficult to reach a larger sample size. Therefore, while this sample does not fully represent the population of employees in the food and beverage sector in Slovenia, it serves an exploratory purpose.

The data analysis utilized Smart PLS (3.0) for PLS path modeling, chosen for its suitability in complex structural models with multiple constructs and indicators, particularly when sample sizes are relatively smaller ( $< 200$ ) (see Hair et al., 2019). The structural PLS model explained 37.8 % of the variance for life satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.377$ ) and 54 % for employee engagement ( $R^2 = 0.544$ ). The analysis revealed robust relationships between variables, with the strongest positive correlation observed between employee engagement and organizational identification. Conversely, stress related to the Covid-19 pandemic exhibited a negative correlation with life satisfaction. Motivation to return to work showed a positive but less strong correlation with employee engagement. In contrast, the relationship between organizational identification and life satisfaction, while positive, was relatively insignificant compared to other associations.

While much research focuses on the organizational implications of employee engagement, the present study focuses on its relationship with broader life satisfaction. As few authors (e.g., Vorina, 2013; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Polo-Vergas et al., 2017) established a positive relationship between life satisfaction and engagement, our research further corroborates this link, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and professional well-being.

Furthermore, the temporary layoff scenario, akin to unemployment, could have demotivated employees. However, our findings align with Mercer's perspective (see Madan, 2017) that motivation, particularly to return to work, is a prerequisite for engagement, influenced by fulfilling basic and social needs, especially pertinent during the pandemic.

Following, organizational identification emerges as a pivotal factor in understanding employees' engagement and life satisfaction (e.g., Golob & Podnar, 2021; De Giorgio et al., 2022; Wakefield et al., 2017). The positive correlation between organizational identification and engagement, established by Dutton et al. (1994), resonates with our findings. Employees with a high level of identification actively contribute to organizational goals, highlighting the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and affiliation. Moreover, the positive relationship between organizational identification and life satisfaction aligns with the broader literature, indicating that a strong sense of belonging positively influences individuals' overall life satisfaction (e.g., Helliwell & Akinin, 2018).

Finally, the pandemic, as characterized by numerous changes and uncertainties, has significantly impacted stress levels. The moderate but negative correlation between stress related to the Covid-19 pandemic and life satisfaction reaffirms existing literature linking stress to diminished life satisfaction (Abolghasemi & Varaniyab, 2010; Extremera et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2016).

The study's findings offer valuable insights into the multifaceted impacts of temporary layoffs on employee engagement, life satisfaction, and organizational identification, especially in the

context of the Covid-19 pandemic. As organizations struggle with significant changes, such as temporary closures and operational disruptions, it becomes imperative to not only focus on consumer needs but also prioritize the well-being of the workforce.

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## Session 5.2 Buying behaviours

### Evaluating community supported agriculture: Accessibility and attractiveness for low-income families in Austria

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**Keywords:** *CSA, community supported agriculture, acceptance of subsidies, economically disadvantaged populations, low-income households*

#### Introduction

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) presents an alternative to current food systems that contribute to social inequalities and the decline of small-scale farming (Kelly-Reif & Wing, 2016; Lin et al., 2011). CSA supports and promotes local farming initiatives, emphasizes sustainability, and fosters better dietary choices (Volz et al., 2016). Despite its potential, CSA remain a niche phenomenon, among other reasons because of poorly developed communication strategies, encompassing both the CSA concept as a whole (Kato 2013) and the individual farms, whose marketing relies mainly on word-of-mouth (Forbes & Harmon, 2008). Furthermore, CSA has faced criticism for its exclusivity, primarily benefiting those with adequate financial means (Egli et al., 2023; Sitaker et al., 2020).

To address accessibility for low-income households, cost-offset CSA (CO-CSA) models have been proposed, utilizing strategies like donations, grants, and food stamps (Jilcott Pitts et al., 2022; Sitaker et al., 2020). Although donations from wealthier members are popular among farmers and current members (Jilcott Pitts, 2021), the perspective of low-income recipients on such subsidies has not been studied. Given the focus on farmers and existing members in prior research, our study aims to fill the research gap regarding low-income families' interest in CO-CSA by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: Is a CO-CSA program relevant for the target group of low-income families in Austria?

RQ2: At what price would a harvest share be considered by low-income families in Austria?

RQ3: Which subsidizing scheme (donations by other members, costs for share based on income, grants from public institutions) is the most acceptable and attractive for the target group?

This study evaluates CSA's potential in Austria to attract low-income populations by identifying cost-offset mechanisms to facilitate their participation, aiming to improve CSA's inclusivity. The results will help refine communication strategies to increase access for low-income families, not only expanding the field and general awareness, but most importantly, increasing diversity.

## **Methods**

We conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study using an online questionnaire. The target group were people living in Austria who belong to the lowest two income tax classes<sup>1</sup>. Recruitment took place via clickworker.com; participants received a payment of 1.50 euros for participation.

After two filter questions to determine whether the participants fall into our target group, we asked about shopping preferences (including possible reasons for or against participation in a CSA, 5-point agreement scale from 1 being "total agreement" to 5 "total disagreement"). Following, we provided a detailed explanation of CSA with an example of a medium-sized weekly harvest share. Participants were asked if they were familiar with CSA, rated the attractiveness of a harvest share, their likelihood of participating, and their willingness to pay for a weekly share.

Participants were informed about the average cost of a medium-sized harvest share in Austria, approximately 30 euros, based on online research. This was followed by the information that there are several ways to reduce this price for people on low incomes. In our research, we considered the following:

- Public funding, e.g. from the municipality
- Donations at their own choice by other, wealthier CSA members
- Differentiated prices for the harvest share according to income (people who earn more pay more for the harvest share so that people who earn less have to pay less)

Following a short introduction to the cost-offset concept (randomized order to prevent bias), participants rated its appeal and their likelihood of using it on a 5-point scale. At the end of the survey, socio-demographic data were collected. As the target group are persons from Austria, the research was carried out in German, easy-to-understand language.

## **Preliminary results**

This is an ongoing study. At the time of writing this abstract, we had a total of 93 analyzable data sets. Only main results are presented in this abstract; further analyses will be presented at the conference.



Of the participants, 44 were female and 49 male, with an average age of 34.8 years (SD=10.17; range 18 to 63 years). A total of 16.1% of the people had a migration background. The majority of the participants were employed (full-time 36.6%, part-time 21.5%) and had a A-levels diploma (33.3%) or an apprenticeship certificate (21.5%) as their highest level of education.

In total, almost a third of respondents (32.3%) had already heard of the community-supported agriculture system before our survey. There is a clear preference for weekly payment (86%) over payment for an entire season in advance (14%). The willingness to pay for an average harvest share as shown in the survey is between zero and 50 euros (on average 22.77 euros, SD=12.49).

33.3% of respondents completely agreed and a further 29% agreed with the statement that they could imagine receiving a harvest share as shown on a regular basis. Only a few people disagreed (4.3%) or strongly disagreed (10.8%) with this statement. A large majority also thought that the community-supported agriculture system would be a good way to support smaller farms (65.2% completely agreed, 23.9% agreed).

In terms of the attractiveness of the different subsidy options, public funding (M=1.98; SD=1.26) was significantly more attractive than the option that existing members deliberately pay more (M=2.63; SD=1.33;  $p<0.001$ ) and income-adjusted prices (M=2.54; SD=1.42;  $p<0.001$ ). The latter two options do not differ significantly from each other. A similar picture emerges in the answers as to whether the respondents could imagine using the offer. Here, people were significantly more likely to agree to use a publicly funded option (M=2.14; SD=1.29) than an option where existing members deliberately pay more (M=2.73; SD=1.34;  $p<0.001$ ) or an option where the price would be adjusted to income (M=2.61; SD=1.38;  $p=0.002$ ). The latter two options again do not differ significantly from each other.

## Discussion

With this research, we want to contribute to determining the potential of CSAs in Austria among people with lower incomes. The results can help CSAs to reach this specific target group. Furthermore, this research contributes to the cost-offset concepts that could be used to enable these people to participate in a CSA as well as the associated benefits to counter the criticism that CSAs have both environmental and health benefits, but that these are only available to a certain section of the population. It is crucial to look at this from the perspective of the target group, otherwise they will not embrace the concept.

While existing members and farmers see the system of voluntary additional payment by existing members as the most practicable and acceptable form of funding (Jilcott Pitts, 2021), our results suggest that this form of subsidy is not the best possible for the target group of economically disadvantaged people, as they would clearly prefer public subsidies. This result emphasizes the vital importance of actively including the target group in the planning process of interventions or – in this case – funding schemes.

With our research, we want to promote the CSA system, which has benefits not only for farmers and participants, but also for the environment, to a wider target group. Ultimately, we provide insights into what economically disadvantaged population groups would need in order to adopt this concept for themselves.

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## Let's Buy Online Directly from Farmers: An Integrated Framework of Individualistic and Collectivistic Consumption Values

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**Keywords:** *agri-food produce, individualistic consumption values, collectivistic consumption values, direct-to-consumer (D2C), pro-environmental behaviour, ethnocentrism*

Buying directly from farmers online has become increasingly popular in recent years due to technological advances and the impact of COVID-19 (McKee et al. 2023; Durant et al. 2023). Advancements in e-commerce platforms, such as online marketplaces and mobile apps, have made it easier for farmers to connect directly with consumers and facilitate sales (Glaros et al. 2023). Moreover, social media have played a significant role in D2C sales by enabling farmers to showcase and promote their products and engage with consumers in real time (Zimand-Sheiner, Kol, and Levy 2022). This growth of the scope of D2C sales necessitates a better understanding of consumer motivation to participate in direct agri-food buying online. Earlier studies investigated consumer motivations for buying directly from farmers on traditional face-to-face platforms, such as farm shops or farmers' markets (Bimbo et al., 2021; Cicia et al., 2021). However, few studies have explored consumer motivations to buy directly from farmers online, using digital platforms (Enthoven and Van den Broeck, 2021). Consumers experience digital consumption differently due to the distinct characteristics of each mode of consumption. Compared to traditional face-to-face consumption, digital consumption is more convenient, cost-effective and interactive, but intangible and therefore provides less sensory experience (Petit et al., 2019). Thus, consumer motivations to buy produce digitally (D2C) may differ significantly. This reveals a research gap in understanding consumer behavior toward online D2C that needs to be addressed (McKee et al., 2023).

Based on the well-established expectancy value theory (EVT) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2000; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which asserts that consumers' motivation to behave is derived from the value they expect to gain from this behaviour, this study aims to investigate the effect of the interaction between various consumption values that drive consumers to buy directly from farmers online. The literature offers several explanations for consumers' expected values that motivate D2C buying behaviour. One dominant approach considers individualistic values related to personal consumer benefits from D2C buying, such as saving money and obtaining

fresh quality produce (Choe and Kim 2018; Hussain et al. 2023). This approach can be based on the comprehensive framework of the consumption value theory (Sheth, Newman, and Gross 1991) which provides a variety of consumption values that may motivate consumer buying choices. Another approach gaining popularity in recent years focuses on collectivistic values. From this perspective, consumers may perceive direct to consumer produce and distribution as sustainable consumption because it supports local economies, reduces transportation-related emissions, and supports small-scale farming (Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis 2020; Bryła 2019; Kol, Zimand-Sheiner, and Levy 2023). When examining these two perspectives, the motivational basis for buying directly from farmers becomes uncertain (Zimand-Sheiner, Kol, and Levy 2022) and may arise from the interaction between these two perceptions. Therefore, this study proposes a conceptual framework suggesting that consumers who buy online directly from farmers are driven by an interaction of weighted individualistic consumption value (i.e., an integration of values such as saving money, getting quality and fresh produce) and collectivistic values (pro-environmental behavior and ethnocentric perception). (see Figure 1)

Data were collected using a representative sample of 576 consumers via an online access panel. The questionnaire was mostly based on validated scales and was formulated to pertain to the procedure of buying directly from farmers. Validity and reliability were assured. To examine the relationships among the constructs and test the hypotheses, a path analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Following Kol and Levy (2022), D2C individualistic consumption value was treated as a second-order reflective construct (composed of three values: functional, hedonic, and economic). Acceptable level of fit was exhibited, indicating that the path model is valid (See Figure 2). The model depicts the direct and indirect relationships and relevant coefficients (see Table 1).

Results indicates that a weighted individualistic consumption value affects consumer attitudes and, consequently, consumers' intention to buy agri-food products directly from farmers. Nonetheless, individualistic consumption value is more effective in enhancing attitudes among consumers with high pro-environmental behaviour. Moreover, ethnocentric perception lowers the effect of individualistic consumption value on attitudes and enhances the positive effect of attitudes on buying intention. Regression analysis results further show moderation effects. Pro-environmental behaviour significantly moderates (interaction with values) the relationship between D2C individualistic consumption value and attitude. This indicates that pro-environmental behaviour strengthens the positive relationship between D2C individualistic consumption value and attitude (see Figure 3). That is, under high pro-environmental behaviour, D2C individualistic consumption value is more strongly related to attitude. However, pro-environmental behaviour does not moderate (interaction with attitude) the relationship between attitude and buying intention. Ethnocentrism significantly and negatively moderates the relationship between D2C individualistic consumption value and attitude (interaction with D2C individualistic consumption value), which indicates that ethnocentrism dampens the positive relationship between D2C individualistic consumption value and attitude (see Figure 4a). That is, under low ethnocentrism, D2C individualistic consumption value is

more strongly related to attitude. Additionally, ethnocentrism significantly and positively moderates the relationship between attitude and buying intention (interaction with attitude), which indicates that ethnocentrism strengthens the positive relationship between attitude and buying intention (see Figure 4b). That is, a high ethnocentric attitude is more strongly related to buying intention.

This study contributes to the literature on consumer online behaviour when buying food products directly from farmers. Its originality lies in the effect of interacting individualistic and collectivistic consumption values to explain consumer motivation for this behaviour. It offers a comprehensive framework suggesting that consumers who buy online directly from farmers are driven by an interaction of individualistic consumption values (such as saving money, obtaining quality and fresh produce) and collectivistic values (pro-environmental behaviour and ethnocentric perception). Embracing a multidimensional approach to individualistic consumption values, this study suggests that individuals' motivation is based on a general weighted perception of value (Fiandari et al., 2019). This weighted individualistic value stimulates hierarchical dynamic processes that form a positive attitude toward online D2C agri-food buying, which in turn leads to buying intention and finally to actual buying. The study further shows that the weighted individualistic consumption value is more effective in motivating a positive attitude toward D2C among those with high pro-environmental behaviour or low ethnocentric perception. Additionally, ethnocentric perception enhances the positive effect of attitude on buying intention. This study's originality lies in the intricate interplay between individualistic and collectivistic consumption values to elucidate consumer motivation in the realm of online direct-to-consumer (D2C) agri-food buying.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

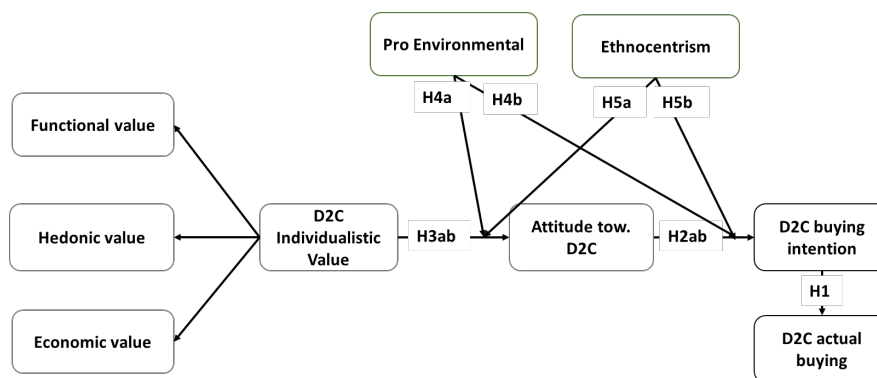
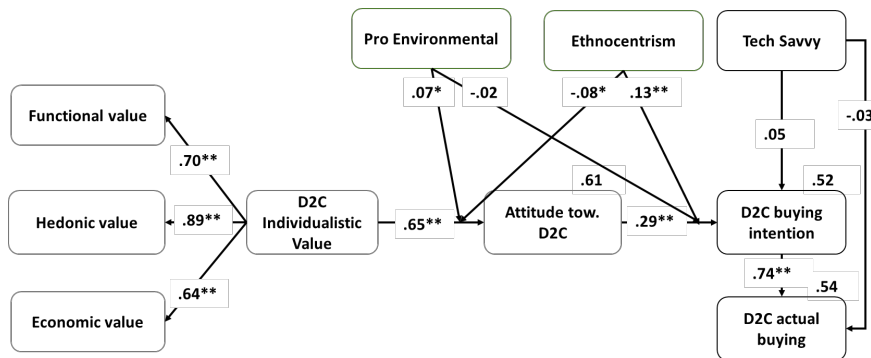


Figure 2. Conceptual Model Testing



Note: Path parameters are standardized parameter estimates;  $R^2$  is depicted in the upper-right corner; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Figure 3. Moderation Effect of Pro-environmental Behavior on the Value-Attitude Relationship.

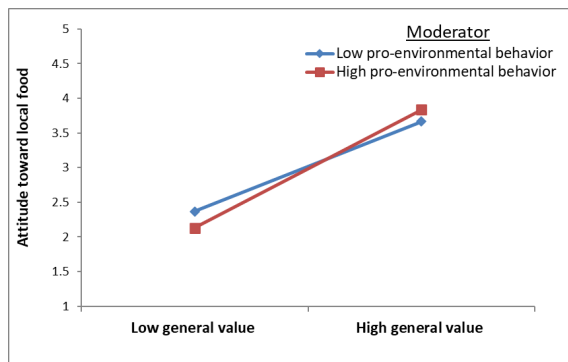


Figure 4a. Moderation Effect of Ethnocentrism on the Values-Attitude Relationship.

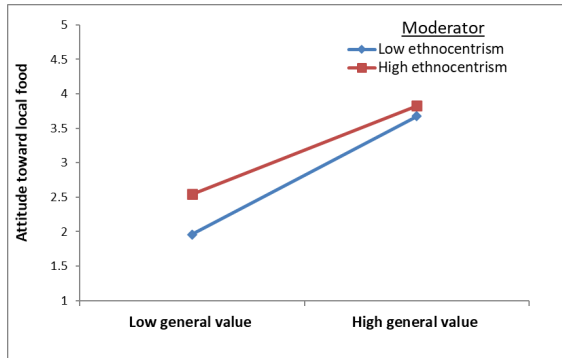


Figure 4b. Moderation Effect of Ethnocentrism on the Attitude-Buying Intention Relationship.

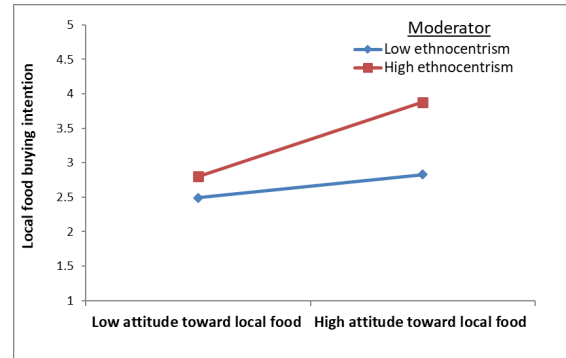


Table 1. Results of hypotheses testing

Relationships	Standardized Effect			Regression Weights (direct)		
	Total	Direct	Indirect	Estimate	C.R.	p
D2C buying intention → Actual D2C buying	.74	.74	.00	.85	21.34	<.01
Attitude toward D2C → D2C buying intention	.29	.29	.00	.35	6.79	<.01
Attitude toward D2C → Actual D2C buying	.21	.00	.21			=.01
Individualistic consumption value → Attitude toward D2C	.65	.65	.00	.75	11.31	<.01
Individualistic consumption value → D2C buying intention	.19	.00	.19			=.01
Pro-environmental behaviour × Attitude toward D2C → D2C buying intention	-.02	-.02	.00	-.03	-.45	>.05
Pro-environmental behaviour × Individualistic consumption value → Attitude toward D2C	.07	.07	.00	.10	2.33	<.05
Ethnocentrism × Attitude toward D2C → D2C buying intention	.13	.13	.00	.19	3.52	<.01
Ethnocentrism × Individualistic consumption value → Attitude toward D2C	-.08	-.08	.00	-.11	-2.47	<.05

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## Enhancing Diversity in the Grocery Shopping Experience: A Call to Action

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**Keywords:** *elderly and disabled customers, customer satisfaction, diversity, grocery shopping, inclusivity, service attributes.*

### Introduction

In today's dynamic retail landscape, the importance of diversity in catering to various customer segments cannot be overstated. The grocery industry serves a diverse customer base, yet the attention to diversity and inclusion remains insufficient. A safe and comfortable shopping experience is something that everyone is entitled to, regardless of age, ability, or background. Therefore, retail brands are responding to this by making their store more consumer-friendly (Williams 2023). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of inclusive customer journeys as drivers for consistent growth. These research findings stress the pivotal role played by fostering a sense of inclusion for all individuals throughout the entire purchasing process. Recent research conducted by Anderson et al. (2023) highlights a compelling correlation between inclusivity in retail and superior performance metrics. Retailers that prioritize inclusivity not only boast high Net Promoter Scores (NPS) but have also consistently outperformed their competitors. The data reveals a remarkable compound annual growth rate of 7.9% from 2019 to 2021 for these inclusive retailers, underscoring the tangible benefits of fostering an inclusive environment within the retail sector.

This paper delves into the facets of diversity, particularly addressing age and disability, within the grocery shopping landscape. Recognizing the significance of inclusion, we explore the need for a more welcoming and supportive retail environment. By categorizing grocery services into intrinsic and extrinsic attributes, we aim to unravel the factors influencing customer satisfaction and highlight the significance of addressing the specific needs of elderly and disabled shoppers.

## **Literature review**

The condition of inclusion manifests when individuals feel a sense of belonging within a group while simultaneously acknowledging their distinctive and unique qualities (Shore et al. 2011). Addressing the pivotal role of catering to specific customer groups, Loiacono & McCoy (2006) posit that businesses aiming for expansion can leverage opportunities in under-invested markets, with a specific focus on individuals with disabilities. They underscore the considerable purchasing power of this demographic, emphasizing the strategic advantage in catering to their needs. Offering services tailored to customers' requirements may help build a stronger, more genuine relationship with them and foster a greater sense of brand loyalty in addition to increasing foot traffic (Williams 2023).

The challenges faced by elderly customers during grocery shopping are illuminated across various studies. In Northern Ireland, Meneely et al. (2009) found that 35% of survey participants faced in-store difficulties related to the environment and available products. Pettigrew et al. (2005) conducted a study specifically addressing the experiences of older shoppers within Australian supermarkets. Their research identified three noteworthy concerns: employee behavior, the effectiveness of shopping equipment (e.g., shopping carts), and the proper arrangement of products on store shelves.

Lesakova (2016) found store staff can enhance shopping satisfaction among elderly customers by providing friendly in-store service in-store. Shelf height concerns, identified by Leighton et al. (1996), remain significant, emphasizing the importance of convenient product placement (Pettigrew et al. 2005; Lesakova 2016).

The existing literature reveals a scarcity of studies addressing inclusiveness and diversity across dimensions like race, age, gender, or disability (Carvalho et al. 2023). Recognizing this gap, companies have a valuable opportunity to tap into diverse customer bases for enhanced business outcomes (Naser et al. 2023).

## **Method**

### ***Netnography***

Online conversations have provided an opportunity for market researchers to get insights into customer attitudes (Jones 1998). Reddit, a public discussion-based platform founded in 2005 (Lee et al. 2021), allows users to join, create, and participate in online communities based on their interests, hobbies, and passions.

## **Findings and discussion**

Analysis of customer comments show that disabled and elderly customers are interested to do their grocery shopping utilizing “shopping carts for disabled customers” and “shopping carts with magnifying glasses”. Reviwing comments also depicts the importance role of “sensory-friendly shopping” for this group of customers. Sensory-friendly shopping aims to make the

shopping experience less busy, noisy, and bright for all shoppers. The “sensory” aspect refers to the senses. The availability of “seating area” was mentioned by customers. In addition, “setting up ‘shopping buddy’” would be so important for helping this group of customers.

**Research model**

To understand the relationship between grocery services and customer satisfaction, a matrix is proposed. By categorizing grocery services into intrinsic and extrinsic attributes, we aim to create a comprehensive framework that captures the diverse dimensions influencing customer satisfaction.

***Intrinsic and extrinsic service attributes***

Addressing a customer's specific concern involves primary or intrinsic qualities (Brechan 2006). Conversely, extrinsic qualities may not be necessary to resolve the primary issue. Differing viewpoints exist regarding the impact of product attributes on customer satisfaction. Building on this, Malekpour et al. (2022) revealed that the interplay between product attributes and customer satisfaction is influenced by the level of competition. Aligned with their findings, the current study's authors categorize service attributes mentioned by customers on Reddit into two groups: intrinsic and extrinsic attributes.

Table 2. Author’s opinion consensus for determining intrinsic and extrinsic service attributes for elderly and disabled customers

Intrinsic service attributes	Extrinsic service attributes
Specific shopping carts (e.g., Caroline carts; motorized carts)	Quiet or relaxed shopping hours
Seating area availability	Mobility aid check-in area
	Shopping carts with magnifying glasses
	Inclusive customer service (setting up ‘shopping buddy’)

Source: Authors data elaboration

**Proposition 1.** In situations of low competitive intensity, where few stores offer these intrinsic service attributes, the presence of these attributes contributes positively to customer satisfaction. Conversely, the absence of these attributes negatively impacts repurchase intentions (Quadrant 3).

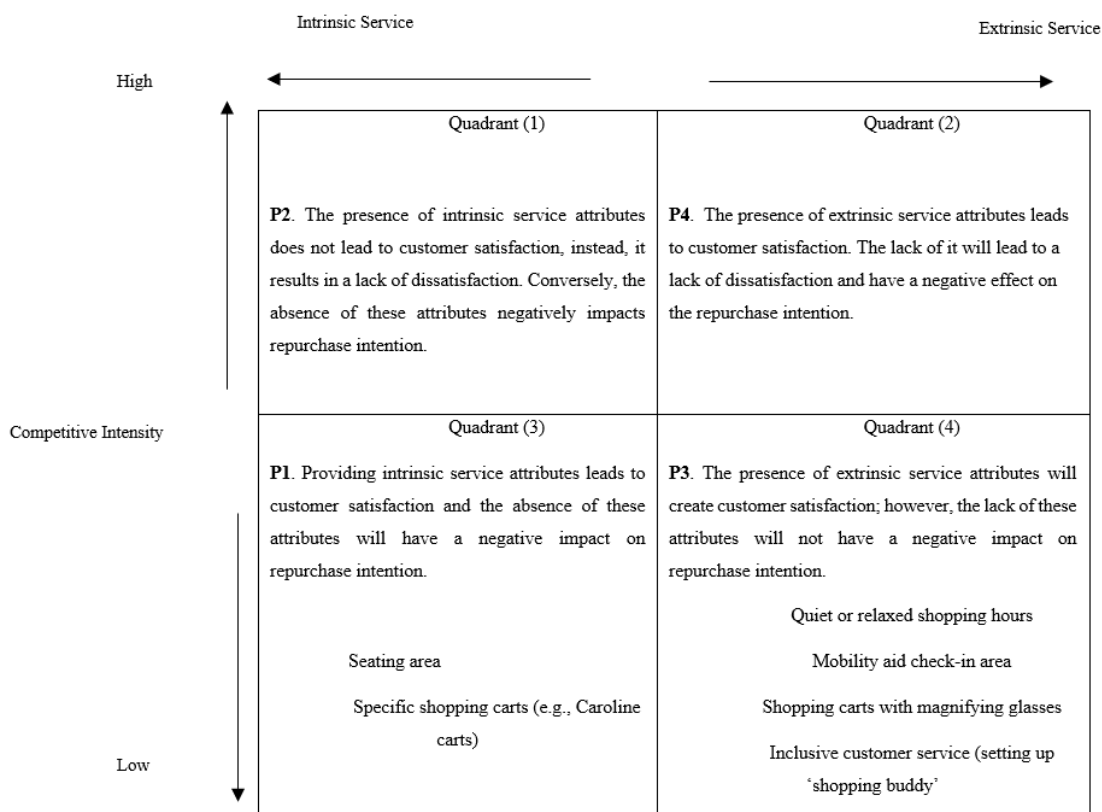
**Proposition 2.** In situations of high competitive intensity, where majority of stores incorporate intrinsic attributes such as specific shopping carts for disabled customers or seating areas for elderly customers as standard features, customer expectations are shaped accordingly. In such

cases, the mere presence of these attributes does not contribute to customer satisfaction; instead, their absence leads to a sense of dissatisfaction. The absence of these attributes, considered as standard in the majority of grocery shopping experiences, negatively influences repurchase intentions (Quadrant 1).

**Proposition 3.** In situations of low competitive intensity, where few stores offer these extrinsic service attributes, the presence of them will create customer satisfaction, however, the lack of these attributes will not have a negative impact on repurchase intention (Quadrant 4).

**Proposition 4.** In situations of high competitive intensity, where the majority of stores incorporate extrinsic attributes such as quiet shopping hours or assistance service for elderly customers as standard features, customer expectations are shaped accordingly. In such cases, the mere presence of these attributes does not contribute to customer satisfaction, in addition, their absence leads to a lack of dissatisfaction. (Quadrant 2). Fig. 1 shows the proposed research matrix and suggested service attributes.

Fig. 1. Proposed research matrix / Service placement according to competitive intensity



(Source: adapted from Malekpour et al. 2022)

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## Conclusions and discussion

In conclusion, customers, spanning various age groups and health levels, share a common desire to feel included in the context of grocery shopping. These shared sentiments highlight the discerning nature of customers actively seeking inclusivity in their shopping experiences. Anecdotal feedback underscores the significance of tailored grocery services for these specific groups and emphasizes the perceived value of creating an inclusive atmosphere. The examination of customer posts on Reddit reveals instances where the current services of some grocery stores inadvertently make certain age groups of customers feel excluded or rejected. In essence, this comprehensive exploration serves as a call to action for retailers to reevaluate and enhance their approaches, recognizing the diverse needs of their customer base and striving for inclusivity in every aspect of the grocery shopping experience. In the exploration aimed at enhancing the grocery shopping experience for older and disabled individuals, the study illuminates the multitude of challenges faced by these demographics in the supermarket environment.

This research suggestions aim to improve the shopping experiences for elderly and disabled customers in a grocery context. Implementing them fosters inclusive and accessible shopping environments for all customers. Including seating areas, assistance services, and innovative design principles aligns with the broader objective of promoting diversity in corporate and marketing communication. These initiatives not only address the specific needs of older customers but also contribute to fostering a more inclusive corporate and market environment on a global scale.

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## Tackling End-Consumer Skepticism in the Digital Age

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**Keywords:** *Customer-entrepreneurs, Scepticism, Authenticity*

In the modern digital economy, a new type of customer has emerged. Moving beyond the traditional role of "passive buyers," these individuals now leverage digital platforms to conduct their own business ventures. This shift away from customers' pre-defined roles in the business models of digital platform providers (Cusumano et al., 2020), to become proactive commercial actors, means a new set of proactive entrepreneurs has emerged into the online business landscape. These customers create and capture value through their own digital entrepreneurship, exploiting commercial opportunities using digital technologies and platforms.

They seek to commercialize products or services with which they are familiar by starting a business selling the products or services they currently use, thus becoming valuable assets for organizations. This platform-based informal economy is flourishing and expanding as customer-entrepreneurs provide value to myriad end-consumers in a manner that is not available in the formal economy.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore how end-consumers perceive the motives of customer-entrepreneurs, and how these perceptions affect their level of scepticism towards them. The ways in which consumers draw inferences about marketers' motives have been explored through the prism of attribution theory, which addresses the processes by which individuals evaluate the motives of others and explains how these perceived motives influence subsequent attitudes and behaviour (Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Understanding how end-consumers perceive customer-entrepreneurs, and the outcomes of these perceptions, is therefore essential, with practical implications for the growing number of firms who are using customer-entrepreneurs to promote and sell their products. This study therefore has practical implications for organizations and practitioners, as well as making a significant contribution to knowledge.

In terms of exploring perceived motivation, extrinsic motives have been found to trigger consumer scepticism (i.e. a tendency to disbelieve), while intrinsic motives have the reverse effect, inhibiting scepticism (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). These perceptions may vary, depending on previous experience. Alongside consumers' tendency towards trust or scepticism, their craving for authenticity is also highly significant. Research reveals that what consumers perceive as authentic must conform to their mental frames of how things "ought to be."

This study therefore examines end-customers' perceptions of the authenticity of customer-entrepreneurs, defining perceived authenticity as consumers' subjective belief that a person is behaving according to his or her true self (Moulard et al., 2015).

This study therefore explores how end-consumers perceive customer-entrepreneurs, and the subsequent impacts on attitudes and behaviours. We present a conceptual model and hypotheses exploring the pathways between end-users' perceptions of both the motives and authenticity of customer-entrepreneurs, their level of scepticism towards the customer-entrepreneurs, the effect of previous experience, and the outcomes of satisfaction, loyalty, and purchase intention.

This study employs a quantitative approach to test the relationship between the study variables. I am looking for a sample of at least 600 participants. The participants are end-consumers who had experience in dealing with customer-entrepreneurs. The data is collected through a professional research agency in the UK.

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## Session 6.1 AI and platform communication

### AI-assisted corporate reputation prediction using social listening data from the internet

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**Keywords:** *Corporate Reputation, Media Reputation, Prediction, Artificial Intelligence*

### Introduction

A company's corporate reputation is the way in which its future prospects and past actions and perceived by stakeholders. It describes how it is viewed in comparison to competitors (Fombrun, 2012) and is a collectively formed representation (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). Reputation can thus be understood as a superordinate variable that encompasses all perceptions.

### Literature review

Based on the theoretical understanding of what reputation is, various approaches to measuring reputation have developed. Fombrun et al.'s (2000) Reputation Quotient forms a major part of the conceptual framework for the present study. It holds that corporate reputation can be measured in terms of 6 different dimensions: profitability, management, products and services, workplace environment created by the company as an employer, sustainability and emotional appeal. The first five of these dimensions are functional, meaning that although they rely on subjective interpretations, they relate to various different elements of the firm itself. The final category of emotional appeal deals with whether people have a positive emotional response to the organisation, admire it, and/or exhibit trust towards it (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004).

Deephouse (2000) came up with the term "media reputation" to describe the evaluation of a company that is presented via the media. He stated that this evaluation can often take in the plethora of different information sources that the media draws upon. These sources are then party to the subjective interpretation of journalists (Deephouse, 2000). Deephouse (2000)

conceptualised media depictions of a firm's reputation as providing signals to the public about what their opinion about the organisation should be (Deephouse, 2000).

Theory from the field of media effects research can be applied to media reputation in order to explain the underlying mechanisms for corporate reputation and shed light upon its effects. The roots of contemporary media-effects research lie in the research phase that took place in the 1920s, which focussed upon the concept of "strong media". This entails the notion that large, strong media mould the population's opinions (Wiemann, 2014).

However, the changing face of media has meant that this theory is now viewed by some as being outdated (Gleich, 2019). The idea that the impact that the media has upon people is significantly affected by a plethora of other factors and merely modifies existing opinions has also since challenged the notion of strong media, leading to "weak media" replacing it (Wiemann, 2014).

Valkenburg et al. (2016) claim that traditional media-effects theories fail to adequately deal with mass self-communication, as they do not account for the possibility that the self-focussed nature of this communication means that their transmission influences the sender as well as the receiver, which is a phenomenon known as the "expression effect".

However, in spite of the numerous theories that exist on the media effects of social media, findings from media effects research have not yet been reflected within media reputation research. This is most likely due to the fact that users as senders are found in social media, which has not adequately been considered in reputation research.

### **Preliminary results**

Against this background, a study was conducted with the research question of the extent to which media reputation based on social listening data can predict corporate reputation in five functional reputation factors according to Fombrun.

For this analysis, all public communication on the Internet in Germany was crawled on around 100,000 news and social media websites, in each case 4 weeks before the respective date of a reputation survey using market research. The database of this study thus comprises more than 400,000 statements on the companies analysed.

Due to the large number of statements, manual coding was not possible. Artificial intelligence tools were used for this, in a combination of an analysis approach with lexical lists and neurolinguistic networks that were trained through supervised learning. Six AI tools were used: one for sentiment analysis and five for the five functional reputation dimensions according to Fombrun et al. (2000).

Two market research studies were conducted for this study:

1. On the one hand, a population-representative market research with 1,000 citizens over 18 years of age in Germany on the reputation of 20 companies from the DAX index. At the same time, all statements from news and social media about these companies were collected from the German-language internet in the four weeks prior to the market research. For each of the five functional reputation dimensions, a so-called reputation heartbeat was formed, which adds up the shares of positive, negative or neutral statements in a reputation dimension to the respective total number of statements in this reputation dimension, weighted with the correlation weights of the respective variables. Thus, 15 relative variables were formed (3 tonalities in 5 functional reputation dimensions).
2. The Reputation Heartbeat Indices for the five reputation dimensions were tested using the second data set. This is population-representative market research on 10 companies from the DAX indices with 1,000 citizens over the age of 18 in eight waves, each with a time interval of two weeks. Here, too, all statements on the ten companies from news and social media were available four weeks before the respective market research wave.

It can be seen that the Reputation Heartbeat Indices can predict the corporate reputation values determined by means of market research with a high R2 and high significance:

Reputation Heartbeat	R2	Adjusted R2	p-value
Management	0.6041	0.599	2.2e-16
Profitability	0.5803	0.575	2.301e-16
Product & Service	0.5253	0.5192	2.945e-14
Sustainability	0.4844	0.4778	7.672e-13
Employer	0.4624	0.4555	4.013e-12

*Table 1: Prediction quality of the Reputation Heartbeat Indices in corporate reputation.*

In the present study, the Reputation Heartbeat Indices approach has succeeded in demonstrating a significantly higher explanatory power of media reputation for corporate reputation than in all previous research approaches in the now 25 years of media reputation research. This is of great importance for practical use in corporate reputation management, because the statements in news and social media can be crawled almost in real time and coded with the help of artificial intelligence tools, so that reputation measurements are available extremely promptly and at low cost - in contrast to traditional market research.

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## **From Twitter to X: Studying the effects of Musk’s takeover and rebranding of the social networking platform on webcare practices**

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**Keywords:** *customer communication, webcare, social media, Twitter/X, corpus linguistics*

The social networking site Twitter, now X, had established a solid role and reputation as a platform frequently used in stakeholder communication by late 2022. It was used regularly for customer service interactions (Lutzky 2021) and served as a platform that customers could turn to when they needed to ask a company questions or wanted to complain. At the same time, businesses took advantage of Twitter’s affordances to foster the organizational goals of webcare by interacting with their customers and engaging in reputation management and marketing (van Noort et al. 2015).

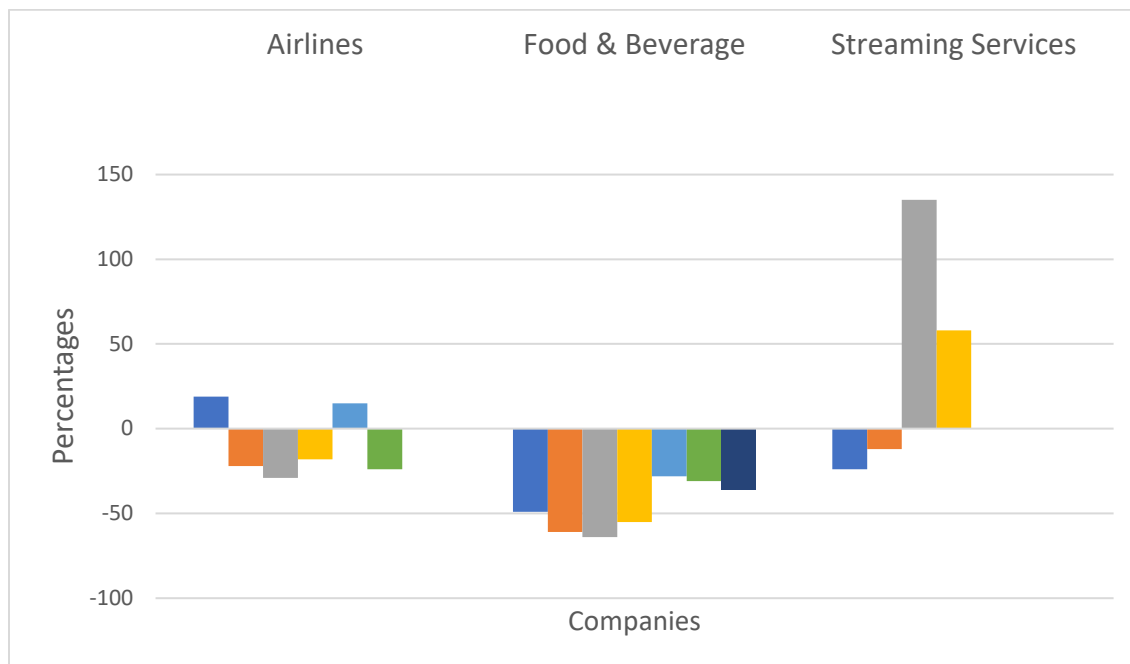
Its takeover by Elon Musk in October 2022 resulted in a rebranding of the platform as X, which entailed next to the name change the corresponding change in logo, marking the end of the iconic blue Twitter bird (Milmo 2023). In addition to the rebranding, however, several controversial decisions were made regarding the running of the platform, which included less thorough approaches to content moderation, the reinstating of banned accounts, or the discontinuation of measures aimed at ensuring safety on the platform (Milmo 2022, Paul and Dang 2022, Zakrzewski, Menn and Nix 2022). As a consequence, extremist and right-wing content surged and X was found to feature the highest rate of disinformation in an EU report comparing fake news across social media platforms (Bump 2023, O’Carroll 2023).

This paper aims to study webcare on Twitter by comparing its use before the takeover by Musk to the period following it. To this end, a large corpus of more than 75 million words and 4.6 million tweets was compiled before the Twitter API was closed for free academic access in March 2023. The corpus includes tweets by seventeen US companies from three industries (airline, food and beverage, and streaming services) and their customers. The US Corporate Twitter Corpus (UCTC) spans one and a half years, reaching from 1 September 2021 to 28 February 2023. It will be explored through a corpus linguistic methodology, which aims to identify patterns of language use in large data sets (Collins 2019). A keyword analysis, which is a specific type of corpus linguistic approach, will allow for the tweets posted before the takeover (target corpus) to be compared to the tweets following it (reference corpus) to identify those words that appear more frequently than expected and are thus statistically significant in the two data sets respectively.

Initial findings indicate that the change in ownership had an effect on the tweet volume produced by the three industries studied and their customers. While the monthly average of US airlines' tweet volume decreased by around a fifth, that of the food and beverage industry almost halved. On the other hand, streaming services saw the monthly average of tweets almost double during the four months following the takeover. When taking a closer look at the specific companies studied, it turns out that there were a couple of outliers. While the average tweet volume of most airlines studied dropped, as Figure 1 shows, the airlines Alaska Airlines (19%) and Southwest Airlines (14%) saw a noticeable increase. Likewise, for two of the streaming services numbers decreased, whereas for the remaining two the number of tweets increased rather sharply, with Netflix tweets more than doubling (135%) and Amazon Prime witnessing a rise by 58%.

The question, of course, remains why exactly these companies showed an increased tweet volume. To uncover possible explanations for these developments, I separated the tweets posted by the respective companies from those addressed to them by customers. This revealed that for both Alaska and Southwest Airlines the average number of monthly tweets customers addressed to the airlines increased by more than half after October 2022. For Alaska Airlines, this was because the company posted several giveaway tweets, announcing that followers could, for example, win a flight if they followed the airline and replied to its tweet. The airline thus focused on the webcare goal of marketing (van Noort et al. 2015) and used Twitter to engage its followers and promote its brand. On the other hand, for Southwest Airlines, the reason was the airline's scheduling crisis which led to numerous flight cancellations over Christmas in 2022, also described as a "holiday meltdown" in the media, leaving 2 million passengers stranded (Shepardson 2023). In this case, the webcare goal of customer care (van Noort et al. 2015) thus moved into the focus of the airline's Twitter activity.

**Figure 1.** Tweet volume per company in the UCTC after October 2022



For the US airlines included in the UCTC, an overall drop in the tweet volume can thus be observed after October 2022, with two exceptions serving two different webcare goals. When complementing these findings with a keyword analysis (Collins 2019), results show that the webcare focus of airlines prior to Musk was on marketing and consumer engagement. This is reflected in keywords such as *getaway*, *spring*, *break*, *mountain* and *beaches*, as well as the imperative forms *tweet* and *book*, encouraging followers to engage in a conversation about destinations and promoting the airlines’ offers. On the other hand, the focus shifts to customer service related keywords after October 2022, when the top keywords include forms such as *case*, *opened*, *tackling*, *solution* and *invite*, reflecting the conversation social media managers engage in with customers about their specific cases and the problems they encounter.

For US streaming services, a shift towards Netflix and Prime is noticeable after October 2022, two companies that saw significant increases in the average tweet volume per month as Figure 1 shows. For Netflix, this higher tweet volume is linked to the fact that customer tweets addressed to the company more than doubled, which also entailed a rise in the average number of tweets posted in response to customer tweets. The reason for this development was news of the fantasy action series “Warrior Nun” being discontinued. This triggered a fan movement set to save the Netflix series, which involved, for example, addressing tweets with the hashtag *#savewarriornun* to Netflix and is reflected in top keywords such as *warrior*, *nun*, and *warriornun* in customer tweets posted in late 2022 and early 2023.

Compared to the other companies showing an increase in tweet volume after the takeover of the platform by Elon Musk, Amazon Prime is the only company where this was due to a rise in the average monthly tweets by the company itself, rather than its customers. This included an increase by more than one fifth of Prime’s original posts used to advertise its services, as well as an explosion in tweets addressing specific followers, which were six times higher than before October 2022. When exploring these response tweets in more detail, it turns out that they are mainly used for marketing purposes, informing followers, for example, of the start of a new show or a sneak peek. This also becomes evident when studying the corporate keywords for Prime in the period following the takeover, where both *opt* and *stop* are top keywords, usually co-occurring in the phrase *reply #stop to opt out*, and thus offering followers the option of unsubscribing from promotional tweets of this kind.

For streaming services in the UCTC, the keyword analyses have thus revealed that customer voices supporting specific series become more prominent and the marketing goal of webcare is foregrounded for individual companies. Keywords include forms pertaining to specific shows, mainly on Netflix and Prime, as well as interactive phrases, informing followers that they can, for instance, decode an invitation to a sneak peek. Overall, this study offers insights into the specific effects the changes to the platform and its ownership have had on communication and webcare practices of the three different industries studied. It has highlighted an overall drop in tweet volume across all industries, with individual exceptions when it comes to the communication of specific companies. At the same time, the keyword analyses have shown that those companies showing an increase in tweet volume followed different webcare goals: some pursued the marketing goal of webcare and used Twitter to promote its services, whereas others mainly focused on customer care. While this research only explored a snapshot of corporate Twitter usage after the platform’s takeover by Elon Musk, it also paves the way for future research which will need to investigate the changes in corporate communication on X on a larger scale.

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## The impact of human-like chatbots on brand purchase intentions: the moderation effect of privacy concerns, and brand innovativeness

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**Keywords:** Chatbots, Purchase intention, AI-driven marketing, privacy concerns, Brand innovativeness

### Introduction

An impactful trend in AI-powered marketing involves the integration of chatbots—virtual conversational agents designed to simulate authentic human dialogues. These bots facilitate diverse interactions with consumers, serving both general inquiries and specific task-oriented engagements. (Bock et al., 2020). These chatbots deliver immediate, personalized, and automated communication, adeptly handling user inquiries (Sundar, 2020). Prior research has predominantly regarded chatbots as self-service technology, unveiling numerous opportunities within relational marketing. (Patel and Trivedi, 2020). In this sense, Dwivedi et al. (2019) highlighted a significant limitation by emphasizing the inclusion of attitude in major explication of chatbot context. Despite the considerable potential of chatbots, research exploring the impact of brand innovativeness on user adoption of chatbots remains limited (Cuong et al., 2022). This study aims to extend our model by examining brand innovativeness as a moderating factor specifically within the realm of online purchases. With heightened concerns about personal data security and privacy among consumers (De Cosmo et al., 2021), the issue of privacy protection gains paramount significance in the context of chatbots, especially within AI-based interactions (Davenport et al., 2020).

### Literature review

#### *Perceived intelligence:*

Based on the marketing literature the concept of perceived intelligence is defined as the subjective evaluation of intelligence effectiveness, usefulness, goal-oriented behavior, autonomy, ability to generate meaningful outputs, and proficiency in processing natural

language (Moussawi 2018). According to Balakrishnan et al's (2022) study, the perceived intelligence of service chatbots is a critical factor in shaping users' attitudes towards these systems. Therefore, we can confirm the causality between perceived intelligence and the attitude.

**H1: The perceived intelligence would have a positive effect on attitude**

***Perceived anthropomorphism:***

The utilization of human-like features in technological objects, such as robots and personal intelligent agents, is intended to enhance their capacity for meaningful social interactions. These interactions necessitate the incorporation of human-like qualities in either physical appearance or behavior (Duffy 2003). Therefore, we can confirm the causality between perceived anthropomorphism and the attitude.

**H2: The perceived anthropomorphism would have a positive effect on attitude**

***2.3. Attitude:***

Originally, the concept of attitude was considered by the study of Mitchell and Olson (1981) as an individual's internal evaluation of the brand. Mogaji et al's (2021) study adopts the UTAUT model and employs qualitative research to investigate users' attitudes towards chatbots in financial services. The positive attitude towards the brand plays a significant role in shaping individuals' decision-making process and their intention to convert their positive perception into actual purchase behavior.

**H3: Attitude has a positive impact on purchase intention.**

***Privacy concerns:***

Privacy concerns refer to individuals' worries or reservations regarding the privacy and security of their personal information when interacting with a chatbot. This concept, encapsulating individual unease about personal data handling in online settings have consistently shown a negative moderation effect on perceived intelligence and anthropomorphism's influence on attitude when it comes in the use of new technology (Adyantari, 2022). This hypothesis suggests that these privacy concerns can negatively moderate the relationship between individuals' perception of the intelligence exhibited by a chatbot and their attitude.

**H4: privacy concerns negatively moderate the relationship between perceived intelligence and attitude.**

Studies by Adyantari (2022) and Ischen et al. (2020) have elucidated that when users perceive chatbots as human-like, it amplifies their worries about privacy. Consequently, users, driven by these privacy apprehensions, exhibit a negative shift in their attitudes towards chatbots. This hypothesis proposes that AI information privacy concerns acting as a negative moderator on

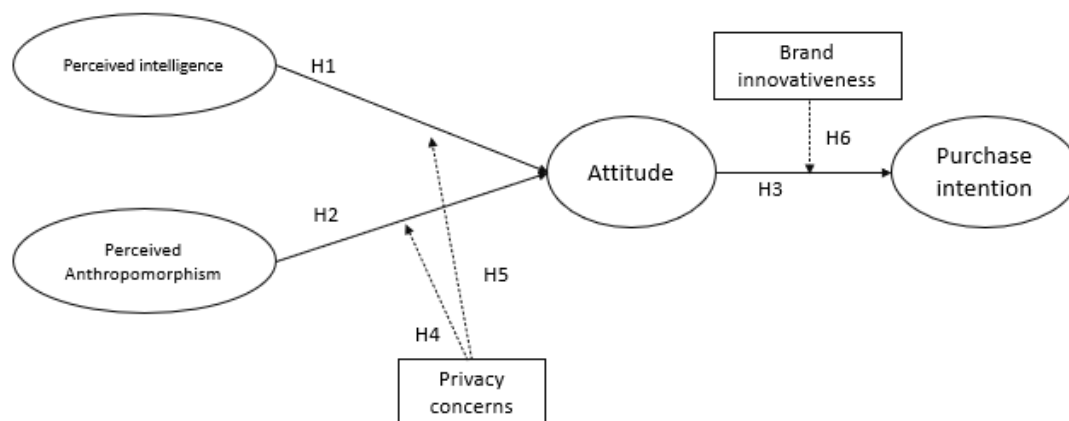
the relationship between individuals' perception of anthropomorphic qualities in a chatbot and their attitude.

**H5: privacy concerns negatively moderate the relationship between perceived anthropomorphism of a chatbot and attitude.**

In the context of chatbot-based services, research by Eisingerich and Rubera (2010), underlines the profound influence of brand innovativeness on consumers' perceptions and acceptance of chatbots. This hypothesis proposes that brand innovativeness plays a positive moderating role on the relationship between individuals' attitude and their purchase intention through a chatbot (Shams et al 2017).

**H6: Brand innovativeness positively moderates the relationship between attitude and purchase intention through a chatbot.**

Informed by a comprehensive review of literature, Figure 1 integrates our model.



**Figure 1: Conceptual model**

## Method

We used an online survey targeting 397 respondents familiar with chatbots, ensuring a balanced gender distribution (56.66% male, 43.34% female) and diverse age representation (60.72% younger, 39.28% older).

## Discussion

Based on the results from our study, we can confirm that H1 which suggested a correlation between perceived intelligence on brand attitude, was supported. However, our findings align with the ideas by Popova and Zagulova (2022), demonstrating that consumers who perceive a

chatbot as intelligent are more likely to adopt a positive and favourable attitude towards the brand that utilizes the chatbot. Thus, our study allows for the generalization of this observation to the use of a chatbot. Furthermore, our results highlight the importance of perceived anthropomorphism in shaping brand attitude (Balakrishnan et al's, 2022). Therefore, hypothesis H2 is accepted. Based on the findings of various studies, including those by De Cosmo et al (2021), there is compelling evidence supporting the significant impact of brand attitude on consumers' intentions to use. This suggests that a positive attitude toward employing chatbots leads to an increased intention to use and purchase them. Thus, H3 is confirmed. Our analysis reveals that privacy concerns play a significant negative moderating role in the relationship between perceived intelligence and anthropomorphism of chatbots and brand attitude. Previous research, such as the study by Maseeh et al (2021), has confirmed that privacy concerns serve as a negative moderator for user engagement regarding data collection and gathering. Also, our research suggests also that when consumers perceive a brand as innovative and continuously adopting new technologies in their communication with customers, they perceive the brand as being innovative. This observation aligns with the study conducted by Ameen et al (2021), which found similar results.

## Conclusions

This study examined how perceived intelligence and anthropomorphism impact attitudes towards service chatbots and purchase intention through chatbots. The findings demonstrate that all these independent variables significantly contribute to shaping attitudes regarding chatbot usage. Overall, users experience a paradoxical situation when engaging with technology, appreciating brand innovation while simultaneously expressing concerns about data privacy and security.

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## Wisdom of the crowd or people like me? Preferences between volume and similarity in eWOM

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**Keywords:** *electronic word-of-mouth, similarity, volume of reviews, online reviews, product type, involvement, display format.*

In recent years, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has become more relevant and needed, shifting the paradigm of marketing communication from marketing-sponsored communication to customer-to-customer channels (Verma, & Yadav, 2021). In eWOM, marketers have many technological options to manage and arrange reviews (Chen & Xie, 2008). Some websites allow consumers to choose between viewing all possible reviews - high volume and low similarity, or filtering reviews for certain groups - increasing the level of similarity while sacrificing volume, (e.g., Booking.com). As a result, during their search process, consumers may face the need to choose between obtaining more relevant reviews from reviewers who are more similar to them (higher similarity), vs. maximizing the “wisdom of the crowd” (higher volume). Both volume and similarity have been found to be critical for consumer choices in eWOM (Filieri, 2015; Majumder, Gupta, & Paul, 2022; Reichelt, Sievert, & Jacob, 2014). However, the two cannot be mutually maximized and consumers must tradeoff one to gain the other. It is also reasonable to predict that consumers’ preference between volume and similarity, may be affected by the purchasing situation, when different types of product and levels of involvement are involved (Babic' Rosario et al., 2016; Li, et al., 2020; Lin, Lu, & Wu, 2012; Lis, 2013). In addition, the display format of the group of similar others (in absolute numbers or percentages) can be a factor in the decision-making process (DeVecchio, Krishnan, & Smith, 2007; Weathers, Swain, & Carlson, 2012).

Thus, the question is under which conditions consumers will be willing to sacrifice the volume of reviews to gain higher levels of similarity and vice versa. In order to address this question, we carried out a series of online studies

Our aim of the first study was to examine whether consumers’ preferences between volume and similarity in eWOM are affected by the product type or by the level of involvement. 536 online-panel participants, saw 4 different purchasing situations in a 2 X product type (hedonic vs.

utilitarian) by 2 X level of involvement (high vs. low), online design. For each situation, participants were asked to rank 5 options for the reviews, ranging from higher volume (all possible reviews) to higher similarity (reviews from consumer who are more like them, based on several demographic attributes), on a scale of 1-5 (1 - the most preferred option to 5 - the least preferred option), according to their own preferences.

The effects of both independent variables; product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and involvement (high vs. low) on the preferences average rank were tested using a MANOVA. The results indicate that the effect of the product type was significant. Participants preferred similarity over volume more, for the hedonic products and volume over similarity more, for the utilitarian products (Wilk's Lambda = 0.962,  $F(4,2126) = 21.26$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The involvement effect was also significant: similarity preference was higher for the high level of involvement than for the low level of involvement (Wilk's Lambda = 0.976,  $F(4,2126) = 13.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results also show a significant interaction between the product type and involvement as, the preference towards similarity increases for the hedonic-high involvement products (Wilk's Lambda = 0.994,  $F = 3.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The aim of second study was to explore how consumers tradeoff volume to similarity under different levels of similarity. Participants had to choose between different masked audiobooks of a specific genre (fantasy or biographies): one that was selected by “all reviewers” vs. one that was selected by “X reviewers most similar to you”. The “reviewers like you” were a subset of all reviewers whose characteristics were said to be the most similar to the participant’s, based on their previous answers to a set of demographic questions (gender, age group and marital status). 294 Prolific participants made a choice between two masked audiobooks for 5 levels of similarity/volume (10 similar reviewers/100 total, 20/100, 25/100, 33/100, 50/100), in a within-subjects design. For each product, participants were asked to rate their preference on a scale from 1 (strongly prefer the audiobook that was rated higher by all reviewers) to 4 (strongly prefer the audiobook that was rated higher by X reviewers most similar to you). As predicted, we found no significant effect for the book genre, however, we found a significant effect for the levels of similarity; the higher the amount of similar others, out of all total reviewers, the more participants tended to follow the advice of similar reviewers (Wilk's Lambda = 0.576,  $F(4, 296) = 54.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Based on the same paradigm, in the third study, we focused on whether the display format of the subset of similar reviews in absolute quantities vs. in percentages would affect people’s preferences towards similarity. 562 Prolific participants were asked to choose between two masked audiobooks: one that was chosen by “all reviewers” vs. one that was chosen by “X reviewers similar to you”. We varied the display format of similar reviewers (N vs. %), between-subjects. Each participant made a choice for 5 levels of similarity (12%, 23%, 34%, 45%, 56%), in a within-subjects design. The results show a higher preference towards similarity (in most levels), when the number of similar others was presented in actual numbers in comparison to percentages. The results of the repeated measure test show a significant effect (Wilk’s lambda = 0.958,  $F(4,553) = 5.994$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).



This research sheds light on the conditions under which consumers are willing to sacrifice volume of reviews in order to gain relevancy and similarity (reviews from people like them), in eWOM. More specifically, it reveals that peoples' preferences depend on the product type, involvement and the ratio between volume and similarity. Moreover, the research shows that consumers' preferences are inconsistent and may be affected by the display format. From a practical perspective, based on our results, in their marketing communication, online reviews marketers could manage online reviews in ways that would appeal to the consumers' preferences and by that to achieve more effective marketing outcomes.

Figures 1. Preference between volume and similarity by product type and involvement.

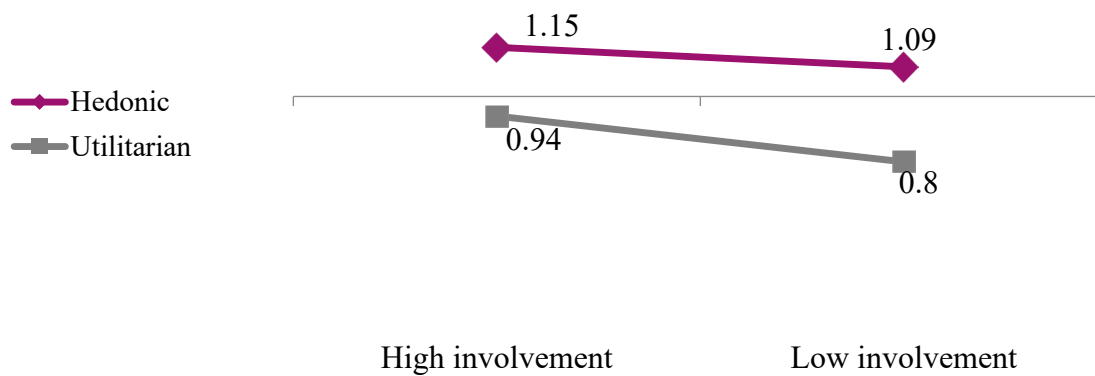


Figure 2: Preferences towards similarity by the ratio of similarity/volume and genre.

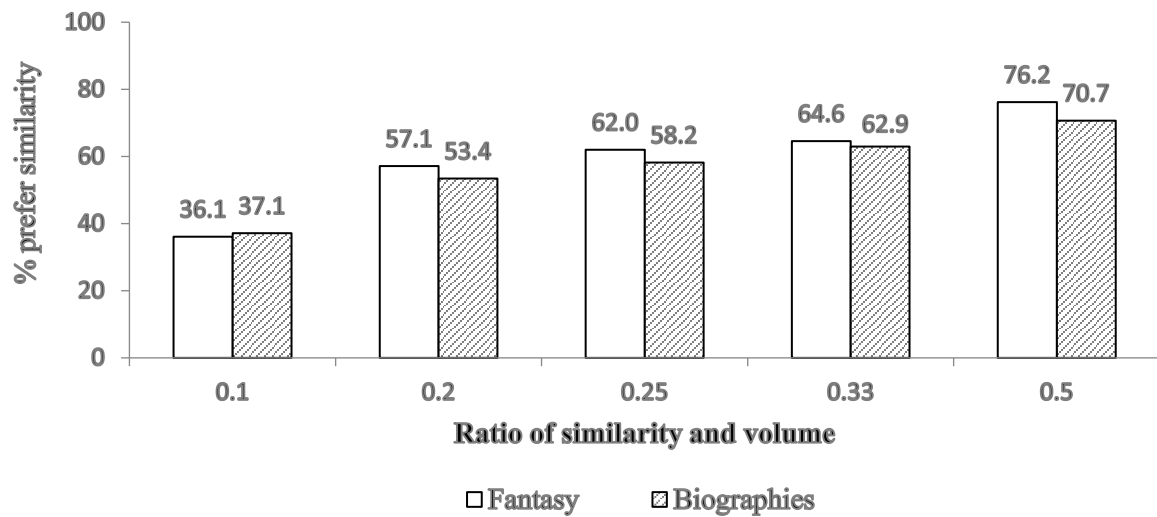
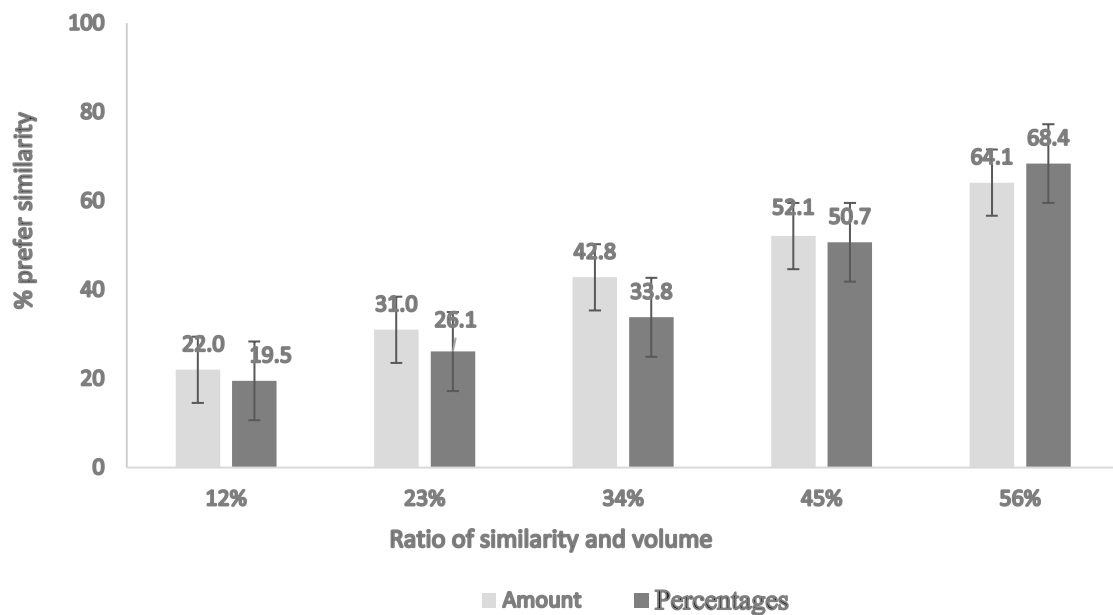


Figure 3. Preference towards similarity by the ratio of similarity and volume and the format of presentation



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## Session 6.2 Young consumers

### The advertising representation of young people by traditional banks: between uniformity and the pursuit of diversity

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#### Introduction

Traditional banks face declining trust from young people due to numerous environmental and financial scandals. Consequently, a significant portion of young individuals express the desire to choose banks that prioritize social and environmental commitments and are open to seek advice from independent advisors outside major banking networks. Moreover, the rise of neobanks, which better meet the needs of the youth, has made this population more volatile for traditional banks.

Despite these challenges, traditional banks continue to focus on young people, prominently featuring them in advertising campaigns and intensifying efforts to attract and retain them.

While several marketing studies have explored strategies traditional banks employ to adapt to youth's evolving needs, none have specifically examined how these banks depict young people in their advertisements and the consequent impact on youths' perceptions and bank choices. However, as Schroeder (2006) emphasizes, *“if marketing depends upon images including brand images, corporate images, product images, and **images of identity**, then research methods in marketing must be capable of addressing issues that such images signify”*. Given young people's increasing sensitivity to stereotypes in advertisements (Pastezeur, 2022), analyzing their perspectives on how traditional banks portray them in their ads seems relevant.

In this study, we sought to answer the following question: *“To what extent does the representation of young people in the advertising campaigns of traditional banks contribute to keeping them at a distance from these institutions?”*

We relied on two propositions:

- **P1:** Young people identify more with diversified representations than with the prototype of youth conveyed by traditional banks.

- **P2:** Young people perceive and appreciate the efforts of traditional banks to renew their representation, aligning it more closely with representations offered by new banks.

## **Literature Review**

### **Prototype: A Central Concept in Advertising Representations**

Advertising relies on prototypes (Cordier & Dubois, 1981) by reflecting subjective perceptions rather than objective reality (Sacriste, 2001). In 2015, Chen emphasized the importance of combating prototypical representations of the elderly in advertisements to address discrimination. In 2021, Shinoda et al. highlighted how prototypical representations of women in advertisements perpetuate gender stereotypes.

### **Diversity: A Key Advertising Strategy for Brands**

Diversity in advertising can be defined as “the equitable and proportionate representation of various groups in a promotional context or specific media” (Eisend, 2022). In 2023, Campbell et al. identified seven forms of diversity in ads. Several authors have shown that diverse representations can influence the attention consumers pay to advertising (Baxter et al., 2016) and brands (Eisend, 2022; Khan & Kalra, 2021; Liljedal et al., 2020).

### **Proximity: A Marketing Concept Borrowed from Social Psychology**

Similarity-attraction principles suggest that likeness strengthens relationships (Byrne, 1971). In marketing, congruence between oneself and the brand is one of the most widely accepted explanation for initial attraction (Elbedweihy et al., 2016), preference, emotional attachment, and consumer loyalty to brands (Kressmann et al., 2006; Malär et al., 2011). According to Ferraro et al. (2013), consumers choose brands that align closely with their identity or the impression they wish to convey.

### **Field Study Protocol**

We realized a semiotic analysis of seven advertising films (Ardhianto, 2019) produced by major French banks and showcasing “young individuals” (INJEP, 2021).

TRADITIONAL BANK	ADVERTISING FILM	DATE	LINK
Crédit Agricole	“Génération formidable”	March 2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqZvrO4L5sA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqZvrO4L5sA</a>
BNP Paribas	“Les Ghostés”	July 2022	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t6-9A9mqV8&amp;ab_channel=Jellyfish">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t6-9A9mqV8&amp;ab_channel=Jellyfish</a>
Banque Populaire	“L'aventure collective”	October 2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEtygc5wxZ4&amp;ab_channel=BanquePopulaire">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEtygc5wxZ4&amp;ab_channel=BanquePopulaire</a>
Caisse d'Epargne	“Jeunes actifs”	August 2022	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-dteo_pA6k&amp;ab_channel=Caisses%27Epargne">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-dteo_pA6k&amp;ab_channel=Caisses%27Epargne</a>
Société Générale	“C'est vous l'avenir”	October 2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDbNiyN0hsg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDbNiyN0hsg</a>
Crédit Mutuel	“Saison 7 épisode 2 - Et du coup voilà !”	September 2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWs_N91XIoQ&amp;ab_channel=Cr%C3%A9ditMutuel">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWs_N91XIoQ&amp;ab_channel=Cr%C3%A9ditMutuel</a>
La Banque Postale	“Quand on a 16 ans on a des convictions. Aujourd'hui La Banque Postale a 16 ans.”	March 2022	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eD6RK51WV80&amp;ab_channel=LaBanquePostale-Publicit%C3%A9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eD6RK51WV80&amp;ab_channel=LaBanquePostale-Publicit%C3%A9s</a>

Subsequently, we conducted semi-structured individual interviews with 16 participants aged between 15 and 30 years old and selected by word of mouth.

During the interviews, we investigated each participant's personal viewpoints on youth-related topics, encompassing their subjective age and key concerns as young individuals. Then, we showed them the commercials to gather their perspective on how young people are portrayed in these films and to observe the influence of these representations on their perception of banks.

## Preliminary Results

### Confusion in the Representation of Youth Ages

In their advertisements, traditional banks tend to downplay physical characteristics associated with young individuals and often assign them responsibilities typically reserved to adults. The mismatch in ages between those shown in bank ads and the youths interviewed may impede their identification and interest in traditional banks.

### Homogenization of the Socio-economic Backgrounds of the Portrayed Youths

Our semiotic analysis revealed that traditional banks often depict young individuals as residing in affluent urban settings and illustrate the world of work as a space of freedom and fulfillment to which all young people are perfectly suited. However, none of the young people interviewed relate to this youth portrayal.

### Towards the Representation of a Diverse Youth

Traditional banks are making efforts to depict a more diverse youth in their advertisements, including ethnic diversity. Participants felt more connected to advertisements featuring diverse individuals, resulting in improved attitudes and increased purchase intentions.

#### Towards the Representation of a Connected Youth

Traditional banks are updating their portrayal of young people by depicting them as digital natives (Octobre, 2019 ; Prensky, 2001) with social and political commitments, aligning with the values and concerns expressed by the interviewed young people.

#### Conclusion

This study examines how traditional banks depict youth in ads and the impact on young consumers' perceptions. Our analysis shows traditional banks often present a prototypical image of youth which may not resonate with modern youth. However, facing competition from neobanks that better match youth habits and values, traditional banks are adjusting their portrayal of youth.

It could be relevant for traditional banks to emphasize cultural diversity to better reflect the identities and experiences of young people from various backgrounds (Cicchelli & Octobre, 2017). Additionally, they should provide young people with genuine and transparent information about their services, without resorting to flattery, to convey a more authentic message (Cornelis & Peter, 2017; Jin et al., 2023; Loebnitz et al., 2022; Shoenberger et al., 2020).

Future research could explore the evolution of youth representation in bank advertisements over time and across various media platforms. Moreover, comparing youth representations by traditional banks in France with those in other countries could provide insights into global cultural and societal influences on youth-bank relationships.

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## The Effects of Parasocial Relationship on Source Credibility and the Consumer-Based Brand Equity Connection in the Context of Brand-Opinion Leader Collaborations on Social Media

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**Keywords:** *parasocial relationship, social media, consumer-based brand equity, source credibility*

The emergence of social media networks (SMNs) has created new opportunities for brand owners to increase brand awareness and image through influencer marketing (Reinikainen et al., 2020; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Although the use of brand-opinion leader collaborations on SMNs is increasing, there is still limited research on their effectiveness and contribution to Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) (Conde & Casais, 2023; Schouten et al., 2020). Scholars suggest exploring how social media enables celebrities to form closer connections with fans, an area that remains underexplored (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). Additionally, few studies directly compare established celebrities and influencers as endorsers, highlighting the need to understand their differing impacts on brand-related constructs like consumer-based brand equity (Schouten et al., 2020; Aw & Labrecque, 2020).

Researchers assert that parasocial relationships positively impact message acceptance (Yuan et al., 2016), brand trust, and credibility (Aw & Labrecque, 2020). Breves et al. (2019) suggest their effectiveness in altering brand perceptions and attracting new consumer segments. Notably, studies reveal that source credibility enhances parasocial relationships (Yuan et al., 2016) and positively influences customer-based brand equity when mediated by brand credibility (Spry et al., 2011). However, there's a gap in research regarding whether parasocial

relationships indirectly affect the connection between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity. Dwivedi et al. (2018) propose exploring if the consumer-endorser connection (parasocial relationship) mediates the effects of source credibility on customer-based brand equity, with potential implications for opinion leader-brand collaborations on social media. Additionally, factors like influencer type (Masuda et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2016) and social media user gender (Al-Emadi & Ben Yahia, 2020; Rihl & Wegener, 2017) are suggested as potential contributors with varying outcomes on source credibility and parasocial relationships.

This research study aims to assess the impact of parasocial relationships on the connections between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity in the context of brand-influencer collaborations on social media. It also investigates the roles that SMN user gender and the type of opinion leader (celebrities vs. influencers) play in these collaborations. The conceptual research model of this study is provided in Figure 1. The research presents its limitations, proposes future research directions, and suggests practical implications for marketers and opinion leaders.

The study was conducted with 310 social media users in Lithuania who were asked to recall any previously seen collaborations on social media and, based on these, assess Source Credibility, Parasocial Relationships (PSR), and CBBE. This research utilized a non-probability convenience sampling technique to recruit participants. The sample comprised individuals who are active social media users and reside in Lithuania. This selection criterion is essential to the focus on opinion leader-brand collaborations in the context of social media. Those who did not use social media or could not recall influencers and influencer-brand collaborations were excluded from the sample.

The research found that source credibility has a positive direct effect on PSR and CBBE, and that PSR has a positive direct impact on CBBE. Furthermore, PSR was found to mediate the relationship between source credibility and CBBE. The type of opinion leader was not found to be a moderator in the relationship between source credibility and PSR, while the gender of SMN users does not moderate the relationships between PSR and CBBE. The results of the hypotheses testing are provided in Table 1.

The study addresses the limited scientific understanding of the effectiveness of brand endorsements by social media personalities and the factors influencing audience responses (Conde & Casais, 2023; Schouten et al., 2020). It contributes to existing literature by examining relationships between source credibility and parasocial relationships (Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Breves et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2016), source credibility and consumer-based brand equity (Dwivedi et al., 2018; Hung et al., 2011; Spry et al., 2011). The study also explores the novel topic of the indirect effect of parasocial relationships on the connection between source credibility and consumer-based brand equity. Additionally, it investigates the impact of gender on parasocial relationships and CBBE relationships, as suggested by Al-Emadi and Ben Yahia (2020). Furthermore, it considers the influence of opinion leader type on the relationship between source credibility and parasocial relationships, aligning with Johns and English's

(2016) call to explore established celebrity endorsements on social media networks, an area insufficiently studied in the academic literature, with few comparisons between established celebrities and influencers as endorser types (Schouten et al., 2020; Wood & Burkhalter, 2014).

Several limitations should be noted for future studies. The sample is predominantly female (66.8%), with underrepresentation in age groups 45-55 years (9.0%) and 55+ years (2.3%). Future research should aim for a more balanced age representation. The assessment of parasocial relationships relies on participants recalling brand-opinion leader collaborations, lacking differentiation between long-term and one-time exposures. A more comprehensive, longitudinal study would provide a deeper understanding, but time constraints prevented its implementation. In the mediation analysis, the direct effect between source credibility and CBBE had a higher coefficient than the indirect effect through parasocial relationships, suggesting the presence of additional variables influencing the link between the independent and dependent variables. This finding contributes to the literature, but further research is needed to identify and evaluate these variables and their relationships.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model

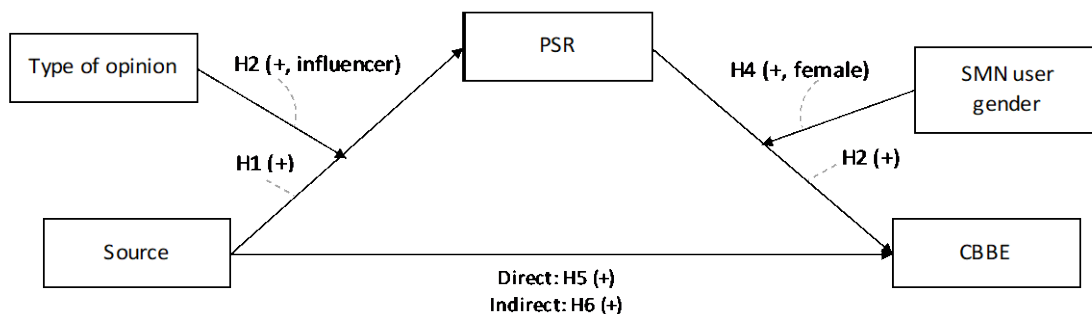


Table 1. Summary of hypotheses testing.

No.	Hypothesis	Status
<b>H1</b>	The credibility of the opinion leader has a direct positive impact on PSR.	Supported
<b>H2</b>	Influencer, as an opinion leader, moderates the effect of source credibility on PSR, such that SMN users are more likely to perceive influencers as credible and form a PSR with them.	Rejected
<b>H3</b>	PSR has a direct positive impact on CBBE.	Supported
<b>H4</b>	Gender of SMN user positively moderates the effect of PSR on CBBE, such that female SMN users are more likely to have better CBBE outcomes when a PSR is established.	Rejected
<b>H5</b>	The credibility of the opinion leader has a direct positive effect on CBBE.	Supported
<b>H6</b>	PSR mediates the relationship between source credibility and CBBE.	Supported

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## Understanding Gen Z consumer-brand identification through Other Customer perception as diversity-driver in marketing strategy

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**Keywords:** other customer, generation Z, other customer perception, consumer-brand identification, national specificity, diversity-driven strategy, mixed methods, multimodal content analysis, perceptual map, social identity theory, social comparison theory, Romania, Adidas

This study addresses knowledge and research gaps concerning the Other Customer concept within the consumer-brand identification paradigm, extending its application beyond the services industry. Specifically, we explore how perceptions of other consumers using or engaging with a brand influence overall brand perception and the extent of consumer identification with the brand (Karaosmanoğlu et al. 2011). We designate Focal Customers (FC) for those forming perceptions about the brand and Other Customers (OC) for those influencing the perception of Focal Customers through their brand use. This distinction sheds light on the dynamic relationship between the brand and the customer, which is not limited to direct interactions.

Previous research on the Other Customer concept focused on perception and its effects in the services and hospitality industries, limiting literature in several ways: it tends to emphasize outcomes, overlooks the configuration and dynamics of perception, neglects national and social cultural specifics, primarily addresses brick-and-mortar settings, lacks generational specificity, and often disregards perceptions formed over time without direct interactions (Heinonen, Jaakkola, and Neganova 2018).

Informed by Social Identity Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Other Customer Perception (OCP), our study investigates the components of OCP (perceived similarity, physical appearance and behaviour suitability) through a multi-stage mixed-methods approach. We look at how Gen Z consumers construct the image of other consumers of international product brands (Adidas) at national level (Romania). We examine demographic profiles, physical appearance, personality, lifestyle, and purchase behaviour, looking into how Gen Z Focal Customers perceive Other Customer, peer identification, and self-brand identification. This shift from customer-to-customer interactions in the service industry to social identities and perceptions related to product brands in a non-context specific setting was additionally considered from a national specificity perspective and how it influenced perceived similarity in Focal Customer-Other Customer-brand identification. This created a different focus for

diversity discussions, centered on Other Customers and the impact of their diversity on brand image.

For this study, we chose Adidas, an international brand with a significant history in the Balkans in general and in Romania in particular. In the context of Romania's Communist regime, where Nike was a symbol of the West and prohibited, Adidas, already present in the country and throughout the Balkans, was a status symbol.

In our study the Focal Customers were 90 young adults (79 women and 11 men), all Gen Z, born between 2000 and 2004, averaging 19 years old and studying in Bucharest, the capital of Romania.

We developed the study around three research questions:

RQ1. How do Gen Z customers perceive Other Customers of the Adidas brand in Romania?

RQ2. How do Gen Z customers' perceptions of Other Customers' identity relate to their perceptions of the Adidas brand?

RQ3. How do Gen Z customers' perceptions of Other Customers' identity relate to their self-image as Focal Customers?

We utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to explore Gen Z young adults' perceptions of Other Customers (OCs) regarding Adidas. Participants from a convenience sample engaged in activities across multiple rounds. In Round 1, they created profiles of Adidas OCs for analysis using Multimodal Content Analysis (MMCA) and Social Network Analysis (SNA) to assess OCP dimensions. Round 2 involved evaluating and assigning values to Adidas brand dimensions, creating perceptual maps reflecting Focal Customers' perceptions. These maps also assessed Focal Customer-Other Customer-brand image similarity. Round 3 included a survey to evaluate OCP's impact on Focal Customer-brand identification, focusing on perceived similarities in this context among the 90 participants.

Results showed a fragmented socio-professional profile of Adidas Other Customers (OCs), characterized by diverse personality and behavioral traits. The OCs' occupational profile was also heterogeneous, with no clear job or occupation. Mostly engaged in unskilled jobs, OCs reflected working-class characteristics, including slightly older age, marriage, and children, associated with lower-paying jobs. This diverse profile, perceived as lower in social status, could introduce socioeconomic diversity but may hinder customer-brand identification if not perceived as similar by Focal Customers. This may indicate a potential sub-evaluation of Adidas OCs and the brand by Gen Z Focal Customers or a lack of in-group identification between younger Focal Customers and more mature OCs.

Social network analysis (SNA) also revealed that Gen Z Focal Customers have a fragmented perception of OCs and their personality, emphasizing the existence of various OC profiles and a potential negative impact on brand image and Focal Customer-brand identification.



Despite Adidas being an international brand, the majority of Focal Customers predominantly envisioned national Other Customers (OCs), reflecting the influence of Social Identity Theory. This inclination toward national OCs enhances customer identification and underscores the significance of considering local perspectives in brand perception.

Results related to the Adidas brand image support this perspective. For Gen Z Focal Customers, the Adidas brand image on the Romanian market tends to be more traditional, bland, and somewhat basic. However, its products are viewed as affordable quality. Consistent with earlier findings, Adidas consumers are considered somewhat mature, and there is no gender bias in the perceived image of the brand or the Other Customer Perception (OCP).

Perceptual mapping results reveal Adidas as a versatile brand, blending traditional and modern elements to appeal to both young and mature consumers with reasonably priced products of good quality. These perceptions align with diverse Other Customer (OC) views. While the brand is associated with sports in the perceptual map, OCs, as perceived by Focal Customers, predominantly use Adidas for everyday and streetwear. This distinction hints at a potential national dimension in OC profiles, underscoring the need to integrate it into marketing strategies like segmentation and positioning. The study also uncovers differences between brand and OC perceptions regarding product use and consumer demographics.

The data also reveals that Gen Z participants perceive the Other Customer (OC) profile as more akin to the national brand image of Adidas than its international counterpart. Notably, those actively purchasing Adidas find the brand image even more similar to the OC profile. This emphasizes the potential for Other Customers to exert a significant negative impact on brand image and purchasing behaviour unless the brand actively engages in direct interactions with Focal Customers.

Despite half of OC profiles depicting Gen Z customers, there seems to be a lack of self-identification between the Focal Customers (which are also Gen Z), the OCs, and the brand. Although the values improve among actual Adidas buyers, they still fall below the average. This indicates an inherent negative bias toward the OC, hindering Focal Customer-OC identification and potentially projecting a negative perception onto the brand. Identity Theory posits that identification is crucial for creating in-groups and a sense of belonging through homophily. However, this absence of perceived similarity may also serve as a means for Focal Customers to construct their self-image by rejecting similarity and affirming their uniqueness within the context.

To enhance comprehension of OCP influence on customer-brand identification, brands must grasp the mechanisms of perceived similarity and discern whether the identification is desired by the Focal Customer. Undesirable similarity can impede customer-brand identification. This study unveils three potential Other Customer-related issues for brands to integrate into their marketing strategy.

First, a brand's long-term national history, like Adidas in Romania, gives rise to diverse Other Customer profiles. Gen Z's connection to this history associates Adidas with both negative and positive traits. Negative profiles (traditional, aggressive, etc.) hinder perceived similarity, impeding Focal Customer-brand identification crucial for purchase behaviour. Positive attributes (young, athletic, etc.) define alternative profiles. Balancing these perceptions is a brand challenge, requiring an understanding of national specificity within the stages of Social Identity Theory: categorization, identification, comparison.

Second, considering the Other Customer solely in terms of its impact on the Focal Customer is limited. Comparison Theory suggests viewing the Other Customer as a form of self-evaluation by the Focal Customer. Gen Z Adidas customers, in our study, tend to evaluate certain OCs negatively for self-validation. This local dominance effect, prevalent in post-Communist Romania, emphasizes that social comparison tends to be more localized, influencing consumer behaviour. Brands need to recognize and address this local dynamic in analyzing consumer behaviour.

Third, Adidas OC profiles offer valuable insights for promoting positive and inclusive messaging. Adidas can actively contribute to challenging stereotypes and cultivating a more inclusive brand image by showcasing diverse physical appearances, dress styles, behaviours and socioeconomic identities. This proactive approach acknowledges the disparity between perceived brand image and perceived product use among Adidas OCs, underscoring the importance of implementing diversity-driven strategies for aligning consumers with the brand.

The study advocates for the development of an Other Customer marketing communications strategy that also fosters diversity through the integration of diverse local consumer profiles.

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## When bad news became good news: The promotion of sustainable consumption among Gen Z SHEIN consumers

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**Keywords:** *sustainable consumption, Generation Z, fashion, environmental information, environmental knowledge, sustainability*

The e-commerce fast fashion industry, which encourages over-consumption of ever-changing cheap fashion items (Statistica 2023), is one of the fastest growing e-commerce sectors in the world and is expected to reach 185 billion U.S. dollars by 2027 (Smith 2023). Alongside this growth, the fashion industry is embroiled in a major critical debate regarding its contribution to societal and environmental damage. In total, the fashion industry produces more air pollution than all international flights and cargo ships combined (Sustain Your Style, 2023).

Sustainable consumption can contribute to society's sustainability goals. Our starting point is that sustainable consumption may be manifested not only by enhancing the purchase intention (hereafter: PI) of sustainable fashion brands, but also by *reducing* PI of *non-sustainable* fast fashion brands such as SHEIN. According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Fishbein and Ajzen 1977, 1975), consumers' knowledge directly impacts their attitudes and behavior intentions, as well as their sustainable consumption. Thus, extensive research focused on promoting sustainable behavior by introducing positive information about sustainable brands has revealed an attitude-behavior gap. This gap indicates that while information about sustainable fashion leads to positive attitudes toward these brands, it is not transmitted to PI (Dhir et al. 2021). However, few studies have assessed the effectiveness of information about the *negative* social and environmental impact of *non-sustainable* brands on attitudes and behaviors (Connell and Kozar, 2012).

The current study focuses on Gen Z consumers of SHEIN. Consumers of Generation Z, born between 1995-2010, have a greater inclination than previous generations to buy eco-friendly online fashion brands (Williams and Hodges 2022). Despite this, they are a main target audience for SHEIN, the world's largest fast fashion retailer (Goldfingle 2022) with the lowest sustainability rating (Fuller 2022; Good on you 2022). The Gen Z relationship with fashion was already described as complicated – a desire for sustainable fashion on the one hand and enjoying excessive clothes shopping on the other (Hilton and Hatami 2023) Generation Z consumers are

considered digital natives (Prensky 2012), with access to many different online sources of information (Francis and Hoefel 2018). As such, they are expected to have a thorough understanding of non-sustainable fashion brands. Yet, most research does not focus on the information available to them but rather on consumer shopping behavior of sustainable fashion, attitudes toward environmental fashion and attitudes toward secondhand sustainable fashion (Dhir et al. 2021; McKeown and Shearer 2019).

In light of this situation, the aim of the current research is to explain the gap between PI before and after exposure to information about the damage caused by SHEIN to the environment by examining the attitudes, motivations and beliefs of Gen Z SHEIN consumers, which stem from their generational identity and values.

The study offers valuable insight into consumer behavior as it relates to information about sustainability and fashion. First, the study focuses on Generation Z, an understudied consumer segment within the fashion industry. A specific focus is placed on Gen Z SHEIN consumers, who are viewed as a sub-group with different values than other members of their generation. Secondly, it allows us to determine whether attitudes, motivations, and beliefs related to a consumer's generational identity contribute to the decline in PI of non-sustainable brands. Finally, our findings contribute to discussions about the attitude-behavior gap associated with sustainable brands.

This study focuses on factors predicting a decline in purchase intentions after receiving negative environmental information. The study was conducted through an online survey among 607 Israeli Generation Z SHEIN consumers (aged 18-26). The questionnaire was presented in the following order: 1) respondents were asked about their attitudes toward the brand SHEIN, PI and purchase behavior regarding SHEIN, materialistic motivations to buy fashion and objective knowledge about environmental issues in the fashion industry, and ascription of responsibility for sustainability; 2) the respondents were provided with information about the extremely low sustainability of SHEIN addressing use of polluting chemicals, poor working conditions, and air pollution through product distribution around the world; 3) the respondents were asked about feelings of deception, attitudes toward SHEIN and PI (the same items as before the information was provided).

The results show that participants have low environmental knowledge regarding the fashion industry, a medium sense of responsibility, and medium materialistic motivations for purchasing fashion. The findings of the hierarchical regression analysis show a decrease in positive attitudes toward SHEIN after receiving negative environmental information and feeling of deception, both of which were positively associated with a decrease in PI. The effect of the ascription of responsibility on the dependent variable was fully mediated by a decrease in brand attitudes and feeling of deception. Consumer materialistic motivation to buy fashion and objective environmental knowledge did not correlate with the decrease in PI. Fashion consumption at SHEIN may be associated with a subset of Generation Z who consume fashion as a lifestyle rather than as a symbol of social standing.

Feeling of deception was positively correlated with the observed PI gap, reflecting Generation Z's expectation of corporate responsibility and complementing the TPB. The mediation mechanism emphasized the role of emotional responses, particularly feeling deceived, in linking attribution of responsibility with behavioral outcomes.

Exploring the complex domain of Generation Z's perceptions, our study reveals nuances and unexpected dynamics in terms of attitudes, purchase intentions, and materialistic tendencies among SHEIN consumers which challenge prevailing assumptions and strongly suggest a reevaluation of generational stereotypes. Contrary to expectations, "digital natives" Gen Z displayed limited knowledge of fashion's environmental impact. Exposure to negative environmental information surprisingly led to a decline in both attitudes and PI for SHEIN, challenging the conventional attitude-behavior gap seen in sustainable brands and emphasizing the importance of accurate communication from independent sources in ethical decision-making. Thus, sustainable brands might consider joining together with policymakers for promoting environmental knowledge about non-sustainable brands.

Additionally, our study revealed moderate materialistic tendencies among SHEIN consumers, which did not align with a decline in PI. The presumed association of online fashion shopping on SHEIN with social status was contested, suggesting that young consumers may form a unique social subgroup with values diverging from overarching generational stereotypes. These results contribute significantly to the discourse on generational cohort theory, suggesting the existence of sub-groups within cohorts with distinct values and emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of generational dynamics.

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# 28th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications

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