

PhD Studentships 2025/26

Centre name:

Centre for Consumers and Sustainable Consumption (CCSC)

Our research expertise and interests include:

- Digital Transformation in Marketing (AI, Blockchain, Metaverse, Extended Reality, NFTs, Big Data)
- Ethics, Responsible Marketing and Sustainable Consumer Behaviour
- Services Marketing (Financial Services, Healthcare, Tourism/Leisure/Entertainment services)
- AI Marketing, Online Retailing
- Interpretivist consumer research
- Critical marketing

We currently propose 7 research topics for scholarship applications. Please get in touch with the potential supervisors named below before submitting your application.

The impact of positioning strategy on firm/brand performance

Potential supervisors: [Dr. Hazel Huang](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

Positioning strategy is an integral part of brand building; however, empirical research on positioning strategy is limited. This topic attempts to investigate the impact of positioning strategy on firm/brand performance using secondary data from firms' annual reports and practitioners' databases (such as MarketLine Advantage, Euromonitor, etc.). The potential research questions are as below:

- What are the key factors impacting the success of a positioning strategy?
- The extent to which a repositioning strategy should remain consistent to the original positioning strategy in order to avoid alienation from existing customers?
- What are the control variables that would impact the answers to the previous two research questions? For example, firm/brand size, characteristics of the industry (B2B, B2C), etc.

References

Nickerson, D., Lowe, M., Pattabhiramaiah, A., & Sorescu, A. (2022). The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Brand Sales: An Accountability Perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(2), 5-28. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429211044155>

Ramani, G., & Kumar, V. (2008). Interaction Orientation and Firm Performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(1), 27-45. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.72.1.027>

Swaminathan, V., Gupta, S., Keller, K. L., & Lehmann, D. (2022). Brand Actions and Financial Consequences: A Review of Key Findings and Directions for Future Research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50(4), 639-664. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00866-7>

Determine influencer charisma via big data analytics

Potential supervisors: [Dr. Hazel Huang](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

Using the methodological foundation of Atalay et al.'s (2023) paper, this research will investigate the extent to which an influencer's charisma via his/her video clips and texts. The expected outcome is to develop a methodological model, relying on machine learning algorithms, to predict influencer charisma, and therefore, success.

References

Atalay, A. S., Kihal, S. E., & Ellsaesser, F. (2023). Creating Effective Marketing Messages through Moderately Surprising Syntax. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(5), 755-775. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231153582>

Wieser, V. E., Luedicke, M. K., & Hemetsberger, A. (2021). Charismatic Entrainment: How Brand Leaders and Consumers Co-Create Charismatic Authority in the Marketplace. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(4), 731-751. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab035>

Tskhay, K. O., Zhu, R., Zou, C., & Rule, N. O. (2018). Charisma in everyday life: Conceptualization and validation of the General Charisma Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 114(1), 131–152. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000159>

Compensatory consumption and consumer well-being: Activating adaptive compensatory consumption

Potential supervisors: [Dr. Hazel Huang](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

Compensatory consumption suggests that we use consumption practices to compensate our threatened identity. The domains of threatened identity that have been investigated include power, intelligence, social connection, etc. The majority of compensatory consumption research focuses on compensatory approaches that only restored threatened identities temporarily, such as symbolic complication, escaping, etc. Ways to restore threatened identity *not* at the superficial level are called adaptive consumption, and Kim and Gal (2014) have already identified self-acceptance as a key mechanism for adaptive consumption. This topic aims to investigate whether different information processing mechanisms are able to trigger adaptive compensatory consumption in order to improve consumer well-being. Main methods are expected to be experiments.

References

Kim, S., & Gal, D. (2014). From Compensatory Consumption to Adaptive Consumption: The Role of Self-Acceptance in Resolving Self-Deficits. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(August), 526-542. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/676681>

Mandel, N., Rucker, D. D., Levav, J., & Galinsky, A. D. (2017). The Compensatory Consumer Behavior Model: How Self-Discrepancies Drive Consumer Behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 27(1), 133-146. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2016.05.003>

Rustagi, M., & Shrum, L. J. (2019). Undermining the Restorative Potential of Compensatory Consumption: A Product's Explicit Identity Connection Impedes Self-Repair. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(June), 119-139. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucy064>

Bonding with Machines: Consumer Psychology in the Age of Emotive AI

Potential supervisors:

[Professor Sarah Xiao](#)

[Professor Zhibin Lin](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

The field of artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly evolving, with a growing focus on developing AI with emotional and social capabilities. This emotive AI holds immense potential to transform various aspects of our lives, but it also raises critical ethical concerns that demand our attention.

AI could revolutionise customer experiences by tailoring interactions based on individual emotions. Notably, emotive AI allows computers to better understand and respond to human emotions and social dynamics, paving the way for more nuanced interactions (Filiari et al., 2022). However, the ascent of emotive AI necessitates caution. Its influence on human identity, autonomy, privacy, and equality cannot be ignored (De Freitas et al., 2023). This raises profound ethical questions and existential inquiries about the relationship between emotive AI and human well-being (Hollebeek et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2023).

Studies have explored various aspects of emotive AI's impact, painting a multifaceted picture. From examining customer experience with service robots (Filiari et al., 2022; Pentina et al., 2023) to analysing consumer trust in voice-based AI systems (Pitardi & Marriott, 2021), research delves into how AI can influence electronic word-of-mouth marketing and even emotional responses to AI service failures (Pavone et al., 2023). As emotive AI becomes increasingly integrated into daily life, understanding its potential pitfalls alongside opportunities is crucial for promoting ethical and responsible use.

By fostering interdisciplinary insights, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between emotive AI's capabilities and their societal implications, ultimately striving to promote responsible and equitable AI deployment.

The proposed research should demonstrate the potential to make a substantial original contribution to AI-customer engagement research. While any methodological approach is welcome, priority will be given to the use of machine learning and big data analytics as well as traditional lab or field experiments. The following are some examples of suitable topics:

- How AI's emotive and social capacities influence individuals' willingness to follow AI recommendations and guidance in various contexts, such as purchasing decisions, health management, and lifestyle choices.

- The role of emotional resonance and rapport in shaping user interactions with AI systems equipped with emotive capabilities
- Collaborative and co-creative interactions between humans and AI systems, leveraging emotive capacities to enhance user experiences, productivity, and creativity while maintaining human agency and control.

References

De Freitas, J., Uğuralp, A. K., Oğuz-Uğuralp, Z., & Puntoni, S. (2023). Chatbots and mental health: Insights into the safety of generative AI. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. (In press)

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1393>

Filieri, R., Lin, Z., Li, Y., Lu, X., & Yang, X. (2022). Customer emotions in service robot encounters: A hybrid machine-human intelligence approach. *Journal of Service Research*, 25(4), 614-629.

Hollebeek, L. D., Menidjel, C., Sarstedt, M., Jansson, J., & Urbonavicius, S. (2024). Engaging consumers through artificially intelligent technologies: Systematic review, conceptual model, and further research. *Psychology & Marketing*. (In press) <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21957>

Pavone, G., Meyer-Waarden, L., & Munzel, A. (2023). Rage against the machine: experimental insights into customers' negative emotional responses, attributions of responsibility, and coping strategies in artificial intelligence-based service failures. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 58(1), 52-71.

Pentina, I., Xie, T., Hancock, T., & Bailey, A. (2023). Consumer-machine relationships in the age of artificial intelligence: Systematic literature review and research directions. *Psychology and Marketing*, 40(8), 1593-1614.

Pitardi, V., & Marriott, H. R. (2021). Alexa, she's not human but... Unveiling the drivers of consumers' trust in voice-based artificial intelligence. *Psychology and Marketing*, 38(4), 626-642.

Zhu, T., Lin, Z., & Liu, X. (2023). The future is now? Consumers' paradoxical expectations of human-like service robots. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 196, 122830.

Examining the effect of AI-powered technologies in online retail environments on consumer's shopping experience

Potential supervisors:

[Dr Arezou Ghiassaleh](#)

[Professor Markus Blut](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

This innovative research aims to investigate the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the online retail environment, specifically focusing on how consumers' behaviours and reactions vary in response to AI implementation. With the rapid advancement of technology, AI has become increasingly integrated into various aspects of online retail, influencing consumers' shopping experiences and decision-making processes. This research seeks to explore the diverse reactions of consumers to AI-powered features such as personalized recommendations, chatbots, virtual assistants, and automated customer service employed by major online retailers. By employing

quantitative research methods, including surveys and experiments, this research intends to identify patterns, preferences, and concerns among different consumer segments regarding AI utilization in online shopping. The findings of this research will contribute valuable insights to retailers, marketers, and AI developers, informing strategies for enhancing customer engagement, satisfaction, and trust in the evolving landscape of online retail. This research helps retailers to better implement Artificial Intelligence and provides scholars novel insights into this exciting and fast-growing research domain.

References

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- Cillo, P., & Rubera, G. (2024). Generative AI in innovation and marketing processes: A roadmap of research opportunities. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-18.
- Clegg, M., Hofstetter, R., de Bellis, E., & Schmitt, B. H. (2024). Unveiling the Mind of the Machine. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 51(2), 342-361.
- Guha, A., Grewal, D., Kopalle, P. K., Haenlein, M., Schneider, M. J., Jung, H., ... & Hawkins, G. (2021). How artificial intelligence will affect the future of retailing. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 28-41.
- Huang, M. H., & Rust, R. T. (2024). The caring machine: Feeling AI for customer care. *Journal of Marketing*, 00222429231224748.

The Role of Inclusive AI for Responsible Marketing

Potential supervisors:

[Dr Chrysostomos Apostolidis](#)

[Professor Zhibin Lin](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in daily life, greatly influencing consumers, organisations, and the society (Sahoo et al., 2023). AI technologies, such as voice assistants (e.g., Alexa), social companions (e.g., Replika), and humanoid robots (e.g., Pepper), are becoming increasingly present in consumers' lives, and offer significant transformative potential for marketers across several industries due to their technological abilities and humanlike attributes (Henkel et al., 2020). For instance, Generative AI tools like ChatGPT are revolutionizing creativity and decision-making, helping marketers generate ideas, promotional content and educational material to communicate and inform consumers more effectively.

For consumers, the benefits of the marketing applications of AI have been documented in extant marketing studies, highlighting the positive effects of AI on consumer well-being, identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, showcasing its potential to enhance customer experiences and improve their quality of life (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021; Ameen et al., 2023; Marikyan et al., 2023). Despite these benefits, AI poses significant challenges for consumers, such as misinformation, fake news, inappropriate content and biased decision making. For instance, over-reliance on AI technologies can legitimize discrimination (i.e., gender, age or racial disparities) and possibly worsen

discriminatory practices against marginalised consumers and communities (Birkstedt et al., 2023; Wirtz et al., 2023; Bonezzi & Ostinelli, 2021).

Since practitioners and policymakers are becoming increasingly aware of the challenges posed by AI technology (e.g., potential bias risks for consumers, disruption to societies through misinformation), the negative side of AI technology remains a relevant area for marketing and consumer behaviour research (Blut et al., 2021; Filieri et al., 2022; McCarthy et al., 2023). Nevertheless, addressing these challenges requires collaboration between academics, practitioners, and policymakers to mitigate risks and optimize the benefits offered by AI. Opportunities thus exist to advance our understanding of the implications of AI technology in business and marketing and promote dialogue on its role on shaping a better future for businesses and creating long-term positive impact on societies.

The aim of this project is to explore AI's impacts on different stakeholders (i.e., consumers, businesses, frontline employees and society), and explore how responsible and inclusive AI, i.e. AI technologies designed, developed and deployed to ensure that all stakeholders are included throughout all the usage stages (Moon, 2023), can enable the positive impacts of AI-based marketing applications on consumers and the society.

References

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- Hollebeek, L. and Belk, R. (2021), "Consumers' technology-facilitated brand engagement and wellbeing: Positivist TAM/PERMA- vs. Consumer Culture Theory perspectives", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp.387-401.
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Wirtz, J., Kunz, W. H., Hartley, N. and Tarbit, J. (2023), "Corporate digital responsibility in service firms and their ecosystems", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp.173-190.

Consumer vulnerability and stigma in the marketplace

Potential supervisors:

[Professor Benedetta Cappellini](#)

[Professor Gretchen Larsen](#)

[Professor Helen Goworek](#)

Description of possible research topic with some key references:

Consumer vulnerability and stigmatisation are conditions that affect billion of consumers, yet there is a limited consensus about their definitions, characteristics and consequences for consumers (Hill and Sharma 2020). The growing interpretivist field of consumer vulnerability in marketing is moving beyond managerially focussed approaches to represent the experiences of excluded and stigmatised consumers (Hamilton et al. 2015). In critical marketing studies, consumer vulnerability and stigma have been examined through the lens of power dynamics, social inequalities, and cultural norms (Hutton 2016). These studies recognise that certain groups, such as low-income individuals, racial minorities, immigrants, or people with disabilities, may be more susceptible to exploitation or discrimination in the marketplace due to systemic injustices and structural constraints (Yen et al. 2021). Studies also show that stigma can arise from various sources, including societal norms, cultural beliefs, and power dynamics, and it often manifests in the form of social exclusion, marginalization, or devaluation of certain identities or behaviours (Larsen et al. 2014). We welcome interpretivist proposals investigating how vulnerable consumers navigate the marketplace, negotiate their identities, and resist or conform to societal pressures, discrimination and consumer expectations. We also welcome proposals examining the coping mechanisms and identity negotiations employed by vulnerable consumers in response to stigma.

References

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Larsen G, Patterson M and Markham L (2014) A deviant art: Tattoo-related stigma in an era of commodification. *Psychology & Marketing* 31(8): 670–681.

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