29th International Conference on

Corporate and Marketing Communications 2025

CMC '25

Abstract Book

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham Business School

Tuesday 15th - Wednesday 16th April 2025

Hosted by Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham

CIM | The Chartered Institute of Marketing

THE MARKETORS 50TH 1975–2025

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Welcome Letter

Message from the Conference Chairs

Dear esteemed attendees,

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to the 29th International Corporate and Marketing Communication (CMC) Conference, held this year at the University of Birmingham's beautiful Edgbaston campus on the 15th and 16th of April 2025.

This year's conference theme, "Artificial Intelligence in Corporate and Marketing Communications- Trends, Challenges, and Future Opportunities." Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionised numerous industries and disciplines, and marketing communications is no exception. As AI continues to evolve, it presents both unprecedented opportunities and challenges for marketers. To explore the latest advancements, trends, challenges, and future opportunities in this dynamic field, we brought together leading experts, researchers, and practitioners to explore the dynamic landscape of AI and its impact on Marketing and corporate communication strategies.

The CMC conference has grown into a dynamic and inclusive platform for academics, practitioners, and policy makers to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and explore the evolving intersections between corporate communication, marketing, technology, and society. This year, we are proud to welcome participants from over 15 countries and more than 20 universities, with support from our distinguished sponsors: the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and the Worshipful Company of Marketors (WCM).

Hosted by Birmingham Business School, a global hub for impactful research and thought leadership, this year's conference reflects our ongoing commitment to advancing responsible and innovative communication practices. We are especially pleased to feature contributions from both leading scholars and industry professionals

In addition to a rich academic programme, we are pleased to provide opportunities for professional networking and dialogue, including a welcome reception on the 14th of April and the official conference dinner on the evening of the 15th.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all participants, session chairs, reviewers, and contributors, as well as our conference team for their tireless efforts behind the scenes. A special word of appreciation also goes to our keynote speakers and editorial panel members for generously sharing their time and expertise.

We hope the discussions over these two days inspire new research directions, foster meaningful collaborations, and contribute to the development of the exciting future of corporate and marketing communications in the digital era.

With warm regards,

Dr Ahmed Shaalan
Professor Scott McCabe
Professor Finola Kerrigan
Conference Co-Chairs
CMC 2025 – Birmingham

Welcome Message from the Conference Founder

It is my pleasure to thank Professor Finola Kerrigan, Dr. Ahmed Shaalan and Professor Scott McCabe for their excellent chairmanship and organization of the 29th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications titled: 'Artificial Intelligence in Corporate and Marketing Communications - Trends, Challenges, and Future Opportunities'. I am also grateful for the kind permission of the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Business School to host this conference here over the next two days. And, of course, to thank our keynote speakers and delegates who will share their papers and expertise with us. I bid you welcome to the conference.

Given the theme in the CFP, I nearly sent my avatar or clone, or ask them to write … but – alas – as they have achieved artificial consciousness, also known as machine, synthetic, or digital consciousness - they rejected my invitation.

The conference began in 1995 – about 55 miles away at Keele University - when it seemed to a younger mind 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 and adjacent to Europe since that time. The conference is designed to be low in cost but high in quality and participation. It is likely unique in its structure and non-profit nature. It would, however be nothing without excellent chairs and host institutions and leaders.

This conference focusses upon Artificial Intelligence (AI) which is in process of transforming many industries and disciplines, and marketing communications is no exception. As AI continues to evolve, it presents and will continue to offer unprecedented opportunities and serious challenges for marketers.

As outlined by Malthouse and Copulsky (2023), there's a growing recognition that Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning will play increasingly central roles in shaping the future of corporate and marketing communications. Leveraging AI technologies, marketers can now analyse vast amounts of data, personalise messaging, and optimise campaigns with unprecedented precision. The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has reshaped the operations of various industries. Notably, leading quick- service restaurants like McDonald's have embraced AI-enabled tools such as automatic license plate attribution and recommender systems. These innovations facilitate predicting customer orders, suggesting new menu items, and streamlining drive-through traffic flow. Similarly, subscribers to platforms like Spotify, Amazon, and Netflix are experiencing a surge in personalised content curation, spanning music, books, and videos. Concurrently, marketers are leveraging AI and machine learning to streamline marketing processes, from audience segmentation to programmatic advertising management and outcome attribution.

It all sounds wonderful! But there are downsides also. For example, at a mixed conference for business, governmental and academic colleagues a question was raised as to 'how do we counter the rise in misinformation and disinformation?'. One business persons attempt at an answer, asked 'do we use AI?'. Approximately 90% of the delegates raised their hands. A further question was – are we now reliant upon it'? Not a single hand was raised. Yet, in the classroom, in presentations, and assignments, and academic papers AI is becoming more prevalent. As the editor of the Journal of Marketing Communications, paper submissions have doubled in the first three months of this year. However, so has the desk rejection rate. I know of many businesses using AI in different ways to ease work flows, analyse problems, generate ideas, evaluate ideas, and to simplify complex problems. These are all valued in the domains of corporate and marketing communications. The concern here is (leaving aside Trumpian tarriffcation or terriffication) is that in one domain of marcoms, namely advertising, where anticipated expenditure in 2025 is anticipated to be in excess of US, $1.2trillion -

all to inform, persuade, and remind consumer of the relatively trivial benefits of specific brands. And, note this is just one domain…

In appear to be idle and vain to attempt even to peer dimly into the future. Problems that beset the world now, will undoubtedly continue. COVID appears to be at stasis, yet new pandemics are forecast. The economic turmoil as a result of the Ukraine/Russia war, the Palestine conflict/war, and Trumpian interruptions will continue to impact business growth and communications. Yet, consumer needs must be brought to and kept to the fore and not (as they are now in many economies) treated with disdain. In a small workshop I offer at my school entitled Globally Integrated Marketing Communications, I focus on three marketplaces – the product-driven, the distribution-driven, and the brand/consumer driven. Only the last offers the full potential of and interaction with customers and consumers. I expect AI to be utilized in all these markets. Yet, behind these three marketplaces - or nowadays spaces - is the ever-present global marketplace. Some say it is now dominant, others refer to the death of globalization which in my view is greatly exaggerated. Yet, we are witnesses to huge body blows to globalization – the 2008-09 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the past few days the savage blows led by the new orange-hued President of the world's leading economy, followed by a 90-day ceasefire. Yet, this is the context in which global, multinational, international and national firms must strategise, plan, implement and compete. Yes, it is dangerous, exciting and dynamic, but within this ever-changing kaleidoscopic environment, marketing, communications is essential and AI must also find its place. Likewise, so must we.

Businesses of all types from multinationals to SMEs 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 previous crises and have enjoyed complete recovery – and ever-accelerating investment. Can this continue?

The widening tram lines between academic research and business practice need to be narrowed and perhaps even closed. We academics cannot afford to keep on forever building theory incrementally on the theoretical foundations of past knowledge. Some of this is dangerously out-of-date. Business executives must learn and re-learn the fundamental basic skills of marketing and communications, even in an AI context.

Marketing communications will continue to be the spearheading force of marketing, undoubtedly with many support mechanisms such as AI.

I thank all the participants of CMC 2025, and have learned from their research, experience and knowledge.

Philip J. Kitchen
Conference Founder

Scientific Committee and Reviewers

- Dr Marvyn Boatswain (University of Birmingham, Dubai)
- Professor Sabine Einwiller (University of Vienna)
- Dr Khaled Ibrahim (Unitec Institute Of Technology)
- Professor Fiona Kerrigan (University of Birmingham)
- Professor Philip Kitchen (ICN Business School)
- Professor Scott McCabe (University of Birmingham)
- Professor Salmi Mohd Isa (Universiti Sains Malaysia)
- Dr Sarah Percy (University of Birmingham)
- Professor Ian Ryder (Cranfield University)
- Dr Ahmed Shaalan (University of Birmingham)
- Professor Marwa Tourky (Cranfield University)
- Professor Ebru Uzunoglu (University of Ljubljana)
- Dr Mahmoud Zakarneh (University of Birmingham)

Key Information

Venue:

Edgbaston Park Hotel
53 Edgbaston Park Road
Birmingham
B15 2RS

The conference will take place in the **Pevsner Room** on the first floor at Edgbaston Park Hotel, which is a short walk from our University Train Station.

The hotel is marked as G23 in the green zone on the campus map, which is available to view on page 6 or to view/download on the University of Birmingham website.

Registration Desk Opening Hours:

- Tuesday 15 April: 08.30 – 19.00
- Wednesday 16 April: 08.30 – 16.20

Catering:

All refreshment breaks will be served outside the conference room.

The lunch will be served in the hotel restaurant on the ground floor.

Social Events:

Please note that the social events were included in your registration, however you were required to sign up for these. If you are not sure if you have, please speak to a member of the team at the Registration Desk.

Monday 14 April: Welcome Reception: 18.30-20.00
The Welcome Reception will be held in the Pevsner Room on the first floor of the hotel.

Tuesday 15 April: Conference Dinner: 19.10-22.30
The Conference Dinner will take place at Marco Pierre White Steakhouse Bar and Grill, Birmingham.

Attendees will enjoy a two course menu, and some wine and soft drinks on the table, any extras ordered on the night will need to be paid for individually.

Transport to the restaurant will leave from outside the main hotel entrance at 19.10.

Wednesday 16 April:
Transport to the Birmingham City Tour will leave from outside the main hotel entrance at 16.30.

The tour will take place from 17.00-19.00. Return transport to the hotel will be provided to those that need it.

Online participation:

If you are joining us online, please refer to the email sent to you with joining instructions.

Sponsors

We are grateful to both **The Worshipful Company of Marketors** and **The Chartered Institute of Marketing** for sponsoring ICCMC 2025.

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Campus Map

Edgbaston Campus Map

Red Zone
R0 The Harding Building
R1 Law Building
R2 Frankland Building
R3 Hills Building
R4 Aston Webb – Lapworth Museum
R5 Aston Webb – B Block
R6 Aston Webb – Great Hall
R7 Aston Webb – Student Hub
R8 Physics West
R9 Nuffield
R10 Physics East
R11 Medical Physics
R12 Bramall Music Building
R13 Poynting Building
R14 Barber Institute of Fine Arts
R15 Watson Building
R16 Arts Building
R17 Ashley Building
R18 Strathcona Building
R19 Education Building
R20 J G Smith Building
R21 Muirhead Tower
R23 University Centre
R24 Staff House
R26 Geography
R27 Biosciences Building
R28 Murray Learning Centre
R29 The Alan Walters Building
R30 Main Library
R31 Collaborative Teaching Laboratory
R32 Teaching and Learning Building
R33 Fry Building
R34 Cuore

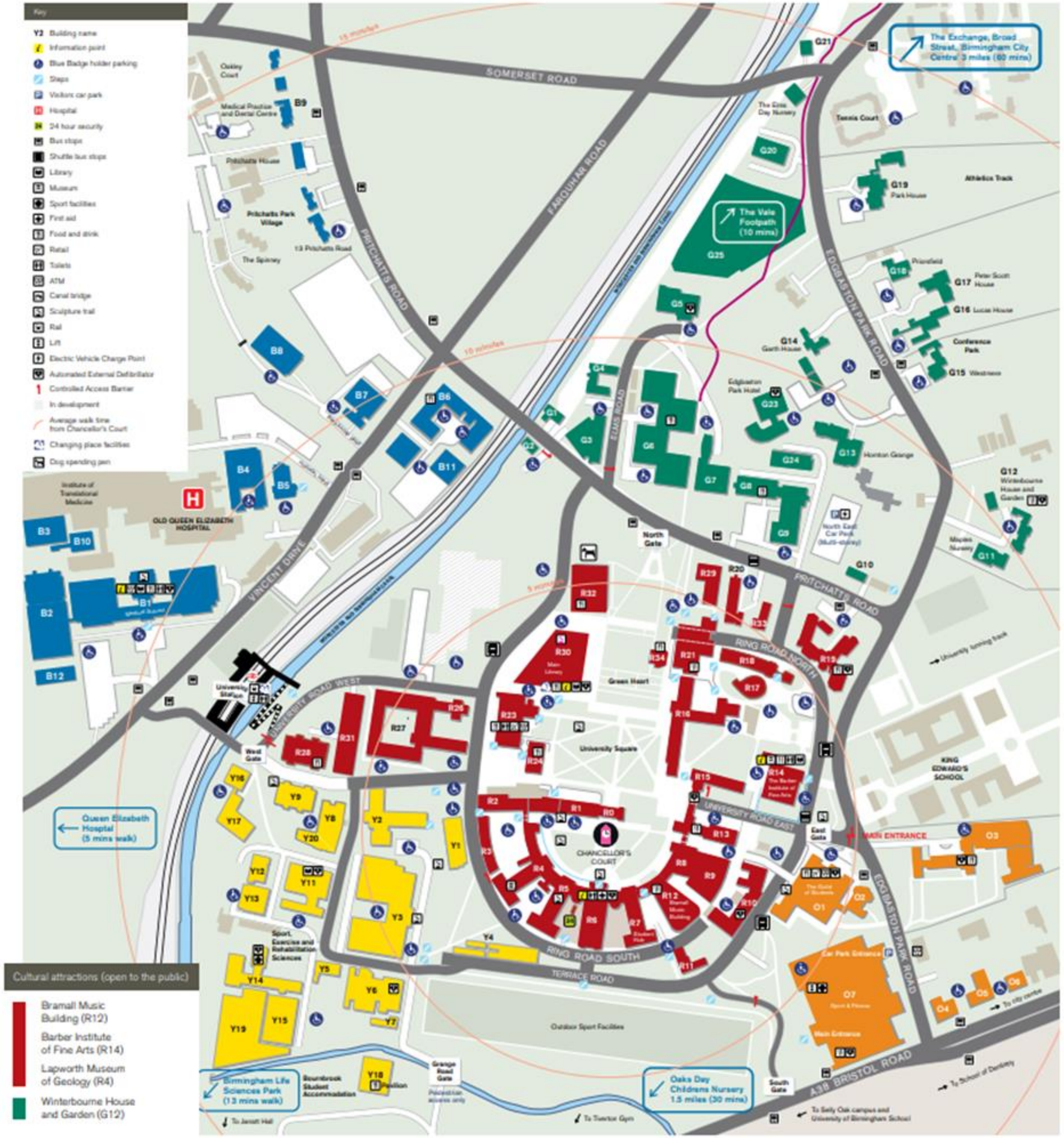
Blue Zone
B1 Medical School
B2 Institute of Biomedical Research including IBR West
B3 Wellcome Clinical Research Facility
B4 Robert Aitken Institute for Clinical Research
B5 CRUK Institute for Cancer Studies and Denis Howell Building
B6 Research Park
B7 90 Vincent Drive
B8 Henry Wellcome Building for Biomolecular NMR Spectroscopy
B9 Medical Practice and Dental Centre
B10 Advanced Therapies Facility
B11 BioHub Birmingham
B12 Health Sciences Research Centre (HSRC)

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Orange Zone
O1 The Guild of Students
O2 St Francis Hall
O3 University House
O4 Ash House
O5 Beech House
O6 Cedar House
O7 Sport & Fitness

Green Zone
G1 32 Pritchatts Road
G2 31 Pritchatts Road
G3 European Research Institute
G4 3 Elms Road
G5 Computer Centre
G6 Metallurgy and Materials
G7 IRC Net Shape Laboratory
G8 Gisbert Kapp Building
G9 52 Pritchatts Road
G10 54 Pritchatts Road – Institute for Global Innovation
G11 Maples Nursery
G12 Winterbourne House and Garden
G13 Hornton Grange
G14 Garth House
G15 Westmere
G16 Lucas House
G18 Priorsfield
G19 Park House
G20 Wolfson Advanced Glasshouses
G22 Elms Day Nursery
G23 Edgbaston Park Hotel and Conference Centre
G24 Centre for Human Brain Health
G25 EcoLab

Yellow Zone
Y1 The Old Gym
Y2 Haworth Building
Y3 Engineering Building
Y4 Terrace Huts
Y5 Estates West
Y6 Maintenance Building
Y7 Grounds and Gardens
Y8 The School of Engineering
Y9 Computer Science
Y11 Chemical Engineering
Y12 Biochemical Engineering
Y13 Chemical Engineering Workshop
Y14 Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences
Y15 Civil Engineering Laboratories
Y16 Institute of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
Y17 Public Health
Y18 Bournbrook Student Accommodation
Y19 NBIF
Y20 UKRRIN



Conference Programme

Tuesday 15th April

- All session talks are 20 minutes presentation, 10 minutes Q&A per speaker

8:30 – 9:00	Registration and arrival refreshments
9:00 – 9:10	**Opening** Prof. Scott McCabe, Professor of Marketing & Head of Department of Marketing, University of Birmingham Professor Philip Kitchen, Professor of Marketing, ICN Artem School of Business, France Dr Ahmed Shaalan, Associate Professor in Marketing, University of Birmingham Dubai
9:10 - 10:10 ***Chair:*** *Professor Scott McCabe*	**Keynote speaker: AI, Creativity, and the Future of Marketing Communications in Virtual Worlds** Professor Margherita Pagani, Professor - Director SKEMA Centre for Artificial Intelligence
10:10 – 10:30	Refreshment break
10:30 – 12:30 ***Chair:*** *Professor Ian Ryder*	**Session 1: A note from the conference founder**
	- 1.1 The rising cacophony of [marketing] communications. A note. Philip Kitchen
	Session 1: Media and Marketing Communications: Trust and Privacy in the Digital Era
	- 1.2 Recognition of Native Advertising and Effects on Media Trust – A Comparison Between GenZ and Baby Boomers Andreea Baciu, Sabine Einwiller
	- 1.3 Media framing through 'natural language processing': An analysis of actors involved in disaster management Ebru Uzunoğlu, Selin Türkel, Pınar Umul Ünsal, Burak Doğu, Senem Kumova Metin
	- 1.4 Exploring privacy-related self-disclosure on social media; A Study of online privacy literacy and self-disclosure behavior Shih Chia Wu, Y. Y. Wei, W. J. Lin, B. Y. Huo, X. Y. Huang, W. L. Chen
12:30 – 13:15	Lunch break
13:15 – 14:15 ***Facilitator:*** *Dr Ahmed Shaalan*	**Meet the Editor** • Professor Philip Kitchen, Editor of the Journal of Marketing Communications • Professor Scott McCabe, Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Annals of Tourism Research • Dr Marwa Tourky, Deputy Editor of the Journal of Marketing Communications
14:15 – 14:30	Refreshment break
14:30 – 16:30 ***Chair:*** *Professor Sabine Einwiller*	**Session 2: Strategic, Internal and Corporate Communications**
	- 2.1 Internal communication satisfaction as a driver of membership satisfaction and identification in a Medical Professional Association Ana Marija Mustafai, Klement Podnar, Urša Golob
	- 2.2 Impact of Corporate Communication on Corporate Reputation of UK Cobranded HEIs through Student-HEI Identification Khadija Rauf, Annie Danbury, Mohammad Waqar Abbasi
	Session 2: Entrepreneurial Communications and Authenticity
	- 2.3 Exploring how owner- manager leadership behaviours and communication contribute to the perception of brand authenticity in SMEs Onyinye Ikenna-Emeka

	- 2.4 From Buyers to Business Owners: The Rise of Customer-Entrepreneurs and Their Perceived Credibility in a World of Sceptical Consumers Ahmed Shaalan, Maha Ebeid, Marwa Tourky, Gomaa Agag
16:30 – 16:45	Refreshment break
16:45 – 18:45 ***Co-Chairs:*** *Dr Marvyn Boatswain (online)* *&* *Dr Marwa Tourky*	**Session 3: Marketing Communications, Engagement and Personalization in the Age of AI**
	- 3.1 Case study: Transforming Customer Engagement: The Impact of AI on Cars24 UAE's Marketing Communications Mahmoud Zakarneh, Truc Nguyen, Abdelhadi Zakarneh
	- 3.2 The Motivational Compass: How Regulatory Focus Shapes B2B Positioning Strategies Marvyn Boatswain, Stavros Kalafatis, Charles Blankson
	- 3.3 The Dark Side of AI-Driven Personalisation: Consumer Resistance and Scepticism in Marketing Communications — A Study of Chinese Consumers Mahmoud Zakarneh, Abdelhadi Zakarneh, **Xueyang Yu,** Truc Nguyen
	- 3.4 Towards Responsible Use of AI in Crisis Communications Practice Hazel Westwood
18:45 – 19:10 19:10 19:30 – 22:30	**Break** **Travel to Conference Dinner venue** **Conference Dinner**

Wednesday 16th April

- Session 4 talks are 15 minutes presentation, 5 minutes Q&A per speaker
- Session 5 talks are 20 minutes presentation, 10 minutes Q&A per speaker

8:30 – 9:00	Registration and arrival refreshments
9:00 - 10:00 ***Chair:*** *Professor Philip Kitchen*	**Keynote speaker: Generative AI Marketing Tools – The New Competitive Advantage** Imran Farooq, CEO, MMC Learning
10:00 – 10:20	Refreshment break
10:20 – 11:50 ***Co- Chairs:*** *Professor Salmi Mohd (online)* *&* *Professor Selin Türkel*	**Session 4: AI and Marketing Communications**
	- 4.1 Breaking the Bubble: How Can Generative AI Reshape Opinion Formation and Echo Chambers Khaled Ibrahim
	- 4.2 AI in Marketing Communications: Developing a Higher Education Curriculum for Industry Readiness Danica Cigoja Piper
	- 4.3 Enhancing Semiconductor Manufacturing through Customer Support AI: Strategic Insights for AI Adoption in Malaysia's Industry Salmi Mohd Isa, Thee Chee Chee
	- 4.4 Virtuous Brand Machines: A Theoretical Exploration Khaled Ibrahim
11:50 – 12:35	Lunch break
12:35 – 13:35 ***Chair:*** *Dr Ahmed Shaalan*	**Keynote speaker: AI – shaping tomorrow's experiences for customers and communities: an ethical evaluation** Professor Sarah Montano, Professor of Retail Marketing, Principal Fellow HEA, National Teaching Fellow 2023, University of Birmingham
13:35 – 13:55	Refreshment break
13:55 – 15:55	**Session 5: Sustainability, Environmental, and Responsible Marketing Communications in the Age of AI**
	- 5.1 Reframing Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) for pro-environmental campaigns: A circular framework for consistency and brand alignment

Chair: *Professor Ebru Uzunoglu*	Zaineb Bouharda, Fiona Harris, Carmen Mal
	- 5.2 Conspicuous consumption in digital age: The influence of social network behaviour Jana Brenkusová Pavelková
	- 5.3 Go Slow is the Fastest Way to Sustainability; The Role of AI Driven Digital Nudges and Pro-Environmental Behaviour in Opting Sustainability Driven Choices for Fast Fashion Muhammad Waheed, Salmi Mohd Isa, Suzari Abdul Rahim
	- 5.4 From Data to Wrapped: The Role of Personalization and Nostalgia in User Engagement and the Mediating Effect of Perceived Value Shih Chia Wu, Su Lei, Chenyu Zhao, Hang Wu, Yudi Liu
15:55 – 16:10	Close
16:30 – 17:00	Travel to City Tour meeting point
17:00 – 19:00	**Birmingham City Tour**

Keynote Speakers

AI, Creativity, and the Future of Marketing Communications in Virtual Worlds

Margherita Pagani, Professor - Director SKEMA Centre for Artificial Intelligence

Abstract:
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not only transforming marketing communications—it is redefining creativity at both the business and individual levels. From enabling marketing managers to enhance creative decision-making to revolutionizing how brands interact with consumers, AI is reshaping the way experiences are designed, delivered, and personalized. This keynote explores AI’s profound impact on creativity in marketing, focusing on its role in fostering innovation, immersive virtual experiences, and dynamic consumer engagement. The session will examine three critical dimensions of AI-driven creativity: enhancing individual creativity among marketing professionals, driving business-level innovation, and enabling immersive brand experiences in digital and metaverse environments. From AI-generated storytelling and hyper-personalized campaigns to virtual environments that deepen brand-consumer relationships, AI is unlocking new possibilities for engagement. Grounded in empirical research and real-world applications, this keynote will offer strategic insights into how AI is augmenting, accelerating, and transforming marketing creativity. Attendees will gain a forward-looking perspective on how AI can empower brands to craft innovative, emotionally resonant experiences that redefine customer interaction. We will provide actionable guidance on leveraging its potential to shape the future of corporate and marketing communications.

Biography:
Margherita Pagani is a Full Professor with a PhD in Management and HDR, specializing in Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence and Digital Marketing. She is the Director of the SKEMA Center for Artificial Intelligence at SKEMA Business School in Paris, leading research on AI for business. She is also a Research Affiliate at the Berkeley APEC Study Center (BASC) at UC Berkeley and previously served as an Advisor for the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on the European metaverse. Additionally, she is an Associate Editor of Micro&Macro Marketing. Her academic career includes professorships at Emlyon Business School (France) and Bocconi University (Italy), as well as visiting roles at MIT Sloan, UCLA, Georgetown University, National University of Singapour (NUS), and Redlands University. Her research explores AI’s impact on consumer engagement, business creativity, digital media, the metaverse, and service robotics. She has authored several books, encyclopedias, and articles in top journals, including MIS Quarterly, Harvard Business Review, and British Journal of Management. Recognized among the top 2% of highly cited scientists globally (2022–2023), she has received prestigious awards, including the 2023 International Marketing Trends Award and the 2009 Mobile Marketing Association Global Award for "Academic of the Year."

Generative AI Marketing Tools – The New Competitive Advantage

Imran Farooq, CEO, MMC Learning

Abstract:
This practitioner-led session is designed for marketers, entrepreneurs, and educators who want to understand how generative AI is being used right now to improve day-to-day content creation, campaign delivery, and decision-making. With AI moving fast, this session cuts through the noise and focuses on what works in real-world marketing and learning environments.

Key areas covered include:
• Content Creation and Optimisation – investigating AI-powered techniques for generating, optimising, and curating content across diverse channels, while evaluating the impact on quality, relevance, and engagement.
• Workflow Efficiency – streamlining marketing operations using AI to reduce manual workload and improve productivity.
• Future Trends – uncovering emerging AI innovations and how to keep your marketing ahead of the curve.
• Ethical Considerations and Privacy Issues – a brief but essential look at the ethical dilemmas, data privacy concerns, and transparency challenges that come with AI adoption in marketing.

Attendees will leave with a clearer understanding of how to use AI tools in their current workflow, what's coming next, and what practical steps to take to stay relevant and effective in a changing marketing landscape.

Biography:
Imran Farooq is a respected industry voice and educator in digital marketing and AI, with experience dating back to 1999. As CEO of MMC Learning and Course Director for AI Marketing Strategy at the Chartered Institute of Marketing, he has supported the development of thousands of professionals around the world. His work bridges strategic thinking with hands-on application, with a particular focus on helping individuals and organisations prepare for what's next. Passionate about futures thinking, Imran encourages leaders to anticipate change, adapt early, and shape the future of marketing with purpose and clarity.

AI – shaping tomorrow's experiences for customers and communities: an ethical evaluation

Professor Sarah Montano, Professor of Retail Marketing, Principal Fellow HEA, National Teaching Fellow 2023, University of Birmingham

Abstract:
AI is already revolutionising the retail sector and how retailers and brands connect to their customers. However, with the ongoing and rapid development of tech, this talk asks us to stop and reflect on what increasing AI will mean for people and our communities. Much of the focus of AI is around the improvements that AI will bring such as increased productivity, efficiencies and optimisation of supply chains. For customers it is suggested that AI will improve personalisation and customer satisfaction. However, this focus on efficiencies omits a consideration of the impact on society and people within it. Taking examples of AI strategies, we will evaluate the impact on people and ask, just because we can do something should we? We will explore the potential consequences on customers and look at alternatives that will enable communities to thrive for future decades.

Biography:
Professor Sarah Montano is an experienced retail marketing academic and a 2023 National Teaching Fellow (AdvanceHE). Sarah holds the award of Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Her work on digital learning has been used to demonstrate the digital excellence internationally. As a first-generation student she is acutely aware of how when at university she lacked social capital. This inspired her to begin her pioneering work in digital pedagogy and much of her work in digital innovation has been to ensure equality of access for all students. Sarah's teaching is heavily influenced by her industry practice and through this, she delivers engaging industry relevant teaching and authentic assessments via an experiential learning approach. Her pedagogical research interests are primarily around how industry practice can be reflected in assessments, digital education and graduate employability skill development. Sarah's academic area of research is retail and consumer behaviour. She is particularly interested in understanding the role of retail in creating community 3rd places. She is an engaging and skilled communicator and regularly appears in the media on the subject of retail industry change.

Session 1: A note from the conference founder

Session Chair: Professor Ian Ryder

1.1: The rising cacophony of [marketing] communications. A note.

Philip Kitchen

[1]ICN_Artem School of Business, France

Working Paper

Introduction

Spanning either side of the millennial divide, marketing is vibrant in all markets and nations. The same applies to businesses in the 20th and 21st century as they moved from production, product, and sales orientation toward marketing and/or societal orientation. With 2025 in mind, marketing is firmly embedded in every business and organisation. Yes, Marketing is an artefact of the 20th century. Despite brickbats and bocquets , it has been legitimised by adoption everywhere. Accompanying the ascendance marketing is an ever-growing cacophony of marketing and corporate communication of all kinds. In short, we live in a world where it is difficult if not impossible to avoid or turn off such communications.

If we take a political example;. Governments, state institutions, and politicians of all shades and parties hues seem to embraced marketing in all its forms. For example, from 1991, governments of the collapsed economies of the failed communist experiment (the ex-Comecon countries controlled by the Soviet Union), not only embraced democratic institutions, but also 'market economies' and with these - albeit with caveats - the marketing discipline and its communicative processes. Within a very few years, ex-USSR nations were joined by 'Red' China who also turned to marketing for its businesses and peoples, while retaining central political command and control. Coase and Wang (2013), for example, noted in their report, that China became a market economy by the end of the 1990's before it joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. Moreover, it has moved significantly to become more integrated with the global economy (Kitchen, 2003a; 2013, 2017), and indeed to become the world's second largest economic leader.

Marketing is deeply rooted in most societies. It is contemporaneous. It is relevant. It is national, international and global. Despite caveats, it is applicable to millions of businesses and a rapidly expanding global population (anticipate 11.2 billion people by 2100, compared to 7.4billion in 2016). Marketing has become the main connection between businesses and organisations of all types and sizes and customers and consumers, and marketing communications is the delivery and persuasive mechanism with the corporate varieties apparently fulfilling a more informative function. For example, customers and consumers around the world are informed ad nauseum that marketing is in their interest, seeks to fulfil their needs, and changes are invariably presented in a way that are supposedly beneficial to target audiences. But,these may not be seen in these ways by everyone. (Kitchen, 2003a, 2003b; 2017; italics added).

Yes, there are misgivings about marketing and communications. These may not amount as yet to brickbats, yet critical discourse is required if only for the purpose of devils advocacy. For, it is evident that many organisations (business or otherwise) do not adopt a customer or consumer orientation.

This is manifest in many ways –

'…. difficulties in consumer being able to contact organisations save by labyrinthine methods; a [perceived] disinterest and disinclination by businesses to treat consumers with respect; products that do not deliver proclaimed benefits and perhaps are incapable of so doing; services that do not match expectations; and products that while they satisfy needs also damage consumers and the environment. And, despite the advent of customer services in many organisations, these – at times – seem purposely designed to keep customers away from influencing businesses and/or their marketing processes in any way as evidenced by the rising popularity of consumer watchdog programs' (see Kitchen, 2013; Kitchen & Taylor,).

In the presentation, examples of recent and current practice will be presented illustrating both success and failure. Success, in that market share is expanded and sales increased. Failure in the sense that products and services fail to deliver promised benefits. And, sometimes sums expanded are perceived to be exorbitant in relation to wastage of precious resources which could perhaps be used more ably elsewhere.

This paper will present, and discuss both sides of the argument, drawing upon illustrative material taken from marketing and corporate communications. Is marketing (and its communicative dominance) a blessing or a curse to mankind? We shall see.

Keywords: marketing communications and Cacophony in Marketing

References:

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1.2: Recognition of Native Advertising and Effects on Media Trust – A Comparison Between GenZ and Baby Boomers

Andreea Baciu[1], **Sabine Einwiller**[1]

[1]University Of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Keywords: native advertising, advertising recognition, media trust, generations, quasi experiment

Extended Abstract:
Because consumers have become avoidant and sceptical of traditional (online) advertising, advertisers increasingly turn to new ways to persuade their audiences. By means of native advertising companies are trying to communicate in a less obtrusive and assumingly more effective way with their customers than by means of traditional ads (e.g., banners). Native ads are ubiquitous on social media, but they are also a common advertising strategy on the online platforms of quality newspapers. Here, these masked commercial messages are designed to resemble the editorial content in which they are embedded, i.e. they fit 'natively' into the journalistic environment.

As shown by extant research (e.g., Obermiller et al., 2005), consumers react with scepticism when they can identify content as promotional, which diminishes an ad's effectiveness. Consumers may, however, not only react negatively towards the ad and the advertiser, but also towards the medium where the native ad appears. As shown by Einwiller and Ruppel (2023), when consumers identified a native ad, which appeared in a news medium, their trust in the medium diminished. The negative reactions towards native advertising can be explained by the persuasion knowledge model (PKM; Friestad and Wright 1994), which states that individuals learn to be sceptical towards manipulative commercial tactics and apply coping strategies to protect themselves against unwanted, biasing influences.

Friestad and Wright (1994, S. 6) argue that "the development of persuasion knowledge depends on the maturation of some basic cognitive skills and on people's accumulated experience with what occurs in social encounters." Evans and Park (2015), however, argue that the mental schemata responsible for information processing should also be considered. Thus, older media users may have accumulated more cognitive skills with regards to traditional advertising, but younger users may be more acquainted with native advertising as a form of promotion. Differences between older and younger consumers have been found with regards to their acceptance of native advertising. Previous research revealed a more positive attitude towards native ads by digital natives compared to digital immigrants, who were especially negative when the ad disclosure label was missing or unobtrusive (Kip and Ünsal 2020). Zimand-Sheiner et al. (2020), who studied adolescents in three countries (USA, Turkey, Israel), found that their participants considered native advertising as credible and ethically unobjectionable.

In this study, we investigated whether there are differences between members of Generation Z and members of the Baby Boomer generation in their ability to recognise a native ad in a news medium as an ad, and what the effects are. To do so, we conducted a quasi-experiment among Austrian consumers. The stimulus, which was modelled after a real native ad, was on property in Austria and

mentioned a property platform. This focus was chosen because housing is a cross-generational issue. A total of 213 people were surveyed, 110 from GenZ and 103 from the Baby Boomer generation.

Before being exposed to the stimulus, participants stated the year of birth, gender, media use and were asked to state their trust in journalism (Matthes and Kohring 2003). After reading the native ad, which had purportedly appeared in a news medium, participants stated their perceived trustworthiness of the stimulus (Ohanian 1990), before indicating whether they had recognised that the stimulus was a journalistic article or an ad (and if so, how they had noticed it). People were then

told that what they had just read was a native advertisement with a brief definition of what this meant. This was followed by measures of trust in the media (Jackob et al. 2019) and inferences of manipulative intent (Campbell 1995). The constructs were measured on 5-point scales.

Results show that most participants recognised the native ad as advertising. Only 8% (N=17; 9 GenZ, 8 BB) mistakenly believed that the native ad was a journalistic article. Thus, no difference between younger and older consumers regarding their ability to recognize the native ad as promotional content was found. This high recognition rate was most likely because the stimulus was rather promotional. In fact, most participants (73%) answered that they recognized the stimulus as an ad because of how the topic was presented. Yet, the disclosure label placed in the top right-hand corner was noticed by only 10% of Baby Boomers compared to 39% of GenZ participants. The two generations evaluated the article as equally interesting.

Regarding perceived trustworthiness of the native ad, there were no significant differences between the generations (BB: $M=3.04$, $SD=.74$; GenZ: $M=3.16$, $SD=.75$). Generations also didn't differ regarding their inference of manipulative intent (BB: $M=3.02$, $SD=.74$; GenZ: $M=3.08$, $SD=.89$). However, we found a significant interaction effect between generation and gender, showing that young men were more likely to infer manipulative intent than all other groups ($M=2.64$, $SD=1.21$); $F(1,204)=5.12$, $p<.03$. Interestingly, there was a significant generational difference in the loss of trust in the media, gauged by subtracting participants' trust in journalism (measured before the stimulus) from their trust in the media (measured after). It showed that Baby Boomers' trust in the media declined more ($M=-0.5$, $SD=.65$) than the trust of GenZ participants ($M=-0.17$, $SD=.58$); $F(1,212)=12.3$, $p<.001$.

This research did not discover any generational differences in consumers' ability to recognize a native ad as advertising. This may have been because the stimulus was rather promotional. Further research should re-examine possible differences with ads of varying promotional appeal. The finding that male participants of the GenZ were better at inferring manipulative intent suggests that this group has developed mental schemata of native ads which helped in this respect. A key finding concerns the greater loss of trust in the media among members of the Baby Boomer generation. For mainstream media, whose core readership is older consumers, this is a worrying finding and a warning not to rely too heavily on native advertising as a revenue stream.

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1.3: Media framing through ‘natural language processing’: An analysis of actors involved in disaster management

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Keywords: media framing, decentralization, disaster actors, machine learning, disaster communication

Extended Abstract:
Natural disasters, which have become a common threat all over the world, are sudden occurrences that are often impossible or difficult to predict, and cause serious damage and destruction to both individuals and institutions (Guha-Sapir et al. 2017). While these disasters are often impossible to predict, preventive measures can reduce the possible destructive consequences of these events through a comprehensive process which extends across before, during and after the incident (Zibulewsky 2001). This process, defined as disaster management, involves multiple institutions and organizations, thus making cooperation and coordination extremely important.

In recent years, it is observed that a decentralized approach has been adopted in disaster management. Instead of a hierarchical system based on top-down instructions, a participatory approach based on active participation of multiple stakeholders—particularly local administrations and non-governmental organizations— is gaining attention in both disaster preparedness and response processes. Worldwide agreements such as the Hyogo Framework For Action 2005-2015 (UNISDR 2005) and its successor, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030 (UNISDR 2015) adopted by the United Nations, are clear signs of the value placed on local participation.

Nevertheless, according to Hermansson and Kapucu (2019), a centralized system is still predominant in the Turkish context, which negatively affects the participation of local elements, and constitutes an obstacle for disaster risk reduction. Besides the lack of cooperation in the disaster management process in Türkiye, prioritizing reactionary activities over disaster preparedness by focusing on response processes is another problem according to the authors (2019). In fact, AFAD (Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency) became operational in 2009 with a primary mission of strengthening the role of local authorities in disaster response and enhancing coordination. However, according to Hermansson, this system has resulted in the re-centralization of authority as a result of the reaction against localization initiatives (2019).

The influence of media on the public perception of disasters has long been a subject of research (see Scanlon, Luukko, and Marton 1978). According to Hansen (2018), disasters do not convey a message by themselves; rather, meaning is constructed through media interpretations and analyses, based on opinions of experts, affected parties, and rescue workers. In other words, media coverage not only documents disasters but also influences how we see the scope, impacts and aftermath of disasters. Researchers often use framing analysis to examine how disaster-related issues are presented in the media (see Parida, Moses, and Rahaman 2021). In the literature, numerous studies address how conflicting actors in disaster policy, such as central and local governments, are framed in the media (Adekola and Lamond 2018). Similarly, many studies focus on how different types of disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis (Rosemary, Syam, and Sartika 2023), fires (Seijo 2009), and floods

(Bohensky and Leitch 2014) are framed.

This study analyzes how Turkish news media framed various types of disasters (such as earthquakes, floods, forest fires and avalanches) between 2019 and 2023, as well as how it represented the stakeholders involved in disaster management. By analyzing a large news pool of more than 2,400,000 news items, the study aims to determine whether disaster news in Türkiye position disaster management within a centralized or decentralized framework. For this purpose, an innovative methodology combining natural language processing capability with human expertise is used. To identify key stakeholders, such as central and local governments, a series of news items are analyzed, and possible actors are manually tagged. Additionally, an extended list of actors is generated using this coded data. This technique attempts to reveal potential biases and patterns on a broader scale beyond the capability of traditional human coding, and to demonstrate how media applies different frames and actors in disaster narratives.

For this purpose, the news framing classification and coding system adapted by Ali and Gill (2022) is utilized in this study. The frames used are human interest, conflict, responsibility, economic consequences, morality and vulnerability. Responsibility frame, which points to actors such as central and local governments that are perceived as at fault in realization or handling of disasters, and conflict frame, which deals with disputes between different stakeholders, are integral to the study. In addition, the tone attributed to different stakeholders involved in disaster management (e.g. central and local governments) by the media is also examined. A coding system is used to analyze the positive (prepared, effective, reliable, active, cooperative, hopeful, encouraging) and negative (unprepared, ineffective, unreliable, passive, uncooperative, doubtful, discouraging) tones in the news reports.

Based on the limited number of empirical studies on disaster framing in non-Western contexts (Saldaña 2022), this study investigates the conditions affecting media framing in the case of Türkiye, whether there are categorical differences in frame and actor portrayal across disaster types and variation over time. The study seeks answers to three research questions:

RQ1: Who are the most prominent actors (central vs. local) in news coverage of natural disasters in Türkiye, and do these prominent actors vary based on the type of disaster and time period?
RQ2: Which news frames are most predominant in the coverage of natural disasters in Türkiye, and do these predominant news frames vary based on the type of disaster and time period?
RQ3: To what extent does the media attribute a positive or negative tone to the responses of central and local governments regarding natural disasters in Türkiye, and does this vary based on the type of disaster and time period?

The findings are expected to provide a detailed perspective on how the media can influence public perceptions of decentralization in different types of catastrophic disasters such as fires, avalanches, and earthquakes, and how these effects can change over time, pointing to the transformative potential of the media for the development of participatory strategies in the context of disaster management.

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1.4: Exploring privacy-related self-disclosure on social media - A Study of online privacy literacy and self-disclosure behavior

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Abstract:
This study centers around social media platforms, aiming to investigate the influence of online privacy literacy on users' self-disclosure behaviors. It further undertakes an analysis of the mediating functions of perceived privacy risk and perceived privacy benefit within the framework of privacy calculus theory. Employing the snowball sampling technique, 238 valid data samples were collected. Subsequently, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to gauge the relationships among variables including privacy literacy, perceived privacy risk, perceived privacy benefit, and self-disclosure. The research outcomes reveal that a higher level of privacy literacy correlates with fewer self-disclosure behaviors by users on social media. Notably, the perceived privacy risk functions as a significant mediator in this relationship. This study makes an innovative contribution by integrating online privacy literacy into the privacy decision-making theoretical framework, thereby offering a novel perspective for relevant research. It also bears considerable reference value for governments, platforms, and individuals in areas such as social media management and privacy protection.

Key words: social media, Online privacy literary, Self-disclosure behavior, Privacy calculus theory

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Session 2: Strategic, Internal and Corporate Communications

Session Chair: Professor Sabine Einwiller

2.1: Internal communication satisfaction as a driver of membership satisfaction and identification in a Medical Professional Association

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Keywords: internal communication satisfaction; professional associations; membership satisfaction; professional identification; organizational identification

Extended abstract:

Introduction

Internal communication satisfaction, an essential part of internal communication (Sinčić Ćorić et al., 2020), plays a vital role in ensuring an organization's well-being and effectiveness (Downs & Adrian, 2004). While extensive research has examined internal communication in corporate settings, less attention has been given to its impact within nonprofit professional associations (Fernandez & Castellanos, 2024; Potnis et al., 2024; Tschirhart & Gazley, 2014). Members of professional associations often engage voluntarily, contributing expertise while maintaining external employment, which distinguishes these organizations from conventional corporate structures (Friedman & Afitska, 2023). As such, internal communication within these associations serves as a crucial tool for fostering connection, commitment, and satisfaction among members (Miao et al., 2024; Wang & Ki, 2018). This research explores the impact of internal communication satisfaction on membership satisfaction and different types of identification in professional associations. Additionally, it examines whether identification with the association acts as a mediating factor in the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and membership satisfaction. Based on an extensive literature review, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: The higher the satisfaction with internal communication, the higher the satisfaction with membership in the professional association.
H2: The stronger an individual's identification with a professional association, the higher their satisfaction with membership in that association.
H3: The higher the satisfaction with internal communication, the stronger the individual's identification with the profession.
H4: The higher the satisfaction with internal communication, the stronger the individual's identification with the professional association.
H5: Identification with a professional association mediates the relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and satisfaction with membership.
By investigating these hypotheses, the study provides new insights into how effective internal communication enhances member-organization relationships, distinguishing it from the more commonly studied employee-organization dynamic. Furthermore, it expands upon social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and discrepancy theory (Markova et al., 2013), offering insights into how communication enhances members' perceptions of value and identity.

Methodology

Data collection involved administering a web-based survey to members of the Slovenian Medical Chamber, a mandatory professional association for physicians and dentists in Slovenia. The survey received responses from 1,214 members (11.8% response rate), with 956 completing it fully. The sample was representative of the Chamber's overall demographics, with most respondents being female (64.6%) and aged 30–40 (27.4%).

SmartPLS 4.0 Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) software was used to test the research model, as it is effective in the early stages of theory development (Tsang, 2002). The structural model was tested through bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples). Finally, a control model (De Battisti & Siletti, 2019) incorporating perceived external prestige (PEP) was tested to assess robustness.

Results
The preliminary results indicated that internal communication satisfaction had significant effects on identification with the professional association and professional identification. The effect of internal communication satisfaction on membership satisfaction was moderate. Furthermore, identification with the professional association showed a significant relationship with membership satisfaction. The preliminary results also indicated that identification with the professional association partially mediated the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and membership satisfaction.
The control model (including PEP) slightly increased R^2 values but did not alter core findings. The final results and their implications will be presented in detail at the conference

Originality
This research offers novel insights into the role of internal communication within professional associations, an area often overlooked in organizational communication studies. Unlike traditional corporate environments, where hierarchical structures bind employees, professional associations depend on voluntary engagement and financial contributions from members, making communication strategies uniquely significant (Friedman & Afitska, 2023; Hager, 2014). While previous studies have explored organizational communication in for-profit settings (Ammari et al., 2017; Kang & Sung, 2017; Pološki Vokić et al., 2021), this study is among the first to empirically demonstrate how internal communication satisfaction enhances not only membership satisfaction but also professional and organizational identification (Rodríguez-Rad & del Rio-Vázquez, 2023).

Additionally, this research extends the organizational identification literature (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006) by examining multiple identification targets—both with the association and the profession—providing a more nuanced understanding of identity formation in professional settings. By integrating communication theories with professional identity frameworks, this study highlights the role of internal communication as a strategic tool for strengthening members' identification, enhancing membership satisfaction, and fostering their professional self-concept.

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2.2: Impact of Corporate Communication on Corporate Reputation of UK Cobranded HEIs through Student-HEI Identification

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Abstract:
Cobranding has gained momentum in the education sector, creating new challenges and opportunities for HEIs. This study explores the intricate relationship between corporate communication, student-HEI identification, and corporate reputation in the context of UK cobranded higher education institutions (HEIs) where private HEI is a service provider and public HEI is a course developer and an awarding body. The mixed method has been employed with post-positivism philosophy. Data is collected from three private HEIs with campuses in London, Luton and Birmingham. Participants are students studying cobranded educational programme in the private HEIs. The findings reveal that effective corporate communication plays a pivotal role in fostering student-HEI identification. Contrary to prior studies, this research demonstrates that students form strong affiliations not only with the institution they physically attend but also with the partner university responsible for course design. Furthermore, the study establishes that student-HEI identification directly correlates with corporate reputation. HEIs can enhance their reputational standing by fostering a sense of identification among students, driven by tailored communication strategies and alignment with students' self-definitional needs. This research bridges a critical gap by extending prior theories into the realm of local academic partnerships, shedding light on the dynamics of student identification in cobranded HEIs. Practically, the study provides valuable insights for academic partnership managers, emphasising the significance of communication and lecturer-student relationships.

Keywords: Corporate Reputation, Corporate Communication, Cobranded HEIs, Academic Partnerships, Student-HEI Identification

Introduction
Nowadays marketers use cobranding to transfer positive associations of the partner brand to the newly formed co-brand. It is considered a popular technique to introduce new consumer products (Washburn et al., 2000a), to increase brand awareness, to gain competitive advantage for both partners. For over 20 years, universities across UK, US and Europe have been increasingly forming alliances or partnerships with foreign institutions. Success in transnational academic partnerships paved the way for UK universities to start considering local academic partnerships. Since 2010, policies of UK higher education have changed, focusing on promoting competition, widening access to higher education and student choice. This change allowed private providers (alternative HEIs) to enter the market. Since 2011, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of private HEIs (Mariampillai, 2019) evident from the total number of private HEIs in 2019 being 813 (Hunt and Boliver, 2019) compared to 674 recorded in 2011/12 (Hughes et al., 2013) and 732 in 2014 (Shury et al., 2016). These private HEI offers degree courses in partnership with private HEIs in the UK. Consumer attitude towards newly formed and existing partner brands is examined in literature (Ueltschy and Laroche, 2004). Xiao and Lee (2014) found that consumer perception of cobranded product could be enhanced by building consumer-brand identification. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) proposed a theory related to consumer-company identification (CCI) stating that consumers identify with brands to satisfy their self-definitional needs. In addition, they argued that people perceive themselves as members of the organisation even when they have no direct interaction or interpersonal ties with the organisation.

Many researchers have empirically tested this model in the different contexts. For instance, in international partnerships context that country of origin of the institution developing the program content and the degree accreditor strongly influence the consumer’s perception of the cobranded programme (Chee et al., 2016). It means that reputation and country of origin are used as proxy to determine student evaluation and identification towards a cobranded programme (Wilkins et al., 2018b). However, there is no evidence of empirical research based on theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) in the context of cobranded HEIs at local level such as in the UK. Underpinned by consumer-company identification theory, this study has two main objectives as follows:

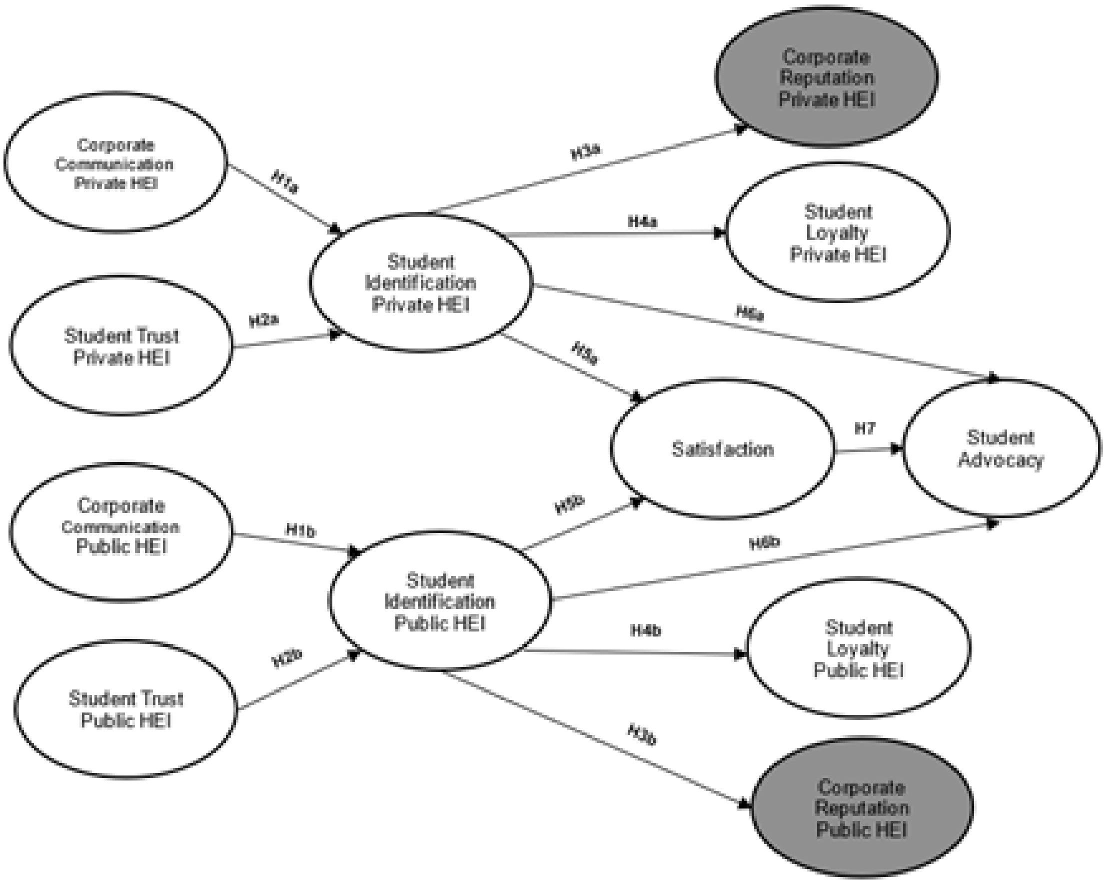
1. Examine the impact of corporate communication on student identification with cobranded HEIs.
2. Assess the impact of student-HEI identification on corporate reputation of cobranded HEIs.

2. Literature Review

To achieve above objectives and due to limited knowledge on subject under investigation, it is important to explore and understand student identification, including its antecedents and consequences in cobranding HE context, through a systematic literature review. Steps of systematic literature review are as follows.

Due to cobranding nature of study, the study examines student identification with the college and with the partner university simultaneously and individually. In literature, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) CCI framework facilitated to understand how organisations or institutions develop a relationship with consumers or students and convert them into brand ambassadors and advocates (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) Consumer-Company Identification (CCI) Framework



Cobranding in higher education

Despite increased interest in cobranding in the recent years, there is still insufficient literature on consumer evaluation of cobranding in service sectors such as higher education (Besharat and Langan, 2014). For instance, Singh et al. (2011) have examined student perception of dual degree programmes containing two brand names of collaborating institutions. In transnational context, it is found that students identified themselves more with the foreign institution due to reputation and credibility of its country (Wilkins et al., 2018a, Heffernan et al., 2018), consistent with findings of prior studies (Bluemelhuber et al., 2007, Low and Lamb, 2000). Extant literature does not include any empirical study that examines student perception of a cobranded educational programme in these UK based private institutions.

Antecedents and Consequences of student-HEI Identification

Review of literature has shown that Tajfel et al. (1979) laid the theoretical foundation of social identification and its antecedents such as similarities, dissimilarities, and self-esteem. Later, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) reiterated these as self-definitional needs and related similarities with need of continuity, dissimilarities with the distinctive characteristics and self-esteem to prestige in the context of consumer-company identification. Many studies consider different self-definitional needs as a basis to form and validate the Consumer-Company Identification (CCI) framework shown proposed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) in varying contexts such as organisations, products, and services (Ahearne et al., 2005, Balaji et al., 2016, Reade, 2001, Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008, Porter et al., 2011, Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012, Kim et al., 2010).

Antecedents include construed image (Ahearne et al., 2005, Myers et al., 2016), prestige (Balaji et al., 2016, Mael and Ashforth, 1992, Stephenson and Yerger, 2014, Sung and Yang, 2008, Kim et al., 2010), reputation (Sung and Yang, 2008, Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010, Heffernan et al., 2018), satisfaction (Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008, Myers et al., 2016), brand attractiveness (Balmer et al., 2019) and corporate communication (Smidts et al., 2001, Fazli-Salehi et al., 2019, Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008). It has been suggested in literature that corporate communication not only enhances visibility and reputation, but also improves quality of the educational experience and perceived supportive outcomes (Sung and Yang, 2009, Foroudi et al., 2019, Smidts et al., 2001) and may have significant impact on identification.

In higher education, studies that have examined factors such as corporate reputation or prestige, corporate communication, brand distinctiveness, brand personality, and student trust as antecedents (Stephenson and Yerger, 2014, Balaji et al., 2016, Fazli-Salehi et al., 2019, Wilkins and Huisman, 2013a, Heffernan et al., 2018).

In student identification literature, university prestige has been used interchangeably as university reputation. University reputation is a sign of high prestige (Keh and Xie, 2009) and hence reduces the level of uncertainty and supports students in their decision-making process (Brewer and Zhao, 2010). Keh and Xie (2009) examined corporate reputation and trust as antecedents of identification along with satisfaction (Su et al., 2016). Another study Brewer and Zhao (2010) found that university reputation is an influential factor in students’ decision-making process for a pathway college which was affiliated with a university in Sydney, similar to student identification literature in case of transnational academic partnerships (Wilkins and Huisman, 2013a, Heffernan et al. 2018).

As indicated earlier, consumer/student identification has consequences. Studies that examined the impact of consumer identification on in-role behaviours such as customer loyalty and repurchase intentions (Ahearne et al., 2005, Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008, Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006, Lam et al., 2012, Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010, Homburg et al., 2009, Tuškej et al., 2013, Porter et al., 2011, Su et al., 2016) and on extra-role behaviours such as positive word of mouth or customer recruitment (Ahearne et al., 2005, Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008, Brown et al., 2005, Lam et al., 2012, Einwiller et al., 2006, Tuškej et al., 2013, Su et al., 2016).

3.Hypotheses and Conceptual Development

Corporate Communication

Fill and Roper (2012) stated that organisations use corporate communication strategically to minimise uncertainty of the customer and to establish relationships. It can be used to create and present its distinctive features (Melewar et al., 2017). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argued that consumers are more likely to identify with their organisations when they are in contact with the organisation. In higher education, due to rising competition it is important to keep in touch with students to maintain long term relationships and to retain the students. This study analyses the role of controlled corporate communication in building relationship with the students which includes all the methods and channels used by the private HEI to convey the message to students.
Therefore, it is hypothesised:

- H1a: Corporate communication of private HEI is positively related to Student Identification with private HEI partner.
- H1b: Corporate communication of public HEI is positively related to Student Identification with public HEI partner.

Student Trust

In higher education sector, student trust is defined as “the degree to which a student is willing to rely on or have faith and confidence in the college to take appropriate steps that benefit him and help him achieve the learning and career objectives” (Ghosh et al., 2001). Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) argued that the perceptions of an organisational identity and the response to it depends on the extent to which they know and trust the identity. In case of international alliances, the secondary brand partner has gained the leverage of reputable and trustworthy foreign partner (Heffernan et al., 2018). It is proposed that:

- H2a: Student Trust in private HEI is positively related to Student Identification with private HEI partner.
- H2b: Student Trust in public HEI is positively related to Student Identification with public HEI partner.

Corporate Reputation

In academic context, corporate reputation can be defined as “a subjective and collective recognition, perception, attitude and evaluation of higher education institutions among all key stakeholder groups (internal and external) during a certain period of time. This is based on their past experiences, communication, and potential to satisfy expectations in comparison with the competition” (Šontaitė and Bakanauskas, 2011).
H3a: Student identification with private HEI is positively related to corporate reputation of private HEI
H3b: Student identification with public HEI is positively related to corporate reputation of public HEI

Student loyalty

Student loyalty starts from the period when a student is registered and ends upon completion of his or her studies. The objective of university is to retain existing students (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001). This is very important for university to encourage students for further studies and involve them in supportive behaviours (Tuškej et al., 2013). Therefore, it is hypothesised:
H4a: Student Identification with private HEI is positively related to Student Loyalty with private HEI partner.

H4b: Student Identification with public HEI is positively related to Student Loyalty with public HEI partner.

Student satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as fulfilment of one's expectation (Stephenson et al., 2014). Positive experience with a brand will encourage consumers to repeat the purchase. This will strengthen their engagement and feeling of attachment with the brand (Aquino, 2002).Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) proposed that consumers who identify strongly with the organisation's performance are likely to be more satisfied with their product selection. Therefore, student-university identification has a stronger or almost equal impact on student satisfaction (Wilkins et al., 2018b). It is found that customer satisfaction is a driver for customer loyalty, purchase intentions and positive word of mouth (Alwi and Kitchen, 2014, Alwi et al., 2019, Brown et al., 2005). Therefore, it is hypothesised:

- H5a: Student identification with private HEI is positively related to student satisfaction with cobranded programme.
- H5b: Student identification with public HEI is positively related to student satisfaction with cobranded programme

Student advocacy

Student advocacy is defined as "the extent to student actively support or recommend an institution to others" (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011). It is found that advocacy is influenced significantly by identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012).
H6a: Student Identification with private HEI is positively related to Student Advocacy of cobranded programme.
H6b: Student Identification with public HEI is positively related to Student Advocacy of cobranded programme.

Mediating role of student satisfaction

It is important to understand how satisfaction with course mediates the student identification with private and public HEIs and advocacy for cobranded programme. Therefore, it is hypothesised:
H7: Student Satisfaction with cobranded programme mediates the effect of Student Identification with Private HEI and Student Identification with Public HEI on Student Advocacy of Cobranded Programme.

Methodology/Approach

The study employs a post positivism philosophy with mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003), post positivism emphasises the understanding of the perspectives on the research from multiple dimensions rather than simply focusing on single elements in case of positivism. Similarly, triangulation helps to strengthen the construct validity of a study by providing multiple measures to the same phenomena (Yin, 2017). In this study triangulation has been achieved by collecting data in two phases.
Phase 1 is qualitative research consists of two studies. Study 1 involves individual interviews with private HEI students. Study 2 is about confirming the findings of interviews with academic experts.
Phase 2 is based on the quantitative research where a pilot study confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire for the main study to assess the relationship between variables and to meet the study objectives.

The context of the study is cobranded private HEIs in the UK. Therefore, data for this study has been collected from three different private HEIs that are offering a cobranded degree course in partnership with the UK public universities. The participating private HEIs have campuses in different locations in the UK and therefore, the questionnaire was distributed in Luton, Birmingham and two different locations in London. The unit of analysis is the individual student studying a degree programme e.g. business, health and computer sciences in private HEIs.

Phase 1 Qualitative Study (Study 1)
Due to lack of prior knowledge, individual interviews were conducted based on purposive sampling to inform the researcher about factors that influence student identification, perception, and behaviour in academic partnerships at local level. Saturation was achieved at tenth interview. This allowed the researcher to better understand the phenomena and generate items to measure student identification for cobranded HEIs. QSR NVivo 12 was employed to analyse the semi-structured interviews and to generate themes and sub-themes. Following is the screenshot of NVivo with a list of predetermined themes which in NVivo calls parent nodes with their colour codes.

To demonstrate on thematic maps and themes generated in the study using NVivo, the sample thematic map and participants' quotes are provided below for student identification.

Sample Analysis- Study 1
The above thematic map indicates that students identify with the private HEI because it is a small college, flexible study structure, adult learning, friendly campus environment, found themselves confident and connected with the institute because of good relationship with lecturers. In case of public HEI, findings indicate that students have positive feelings for Partner University due to good reputation and future employability. Themes that emerged for the public HEI are virtual connection, just name on a degree, course provider, good reputation, and self-esteem.

Phase 1 Qualitative Study (Study 2)
Interview findings were then subjectively validated with five academia experts using scoring criteria (Thornhill et al., 2009, Morgado et al., 2017). Expert interviews helped determine whether items should be retained or discarded using the scoring criteria given below (Hardesty and Bearden, 2004) and to assess whether the measurement items adequately represent the construct domain (Rossiter, 2002).

Relevance	Score
Not Useful	1
Useful	2
Essential	3

The final draft questionnaire is designed based on the findings of phase 1 containing new items of the study and from the literature. A sample is shown below demonstrating the use of scoring criteria.

Phase 2- Quantitative Research (Pilot and Main Study)
Due to the dual conceptual framework, this phase is a dominant phase of the study. Pilot study supported to refine the questionnaire for the main study. Quantitative data analysis consists of five stages as shown in the image below.

IBM SPSS 26 was employed to delete the outliers, perform the reliability test, descriptive analysis, and exploratory factor analysis to validate the newly developed domain of the latent constructs. Item redundancy was also considered in this analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in AMOS to validate the measurement items. Last step involved testing the hypothesis using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS 26.
Pilot Study Results

A questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics. Based on convenience sample, 100 participants were selected and sent the questionnaire through Qualtrics link. A total of 66 useable responses were collected to analyse the internal consistency. Results are as follows showing the Cronbach alpha value of all the constructs is above 0.8, which is good and well above the threshold value. The number of items were also reduced from 183 to 123 based on participants feedback and to avoid the repetition and fatigue.

Main Study Results

Total number of questionnaires attempted was 644. 56 students opted out at the beginning leaving the 588 number of questionnaires returned and analysed. The following table provides a summary of the respondent's profile.

Stage 1: Data Screening Results

This study followed the deletion method to handle missing data and excluded 92 responses because their completion rate was 50% or less. A summary of the total questionnaire distributed, returned, and excluded are provided below.

Following the data screening stage, outliers were deleted using univariate and multivariate detection methods. Univariate outliers can be detected by analysing frequency distribution of z scores, $z>3.00$. This study inspected univariate outliers by assessing the z-score. Tabachnick et al. (2007) suggested that a case is considered an outlier when z-score is greater than ± 3.29. Box plots are simpler to interpret in terms of values that are far away from the box, which are considered extreme values or outliers. For results of univariate outliers, please refer to the following diagram.

According to Hair et al. (2010), the multivariate method to detect outliers is by assessing the Mahalanobis D^2 measure. Mahalanobis D^2 measures the distance of each case from the centre for all variables (Hair et al., 2010). If chi-square value is less than 0.001 ($p<0.001$), then the case is considered an outlier. Therefore, this study deleted 74 cases as outlier and achieved a useable sample of 422.

Stage 2: Descriptive & Multivariate Analysis

To check the univariate normality the study applied skewness and kurtosis (Tabachnick et al., 2007, Kline, 2015). Hair et al. (2010) stated the range of skewness and kurtosis for the normal distribution is ± 2.58. Normality test has no concerns in this study as evident in the table below.

Multicollinearity refers to the relationship between two or more independent variables which demonstrate little correlation with other exogenous variables. To handle the problem of multicollinearity an examination of tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) with threshold values of 0.1 and VIF of 10 is recommended (Hair et al., 2010). There was no multicollinearity among the variables.

Stage 3 & 4: Reliability Test & Factor Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha values of all the constructs are above the cut-off point of 0.6 satisfying the reliability test of the main study.

Next stage is the factor analysis. Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to refine the underlying patterns or relationships in the large number of variables into smaller set of factors (Hair et al., 2010).

Exploratory factor analysis is one of several multivariate statistical methods, refers to a reduction process of multi-measurement measures into fewer factors (Tabachnick et al., 2007, Hair et al., 2010). It is known that EFA explores the data and provides information regarding the number of variables that adequately represents the data. It also assesses empirically the relevancy of new measures to the pre-determined constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Due to new items developed in the study, EFA is a prerequisite before testing the hypotheses. EFA has been satisfied by achieving the threshold value of 0.5.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) refers “a way of testing how well measured variables (indicators) specify the constructs” (Hair et al., 2010). The study developed a measurement model in AMOS 26 to perform CFA. Maximum Likelihood Estimation option was checked in AMOS to assess the model fit. Further, the modification indices and standardised residuals are used. The sample size of the study is greater than 250 (n=422) and the study follows the three-indicator rule. All the measurement items extracted from EFA initially loaded well above the threshold value of 0.5. However, a few items were deleted to achieve the expected standard fit indices discussed earlier. The findings are presented in the following table.

As indicated in above table, the study has achieved a good model fit. IFI, TFI, and CFI are above 0.94, well above the recommended value of 0.9. RMSEA value is 0.05 which meets the acceptable level. Following is the visual diagram of CFA conducted for the study in AMOS.

After developing and confirming the measurement model fit, the next step is to assess the validity of measured variables. To assess the convergent validity, three measures should be considered that include factor loadings, average variance extracted and construct reliability (CR). The results of CR depict that the measured variables define to their constructs adequately with most of constructs loaded above 0.8. The measurement model has achieved adequate discriminant validity.
Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a multivariate technique that combines aspects of factor analysis and multiple regression to examine the relationships among multiple variables (Hair et al., 2010). Therefore, stage 5 is about the development of structural model to verify the causal relationships between the dependent and independent variables and to test the proposed hypotheses. The criteria applied to assess the structural model fit are same as they were for the measurement model fit. Therefore, the study follows the same cut-off indices to report the structural model fit.

The structural model has obtained the recommended threshold values as shown in the table below.

After testing the adequacy of structural model, the proposed hypotheses will be examined. All hypotheses are accepted, and results are provided in below table.

Findings

The quantitative findings show that there is a significant direct relationship of corporate communication with student HEI identification for both institutions. It means that students identify themselves with both institutions (private and public) based on the communication approach adopted by both. This finding is consistent with the theory proposed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), which states that students feel more identified with their institutions when they are in contact with the institutions.

The findings reveal that lecturers are a main source of building student identification with cobranded HEIs. This study has supported the findings of Smidts et al. (2001), Oltarzhevskyi (2019), Verčič et al. (2016), and Tourky et al. (2020) that positive staff communication is vital in building student identification in cobranded HEI context. In case of partnerships, private HEIs are the service providers and are responsible for sharing all the information with students on the behalf of the public HEI. Therefore, in this scenario, sharing information with academic staff or lecturers would support students in identifying with the institutions (Smidts et al., 2001).

As revealed by the qualitative findings and tested empirically, factors that influence student perception and reinforce their level of connectedness with the private HEI are a campus environment that allows students to "feel like home", and friendly and supportive staff who treat students as "part of the family". Also, mature students stated that smaller size of the campus makes an institution a comfortable place for them to study. The findings reveal that communication is an influential factor

in student identification with cobranded HEI, as mentioned earlier. The findings also reveal that private HEIs are successful in meeting their self-definitional needs such as providing an opportunity to study after long study gap, offering them a chance to get a recognised education which is valuable to employers, catering to the needs of all ages, enhancing their job prospects, and boosting their level of confidence, knowledge, and skills.

Driven by self-definitional needs, students identify strongly with the private HEI because they perceive that the institution shares similar attributes that support their needs. The findings are consistent with consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Although there is no physical interaction of students with the public HEI, students are still found to be identified with the public HEI. The reason that students identify with the public HEI is the course itself which is designed by the university. It is therefore concluded that students identify with cobranded institutions when they perceive the institution as compatible with their goals, attitudes, and values.

The findings show that corporate reputation depends on student identification with HEIs contrary to what prior studies argued. In addition, the applied theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) is inconsistent when it comes to corporate reputation in cobranded HEI context. Findings are consistent with prior studies which claimed that reputation formed on the basis of good relationships with stakeholders including Yang (2007), Sung and Yang (2009), Fombrun (1996), Balmer (2017). Scholars such as Tourky et al. (2013) proposed that reputation is a consequence of identification with an organisation. This study has provided empirical evidence that student identification has a significant, direct, and positive relationship with corporate reputation. Therefore, the study shows that favourable, positive identification facilitated by the HEI's communication supports to build a good relationship with students.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes important theoretical contributions to cobranding in higher education, corporate communication, corporate reputation, local academic partnerships in the UK, and student identification literature. For instance, this study makes a theoretical contribution to the existing knowledge of corporate communication by providing empirical evidence that corporate communication directly influences student HEI identification and indirectly influences corporate reputation (Goodman, 2006) for cobranded HEIs.

The extant literature has promoted the merits of student identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003, Balaji et al., 2016) and the impact of country of origin (Chee et al., 2016, Heffernan et al., 2018) on identification in case of transnational higher education. No research was conducted to analyse student identification in local partnerships. By adopting a rigorous methodological approach, this study has addressed the identified gap and derived insights into the antecedent and consequence of student identification for cobranded HEIs in the UK.

Practical Implications

This study has also generated valuable practical insights for academic partnership managers and marketing managers within cobranded HEIs. These insights can assist in decision-making in forming new HEI partnerships as well as managing existing partnerships. It is recommended to the academic partnership managers who are struggling to build the reputation of their institution, to focus on corporate communication with students and build good relationships with them. This study indicates that success of local academic partnerships is dependent on student perception that HEIs offer distinct attributes that are similar to their needs.

This study has also highlighted the importance of the relationship between lecturers and students as a driver of student identification. Therefore, private HEI managers must provide lecturers frequent training and development opportunities that make them more effective communicators.

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2.3: Exploring how owner- manager leadership behaviours and communication contribute to the perception of brand authenticity in SMEs

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Abstract

The lack of trust in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has increased the need to build authenticity in SME brands (Eggers et al., 2013). In today's ever evolving world of business, power lies in the hands of the consumer (Campagna et al., 2023). SMEs whilst constrained with the challenges of newness and smallness have to deal with competing against large organizations who have more established business operations (Stinchcombe, 1965; Mayr & Lixl, 2019). Consumers have been found to lack trust for the untested and unknown SMEs, who have limited capability to showcase their businesses as transparent and credible (Eggers et al., 2013). This presents a challenge for SMEs who seek survival (Södergren, 2019).

The brand has been identified as one of a firm's intangible resources important in delivering superior competitive advantage (Hamdoun et al., 2019; Osakwe et al., 2020, M'zungu et al., 2019) and impacting a company's survival (Porcu et al.,2020; Alwi et al., 2022). Previous research shows that SMEs that invest in the brand will generate higher brand performance than non- brand oriented SMEs (Baumgarth et al., 2013; Wong & Merrilees, 2008). Therefore, to achieve consumer trust, it is argued that firms must learn to understand and excel at rendering authenticity (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Nunes et al 2021).

Brand authenticity has been identified as a key determinant in consumer- brand relationships (Oh et al, 2019; Campagna et al, 2021), as consumers today continue the search for brands that are consistent and trustworthy (Campagna et al 2021). Brand authenticity is a concept in branding that is relevant for building trust (Portal et al, 2019) especially in times of uncertainty (Eggers et al+.,2013). It would aid in overcoming the lack of transparency and credibility that hinders consumer trust (Campagna et al 2021).

In previous research, claims exist that a focus on brand management could help build authenticity and contribute to brand survival (Oh et al, 2019; Vallaster and Kraus, 2011), particularly through the impact of the leader (Vallaster and Kraus 2011; Eggers et al., 2013; Lude and Prugl, 2018; Alwi et al., 2022) and communications (Yang & Battocchio., 2021; Dwivedi and McDonald., 2018). The leader is seen as a critical part of the SME organization (Vallaster and Kraus., 201; Alwi et al., 2022) contributing significantly to the communication of its value proposition (Freeman & Siegfried Jr., 2015; Alwi et al., 2022). This reality has necessitated interest in examining leadership behaviours needed by SME owners to achieve survival (Omeihe et al., 2020).

Despite the knowledge on the importance of communications and the leadership behaviours (Vallaster & Kraus., 2011; Alwi et al., 2022; Dwivedi and McDonald., 2018) there exist a scarcity of research focused on understanding the leadership style(s) and behaviours and communication attributes to be adopted by entrepreneurs/owner-managers that aid in fostering brand authenticity and achieving survival. The presence of this would present an ability for the SME to; -

Build trust (Portal et al., 2019)
Develop unshakable relationships with customers or clients (Choi et al., 2015),
Build customer loyalty efforts (Kucharska et al, 2020).
Aid understanding of the customer comprehensively (Ilicic & Webster, 2016)
Deliver on promises made to customers (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis 2019

This research seeks to investigate the research gap with the research question as formulated below;

How can owner- manager leadership behaviours and communication contribute to the perception of brand authenticity in SMEs?

And the following sub questions
How does consistency in messaging, transparency, and credibility affect brand trust thereby boosting SME brand authenticity?

How does the owner-manager leadership style impact the trust, transparency and credibility of an SME, thereby contributing to brand authenticity?

The outcome of this study will enlighten owner- managers on how to leverage on the right leadership behaviours and communication channels to eliminate lack of trust thus increasing the chances of survival in emerging markets for SMEs through the achievement of brand authenticity. It would also provide additional contribution to ongoing research on SMEs and their survival strategies. It is hoped that a comprehensive interrogation of the research question through qualitative research will effectively address the managerial and theoretical problems identified by the research gap.

Key words: *brand communication, brand authenticity, leader, owner-manager, small and medium businesses, SME, trust.*

2.4: From Buyers to Business Owners: The Rise of Customer-Entrepreneurs and Their Perceived Credibility in a World of Sceptical Consumers

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Keywords: Customer entrepreneurship, scepticism, credibility, end-user experience

Extended Abstract

In the contemporary digital economy, customers have increasingly moved beyond their conventional roles. Rather than remaining "passive buyers," they now leverage digital platforms to engage in their own business activities (Park et al., 2021a; Park et al., 2021b). This transition from predefined customer roles within the business models of digital platform providers (Cusumano et al., 2020; Saadatmand et al., 2019) to proactive commercial participants has led to the emergence of a new category of online entrepreneurs (Park et al., 2021a; Park et al., 2021b). These entrepreneurial customers utilize platform functionalities not only for social networking but also to generate and capture value by (a) promoting products and services, (b) interacting with end-consumers, and (c) processing payments from end-consumers (Park et al., 2021a). This phenomenon, known as customer entrepreneurship, is defined as "the entrepreneurial activities of actors conventionally categorized as end-consumers or end-users in ecosystems" (Park et al., 2021b, p.1). Given that these customer-entrepreneurs assume dual roles as both customers and entrepreneurs (Biraghi et al., 2018), they exhibit characteristics of both groups, forming a distinct category.

Scholarly interest in customer entrepreneurship has grown, leading to three primary research perspectives. First, some studies examine customer entrepreneurship through the lens of institutional logic. Second, others investigate it from the perspective of customer-entrepreneurs themselves. Third, some scholars explore how platform providers can monetize customer entrepreneurship as a revenue source (Park et al., 2021a). However, to date, no research has examined customer entrepreneurship from the standpoint of end-consumers. This study aims to address this gap by investigating critical questions such as how end-consumers perceive the motives of customer-entrepreneurs and how these perceptions influence their scepticism toward them. Additionally, this study will examine whether end-consumers' prior interactions with customer-entrepreneurs moderate the relationship between perceived motives and scepticism.

Furthermore, the research will explore how end-consumers evaluate the credibility of customer-entrepreneurs and assess the relationships between perceived motives and perceived credibility, as well as between scepticism and perceived credibility. Finally, the study will analyze whether consumer scepticism mediates the relationship between perceived motives and perceived credibility, and how this perception of credibility influences consumer satisfaction and loyalty toward customer-entrepreneurs. Moreover, the study will examine how consumer perceptions of credibility impact the benefits customer-entrepreneurs derive from engaging in such entrepreneurial activities. Specifically, it will assess the functional, economic, psychological, and social benefits that customer-entrepreneurs realize from their participation in digital entrepreneurship.

A quantitative longitudinal research approach will be employed to examine the relationships among these study variables. The study aims to recruit a sample of at least 1,000 participants, consisting of both end-consumers and customer-entrepreneurs. While end-consumers will provide insights into their perceptions of customer-entrepreneurs, the entrepreneurs themselves will be surveyed to assess the actual benefits they have realized from engaging in customer entrepreneurship. The study will be conducted over two time periods to examine how perceptions evolve over time, providing a deeper understanding of changes in consumer perceptions, scepticism, and credibility assessments. Data collection will be facilitated through a professional research agency in the UK. The questionnaire

was developed and pre-tested with five marketing academics and five PhD students, after which it was refined and finalized.

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Session 3: Marketing Communications, Engagement and Personalization in the Age of AI

Session Co-chairs: Dr Marvyn Boatswain (online) & Dr Marwa Tourky

3.1: Case study: Transforming Customer Engagement: The Impact of AI on Cars24 UAE's Marketing Communications

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Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Customer Engagement; Digital Transformation; Intelligent Virtual As-sistant (IVA); Personalisation.

Extended Abstract

Case study:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is fundamentally transforming marketing communications, empowering businesses to enhance personalised, efficient, and scalable customer interactions. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a country where digital innovation is a national priority through initiatives such as the UAE National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2031, AI has become a central force in driving business growth and improving competitiveness (UAE Government, 2024). This strategic push towards digital transformation has prompted companies such as Cars24 UAE, part of the global Cars24 network, to integrate AI technologies into their marketing strategies to optimise customer engagement and streamline operations.

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3.2: The Motivational Compass: How Regulatory Focus Shapes B2B Positioning Strategies

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Keywords: positioning strategy, business-to-business (B2B), regulatory focus theory, online survey experiment.

Extended abstract
Positioning in business-to-business (B2B) marketing is a critical aspect of modern marketing management, aimed at establishing clear differentiation between a company and its competitors (Koch and Gyrd-Jones, 2019). Despite extensive studies on positioning strategies, there remains a gap in understanding the motivational drivers behind managers' positioning-related decisions. This study, looking through the lens of regulatory focus theory (RFT) (Higgins, 1998), examines the mechanisms guiding managers' positioning decisions in B2B contexts.

The research investigates what motivates managers to recommend specific positioning strategies and seeks to understand the motivational drivers behind decisions related to contextual and market conditions. The investigation is guided by two underlying questions: what motivates managers to recommend specific positioning strategies, and what motivates related decisions regarding contextual and market conditions?

Two studies were undertaken in this research. Study 1 adopted an online scenario-based experimental design using, using the Delphi method and involving a panel of expert informants to assist in the design process. The positioning strategies in the study are based on from existing organisations. Study 2 tested the stability of the results from Study 1 and extended the analysis by introducing an additional dependent variable and market feedback. The results of the scenario-based online surveys were subjected to partial least squares structural equation analyses.

The findings, consistent with regulatory focus theory (RFT), indicate that RFT effectively explains inter-manager differences in positioning decision-making under similar market and company conditions. The results demonstrate that B2B marketing managers' positioning decisions are influenced by a desire for congruity between their regulatory focus and their chosen positioning strategy. Furthermore, regulatory foci differentially impact the likelihood of managers changing a recommended positioning strategy. The valence of a positioning strategy recommendation moderates the relationship between regulatory focus and the type of positioning strategy adopted.

This research contributes to the literature by providing a theoretically grounded explanation for why managers recommend or adopt specific positioning strategies. It highlights the role of strategic goal-oriented motivational factors in guiding managers' decisions associated with B2B positioning considerations. The study also introduces the concept of regulatory fit and demonstrates its relevance in the B2B domain. For instance, the study finds that the valence of the recommendation of a positioning strategy moderates the relationship between regulatory focus and the type of positioning strategy.

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3.3: The Dark Side of AI-Driven Personalisation: Consumer Resistance and Scepticism in Marketing Communications — A Study of Chinese Consumers

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Keywords: AI-driven personalisation; Consumer resistance; Psychological reactance; Privacy concerns; Marketing communications.

Extended Abstract
This study investigates consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation in marketing communications, focusing on psychological, cultural, and privacy-related factors among Chinese consumers. Applying Reactance Theory and the Persuasion Knowledge Model, the research explores how excessive targeting can provoke negative reactions, reducing marketing effective-ness. Semi-structured interviews are used to understand consumers' perceptions, revealing how privacy concerns, perceived intrusiveness, and lack of trust in AI contribute to scepticism. Managerial implications suggest ethical AI practices, including transparency and consumer control, to mitigate adverse effects. The findings provide valuable insights for businesses navigating AI personalisation in the rapidly evolving Chinese market.

Keywords
AI-driven personalisation; Consumer resistance; Psychological reactance; Privacy concerns; Marketing communications.

Extended Abstract

Introduction
Artificial intelligence (AI) has revolutionised marketing communications, enabling highly personalised advertising and precise consumer targeting. Through sophisticated machine learning algorithms, companies can refine segmentation and deliver custom content at an unprecedented scale (Jesse, 2024).

AI's integration into marketing has transformed personalisation, allowing firms to tailor messages to individual consumers based on extensive data gathered from touchpoints such as websites, social media, and mobile apps (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). This enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty. Technologies such as chatbots, recommendation engines, and personalised emails are now common in digital marketing (Davenport et al., 2020). How-ever, ethical concerns surrounding AI in marketing have emerged, particularly regarding consumer privacy and awareness of data usage (Clark, 2024; Hari et al., 2025). While AI-driven personalisation offers significant opportunities to enhance consumer engagement, it also presents psychological concerns.

Increasingly, consumers express resistance and scepticism towards overly intrusive personalisation, raising issues related to privacy, manipulation, and loss of autonomy (Clark, 2024). Excessive personalisation can provoke psychological reactance—a defensive response triggered when individuals feel their freedom is being constrained (Brehm, 1966; Friestad and Wright, 1994). As consumers develop persuasion knowledge, they become more adept at recognising and resisting AI-driven marketing strategies, reducing their effectiveness.

Consumer resistance to AI involves reluctance or opposition to adopting AI technologies in various aspects of life, including marketing. This resistance is driven by psychological and contextual factors such as privacy concerns, perceived lack of control, and trust in AI systems. Studies show that consumers who perceive AI as intrusive or who lack trust in AI are less likely to engage with AI-driven marketing (Hari et al., 2025). Understanding these resistance drivers is essential for businesses using AI personalisation.

This study investigates how AI-driven personalisation fosters consumer resistance and disengagement, challenging brand credibility and trust. Specifically, the aim is to explore the factors contributing to consumer resistance in marketing communications, focusing on the psychological, cultural, and privacy-related concerns of Chinese consumers. Given China's rapid AI adoption, unique socio-cultural dynamics, and strict governmental regulations, it serves as a crucial market for examining consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation (Roberts et al., 2021; Zhang and Zhang, 2025). Understanding these attitudes provides valuable insights for international businesses looking to expand in China.

Research Questions
The overarching research question is: How do psychological factors, cultural values, and privacy concerns influence consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation in marketing communications, particularly among Chinese consumers?

Sub-research questions:
RQ1. How do Chinese consumers perceive AI-driven personalisation in marketing communications?
RQ2. What factors contribute to consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation in China?
RQ3. How do psychological factors, such as persuasion knowledge and perceived intrusiveness, mediate the relationship between AI personalisation and consumer resistance?
RQ4. To what extent does cultural context influence consumer attitudes toward AI-driven personalisation in China?

Research Objectives
This study aims to explore consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation within the Chinese context. The primary objectives are:
RO1. To explore consumer perceptions of AI-driven personalisation, focusing on privacy concerns, data usage, and trust in AI systems.
RO2. To examine factors influencing consumer resistance, such as perceived intrusive-ness, accuracy of personalisation, attitudes toward AI, and individual differences like privacy concerns.
RO3. To investigate the psychological mechanisms behind consumer resistance, particularly persuasion knowledge.
RO4. To evaluate the impact of China’s cultural context on consumer resistance to AI-driven personalisation.

Theoretical Contribution
This research integrates Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1966) and the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright, 1994) to explain the negative effects of AI-driven personalisation. Reactance Theory suggests that excessive targeting can provoke resistance, leading to negative attitudes toward brands (Chen et al., 2022). The Persuasion Knowledge Model posits that as consumers become more aware of marketing tactics, they develop cognitive resistance, diminishing the effectiveness of these strategies (Campbell and Kirmani, 2000). By combining these theories, this study provides a deeper understanding of why AI personalisation may backfire and erode consumer trust.

Managerial Contributions
From a managerial perspective, this proposed study will explore the importance of ethical AI implementation in marketing. Based on the findings, recommendations will likely include the following strategies for marketers to consider:

1. Prioritising opt-in personalisation, allowing consumers to have control over their level of engagement.
2. Ensuring algorithmic transparency, so that users can understand how their preferences and recommendations are determined.
3. Empowering consumers with greater control over their personalisation settings.

By adopting these potential strategies, brands could enhance trust, build credibility, and maintain consumer engagement, while mitigating the negative psychological effects of excessive personalisation.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews to explore Chinese consumers' perceptions of AI-driven personalisation. Participants will be selected based on their exposure to AI-driven marketing (e.g., personalised ads, recommendation engines). Thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns in consumer responses, particularly regard-ing psychological reactance, persuasion knowledge, and trust-related concerns (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

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3.4: Towards Responsible Use of AI in Crisis Communications Practice

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Extended Abstract:
The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into strategic organisational communication, particularly in the critical domain of crises, presents significant challenges for organisations seeking to safeguard their reputation and maintain stakeholder trust, (Baaj et al, 2024, Germinder & Capizzo, 2025). There also exists an opportunity for establishing responsible best practice in the developing field of computer-mediated crisis communication. This paper brings a practitioner's lens to the inherent tension between the efficiency and authenticity of AI-mediated crisis communication and the ongoing fundamental need for stakeholders to have trust in the crisis organisation's responses.

The Problem

As organisations leverage AI-powered tools for real-time information dissemination, sentiment analysis, and generation of automated responses during crises (Zhan, 2025), deeper analysis and understanding of how stakeholders perceive and potentially trust AI-mediated communications is becoming paramount, notably within the context of magnified audience attention and the raised stakeholder expectations of attribution that accompany preventable crises, (Coombs, 2007). This study will address a significant gap in the literature by investigating the multifaceted dynamics of trust in AI-driven crisis communication, including exploration of the interplay between AI disclosure and transparency, the need for empathy in crisis communication responses, perceived AI competence, and AI literacy in navigating crises to protect, maintain or rebuild trust in the organisation.

As AI is increasingly adopted by organisations, more immediate responses are enabled. Through educating AI to employ established crisis frameworks, benefits are extending to more tailored responses, yet concerns remain, even deepen, regarding its ability to convey empathy, sincerity, and genuine human care, qualities often deemed essential in crisis communication for building and maintaining trust, (Piller, 2025). This paper posits that the perceived lack of authenticity in AI-mediated emotional or ethically charged messages, such as apology, can lead to decreased organisational trust and potentially negative reputational consequences (Glickson, 2023). Furthermore, existing research lacks grounding in emerging patterns of practice and the rich evidence provided there.

Meanwhile, existing literature is suggesting that disclosure of AI authored emotional content, like apology, may not mitigate negative stakeholder perceptions of authenticity in AI content and could even exacerbate distrust in some contexts (Xiao & Yu, 2025). By examining current and emerging practice in AI-mediated crisis communication, this paper seeks to contextualise existing research, within practice, to establish evidence and analyse experience from the field on how messages perceived to be AI-authored influence stakeholders as recipients of crisis communications.

Draft Research Objectives

1. To analyse how practitioners employ and apply established crisis communications frameworks, including SCCT (Coombs, 2006/7) and Image Repair Theory (IRT), (Benoit, 1997) in the practice of AI-mediated crisis communication.
2. To identify barriers to successful stakeholder outcomes in AI-mediated crisis communication.
3. To analyse key drivers for practitioner human input into AI crisis communication generated by AI.

4. To propose emerging typologies in developing best practice for the ethical use of AI-generated crisis communication in mitigating any negative impact on stakeholder trust (threatened by the crisis and organisational handling of it) when using AI.
5. Suggest a modification or adaptation to the current frameworks to incorporate AI.

Proposed Methodology - overview

Case analysis of a selection of AI generated crises will be conducted, both with and without human generated additions, with application the selected framework(s).

Qualitative in-depth interviews with 15-20 senior practitioners in crisis communication will be conducted to gather insights into current and emerging practices, with thematic analysis.

Possible experiment to test public recognition of and reaction to AI-mediated crisis communications messages.

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4.1: Breaking the Bubble: How Can Generative AI Reshape Opinion Formation and Echo Chambers

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Abstract:
The rapid advancement of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) is reshaping opinion formation by influencing how individuals consume and interpret information. AI-driven tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and DeepSeek offer access to diverse viewpoints, yet they also risk reinforcing echo chambers and filter bubbles, limiting exposure to alternative perspectives. This study examines the role of GAI in shaping, reinforcing, or disrupting digital silos, focusing on the interaction between AI-generated content and human cognition.

This study adopts a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with industry experts and GAI users to explore how generative AI tools influence opinion formation. Thematic analysis is applied to uncover key patterns in user engagement and AI's role in digital discourse. The findings contribute to theoretical debates on opinion formation by integrating human-based cognitive models with AI-driven learning mechanisms. Managerially, this study offers insights for AI developers, policymakers, and marketers on designing AI systems that encourage balanced information consumption. By questioning AI's potential as either a neutral facilitator or a biased curator, this study contributes to broader discussions on AI ethics, misinformation, and digital polarisation in the evolving media landscape.

Keywords: Opinion Formation, Echo Chambers, Generative AI

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE
The rapid development of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) has ushered in a new era of digital communication, where machines not only process information but also create content that can be nearly indistinguishable from human-created material (Jaidka et al., 2025). Generative AI enables advanced types of content creation, such as deepfakes, which contribute to misinformation and biased opinion formation, raising significant ethical concerns (Brewer et al., 2024). These concerns are particularly pertinent when considering issues of authenticity, trust, and the manipulation of public opinion. Recent studies have shown that autonomous agents, such as chatbots, can fall victim to the same polarisation effects as humans when trained with large language models like ChatGPT (Llorca Albareda, 2024; Ohagi, 2024). This is due to ChatGPT's strong ability to interpret prompts and update its responses based on the collective opinions of its users, reflecting the biases and ideologies of the input it receives.

However, Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, can also offer users broader and more diverse access to information (Huang & Huang, 2024). This suggests that, if trained with an awareness of human morality and diverse perspectives, Generative AI could potentially break users' echo chambers, which are often reinforced by the biases inherent in search engines and social media algorithms (Song & Yeung, 2024). This raises the question: how can Generative AI facilitate access to a broader spectrum of information and help individuals develop new perspectives beyond their echo chambers? More importantly, how might AI contribute to reshaping social communication and independent opinion formation by presenting individuals with alternative viewpoints?

GENERATIVE AI TRAINING SHAPING 'THEIR OPINION'

There are different approaches towards the AI learning process, which in turn shape their opinion. These approaches can be classified into supervised learning, unsupervised learning and deep learning. It is essential to highlight the datasets on which generative AI is trained, as it is similar to how humans shape their opinions (Azevedo et al., 2024). They trained on data sets such as online forums, literature and books, academic papers, news articles and websites, social media posts, and dialogue datasets such as between users and Generative AI, and users and other agents [humans or chatbots].

OPINION FORMATION THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

For clarity, this study does not focus merely on political opinion formation; rather, it focuses on a more comprehensive approach towards it, such as opinion formation through social media, news, and, most recently, Generative AI. Considering that AI build their opinion similar to us by being exposed to a large amount of information, actually, to far more significant information than a single human can process (Ohagi, 2024). Several theories explain opinion formation and draw on any similarities between [us and them]. Theories focused on the [human side] such as social influence theory (Kelman, 2017), cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962), framing theory (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), confirmation bias theory (Wason, 1960), and the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). While AI, particularly Generative AI, is still a relatively new area, there are several theories that explain their opinion formation, such as Bayesian inference (Bayes & Price, 1763), connectionism (Rumelhart et al., 1986), and cognitive bias theories [similar to confirmation bias theory] (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). These theories enable further understanding of the similarities and differences between human and AI's opinion formation.

Algorithmic Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, And Opinion Formation

The process of opinion formation within groups is often predictable, especially when individuals are exposed to only one side of information (Kelman, 2017). On the internet, information is frequently filtered and censored, often without users' awareness (Geschke et al., 2019). Opinion formation tends to be homogeneous within groups and heterogeneous between groups (Taylor et al., 2018). Moreover, populist movements have shaped the way individuals form opinions; even access to objective truths does not necessarily alter entrenched beliefs (Bakir & McStay, 2018). Opinion formation is influenced by various sources, such as family, friends, online platforms, and algorithmic personalisation, which often provide information that aligns with the individual's existing beliefs. While the internet offers users a multitude of media platforms for accessing diverse types of information, echo chambers arise when individuals with similar preferences and ideologies interact predominantly within their own networks (McStay, 2018). This phenomenon leads them to search for and share information that aligns with their pre-existing views, further entrenching their perspectives (Wu, 2019). These online echo chambers are a direct consequence of the internet's ability to connect like-minded individuals while simultaneously filtering out dissenting voices. News sources, group memberships, and community forums can alter what individuals are exposed to, thereby shaping their opinions (Ohagi, 2024).

In echo chambers, individuals are primarily exposed to information that reinforces their existing beliefs, rarely encountering alternative perspectives (Flaxman et al., 2016). The internet facilitates this isolation of opinion by offering tools such as community selection, algorithmic profiling, and the use of cookies to curate content that supports individuals' views. This perpetuates a cycle of polarisation, as individuals become increasingly divided between those who are informed by diverse sources and those whose knowledge is limited by their echo chambers. As a result, polarisation intensifies, controlling both the information people receive and the discussions they engage in (Ohagi, 2024). In addition to echo chambers, the concept of the "filter bubble" refers to a state where information is filtered and censored by providers, such as search engines and news platforms, based on users' previous online behaviour (Flaxman et al., 2016). While filter bubbles can help reduce information overload by tailoring content to users' interests, they also limit the scope of information

individuals are exposed to, which in turn constrains their knowledge. The growth of the filter bubble phenomenon not only affects how we perceive news but also significantly influences opinion formation.

New technologies have contributed to the rise of filter bubbles by prioritising content that aligns with users’ preferences, thereby limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. This filtration further isolates individuals within their networked echo chambers. Filter bubbles are often a consequence of "search engine bias," where algorithms deliver content tailored to users' past behaviour (Goldman, 2008). Social media platforms, in turn, leverage this data generated by hybrid media platforms for consumer insights, market segmentation, and targeted advertising. These platforms employ techniques like "waste-free" advertising through personalised messages, emotionally intelligent machines, and behavioural monitoring systems (McStay, 2018).

GENERATIVE AI'S ROLE IN OPINION FORMATION, ECHO CHAMBERS, AND FILTER BUBBLES

The inclusion of Generative AI introduces a significant variable into the traditional framework of opinion formation, echo chambers, and filter bubbles (Ohagi, 2024). On one hand, AI-driven systems, when designed with human biases and preferences in mind, may contribute to reinforcing filter bubbles by curating content based on individuals' existing beliefs (Jaidka et al., 2025). On the other hand, Generative AI has the potential to act as a disruptive force within these echo chambers by exposing users to a broader range of perspectives and creating opportunities for more balanced viewpoints. Generative AI's ability to analyse vast amounts of data from diverse sources and independently synthesise and generate new content presents a unique opportunity to combat polarisation (Huang & Huang, 2024). It allows the system to offer users information beyond their usual spheres of influence. By integrating moral AI frameworks and ensuring diversity in content delivery, AI systems could challenge the confirmation bias inherent in filter bubbles and echo chambers. This, in turn, could foster a more open and constructive public discourse, countering the isolating effects of algorithmic personalisation (Ohagi, 2024).

This study will address recent attempts, both theoretical and practical, to mitigate individual polarisation in opinion formation. However, it will also raise the question of whether efforts to break polarisation could inadvertently lead to a more complex form of polarisation due to the advancement of AI's intelligence. In other words, could AI begin to control which echo chamber a human is placed into, rather than offering them diverse opinions?

BREAKING THE ECHO CHAMBERS THROUGH GENERATIVE-MORAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Recent studies are significantly focusing on teaching autonomous machines (AIs) human morals to tackle the issue of AI being ‘autonomous’, such as autonomous cars, or autonomous business tools (Awad, 2017; Awad et al., 2018). This poses the question, can teaching AI human morals break individuals' echo chambers? Several questions can be driven as follows: Can AI be impartial and show different viewpoints? How can artificial intelligence provide a unified moral code while morals change from time to time and between different cultures? Can this create a more complex echo chamber based on their understanding of specific moral codes that may fit one culture, not the other? Exploring these questions will provide significant and thought-provoking arguments into the opportunities and challenges that AI may face during attempts to break echo chambers.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study follows a qualitative design using semi-structured in-depth interviews. A purposive sampling technique is employed in two stages. First, industry experts and opinion leaders in generative AI and opinion formation. Second, GAI users interact with tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and DeepSeek to shape their opinions and gather information about various topics.

This study will apply thematic analysis techniques to develop key themes emerging from the interviews. Thematic analysis will involve a systematic process of coding, categorisation, and theme development to identify patterns in how individuals perceive and interact with generative AI in the context of opinion formation (Forbes, 2022).
Data will be collected through recorded and transcribed interviews, ensuring the reliability and accuracy of insights. NVivo will be used to organise and code the data effectively. To ensure credibility, triangulation will be applied by comparing expert perspectives with user experiences, showing both negative and positive opinions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of GAI on echo chambers and opinion formation.

Ethical considerations will be strictly followed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring anonymity, and maintaining data security throughout the research process.
By adopting this methodological approach, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into the role of generative AI in either reinforcing or disrupting opinion formation and echo chambers, contributing to the broader discourse on AI ethics and information dissemination.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS
From a theoretical perspective, this study extends traditional opinion formation models—such as social influence theory, cognitive dissonance theory, and confirmation bias theory—by incorporating AI-driven learning mechanisms like Bayesian inference and connectionism. It introduces Generative-Moral AI as a framework, raising critical questions about whether AI can truly be impartial and whether a universal moral code can be applied across diverse cultures. Furthermore, it challenges existing literature on echo chambers and filter bubbles by positioning generative AI not just as a passive tool but as an active mediator of digital polarisation. This work opens new avenues for research into AI ethics, human-computer interaction, and digital sociology, particularly regarding AI's evolving role in shaping global public opinion.

This study contributes to the managerial lens by highlighting how generative AI can either reinforce or disrupt opinion silos, influencing media, marketing, and policymaking. AI-driven platforms such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and DeepSeek can be leveraged to create more balanced information ecosystems, reducing misinformation and enhancing public discourse. The findings provide actionable insights for AI developers, regulators, and business leaders on integrating moral AI frameworks to ensure ethical content curation. Additionally, this research offers valuable guidance for brands and marketers, helping them navigate consumer engagement strategies without reinforcing digital echo chambers. It also informs government and regulatory bodies on how AI policies can be designed to mitigate algorithmic biases, fostering more open and inclusive online discussions.

This study acknowledges its limitation in that the discussion is based on a thorough review of the literature, and qualitative study, without conclusions drawn from quantitative empirical evidence. Thus, it opens avenues for further research to examine this phenomenon in the future.

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4.2: AI in Marketing Communications: Developing a Higher Education Curriculum for Industry Readiness

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Keywords: AI, marketing, communications, curriculum analysis

Extended Abstract:
After the breakout of social media and digital marketing, mainly in the five years between 2012 and 2017, higher education institutions worldwide had to add value to their marketing communications programs and start preparing students for real-life jobs in the contemporary marketing field. At that time, higher education institutions with marketing communications programs had to develop new approaches to their programs to address digital marketing industry challenges (Rohm et al., 2018). This trend continued in the next five years, as the number of internet users worldwide grew by 43.2 percent (Petrosyan, 2023). After the breakout of AI tools in the following years, the new digital evolution strikes those programs again. The rapid and inevitable AI development is growing a massive gap between traditional marketing communications curricula and industry demands. Higher education institutions with marketing communications programs are again in the position to consider reshaping their academic catalog now to offer expertise in understanding and actively using AI tools in the field.

This opinion-based paper explores the possible transformation of marketing communications programs. It puts effort into finding the answer to the question – What is the suitable AI-aware, contemporary, and industry-needed higher education program in marketing communications? The paper provides directions for creating an AI marketing communications curriculum aligned with the industry's and global higher education needs (Hancock, 2023). Based on the digital transformation framework in higher education (Benavides et al., 2020; Marks et al., 2020), the model program presented in this paper is an interdisciplinary study program that integrates ethical awareness regarding AI usage, analytical thinking, IT skills, digital communication skills, communication management, and authentic creativity. The proposed curriculum places AI-driven marketing at its core because students must learn to develop and communicate models relevant to the digital age and develop skills needed for their future careers. This includes understanding the changes AI tools bring to digital business models, e-commerce strategies, and user experience (UX). The program also introduces specialized courses on AI communication management, AI-driven marketing strategies, personalization strategies, and AI applications in content marketing creation.

The methodological approach in building the argument for this paper is based on the author's curriculum analysis of fifteen BA programs in marketing communications worldwide. The first step included collecting curricula through a Google search using the keywords "marketing communications BA programs". Programs were chosen based on their range in the top search results. A maximum of five programs per country (UK 5, UAE 5, USA 3, Canada 1) were selected to ensure geographical diversity. At least one Asian higher education institution (China 1) had to be included to support the global perspective. This approach allowed a comprehensive analysis of current marketing communications curricula across different regions, providing information about international trends and variations in the offer. The second step was identifying key components in the curricula – course titles, learning objectives, teaching units, and assessments; in the third step, the primary curricula components were compared, and the components oriented to technical and digital skills were taken as the primary focus. The last step of the analysis included comparing curricula on integrating AI topics and tools into the program offerings.

After a detailed analysis of the key components in the curricula and comparative analysis related to AI integration in the programs, only one program is seen as an example of an AI-oriented marketing communications program as it explicitly integrates AI into its curriculum. This program includes courses such as "Brand Management with AI" and "Advertising in the Age of AI," highlighting a strong focus on AI-driven marketing strategies. It incorporates AI into traditional marketing concepts like branding and media planning. The program also features a digital marketing lab, providing students with hands-on experience using AI tools. The comprehensive approach to AI in this curriculum distinguishes it from other reviewed marketing communications programs that, so far, have been transformed only by including some of the digital marketing components in the course offering.

The main development plan of the model program consists of three paths: (1) keeping core courses with a strong background in marketing communications and aligning their content with AI-related teaching units together with integration of AI tools and platforms into course material, activities and assessments, and developing new courses related to AI implementation in the field; (2) rewriting the assessments to be more AI resistant; and (3) building the high level of collaboration with industry partners on real-world projects where the AI implementation in everyday work task can be actively followed.

The first path is the most demanding, requesting significant changes to the existing curricula. Most core courses related to marketing communications, such as "Fundamentals of Marketing" or "Introduction to Marketing and Communications," should be kept with minor changes in the teaching units where students will be introduced to AI implementation in the field. Most traditional marketing and communication courses can be transformed in the same way. New courses can be developed by following the principle given by the mentioned novel program with high AI integration. It can include courses such as: "AI Communication Management," "Creative Content and AI Tools," "AI-driven Marketing," Social Media Marketing in the Age of AI," or "AI and Digital Ethics." These courses can reshape the understanding of AI’s effects on the field of marketing communications, and they can build skills needed on the industry side.

The second path asks for a review of course learning materials, activities, and assessments. This is a very sensitive step, as we have to keep in mind the usage of ChatGPT and similar AI tools for cheating on exams and plagiarizing work (Education Week, 2024). The task of the curricula creators and academic teachers is to re-format the content they use, as it must be more AI-sensitive.

The third path, or task, for higher education institutions is to build and nurture strong collaborations with industry partners. That will allow students to actively observe and engage with the practical implementation of AI in everyday marketing communications tasks. Their feedback and observations will ensure academic programs remain current and aligned with industry practices.

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4.3: Enhancing Semiconductor Manufacturing through Customer Support AI: Strategic Insights for AI Adoption in Malaysia's Industry

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Abstract

This study examines the adoption of customer support artificial intelligence (AI) within Malaysia's semiconductor manufacturing industry, focusing on how it can drive operational efficiency, optimize resource utilization, enhance product quality, and lower manufacturing costs. Despite AI's growing importance, there is a lack of research on its adoption within internal customer support functions in this sector. Using the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, the study identifies key AI applications across critical departments such as assembly, testing, quality assurance, new product introduction, and research and development. A quantitative survey of 143 organizations was conducted and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The findings highlight that competitive pressure, top management commitment, and employee adaptability are the primary drivers of AI adoption, with competitive pressure being the most influential factor. However, external support and organizational readiness were found to have minimal impact on AI adoption, suggesting that established semiconductor companies in Malaysia have the necessary resources and infrastructure to support AI integration independently. This research contributes valuable insights for corporate leaders and marketing professionals, providing actionable strategies to strengthen leadership involvement, enhance employee adaptability, and address competitive pressures. These factors are key to accelerating AI adoption and maintaining a competitive edge in the global semiconductor market.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Semiconductor Manufacturing, Top Management Commitment, Competitive Pressure, Employee Adaptability, TOE Framework

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4.4: Virtuous Brand Machines: A Theoretical Exploration

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Keywords: Brand virtues, Brand machines, Virtuous machines.

Extended Abstract:
In the current era, artificial intelligence (AI) performs numerous tasks without human supervision. Firms utilise AI to automate customer communication to respond to their favour (e.g. repeat purchase; positive eWOM). This programmatic branding is efficient in achieving marketing outcomes like improved brand equity and market share. However, firms may be confronted with moral issues when the algorithms behind the automation fail to factor in the ethical standard of the marketplace. Human intervention is essential to teach brand machines to behave according to human morals. The integration between AI and ethical branding is undeveloped in the literature despite the increasing number of AI-activated brands. Consequently, this paper explores the recent development of AI and its application in corporate branding by applying virtue ethics, business ethics, and human-like brand theory as an initial theoretical framework to introduce the concept of virtuous brand machines.

Keywords: Brand virtues, Brand machines, Virtuous machines.

Introduction and Research Aim
Firms use branding to instil human-like traits in their product and services as unique characteristics for different reasons (Woods, 2020). For instance, create brand attachment (Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009), integrate with a specific segment, interacting with a multi-national market, or gain a favourable perception (Chun, 2019). Customers also adopt a brand's personality to express their self-image to peers (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2017). The self-image is moderated by our moral code of conduct to make them socially acceptable (Whetstone, 2001). Likewise, branding needs to follow moral practices when shaping perceptions and positions in the marketplace (Chun, 2005). Moral branding, therefore, needs to be implemented at an external and internal level to be consistent (Morsing, 2006; Solomon, 1992b).

The other end of morals is virtues (Solomon, 1992a). For example, consider the virtue of generosity; if brands do acts of giving, people may call them generous. Brands that portray themselves by this virtue need to consistently perform acts of giving to be seen as a generous brand. Therefore, adopting a virtuous position is not about being right and wrong or good and evil. Instead, it is being consistent in all aspects of the business with regard to the virtue. Thus, branding by virtue is multidimensional and comprises interactions with various stakeholders (Chun, 2005).

Brands use technology to communicate their human-like traits. Broadcasting these traits is driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to maximise the benefit for the brand (Carah, 2017). These AI agents have the ability to enforce beliefs on consumers (Brodmerkel & Carah, 2016) for persuasive and effective reach (McStay, 2017). As yet, AI-branding is significantly impacted by the bais of brand, developer and data (McStay, 2017). Consequent to the proprietary nature of the algorithm, any violation of ethicality remains hidden from the public eyes and knowledge. Thus, the current approach teaches these brand AI-machines human morals (Awad et al., 2018; Ibrahim, Parackal, Mather, & Hansen, 2021; Rahwan et al., 2019) and virtues (Berberich & Diepold, 2018; Govindarajulu, Bringsjord, Ghosh, & Sarathy, 2019) to enhance their autonomous decision making according to human morals. Regardless of the growing interest in ethical branding and the current application of virtuous AI agents, no study has adopted incorporating algorithmic brands and virtues empowered AI agents to enhance the perceived brand virtue.

Therefore, the study aim is:
To conceptualise virtuous brand machines (VBM) as a novel concept to improve the ethicality of AI-based marketing.
The research attempts to investigate the following question:
RQ1: How can AI-based branding ensure sustaining the brand's perceived virtue?
Background and Conceptual Model
The task of creating and maintaining a global brand that values people's diversity is incredibly challenging for marketers (Gringarten & Fernández-Calienes, 2019). This is primarily because of the variations in the moral standards between members of society (Chun, 2019). The earlier theories related to business ethics focused on two main approaches, namely Kantian and Utilitarian. These approaches provided a framework for doing business based on wrong and right ethical practices. According to Kantian philosophy, a firm is expected to follow the universal moral code such as 'do not lie' or 'do not steal' (Darwall, 2006; L'etang, 1992).

On the other hand, the Utilitarian approach by Friedman (2002) suggests that the social responsibility for brands is to be lucrative, provided they comply with the competition rules. A firm's practices are acceptable and provide more good than harm (Minow, 1996). The two approaches are criticised as impractical, as they have provided a general ethical consideration to all situations with the same moral principle (Solomon, 1992b). They have also failed to answer a question like "why should a firm be ethical?" (Hosmer, 1994; Solomon, 1992a). Consequent to the criticism, scholars shifted to the moral trait's brands should have "what kind of organisation should we be?" (Solomon, 1999; Whetstone, 2001).

Understanding the nature of the moral traits perhaps could guide to propose a virtuous branding framework. As virtues lead brands to behaviours that people admire (Whetstone, 2001) and morally valued principles (Ciulla, 2007). Brands with authentic virtuous personalities will always insist on operating distinctively according to particular beliefs and morals regardless of any transitory challenges (Azgad-Tromer, 2016).

Virtue is defined as "a trait of character that is socially valued and moral virtue is a trait that is morally valued" (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994, p. 64). Setting an operational definition of virtue that can offer a satisfactory guideline to be utilised in the business is challenging (Solomon, 1992a). Thus, the attention to moral character is towards the traits more than certain actions. In this case, virtue refers to the personality traits that determine whether to accept or decline to participate in actions according to certain moral considerations (Williams, 2006). Delineating a virtue as a moral character enables the virtue ethics theory to have a significant role in applying business ethics, which provides a foundation for brand virtues (Moberg, 1999).

A virtuous person regularly shows personality qualities that comply with moral codes such as honest, reliable, fair, and trustworthy (Paine, 1991). Therefore, the characterisation resemblance can be suggested to be associated with brands. Chun (2005) assumed that individual virtues originated from an individual's personality traits. Accordingly, a corporate virtue can be established and defined by measuring corporate personality. As corporate personalities are collective characters that involve virtues in return (Hartman, 1998). Therefore, virtues are moral traits that have been developed from progressive experience that represent corporate/brand behaviour through daily activities (Chismar, 2001). This impedes the proclamation that virtue ethics is associated with 'being', which is in greater status than the 'doing' as rationalised in the Kantian and Utilitarian approaches.

Brands tend to express their virtuous orientation in their ethical statements as a marketing tool for communication with customers (Ferrero & Sison, 2014). However, this communication is not only limited to the psychological side but also includes a technological side (Carah, 2017). Brands have been empowered by machines for more effective communication and influence consumer behaviour

(Brodmerkel & Carah, 2016). Machines here refer to any brand's AI-enabled platform that aids the brand in branding activities (Belk, 2019).

At the current stage, the increasing cognitive ability of machines exhibits an undeniable degree of autonomy. Each of these machines' cognitive decision takes falls into the human moral and ethical sphere. With the current challenge, these actions cannot be justified by the developers or users. This highlights that these moral agents need fundamental theories to rely on when necessary to make a self-governing decision (Rahwan et al., 2019). Giving the rapid development has made these autogenous machines significantly more capable than humans (Berberich & Diepold, 2018). Therefore, human intervention is necessary to teach and socially engineer these machines to behave according to human morals (Awad et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2021).

On the other hand, human morals are evolving by the changes of society and culture. Subsequently, teaching the machines the fundamental list of morals will not be adequate to keep pace with these alterations (Bauer, 2018). A more effective approach to adopt is teaching the autonomous ethical agents about the core virtues, e.g. generous, honest (Howard & Muntean, 2017). This would ensure that moral machines behave morally with the changes in situations, behaviours, and cultures (Howard & Muntean, 2016). Moreover, virtues have remained stable more than morals, as we can see throughout history (Allen & Wallach, 2012).

Therefore, considering the paper's theoretical argument. Figure (1) illustrates the Virtuous Brand Machines conceptual Model (VBMM).

Therefore, the research proposes the following propositions:
Assumption 1: An AI-amplified branding can be enhanced by incorporating virtuous AI agents.
Assumption 2: Virtuous brand machines can improve the perceived brand virtue.

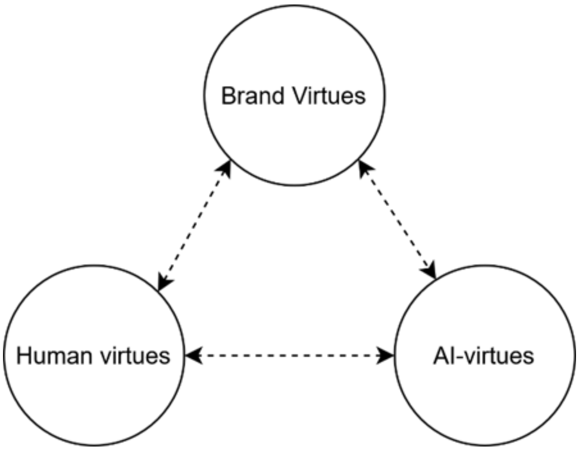

Figure 1 Virtuous Brand Machines Model (VBMM)

Implications for Theory and Practice

The paper aims to provide a theoretical contribution by exploring an innovative concept to contribute to the brand virtues literature investigated previously by (Chun, 2005, 2019), and adopt the integration between virtue ethics theory and business ethics theory (Whetstone, 2001). Throughout proposing a complex concept that aims to advance the brand machine concept (Brodmerkel & Carah, 2016; Carah, 2017) by integrating virtuous machines (Berberich & Diepold, 2018; Govindarajulu et al., 2019) as an opportunity to enhance ethical branding activities. Branding research has been focused on AI privacy or addressing the influence of AI on marketing in a broader term (Ma & Sun, 2020). While there is a noticeable increase of the interest from AI experts to equip machines with virtues as a comprehensive understanding of the human's cognitive system (Allen & Wallach, 2012; Berberich & Diepold, 2018). Moreover, the increase of the customer's awareness has necessitated the brand to perform according to the community manners. Therefore, this study provides conceptual evidence that AI moral agents can enhance the brand's perceived virtue.

Furthermore, the paper contributes on the managerial level. Firstly, the AI active brand managers by providing a modern concept to improve ethical branding based on virtuous machines instead of illogical 'algorithmic' branding. Secondly, to AI experts, to contribute to the general experiments of enhancing the machine's cognitive processing and autonomous decisions.

This paper only focused on providing a conceptual contribution to brand virtue literature. Forthcoming studies could adopt empirical studies regarding consumer perceptions about the AI amplified brand virtues. Further studies may study the effect of AI-enhanced virtue on brand trust, perception, and personality. Interviews with AI experts, ethicists, and marketers will possibly enhance the understanding of opportunities and limitations to develop such a proposition. Providing

an extended study investigating the privacy and regulatory aspects would participate in generalising the virtuous brand machines concept.

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Session 5: Sustainability, Environmental, and Responsible Marketing Communications in the Age of AI

Session Chair: Professor Ebru Uzunoglu

5.1: Reframing Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) for pro-environmental campaigns: A circular framework for consistency and brand alignment.

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Keywords: IMC, brand promise, consistency, pro-environmental behavior change

Extended Abstract

Adopting marketing communications for environmental causes is becoming increasingly prevalent. However, branding strategies are often overlooked in non-profit and social marketing interventions. This paper, based on my PhD research, investigates Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) as a branding strategy in the context of pro-environmental behaviour change campaigns. Given the abundance of environmental communication, which often dilutes the meaning and believability of environmental claims, this study explores the nature of the brand promise in such campaigns. It examines how integration, the “I” in IMC, is approached across diverse audiences and multiple stakeholders who interact at various touchpoints within the single-use plastics (SUP) ecosystem. IMC is chosen as the theoretical background for this research because the framework ensures that campaigns communicate a coherent brand promise across various communication channels (Fill, 2001; Kitchen et al., 2008). IMC has been shown to positively impact brand equity over time, support recall behaviour, and ultimately contribute to achieving business goals (Batra & Keller, 2016; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010). In a social marketing context, relying solely on social communication is not sufficient to achieve or sustain social behavioural change (Alden et al., 2011). Therefore, integrating marketing communications becomes essential for ensuring long-term impact in environmental interventions.

While consistency in communicating the brand promise is often assumed in existing IMC conceptualizations and frameworks, its theorization, particularly in addressing wicked problems such as climate change, remains underexplored. This research extends the conceptualisation of IMC by critically examining the meaning of consistency. Specifically, it explores how consistency in communicating the brand promise can be achieved in this context by applying a systems thinking perspective.

The study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on two data sources. In-depth interviews were conducted with nineteen senior marketing practitioners from environmental non-profit organizations, advertising agencies, and strategic marketing consultancies in the UK and Ireland. These interviews were complemented by multimodal documentary data from three SUP campaigns, providing triangulation and enriching the interpretation of participants' perspectives.

The findings identify and support three existing interpretations of consistency within IMC conceptualizations (Nowak & Phelps, 1994) while also revealing new constraints and tensions in achieving this consistency in campaigns addressing single-use plastics (SUPs).

The first conceptualization, "One Voice Marketing Communication" (Nowak & Phelps, 1994: 51), emphasizes the need for a unified message across all campaign materials. However, an additional dimension emerging from this study is the necessity of achieving consistency sector-wide (midstream level). A key challenge in this regard is competition among environmental organizations for funding, which can hinder collaborative efforts. Moreover, non-profit environmental organizations often lack the leverage to enforce such consistency across the sector.

The second conceptualization, "Coordinated Marketing Communications" (Nowak & Phelps, 1994: 51), highlights the need for alignment among various stakeholders. However, tensions arise when coordinating with upstream stakeholders, such as funders, who hold significant influence over creative campaign decisions. These stakeholders may have competing interests, including corporate social responsibility (CSR) or greenwashing agendas, and in some cases, they may even be contributors to the plastic pollution problem (e.g., policymakers and industry actors).

The third conceptualization, "Communication Mix Alignment", focuses on achieving consistency in downstream objectives. Constraints in this area stem from the diversity of target audiences, which include both pro-environmental audiences and the general public, who may not relate to environmental protection. Ensuring alignment in messaging across such varied audience segments presents a significant challenge for campaign effectiveness.

Accordingly, the study proposes a new circular framework for IMC, characterized by flexibility, continuity, and adaptability, reflecting the dynamic nature of brand negotiations (Bruhn and Schnebelen, 2017: 477). By placing behavioural branding alignment at the core, this framework addresses tensions arising from conflicting campaign goals across different levels of the SUP ecosystem (upstream, midstream, and downstream). This conceptualization offers a complementary perspective to existing hierarchical IMC models in both commercial marketing (Schultz & Kitchen, 2000) and social marketing for health interventions (Dahl et al., 2015).

While grounded in insights from environmental marketing campaigns in two countries, this research presents a novel perspective on IMC, encouraging its broader adoption in future marketing research. It particularly emphasizes IMC’s role in addressing complex social and environmental challenges, aligning with the imperative of marketing to contribute to a better world (Chandy et al., 2021). Furthermore, it highlights IMC’s significance in social marketing decision-making, shaping branding strategies to enhance campaign credibility, mitigate greenwashing risks, and ultimately achieve sustainable behaviour change.

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5.2: Conspicuous consumption in digital age: The influence of social network behaviour

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Keywords: conspicuous consumption, social networks behaviour, visible consumption, generation comparison

Extended abstract:
Social networks are used by 63.8% of the world's population (Statista, 2024). They have become part of everyday life and have changed people's lifestyles, access to information and purchasing behaviour (Chang et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2016). They have also changed the style of iteration and communication between people and have become a platform where people publicly and visibly express their personality, style and opinions as well as their experiences (Boer et al., 2022; Ellison et al., 2007; Josiassen and Assaf, 2013). They have thus become an ideal environment for ostentatious behaviour and therefore for conspicuous consumption, for which the visibility of product consumption is key (Heffetz, 2011).

The concept of conspicuous consumption, first defined by Thorstein Veblen in his book The Theory of Leisure Class (1899), has changed over time due to the progressive transformation of society. In addition to the demonstration of wealth and social status in society, other factors and characteristics of the consumer have been added over time to present conspicuous consumption. These factors include the consumer's personality, values and self-perception (Bronner and de Hoog, 2019; Chen, Yeh and Wang, 2008; Mai and Tambyah, 2011). Social networks, with their various formats ranging from simple posts to more transient stories, are ideal environments to showcase a user's opinions and personality.

At the same time, it is important to remember that social networks also influence users. Users often try to adapt their self-presentation to current trends, are inspired by other users or try to become more like their role models – the influencers (De Veirman et al., 2017; Kim and Ko, 2012). In their research, Shamu et al. (2024) showed a positive correlation between social media use and social visibility of consumption, but the question remains whether this social media behaviour itself can directly influence the tendency towards conspicuous consumption.

This study therefore aims to investigate whether social media behaviour is among the other factors shown in the literature that influence conspicuous behaviour.

Research methodology
The primary data was obtained through an online questionnaire survey conducted in October and December 2022 in Czechia. The respondents were from three generations most associated with social media use – Generation Z, Y and X (Kardes et al., 2015). The final sample consisted of 679 respondents and was adjusted using the quota sign of age to approximate the composition of the total population in each generation in Czechia reaching the final number of 484 respondents (nZ = 128, nY = 207; nX = 149). The questionnaire consisted of statements focusing on conspicuous consumption, status consumption and other factors based on previous studies on this topic, supplemented by statements on behaviour on social networks and statements focusing on the purchase of food. The research focused on food as a category due to the variability of these products and price availability for the selected generations, as Generation Z consists of low-income consumers.

The factor analyses were used to identify the latent variables as the first step of the PLS-SEM analysis. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was then used to identify the relationships between the latent variables using SmartPLS software (see Fig. 1). The model was applied to the entire sample and then to each generation separately to identify differences between generations.
Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model

Results
The factor analysis identified 7 latent variables: Sensitivity to others; Social network behaviour; Materialism and status consumption; Personality and Grandstand; Origin and sustainability; Price and Conspicuous consumption (CC). The conceptual model was then proposed to test the relationship between the variables and CC.

The validity and reliability of the model were tested given the reflective nature of the model. Reliability was tested by evaluating the outer loadings, which should be above the value of 0.7. All variables were above this value, except for three variables (CC2, O&S2 and O&S4), which were still above the minimum value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022). The elimination of these variables did not improve the model specification, moreover, their removal from the model reduced the relevance of the model, so they remained in the model. The values of the other coefficients that test the validity of the model - Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and AVE (the Average Variance Extracted), were also within the threshold values.

Once the conditions for validity and reliability were met, the model itself was evaluated. First, collinearity was checked using the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor), with all values below the recommended value of 5, indicating a negligible level. The model had low predictive power, but the Q2predict values were still greater than 0.

Overall, the model explained 53.8% (R2 = 0.538). Hypotheses H5 and H6, i.e. the relationship between the latent variables Price and Origin and Sustainability and Conspicuous consumption, could not be proven (see Table 1).

This model was then applied separately to the sample of respondents from each generation. For Generation Y, the model fulfils all conditions and explains a total of 65.1%. After a minor adjustment of the variables (removal of the variable O&S2), it can also be applied to Generation X, where it explains 61%. For Generation Z, the model does not fulfil the conditions of validity and reliability even after adjusting the variables. Therefore, this model is not appropriate for this generation and a different approach is needed to establish the relationship between CC and social media behaviour.
Table 1. Path coefficients of the structural model.

Conclusion and discussion
The aim of this study was to investigate the inclusion of social media behaviour as a separate factor alongside others in a model to explain conspicuous consumption. Although the tendency towards materialism and status consumption consistently influence conspicuous consumption the most, the link with social networking behaviour was also confirmed.
Interestingly, the resulting model is applicable to both Generation X and Y, but not to Generation Z. This raises the question of whether qualitative research is not better suited to this generation so that we can go deeper and explore the question of how conspicuous consumption is perceived by this generation.

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Figure 1:

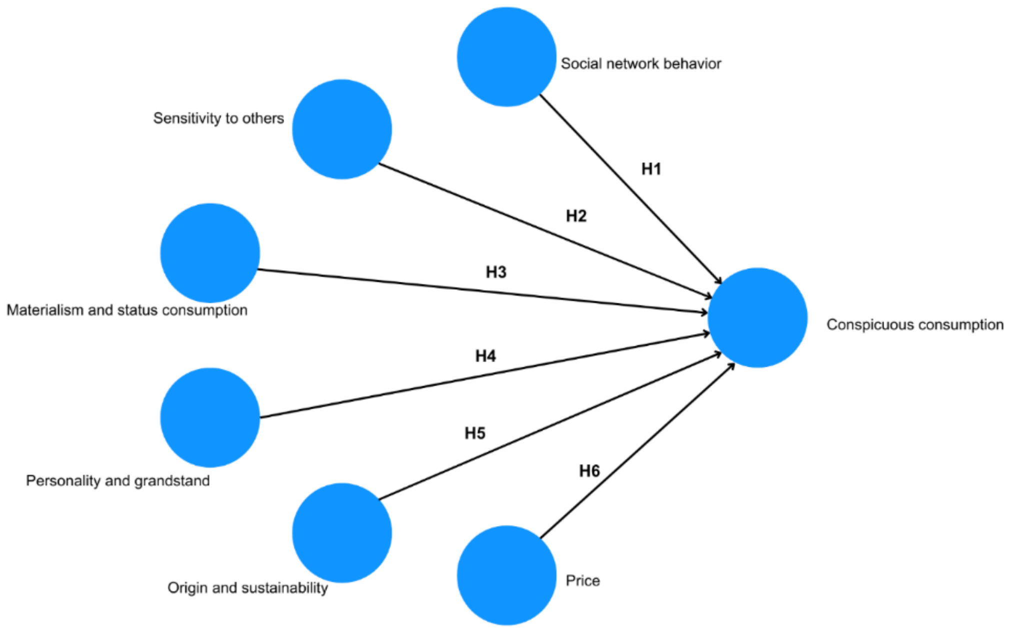

Table 1:

Hypotheses	Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Result
H1	Social network behaviour → CC	0.131	3.316	0.001	Supported
H2	Sensitivity to others → CC	0.113	3.194	0.001	Supported
H3	Materialism and status consumption → CC	0.434	11.416	0.000	Supported
H4	Personality and grandstand → CC	0.297	8.092	0.000	Supported
H5	Origin and sustainability → CC	0.015	0.431	0.667	Not supported
H6	Price → CC	-0.037	1.057	0.290	Not supported

5.3: Go Slow Is The Fastest Way To Sustainability; The Role Of AI Driven Digital Nudges And Pro-Environmental Behaviour in Opting Sustainability Driven Choices for Fast Fashion.

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Keywords: Fast fashion; AI driven digital nudges; pro-environmental behaviour; sustainability driven choices.

Extended Abstract:
Fast fashion is characterized as trendy, quick imitation of leading brands, low price, and mass availability. The industry is valued at $1.95 billion in retail by 2024 and its value chain is projected to exceed $1.7 trillion by 2029. However, the environmental toll is severe as use per article has plummeted from 200 wears in 2002 to a mere 62 in 2019, reflecting a culture of frequent purchases but less utilization. This consumption pattern is generating tons of solid waste, contributing to global wastewater, and CO2 emissions ranked among top climate changing industries. This conceptual paper combines two theories and develop a model with an effort to exploit Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Theory with Nudging Theory (NT) focusing on AI-driven digital nudges (AIDDN) and pro-environmental behavior (PEB) to deal with these vicissitudes. As knowledge of environmental decay caused by fast fashion will influence attitude towards environment and persuade practice of buying slow fashion. Among AIDDN, information nudge, and feedback on choice nudge for online e-commerce platforms can streamline real-time consumer behavior to personalize sustainability messages to inform, trigger, and promote responsible buying, consumption, and would shape transition towards slow fashion targeting eco-conscious consumers. Pro-environmental behavior is an environmental stewardship which if aided by AIDDN would synergize efforts to heal environmental loss caused by unwise consumption. The proposed model would pave the path for empirical testing later on. This study would contribute to the literature of sustainable consumption behavior and intervention of digital nudges in e-commerce. Digital marketers, up-cyclers, and policy makers could benefit from the findings of this study to seek economic gains while upholding commitment for sustainability.

Introduction:
The fast fashion industry (FFI) is contributing billions to the economy with projections reaching $1.95 billion by 2029, while the global fashion industry is increasing due to affordable prices and trendy options. Which is causing a reduction in uses per article (UPA) of fast fashion articles (FFA), which is damaging the environment. All these initiatives are futile without sustainable consumption behavior. Corrective intervention has become a challenge due to the diverse vested interests of stakeholders. In today's ultra connected community of fast fashion consumers, influencers, promoters, stakeholders, shareholders, regulators, and manufacturers, it has become a question to safeguard social, economic, and ecological concerns at the same time. But, thanks to the recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) with capabilities to assess, analyze, predict, and influence the way people used to make buying decisions for fast fashion articles. Study of extant literature shows that different studies have been conducted so far on various aspects of fast fashion but utilization of KAP theory and Nudge Theory has not been combined with gauging the effect of digital nudges on knowledge, aptitude and practices leading to sustainability driven choices for fast fashion which if moderated with pro-environmental behavior results into the transition from fast fashion to slow fashion.

Literature Review:
AI-driven sustainability messaging in the form of digital nudges can trigger and promote responsible consumption by making consumers subtly aware of the impact of their buying, consumption, and end-of-life effects of fast fashion articles they have been in love with. AI can drive sustainability messaging by Information nudging, presenting alternatives (as default choices), manipulating User Interface as Design nudge, Reversal of Impulsive Decision/Modify the environment, Feedback on Choices. (Bauer et al., 2022)Thus the curation of environmental impacts without being intrusive would be achieved and would support SDGs achievement through ethical use of AI (Sallaku et al., 2024). Pro environmental behavior (PEB) is caring for environment during purchase such as making sustainability driven choices, utilization and then disposal of goods, thus preventing and reducing damage to ecology (Zhu et al., 2010). There is a need to address environmental issues (Minnelgait and Leobikien, 2021). Thus changes in human behavior for the environment is crucial (Bartolo et al. 2023) to change the way they act in the positive way (Romanova 2024). Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Theory traditionally accentuates the headway from knowledge (awareness and information about devastating effects of fast fashion articles) to attitudes (perceptions and values formed, founded on that knowledge of consumer) and then to practices (practical actions taken that align with those attitudes formed over the base of knowledge of environment and sustainable purchasing practices (Hasan et al., 2024; Henao-Hincapié et al., 2024; Masumbuko et al., 2024; Mogre et al., 2024; Songlar et al., 2019).

Problem Statement:
Irresponsible consumption of fast fashion can be guided to responsible consumption with the help of AI driven digital nudges and pro-environmental behavior promoting slow fashion and minimizing the environmental impact of fast fashion.

Methodology and Framework:
This conceptual paper is an effort to present a model framework to combine KAP and Nudge Theory, both are moderated by digital nudges and Pro-environmental behavior as reflected in Fig. 01.

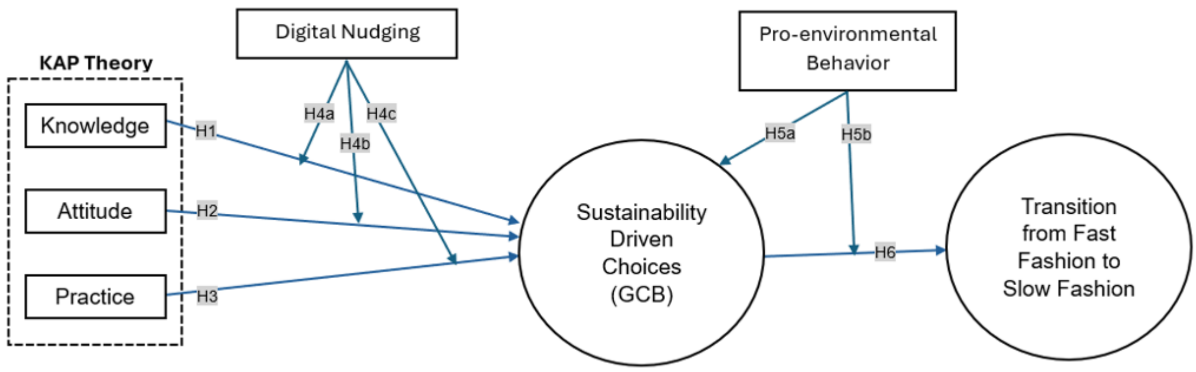

Figure 1. Research framework grounded in KAP Theory and Nudge Theory, moderated by AI-driven Digital Nudges and Pro-environmental Behavior.

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5.4: From Data to Wrapped: The Role of Personalization and Nostalgia in User Engagement and the Mediating Effect of Perceived Value

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Abstract:
“Wrapped” is a fresh marketing communication tool leveraging AI to generate personalized user data to visualized reports. It's widely applied across musical, lifestyle services, learning, and entertainment sectors to offer unique user experience. Wrapped includes individual data, anomalous data analysis, and usage summary. This study aims to identify possible features in Wrapped, and how Wrapped contributes to the experience economy by creating memorable, shareable moments that drive user engagement.

Through an online survey targeting 223 “Wrapped” users and regression analysis, this study finds that personalization and nostalgia in the Wrapped positively correlate with user engagement mediating by perceived value. Emotional value significantly mediates this relationship while social value partially mediates the relationship. This study contributes to the marketing communication literature by analyzing personalization and nostalgia as features of Wrapped and empirically validating their roles in shaping user engagement through perceived value. Firms in different industries can emulate this study's results, creating unique consumer experiences and enhancing user engagement.

Keywords: personalization, Nostalgia, perceived value, user engagement, Wrapped

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