Rising Scholars Conference
Marketing Student Research Presentations

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Gheremey Edwards is a behavioral marketing Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan's Ross Business School. His research investigates how social environments and identity influence consumers' self-perception and service experiences. He examines how social disparities in the market can lead to unintended marketing results and influence consumers to use distinct impression management tactics among different social groups. Before joining Ross, Gheremey was a marketing strategist for Walmart, focusing on seasonal campaigns. He holds a B.A. in Business Administration from Vanderbilt University, an M.Ed. in Teacher Leadership from Christian Brothers University, and an MBA from Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis, where he received the Milford Bohm Award in Marketing.

Abstract:

Familiar Faces, Knives in Places: Adverse Effects of Racial Ingroup Alliance on Consumer Evaluations

Following George Floyd's death in 2020, "Black business" searches surged on Google. Concurrently, entrepreneurs from marginalized groups began prominently showcasing their ethnic and racial backgrounds in their business personas. For example, Black business owners displayed "Black-owned" signage visibly, while some utilized Google and Yelp's labeling functions to emphasize their race. Amidst social unrest, many Black entrepreneurs emphasized racial ownership in their competitive positioning, targeting consumers, especially Black patrons, eager to support Black-owned companies.

Prior research shows that Black-owned businesses are more likely to offer service experiences that resonate deeply with the cultural values of Black consumers. Consequently, purchasing from these businesses can help Black patrons affirm their racial identity and contribute to a sense of belonging. Despite general expectations that shared racial status will positively impact Black consumers' experiences with Black businesses, this dynamic may backfire during negative service transactions. Given the stigmatization of Black Americans, substandard service from a Black business might be perceived as a stereotype threat to the collective race, essentially confirming harmful stereotypes about the racial group. This threat is significant in the context of respectability politics, as poor service may contribute to the perceived stigmatization of the entire community. Consequently, Black consumers may have heightened expectations of their ingroup, often being more critical of mediocre service from Black-owned enterprises than comparable lapses from White-owned ones.

In this research, I ask whether Black American consumers might react more critically to negative experiences with Black-owned businesses than similar service experiences with White-owned businesses. In exploratory studies, I examine business evaluations based on the quality of service and racial ownership from Black and White participants. Preliminary results have shown a significant two-way interaction between consumer race and service quality. When Black consumers encountered negative service from Black or White-owned businesses, they rated them lower than White consumers.

The relationship between Black consumer attitudes and Black businesses carries important practical, managerial, and marketing implications. Black entrepreneurs may find it helpful to understand these dynamics to navigate the expectations of their core consumers. It could inform strategies to improve service delivery, product quality, and customer satisfaction. Managers can design and implement operational practices that accommodate Black consumers' expectations, fostering loyalty and repeat business by understanding their expectations and perceptions. In addition, these insights can assist in hiring, training, and creating internal cultural norms that fit the needs of employees and customers. Insights gained from this line of research may prove crucial to crafting communication strategies that resonate with Black consumers from a marketing perspective. Managers can better determine when it may be appropriate to reinforce race as part of the business’s competitive positioning by understanding communal solidarity among Black consumers.

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Yunhao Huang is a Marketing PhD Candidate at the Haas School of Business. With a keen focus on Internet strategies, his research explores the fascinating intersection of the economics of AI and digitization. His work seeks to uncover the profound impacts of digital innovations.

Abstract:

Unmasking the Deception: The Interplay between Fake Reviews, Rating Dispersion, and Consumer Demand

In online marketplaces, consumers rely on reviews to make informed purchase decisions, rendering the presence of fake reviews detrimental. Meanwhile, products that have acquired fake reviews may exhibit different characteristics of the review distributions, such as a higher rating dispersion, and consumers may take this into account when making their purchase decisions. In this paper, we explore the interplay between fake reviews and rating dispersion, and their impact on consumer demand, while controlling for average product ratings. First, using a data set with fake review labels, we find that product rating dispersion is positively correlated with the likelihood that the product has acquired fake reviews. Then, by employing rating dispersion changes due to rating distribution rounding as an identification strategy, we isolate the effect of rating dispersion on product sales. Our findings indicate that rating dispersion negatively affects sales. To further investigate the underlying mechanism, we conduct experiments in which participants are shown products with varying rating distributions and are asked about their choices, willingness to pay, and concerns about fake reviews. Additionally, we incorporate an information treatment, which later functions as an instrumental variable, to determine the impact of consumer suspicion of fake reviews on their demand. The experimental results demonstrate that rating dispersion significantly impacts consumer demand, with heightened dispersion in ratings leading to concerns about fake reviews. These findings align with the outcomes from our observational study, underscoring the importance of comprehending the interplay between fake reviews, rating dispersion, and consumer demand in online marketplaces.

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Denny Huynh is a Marketing PhD student at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. Denny is interested in the signaling of social status from consumption. His other research interests include stigmatization, luxury aesthetics, and social media behavior. Prior to his PhD program, Denny worked as a Nielsen consultant at the Coca-Cola Company, where he supported brand management, consumer insights, and product launches for the Diet Coke, Sprite, and Fresca portfolios.

Abstract:

Conspicuous Quantification: Behavioral Tracking as a Status Symbol

Behavioral tracking is increasingly prevalent. From steps and sleep to energy consumption and personal finances, new technologies have made it easier than ever before for consumers to track their behavior in a variety of domains. Wearable technology alone is estimated to reach 300 million users by 2027 and is valued at over $32 billion worldwide

(Statista, 2023).

Importantly, behavioral tracking is not just a private phenomenon, but a public one. Across numerous websites, tools, and apps, consumers often share or display the outputs of their tracking. People share metrics like step count using Fitbit, for example, or distance biked using Strava. But while recent work has begun to explore consequences of behavioral tracking for the individual who tracks (Etkin, 2016; Silverman & Barasch, 2023), tracking's social implications are less well understood.

In the current research, we propose that behavioral tracking shapes judgments of social status. Consumers infer status based on observing others' behavior. Conspicuous consumption of expensive or exclusive products, for example, signals status to observers (Veblen, 1899). We suggest that conspicuous tracking increases status due to what it signals about self-control. In modern Western society, hard work, ambition, and busyness are associated with success and wealth (Bellezza et al., 2017). Self-control has similar positive associations (Koval et al., 2015). We suggest that because choosing to track implies greater interest in goal monitoring, which supports self-regulation (Gennara et al., 2023; Harkin et al., 2016), observing others' tracking should increase perceptions of their self-control, and as a result, status. Six pre-registered studies support our predictions.

Study 1A-1C provide initial tests of our theory. In Study 1A, participants (N=587) read about a person who likes to go for runs, and half were told that the person uses a fitness app to track their behavior. All participants then rated the person on: (1) status qualities; i.e., the extent the individual is respected, admired, and influential (Anderson et al., 2012); overall status; i.e., perceptions of social status, wealth, and income (Bellezza et al., 2017); and socioeconomic placement; i.e., a 10-rung ladder representing social standing in terms of money, status, and influence (Adler et al. 2000). As predicted, compared to the control, tracking increased perceptions of specific status qualities (M_{track}=6.05 vs. $M_{control}$=5.81; p=.012), overall status

(Mtrack=5.74 vs. Mcontrol=5.43; p<.001), and socioeconomic placement (Mtrack=6.07 vs. Mcontrol=5.81, p=.008).

In Study 1B, participants (N=583) read about a person who manages their finances either with their bank's mobile app (control condition) or an expense tracking app (tracking condition), and then rated the person on the three status measures from Study 1A. Consistent with Study 1A, compared to the control, tracking increased perceptions of specific status qualities (Mtrack=5.74 vs. Mcontrol=5.40; p<.001), overall status (Mtrack=4.25 vs. Mcontrol=4.01; p<.001), and socioeconomic placement (Mtrack=5.73 vs. Mcontrol=5.53; p=.055).

In Study 1C, participants (N=574) viewed a social media post from an individual who either referenced using an alarm app (control condition) or sleep tracking app (tracking condition) to manage their wake-up times, and then evaluated this person based on the same specific status qualities as measured before (respected, admired, and influential). Consistent with the prior results, tracking increased status (Mtrack=4.77 vs. Mcontrol=4.42; p=.064).

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Boya Xu is a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. Her research explores the influential factors shaping the new content generation on social media, examines the causal effects of social media publicity on local entrepreneurs' adoption of new technology, and develops recommendation algorithms to distribute new products at scale in a two-sided market. To do so, she uses a collection of methodologies from machine learning, online experimentation, and causal inference. In summary, her research aims to inform and optimize platform stakeholders' marketing strategies by considering the innovation dynamics including generation, adoption, and distribution. Boya Xu is the 2023 AMA Sheth Foundation Doctoral Consortium Fellow, and the 2021 and 2023 INFORMS Marketing Science Doctoral Consortium Fellow. Prior to joining the doctoral program at Duke University, Boya Xu received her BS in Statistics from Zhejiang University and my MA in Economics from Duke University.

Abstract:

Social Media Publicity and New Product Entry via Local Entrepreneurs

Authors: Boya Xu, Tong Guo, Daniel Yi Xu; Duke University

We study the early-stage adoption of impossible meat products by local businesses, overcoming the common challenges in understanding new product entries via local intermediaries: 1) empirically tracking intermediary decisions at scale in a timely manner is difficult if not at all impossible; 2) marketing communication for the innovation is largely endogenous to unobserved demand shocks, making it hard to causally identify the driving factors behind the innovation adoption. Focusing on the key producers in their US market debut between 2015-2019, we construct a novel location-specific adoption metric that accurately measures the decisions of local intermediaries and link it to comprehensive marketing communication extracted from social media corpus using Natural Language Processing. Using an identification strategy interacting the global shocks in news content with pre-determined local shares of topic-specific news consumption, we find that local news mentioning the innovation increases the regional adoption of impossible meat products by intermediaries. Interestingly, news content about producer financials appears to be as important as content about sustainability in driving local adoption of impossible meat products. We conjecture that financial news plays a role in boosting the perceived market potential of the innovation both by signaling the trustworthiness of the technology (thus lower uncertainty) and by reinforcing the trendiness of the technology (thus providing free marketing to small businesses who adopted the innovation). We further explore news topic heterogeneities by socio-economic conditions and timing.