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DO MORE LIKES LEAD TO MORE CLICKS?

EVIDENCE FROM A SOCIAL ADVERTISING FIELD EXPERIMENT

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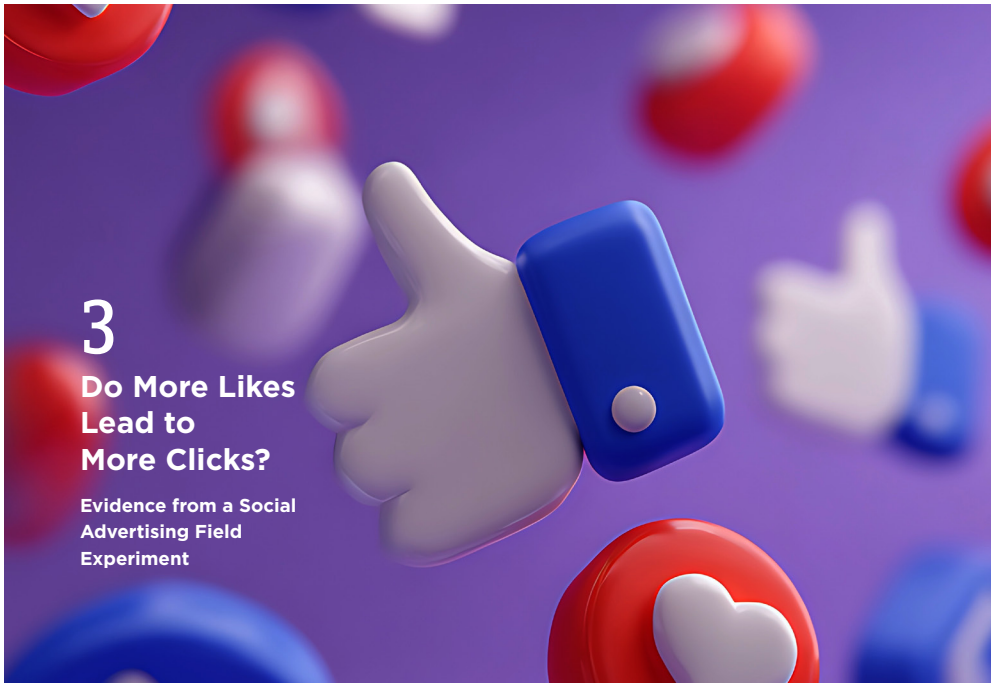

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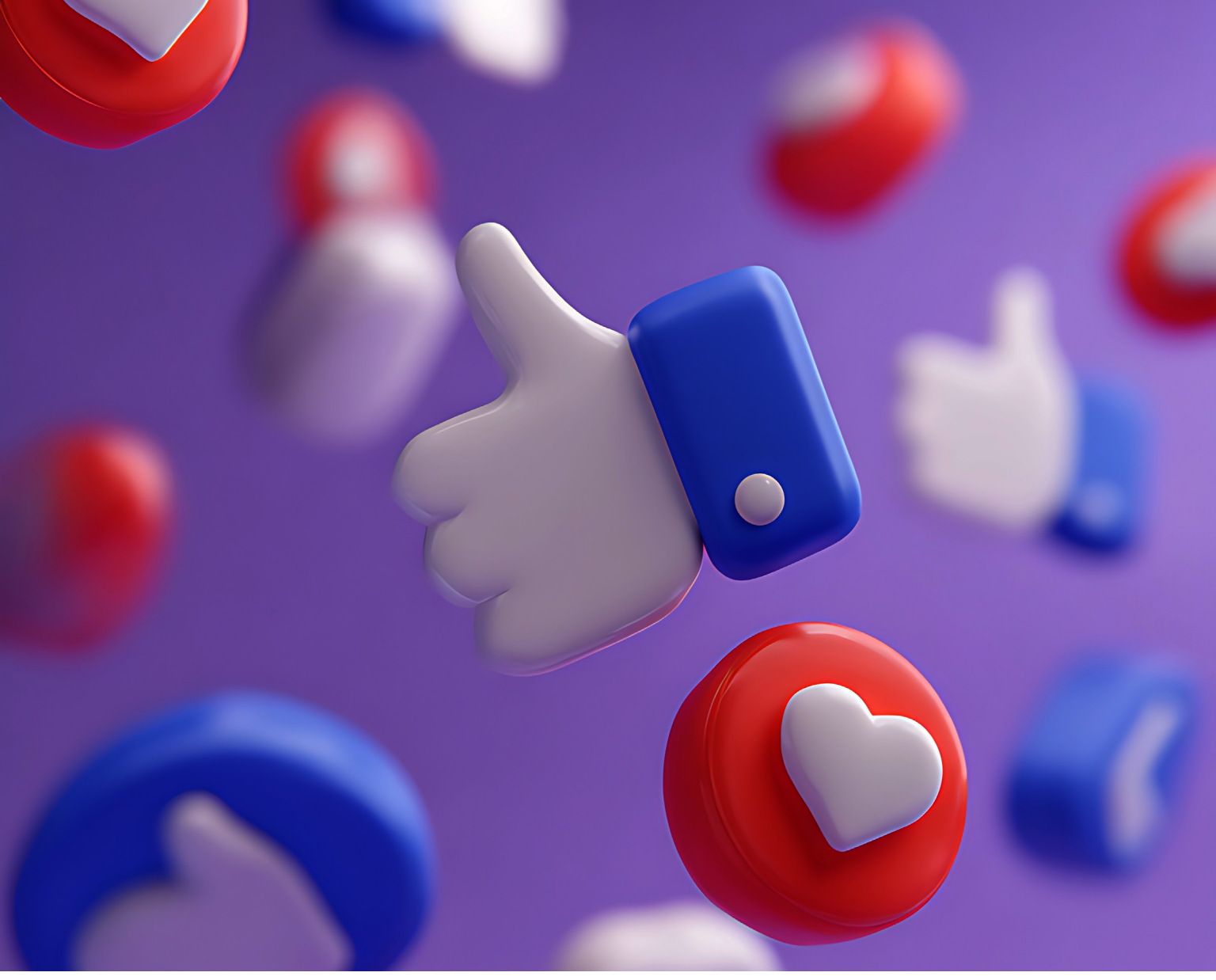


Do More Likes Lead to More Clicks?

Evidence from a Social Advertising Field Experiment

BY SHAN HUANG AND SONG LIN

Social media has transformed how brands interact with consumers, making platforms like Instagram and Facebook critical for advertising success. As businesses invest billions into social ads, understanding how users engage with these ads is more important than ever. But how do social signals such as likes influence user behavior?

A new *Journal of Marketing* study finds that the first like on a social ad has a profound impact, significantly boosting both clicks and likes. However, as the number of likes increases, their influence on clicks diminishes. The research reveals two key forms of social influence at play: normative and informational. Normative influence encourages users to conform to social norms, leading them to like an ad simply because others have done so. Informational influence, on the other hand, drives meaningful actions like clicking on an ad when users perceive it as credible or relevant.

This dual effect of likes provides critical insights for marketers and platforms aiming to optimize ad performance and user engagement.

Key Findings: How Likes Shape User Behavior

- **Initial Likes Are Critical:** The first like on an ad acts as a powerful social cue, boosting both clicks and likes. It serves as a signal of credibility, encouraging users to engage with the content.

- **Normative vs. Informational Influence:** While the first like generates both normative and informational influence, additional likes primarily encourage conformity rather than meaningful engagement. This results in more users liking the ad but fewer clicking through to learn more.

- **Plateau in Engagement:** As the number of likes grows, their ability to drive clicks diminishes. This suggests that showing too many likes can dilute their informational value, leading to a plateau in meaningful engagement.

The first like is a critical moment for engagement. It signals to users that the content is worth their attention, encouraging both likes and clicks. However, as likes accumulate, their role shifts. Instead of driving deeper interactions, they primarily serve to reinforce conformity, leading users to simply like the ad without taking further action.

Practical Insights for Marketers

For marketers, these findings offer actionable strategies to enhance the effectiveness of social media ad campaigns:

- **Optimize for Click-Through Campaigns:** Campaigns designed to drive clicks should display only a few likes to preserve the informational value of the first like. This strategy helps maintain the ad's perceived credibility, encouraging users to take action.

- **Boost Brand Awareness:** For campaigns focused on building brand awareness, showing higher like counts can leverage normative influence to make the ad appear more popular and widely accepted. This approach enhances brand perception and visibility.

- **Tailor Social Cues to Campaign Goals:** Marketers should carefully consider the type of engagement they aim to achieve. Balancing normative and informational influences can help design campaigns that maximize both likes and clicks.

By aligning the visibility of likes with campaign objectives, brands can optimize their return on investment.

Implications for Social Media Platforms

The study also has significant implications for social media platforms. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook continuously experiment with the visibility of likes, as seen in Instagram's recent tests on hiding like counts. These decisions impact user behavior and advertiser outcomes, making it critical for platforms to strike the right balance.

Platforms can use these insights to refine how they display likes in ads. For click-through campaigns, limiting the visibility of likes can preserve the informational value of the first like, driving deeper engagement. For awareness campaigns, showing higher like counts can enhance normative influence, boosting surface-level engagement and brand visibility.

Platforms must consider how their design choices influence both user behavior and advertiser performance.

Challenges and Considerations

While likes are a powerful tool for driving engagement, their effects are not universal. Campaigns that rely too heavily on normative influence may fail to drive meaningful actions like clicks or purchases. Similarly, campaigns that prioritize clicks without considering the role of social cues risk missing opportunities to build brand awareness.

Another challenge lies in balancing authenticity with strategy. Overemphasizing likes as a metric of success can lead to inauthentic interactions, where users engage with content superficially rather than meaningfully. Platforms and marketers must work together to ensure that social cues are used in ways that enhance user experience and drive real value.

A Vision for the Future of Social Advertising

This study offers a framework for leveraging likes as a tool for both engagement and action. By recognizing the dual role of likes, marketers and platforms can design campaigns that deliver better results for advertisers while maintaining user trust.

In a world where attention is increasingly scarce, the ability to understand and harness the dynamics of social influence offers a competitive edge. Whether the goal is to drive clicks, increase likes, or boost brand awareness, leveraging the power of social cues is key to creating impactful campaigns. **MN**

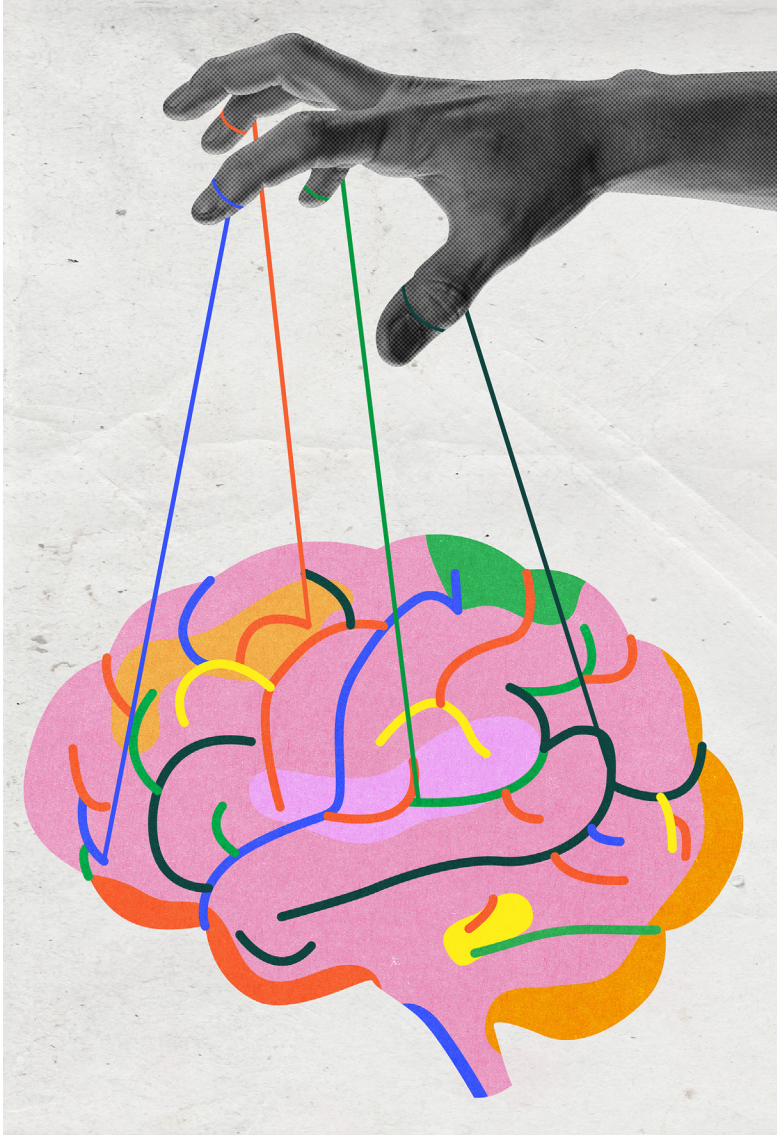
READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Shan Huang and Song Lin, "Do More Likes Lead to More Clicks? Evidence from a Field Experiment on Social Advertising," *Journal of Marketing*.

Inside the Consumer Brain

How Neuroscience Can Predict Ad Enjoyment

BY CEYLIN PETEK ERTEKIN AND ELVIRA TOLEN



Video advertising continues to dominate digital marketing budgets; however, a fundamental question persists: What drives consumers to genuinely like an ad? How do consumer preferences and their psychological roots emerge when individuals watch video ads?

Traditional approaches to answering this question have relied heavily on self-reported preferences, which are prone to bias and offer limited insight into real-time psychological processing. Neuroscience provides a powerful new lens for understanding how consumers respond to advertising, offering real-time, high-resolution insights into the psychological processes that unfold during exposure to marketing stimuli.

In their 2024 *Journal of Marketing Research* article, authors Hang-Yee Chan, Maarten A.S. Boksem, Vinod Venkatraman, Roeland C. Dietvorst, Christin Scholz, Khoi Vo, Emily B. Falk, and Ale Smidts investigate how neural signals track and predict consumer liking of video advertisements. This neurophysiological approach reveals the critical moments in an ad that capture attention, trigger emotional responses, and lead to more favorable evaluations.

Connecting Neural Signals to Ad Enjoyment

The first part of the two-part study draws on data from three functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) datasets to analyze neural signals during video ad exposure. These signals reveal how people process advertisements. The authors used neural measures related to perception, language, cognitive functions such as executive function and memory, and social-affective responses such as social cognition and emotion, to estimate self-reported ad liking. In the second part of the study, they examined how well these neural signals predicted aggregate ad liking.

The authors show that liking appears to be a cumulative process shaped by evolving neural states. The different measures displayed distinct patterns. Emotional signals were predictive of ad liking very early, starting around the third second of exposure, but they declined soon after. In contrast, social cognition signals became predictive after their peak and remained stable. Overall, they find that cognitive and social-affective responses during video ad exposure are strong predictors of how much people report liking an ad.

By bridging neuroscience and marketing, these findings offer new possibilities for marketers. The authors provide insights into how brands can optimize video content in an environment where competition is intense and the audience's attention is limited. Their findings can help marketers refine both the creative and structural elements of their ads, from the pacing of storytelling to the timing of marketing cues. As marketers aim to improve their creative strategies in a data-rich but attention-poor world, aligning with the brain's temporal rhythm may be key to creating content that engages audiences and resonates with them.

In this interview, author Hang-Yee Chan discusses the implications for marketers: what this means for storytelling strategy, how neural patterns shift across platforms, and whether AI-generated content can ever feel human.

"Stories that foster social connection and meaning will likely lead to the best results, creating a receptive context where product information feels relevant rather than being intrusive."

Q Your study shows that emotion is an early predictor of ad liking, but its influence declines as the ad continues, while social cognition and executive function become more predictive. Why does this shift occur, and what does it reveal about how viewers process ads?

A That early emotional peak reflects our brain's intuitive reaction to new stimuli—it's fast, visceral, and helps form immediate impressions. However, as the ad unfolds, viewers begin to process its deeper meaning. Initially, emotional elements grab attention and generate interest, an evolutionary adaptation that prioritizes the rapid assessment of stimuli. However, as viewers continue watching, they begin engaging more deeply in the reflective evaluation of the ad's message, characters, and narrative through social cognition processes, while executive functions help them evaluate relevance, credibility, and value.

Q Should advertisers delay complex brand messaging until viewers are emotionally engaged?

A Yes, advertisers should strategically consider when to introduce complex information such as brand messaging or product features, but it goes beyond simply waiting for emotional engagement. Our research reveals that sustained engagement most likely comes from well-formed narratives—socially meaningful moments that encourage consumer empathy and perspective-taking.

While emotion serves as an important early hook that captures initial attention, social cognition elements sustain engagement throughout the ad's duration. Rather than approaching ad design as a rigid sequence—first capturing emotion, then delivering information—advertisers should focus on seamlessly integrating product messaging within compelling storytelling. The sustained predictiveness of social cognition signals suggests that when viewers connect with characters or scenarios meaningfully, they remain receptive to information for longer periods. In essence, our neural findings support what many creative advertisers intuitively understand: stories that foster social connection and meaning will likely lead to the best results, creating a receptive context where product information feels relevant rather than being intrusive.

Q Your study highlights that moment-to-moment engagement plays a critical role in ad effectiveness. Should marketers prioritize optimizing specific segments of ads that generate the highest neural engagement rather than the full narrative arc?

A I don't see an inherent conflict between optimizing specific segments and focusing on the ad as a whole. Truly effective ads sustain engagement throughout, making it shortsighted to isolate and optimize only a particular segment of the ad. Our study supports what many creative professionals intuitively know: impactful advertising relies on a sequence of meaningful moments that build a coherent narrative arc. Rather than optimizing isolated segments, our findings suggest that marketers should focus on the temporal flow between early emotional peaks and sustained meaningful storytelling. This perspective enhances traditional ad creation approaches by providing a neuroscientific framework for structuring narratives that capture attention and resonate more deeply. It is not about abandoning holistic storytelling for neural "hot spots" but rather using our understanding of these temporal dynamics to create more effectively structured narratives.

Q How well do these findings generalize to other formats, such as short-form social media videos, influencer content, or interactive ads?

A Although our study focused on traditional video advertisements, the underlying neural mechanisms we identified likely extend across a wide range of video formats, albeit with important contextual variations. The temporal pattern we observed—early emotional activation followed by sustained engagement through social cognition, alongside suppressed executive function—reflects fundamental information processing dynamics in the brain rather than processes unique to traditional advertising.

That said, the specific dynamics may be adjusted based on the format characteristics. For short-form content such as TikTok or Instagram Reels, temporal compression might accelerate these processes, requiring emotional hooks and social cognition elements to work almost simultaneously. Influencer content, which already leverages parasocial relationships, may show even stronger social cognition activation from the outset than brand-created ads. For interactive advertising, we might see enhanced executive functioning engagement throughout the experience as viewers make choices that require more deliberative processing.

Q As AI-generated video ads become more prevalent, how do you anticipate the brain's response to them might change? Could key psychological triggers of ad liking—such as emotion, memory, or social cognition—shift when viewers are aware or even just suspect that the content wasn't created by a human?

A There's a fascinating tension in how our brains may respond to AI-generated advertisements. On the one hand, humans have a remarkable tendency to anthropomorphize; we instinctively attribute intention and emotion to nonhuman agents. Just think about how naturally we talk to our pets, as if they understand every word. This suggests that our social cognition systems might readily engage with AI-generated content if it presents recognizable social patterns.

On the other hand, our brains are exceptionally adept at detecting subtle artificiality. Neuroimaging studies examining the "uncanny valley" effect have shown that our brain's valuation and social cognitive systems penalize stimuli that appear almost but not quite natural. These neural responses occur even when we cannot consciously articulate what feels "off" about the content.

The key psychological triggers we identified in our research—emotion, memory, and social cognition—might function differently when viewers sense artificial creation. The social cognition component could be particularly vulnerable, as this system has evolved specifically to interpret genuine human social signals and intentions. For marketers embracing generative AI for advertising, this raises an important caution: even as the technology improves, our neural architecture may continue to detect subtle inconsistencies that reduce ad effectiveness through diminished social cognitive engagement.

The most successful AI-generated content might need to acknowledge its nature rather than attempt perfect human mimicry or focus on elements where artificiality does not trigger the same penalties. The evolution of these responses will likely depend on how AI-generated content develops and how exposure to it shapes neural expectations over time.

Q Based on your findings, how do you think the neural processes you identified relate to the factors driving viral video success?

A In a separate study (PNAS, 2024), my collaborators and I explored the neural mechanisms behind information sharing and found strikingly similar patterns: brain activity in regions associated with reward and mentalizing predicted whether the content would go viral. In other words, the same psychological processes that drive ad liking—emotion and social cognition—also contribute to content-sharing behavior.

We share cat videos because they make us feel good (emotional response) and help us relate to others (social cognition). This neural understanding raises important considerations regarding how information spreads online. The dominance of emotion in early processing explains why emotionally provocative content often spreads rapidly, sometimes at the expense of accuracy and nuance. Furthermore, the social cognitive component suggests that people share content not just for its inherent value but as social currency to signal group belonging, values, or desired identity. This implies that we may share information without fully considering its broader impact or unintended consequences.

Understanding these neural mechanisms gives content creators tremendous responsibility. The same techniques that make ads likable and shareable can be used to spread both beneficial and harmful content. As our understanding of these neural processes deepens, it becomes increasingly important to consider the ethical implications of creating highly optimized and emotionally engaging content in our hyperconnected media landscape. **MN**

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Hang-Yee Chan, Maarten A.S. Boksem, Vinod Venkatraman, Roeland C. Dietvorst, Christin Scholz, Khoi Vo, Emily B. Falk, and Ale Smidts, "Neural Signals of Video Advertisement Liking: Insights into Psychological Processes and Their Temporal Dynamics," *Journal of Marketing Research*.

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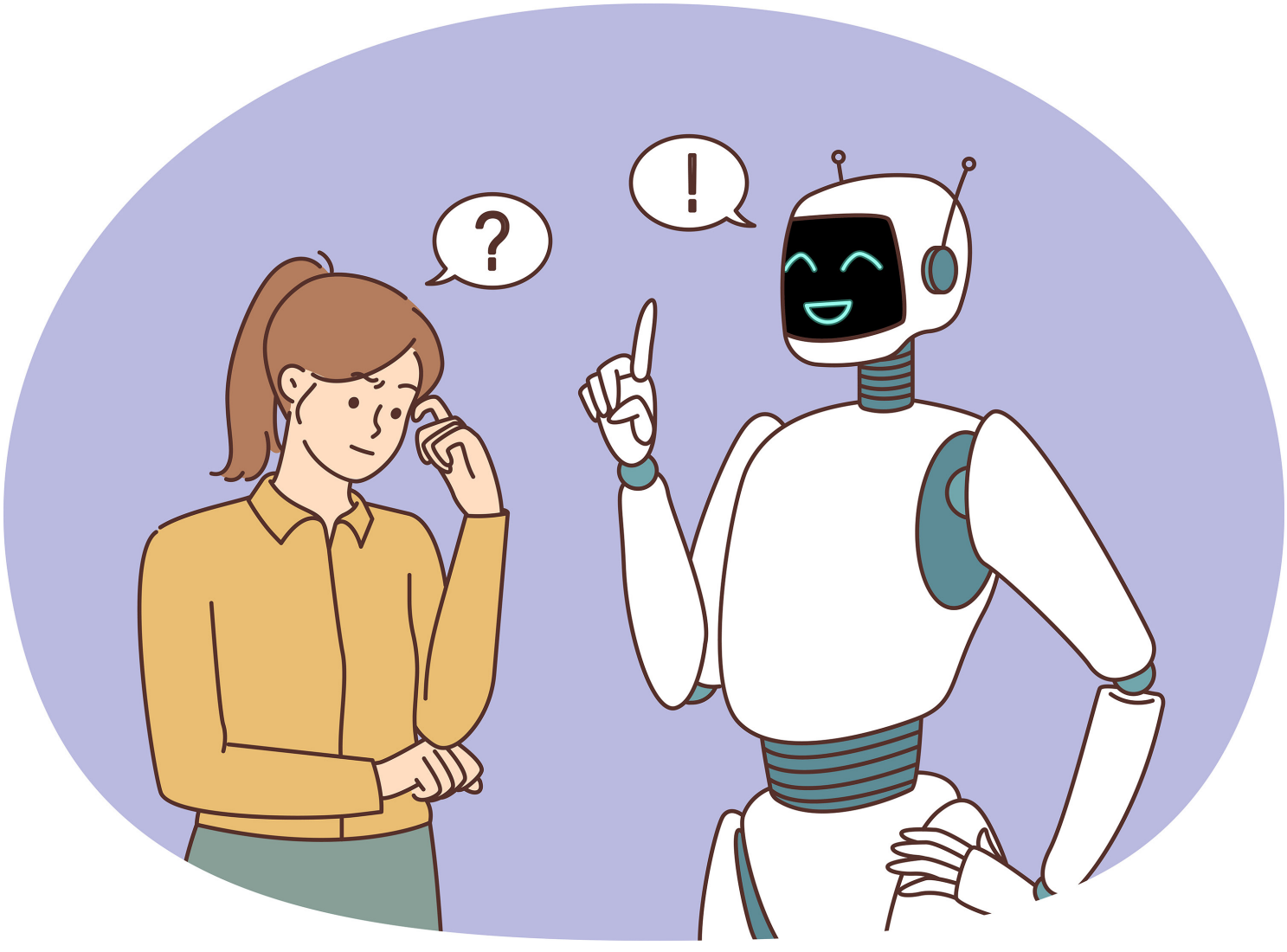
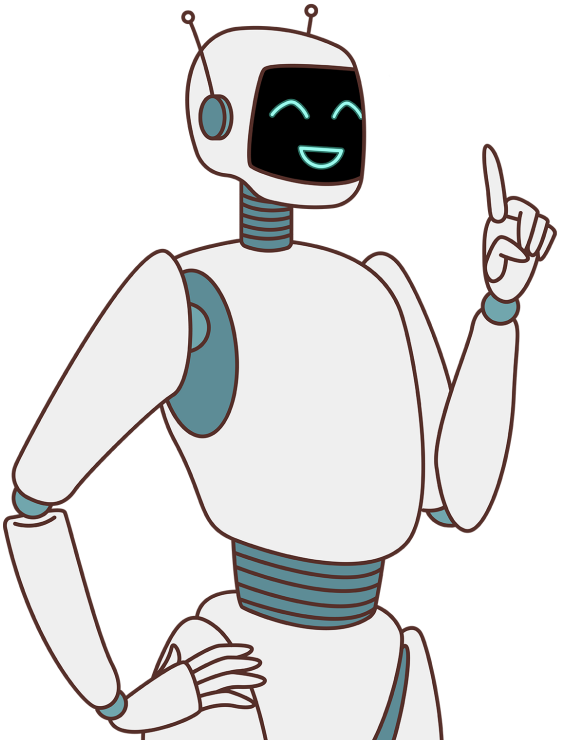


Those Who Know Less About AI Are More Likely to Adopt It

BY STEPHANIE M. TULLY, CHIARA LONGONI, AND GIL APPEL

Who's adopting AI faster: tech-savvy experts or beginners? With artificial intelligence becoming increasingly integrated into daily life, this question carries enormous implications for marketers and product designers. A new *Journal of Marketing* study reveals a surprising answer: Consumers with lower AI literacy are more likely to adopt AI tools because they view AI as magical and awe-inspiring.

We uncover a powerful insight: The key to increasing AI adoption lies not in technical sophistication but in emotional engagement. When AI feels magical, it inspires curiosity, excitement, and trust. Harnessing this emotional response can unlock new opportunities for innovation and growth across industries.



This sense of wonder drives a willingness to adopt AI, even though these users often perceive AI as less capable or ethical than those with greater AI literacy.

In contrast, consumers with higher AI literacy take a more critical view of AI, focusing on its technical limitations and ethical concerns. This group is less likely to see AI as magical and, as a result, is slower to adopt new tools or products.

Implications for Marketers and Product Designers

This gap in adoption behavior has significant implications for marketers, product developers, and policymakers. It challenges the common assumption that tech-savvy consumers are the leading edge of AI adoption. Instead, businesses targeting lower-literacy audiences can emphasize AI's awe-inspiring potential to drive engagement and usage.

For example, marketing campaigns showcasing AI's ability to generate lifelike images, analyze complex patterns, or offer empathetic care can resonate deeply with consumers who view these capabilities as extraordinary. By focusing on the "magic" of AI, brands can tap into the sense of wonder that drives adoption.

Balancing Wonder and Responsibility

This approach comes with a caution. Although lower AI literacy fosters adoption through magical thinking, it may also leave these consumers vulnerable to misuse or misrepresentation. For instance, users may overestimate AI's capabilities or fail to recognize its limitations, leading to ethical and practical challenges.

Marketing campaigns showcasing AI's ability to generate lifelike images, analyze complex patterns, or offer empathetic care can resonate deeply with consumers who view these capabilities as extraordinary.

Marketers and policymakers must strike a balance between highlighting AI's potential and promoting informed usage. Clear messaging about AI's capabilities and boundaries can help prevent misunderstandings while maintaining the sense of wonder that encourages adoption.

Another key challenge involves the role of education. As AI literacy increases, the perception of AI as magical diminishes. While education is crucial for fostering responsible use, it may inadvertently dampen adoption by reducing the sense of awe that motivates initial engagement. Policymakers and educators need to design programs that enhance understanding without eroding the excitement that drives consumers to explore new technologies.

Tailoring Strategies to Audience Perceptions

The study also highlights the broader implications of consumer perceptions for AI integration. Businesses should consider how AI is positioned within their offerings, ensuring that messaging aligns with the target audience's level of understanding and emotional response.

For example, companies developing AI-powered tools for creative industries might focus on the "magic" of artistic generation, appealing to less tech-savvy consumers. Meanwhile, brands targeting professionals or experts might emphasize transparency and accuracy, addressing the more critical lens through which these audiences view AI.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that marketers and product developers must tailor their strategies to different segments of the population. By understanding how consumers perceive and interact with AI, businesses can create products and campaigns that resonate more effectively with their audiences. **MN**

READ THE FULL ARTICLE
Stephanie M. Tully, Chiara Longoni, and Gil Appel, "Lower Artificial Intelligence Literacy Predicts Greater AI Receptivity," *Journal of Marketing*.

Let People Talk

Rediscovering the Human Side of Marketing Insights

BY HEATHER O'SHEA

Marketers have access to more data than ever, but that abundance can sometimes pull us away from what truly drives consumer behavior: human motivation. I've spent my career studying why people make the choices they do (often irrationally) and helping brands connect those dots in ways that drive growth. If there's one thing I've learned from years of research across categories like retail, entertainment, CPG, and technology, it's this: You can't automate curiosity.

When I first started out, I worked on the media agency side, long before digital dominated marketing budgets. Back then, all of our research focused on TV and print. I noticed I was spending all my free time online, but we weren't studying online advertising at all. So I reached out to our digital media teams and asked, "If your partners are running research, can I be part of that?" That small step following my curiosity completely changed my career. I started publishing research on digital measurement, speaking at industry events, and eventually moving into platform-side roles at Twitter and Snapchat before joining Alter Agents. That willingness to fill the gap and meet a need turned out to be the best decision I ever made.

Listening Is Still the Strongest Research Tool

Today, the gap has changed, but it still exists. We're all swimming in data, yet marketers often struggle to translate it into understanding. I've found that some of the richest insights come not from dashboards or benchmarks but from slowing down and *listening*. Pause. Ask: "Tell me more about that." Give space for stories to emerge. When you do, you uncover the messy, contradictory truths that no metric can show you.

In our work, we use every kind of tool, from mobile ethnographies to agile neuroscience, to get at what people think and feel. One of my favorite examples is the Immersion method, which tracks variable heart rate via a wearable to measure the release of oxytocin, the same hormone tied to memory and trust. When someone's heart rate pattern changes as they interact with an ad or product, it signals that they're encoding it into memory.

According to recent research published in the *Psychology & Marketing* journal, heart rate variability is "a promising tool for identifying and evaluating consumer psychophysiological responses to marketing stimuli … broadening opportunities for marketing researchers to improve real-time consumer experiences." And in a blinded test that Immersion did with advertising giant BBDO, they found that neural signals are able to predict actions and what will happen in the market. That's the kind of connection marketers crave: emotional engagement that drives real-world results.

Technology Should Bring Us Closer to People

Of course, AI is changing how we get there. We now use secure AI tools to analyze qualitative data such as transcripts, videos, and interviews to find themes faster. It doesn't replace human judgment, but it lets researchers spend more time thinking deeply about why people behave the way they do. That's what excites me most: using technology not to distance us from consumers but to get even closer to them.

At the same time, we can't lose sight of what really matters. If I could throw one marketing metric in the garbage, it would be clicks. In my experience, clicks don't represent people or motivations and can be wrongly conflated with these to incorrectly inform decisions. The overfocus on last-click data has trained entire industries to chase performance over perspective, ignoring, as a *Fast Company* article points out, earlier touchpoints in the shopper journey.

Clicks tell you what's easy to measure, not what's meaningful. When brands optimize only for what's trackable, they miss the deeper story surrounding the relationships, values, and motivations that actually sustain loyalty.

What Today's Audiences Really Expect

What's clear from the variety of research we conduct around the globe is that shopper motivations are shifting. Especially among younger audiences, brand purpose still matters, but integrity matters more. In some of our recent research with Snapchat, we found that 70% of global Gen Zers say they would assign more status to a figure who advocates for causes on a global scale, and 60% said they only purchase items from brands whose values they agree with—and Gen Z would also spend more when values align.

It's not enough to say the right thing. People (especially Gen Z) are looking to see if your brand has lived those values consistently. They've grown up in public forums, where taking a stand is the norm, and they expect the same from brands. Authenticity, consistency, and action now define credibility.

So where do marketers start?

- **Listen deeply.** Go beyond what consumers say to how they feel. Emotion reveals the "why" behind behavior and gives marketers richer direction than surface-level opinions ever could.

- **Widen your focus.** Stay curious and open to the unexpected. Insights have the most impact when you look past assumptions and allow patterns, tensions, and surprises to emerge naturally.

- **Use technology and AI to speed the process, not skip the thinking.** AI can process the data faster, but meaning still comes from human interpretation. Use it to clear the noise so your team can spend more time connecting dots and telling stories that matter.

- **Rethink what you measure.** Trade "clicks" for comprehension, understanding not just when people act, but how and why they decide. That's the kind of knowledge that builds lasting relationships, not just temporary results.

At the end of the day, insights are about empathy. Whether you're a researcher or a marketer, your job is to understand people in all their beautiful, irrational complexity. Let them talk. They'll tell you everything you need to know. **MN**

Heather O'Shea is the Chief Research Officer of Alter Agents.

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Maura L. Scott, Sterling Bone, Glenn Christiansen, Anneliese Lederer, Martin Mende, Brandon Christiansen, and Marina Cozac

Pictured L to R: Glenn Christiansen, Brandon Christiansen, Maura L. Scott, Martin Mende, Sterling Bone

"When the Road Is Rocky: Investigating the Role of Vulnerability in Consumer Journeys" | *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*

Lynn Sudbury-Riley, Philippa Hunter-Jones, Ahmed Al-Abdin, and Michael Haenlein

Pictured L to R: Michael Haenlein, Philippa Hunter-Jones, Lynn Sudbury-Riley

WINNERS:

"Social Profit Orientation: Lessons from Organizations Committed to Building a Better World" | *Journal of Marketing*

Leonard Berry, Tracey Danaher, Timothy Keiningham, Lerzan Aksoy, and Tor W. Andreassen

"Consumers Value Effort over Ease When Caring for Close Others" | *Journal of Consumer Research*

Ximena Garcia-Rada, Mary Steffel, Elanor F. Williams, and Michael I. Norton

"Does Cash Really Mean Trash? An Empirical Investigation into the Effect of Retailer Price Promotions on Household Food Waste" | *Journal of Consumer Research*

Arjen van Lin, Aylin Aydinli, Marco Bertini, Erica van Herpen, and Julia von Schuckmann

"Consumers on the Job: Contextualization Crafting in Expert Services" | *Journal of Service Research*

Courtney Nations Azzari, Laurel Anderson, Martin Mende, Josephine Go Jefferies, Hilary Downey, Amy L. Ostrom, and Jelena Spanjol

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FINALISTS:

"Understanding and Neutralizing the Expense Prediction Bias: The Role of Accessibility, Typicality, and Skewness" | *Journal of Marketing Research*

Chuck Howard, David Hardisty, Abigail Sussman, and Marcel Lukas

"Improving Blood Donor Retention and Donor Relationships with Past Donation Use Appeals" | *Journal of Service Research*

Edlira Shehu, Besarta Veseli, Michel Clement, and Karen Page Winterich

2024 Journal of Interactive Marketing Best Paper Award

This award honors the *Journal of Interactive Marketing* article from the most recent calendar year that has made the most significant contribution to the advancement of the practice of marketing.

WINNER:

"Amplifying Off-Site Purchases with On-Site Retail Media Advertising" (*Journal of Interactive Marketing,* November 2024)

German Zenetti and Koen Pauwels

HONORABLE MENTION:

"The Power of AI-Generated Voices: How Digital Vocal Tract Length Shapes Product Congruency and Ad Performance" (*Journal of Interactive Marketing,* May 2024)

Fotis Efthymiou, Christian Hildebrand, Emanuel de Bellis, and William H. Hampton

Journal of International Marketing Awards

2024 S. Tamer Cavusgil Award

This award honors the *Journal of International Marketing* article from the most recent calendar year that has made the most significant contribution to the advancement of the practice of international marketing management.

Pictured: Mark Cleveland

WINNER:

"Within and Between Two Worlds: Conceiving, Measuring, and Applying Mixed-Ethnic Identity in Three Countries" (*Journal of International Marketing*, June 2024)

Mark Cleveland

2025 Hans B. Thorelli Award

This award honors a *Journal of International Marketing* article published at least five years ago that has made the most significant and long-term contribution to international marketing theory or practice.

WINNER:

"Will the Real-World Citizen Please Stand Up! The Many Faces of Cosmopolitan Consumer Behavior" (*Journal of International Marketing,* December 2002)

Hugh M. Cannon and Attila Yaprak

Pictured L to R: Attila Yaprak, Hugh M. Cannon

Journal of Marketing Awards

2024 AMA/Marketing Science Institute/H. Paul Root Award

This award is given to the *Journal of Marketing* article that has made the most significant contribution to the advancement of the practice of marketing in the latest full calendar year.

WINNER:

"Revenue Generation Through Influencer Marketing" (*Journal of Marketing,* July 2024)

Maximilian Beichert, Andreas Bayerl, Jacob Goldenberg, and Andreas Lanz

Pictured L to R: Maximilian Beichert, Andreas Lanz, Andreas Bayerl

2024 Shelby D. Hunt/Harold H. Maynard Award

This award recognizes the *Journal of Marketing* article published in the latest full calendar year that has made the most significant contribution to marketing theory.

WINNER:

"Conceptual Contributions in Marketing Scholarship: Patterns, Mechanisms, and Rebalancing Options" (*Journal of Marketing,* May 2024)

Bastian Kindermann, Daniel Wentzel, David Antons, and Torsten-Oliver Salge

Pictured: Daniel Wentzel

2025 Sheth Foundation/Journal of Marketing Award

This award honors a *Journal of Marketing* article that has made long-term contributions to the field of marketing. An article is eligible for consideration to receive the award in the fifth year after its publication.

WINNER:

"Uniting the Tribes: Using Text for Marketing Insight" (*Journal of Marketing,* January 2020)

Jonah Berger, Ashlee Humphreys, Stephan Ludwig, Wendy W. Moe, Oded Netzer, and David A. Schweidel

Pictured L to R: Stephan Ludwig, Ashlee Humphreys

Journal of Marketing Research Awards

2024 Paul E. Green/Vithala R. Rao Award

This award recognizes the best *Journal of Marketing Research* article published in the last full calendar year that shows or demonstrates the most potential to contribute significantly to the practice of marketing research.

WINNER:

"Using Price Promotions to Drive Children's Healthy Choices in a Developing Economy" (*Journal of Marketing Research,* December 2024)

Szu-chi Huang, Michal Maimaran, and Daniella Kupor

Pictured: Michal Maimaran

2025 Weitz-Winer-O'Dell Award

The Weitz-Winer-O'Dell Award honors *Journal of Marketing Research* articles published five years earlier that have made the most significant, long-term contribution to marketing theory, methodology, and/or practice.

WINNER:

"Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? An Empirical Study of Image Content and Social Media Engagement" (*Journal of Marketing Research,* February 2020)

Yiyi Li and Ying Xie

Pictured: Yiyi Li

2025 Thomas C. Kinnear/Journal of Public Policy & Marketing Award

This award honors *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* articles that make the most significant contribution to the understanding of marketing and public policy issues within a three-year time period.

WINNER:

"Disinformation and Echo Chambers: How Disinformation Circulates on Social Media Through Identity-Driven Controversies" (*Journal of Public Policy & Marketing,* January 2023)

Carlos Diaz Ruiz and Tomas Nilsson

2024 Louis W. Stern Award

This award recognizes outstanding articles in widely recognized and highly respected refereed journals that have made a significant contribution to the literature on marketing and channels of distribution.

WINNER:

"Uncle Sam Rising: Performance Implications of Business-to-Government Relationships" (*Journal of Marketing,* January 2019)

Brett Josephson, Ju-Yeon Lee, Babu Mariadoss, and Jean Johnson

Pictured L to R: Babu Mariadoss, Ju-Yeon Lee, Brett Josephson

2025 Williams-Qualls-Spratlen Multicultural Mentoring Award of Excellence

This award recognizes world-class marketing scholars and mentors of color while carrying on the legacy of Jerome Williams, Bill Qualls and Thaddeus Spratlen.

WINNER:

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Professor of Teaching,
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2025 Valuing Diversity PhD Scholarship

In partnership with the PhD Project and the AMA Academic Council, this scholarship seeks to widen the opportunities for underrepresented populations to attend marketing doctoral programs.

WINNERS:

Vannesia Darby
Kennesaw State University

Donovan Gordon
University of Mississippi

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2025 Charles Coolidge Parlin Marketing Research Award

This award is given to leading scholars and practitioners, in honor of Charles Coolidge Parlin, who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and sustained impact on advancing and evolving the profession of marketing throughout their careers.

WINNER:

Pradeep Chintagunta
Joseph T. and Bernice S. Lewis Distinguished Service Professor of Marketing,
Booth School of Business, University of Chicago

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2025 Robert J. Lavidge Global Marketing Research Award

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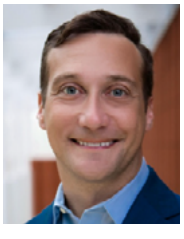
WINNER:



Eric Schwartz
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Sharing Makes Us Wasteful

How Shared Products Drive Overuse—and What Businesses Can Do

BY HAN ZHONG AND WENTING ZHONG

Shared product consumption is becoming increasingly popular, with examples including communal amenities in hotels and the use of hand sanitizer in restaurants. This approach can help firms reduce costs, and in some cases, it aligns with sustainability policies. However, essential questions remain: How do consumers feel when using shared products, and does it matter with whom the product is shared?

A *Journal of Marketing Research* study explores shared product consumption from the consumer's perspective. The research examines how sharing a product with distant others (sharing-out), compared to sharing with close others (sharing-in) or not sharing, influences consumers' perceived product efficacy. Using a variety of products (hand sanitizer, shampoo, and a plant growth product), the authors consistently show that in the sharing-out condition, consumers perceived lower product efficacy and used more of the product compared to the sharing-in or no-sharing conditions. This adverse effect of sharing out is driven by a reduced sense of identification with the product in these contexts. However, the strength of the sharing-out effect on perceived product efficacy is not uniform across all consumers. The authors show that the adverse impact of sharing out is attenuated for consumers with low (vs. high) self–brand connection, as these consumers are less likely to use the self as a reference point when evaluating the product.

Striking the Right Balance in Shared Consumption

This research highlights a significant challenge in hospitality, restaurant, and related industries as the use of shared products becomes increasingly popular and, in some cases, mandated by policy. Although shared products have clear benefits, they also risk undermining consumers' perceptions of product efficacy, leading to overconsumption and potentially diminishing the customer experience. How can firms strike the right balance?

According to the study, strengthening the customer–brand connection and fostering a sense of "in-group" belonging can help. For instance, to encourage acceptance of shared pump bottles for shampoo or body wash, Marriott Hotels could highlight the sense of community built through its Bonvoy membership program, echoing the inclusive spirit of Olive Garden's former tagline, "When you're here, you're family." Similarly, marketers can cultivate perceptions of in-group membership and closeness—whether rooted in geographic location, community, or workplace—so that sharing feels less like "sharing out" with strangers and more like "sharing in" with trusted others.

We were honored to have a chance to contact the authors to learn more about their study and gain additional insights.

Q What motivated you to study how sharing products with strangers affects consumers' perceptions of product efficacy? Why did this question feel important to explore in light of current industry practices or trends?

A Several of the coauthors on the paper had worked together before on projects related to product efficacy and so were familiar with the literature. And, as happens when you are immersed in a domain, you begin to process phenomena around you through that lens. We had all started noticing a proliferation of shareable toiletries in hotel rooms, and then, of course, the shared hand sanitizer stations that seemingly sprang up overnight during COVID. We began brainstorming about these shared consumption experiences and how they might differ from experiences with individual containers of the same products.

Q Were there any surprising findings about which consumers were most affected by sharing out? For example, did loyal or brand-connected customers respond differently from casual users?

A We found that the negative effect of sharing with strangers on perceived efficacy is more pronounced for consumers with high self–brand connection, which is consistent with our theorizing. What we were surprised by was the extent of the heterogeneity in responses among the 77 managers surveyed. Almost all of them believed that the decision to offer a shared product was essential and would impact customers, but beyond that, they had no clear consensus on how it would affect customers. This reinforced our decision to tackle this research question.

Q Do you believe these effects might extend beyond toiletries or hand sanitizers to other shared products (e.g., rental equipment, coworking tools)? How might businesses in those categories address similar challenges?

A The focus of the work is on judgment of product efficacy. We test the theory in categories, like pain relievers and hand sanitizers, that are used specifically for their efficacious outcomes. There is already extensive literature on the sharing of other "non-efficacy" products, like rental cars, that shows that these products suffer from the potential contagion or disgust that arises from shared touch. By contrast, in our work, there is not necessarily a shared touch component, and therefore, the underlying process is entirely different. We do think that there is room for future work to extend our theory to other consumer contexts that lead to reduced product identification and lower efficacy. That would be a nice contribution to the literature.

Q Your research suggests that shared product usage may lower perceived efficacy, potentially leading to overuse and declining brand loyalty. At the same time, providing single-use products (like toiletries in hotels) raises sustainability concerns. What advice would you offer hospitality businesses trying to balance guest experience with environmental goals?

A It is crucial for companies to think of the environmental impact of their policies and products. Companies should consider investing in technologies and using materials that are consistent with both societal and environmental goals and individual customer experience. For example, most restaurants now only offer compostable paper straws in place of plastic ones.

Q Do digital or virtual product-sharing experiences (e.g., co-watching, app demos) show similar psychological effects?

A We focused our investigation on physical goods; however, it would be interesting for future research to explore whether the same effect holds for digital or virtual experiences.

Q How can brands apply your findings in designing product sampling or trial experiences? For example, in stores like Sephora, where trial products are typically shared, what should marketers consider to preserve or enhance perceived product efficacy?

A To address the negative effects of sharing, businesses might consider strengthening social bonds among users. For stores like Sephora, this could be achieved by organizing community events or by adopting messaging that fosters a sense of belonging, such as Olive Garden's tagline: "We're all family here." **MN**

READ THE FULL ARTICLE
Lama Lteif, Lauren Block, Thomas Kramer, and Mahima Hada, "The Influence of Shared Consumption on Product Efficacy Perceptions: The Detrimental Effect of Sharing with Strangers," *Journal of Marketing Research*.

Healthy But Wasted

How Consumer Misconceptions About Expiration Dates Increase Food Waste and Eat into Profit Margins

BY JEEHYE CHRISTINE KIM, YOUNG EUN HUH, AND BRENT MCFERRAN

The fight against food waste has gained global momentum, with policies like California's ban on "sell by" dates aiming to reduce unnecessary disposal. A new *Journal of Marketing* study finds that consumer perceptions about food healthiness play a surprisingly critical role in waste decisions. We discover that healthy foods are more likely to be discarded when nearing their expiration dates because consumers perceive them as more perishable—even when actual freshness is the same.

This misperception has wide-reaching consequences. Consumers demand steeper discounts for healthy foods close to expiration, are less likely to consume them, and ultimately waste them more often than less healthy options. These biases not only undermine sustainability efforts but also create challenges for retailers striving to balance inventory management and profit margins.

Misconceptions About "Freshness"

Our research reveals a fundamental disconnect in how consumers evaluate healthy and unhealthy foods. Healthy items are often perceived as "fresher," which ironically leads to the belief that they spoil faster. This misconception influences decisions across the food value chain—from purchase to consumption to disposal. For example, consumers are less likely to eat a salad nearing its expiration date compared to a similarly aged bag of chips, believing the former to be riskier to their health.

Retailers face the ripple effects of these biases. Healthy foods nearing expiration often require deeper price cuts to incentivize purchase. This impacts profit margins and creates logistical challenges in maintaining stock levels.

Key Insights

- **Consumers Demand Larger Discounts for Healthy Foods Nearing Expiry:** Healthy items close to their expiration dates are often perceived as riskier to consume, causing consumers to demand steeper price reductions compared to unhealthy alternatives.

- **Healthy Foods Are Wasted More Frequently:** The belief that healthy foods spoil faster means consumers are more likely to discard these items before their expiration dates, leading to higher levels of waste.

- **Bias in Leftover Decisions:** When presented with leftover foods, consumers are less inclined to eat healthy options and are quicker to dispose of them compared to less healthy choices, believing the former to be less safe.

Implications for Marketers and Policymakers

For marketers and retailers, these findings offer actionable insights. Addressing these misperceptions through better labeling and communication can help shift consumer behavior. For instance, emphasizing the durability and stability of healthy foods could mitigate concerns about spoilage. Campaigns that educate consumers about the true perishability of items—highlighting facts like the longevity of certain produce or the minimal risks of consuming healthy foods slightly past their expiration dates—can also play a crucial role.

In addition, current regulations often emphasize the removal of ambiguous date labels but overlook the underlying biases that drive consumer behavior. Policymakers can complement these efforts by promoting educational initiatives that challenge misconceptions about healthy food spoilage. Encouraging transparency in food labeling and creating consistent messaging around expiration dates can reduce waste across households and retail environments.

We also observe opportunities for innovation. Retailers could experiment with dynamic pricing models tailored to healthy foods nearing expiration, offering targeted discounts that maintain profitability while encouraging consumption. Additionally, grocery stores could partner with brands to develop packaging that reassures consumers about the freshness of healthy items, even as they approach their expiration dates.

- **Clearer Labeling:** Retailers can introduce packaging that emphasizes the durability and stability of healthy foods, correcting the belief that they spoil faster.

- **Consumer Education Campaigns:** Policymakers and industry leaders can develop initiatives that educate consumers about the true perishability of healthy foods, particularly those that appear fresher but have similar shelf lives to less healthy items.

- **Dynamic Pricing Models:** Retailers might adopt targeted discount strategies that account for perceived risks while maintaining profitability.

Beyond waste reduction, these strategies align with broader goals of promoting healthy eating and sustainability. By making consumers feel more confident about purchasing and consuming healthy foods close to expiry, marketers and policymakers can drive both health and environmental benefits. **MN**

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Christine Kim, Young Eun Huh, and Brent McFerran, "To Dispose or Eat? The Impact of Perceived Healthiness on Consumption Decisions for About-to-Expire Foods," *Journal of Marketing*.

Do Good, Sell More

Can Cause-Related Marketing Promotions Boost Product Sales?

BY XIAOYING FENG AND ANUJA BHATTACHARJYA

Have you ever considered using a small donation on product packaging to benefit your brand? Popular examples of this practice include "buy a pack of toilet paper and the brand will donate 5 cents to the WWF" or "purchase a chocolate bar and 1.4 cents goes to UNICEF." These promotional campaigns are known as **cause-related marketing promotions (CMPs)**, which are designed to boost sales while supporting important causes of nonprofit organizations. Although these may seem small on the package, they are considerable investments for marketing managers. Beyond the donation, this promotion technique involves negotiation with the nonprofit organization as well as the redesign and reproduction of the packaging.

However, do CMPs *actually* drive sales, especially when they're tucked away on a tiny part of the package? In addition, can they cut through the noise when consumers are faced with overwhelming product choices on grocery store shelves?

In a recent *Journal of Marketing Research* study, authors Christina Schamp, Mark Heitmann, Yuri Peers, and Peter Leeflang investigate the potency of CMPs in driving short-term sales in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) retail settings. By analyzing eight years of data covering 63 CMP campaigns across 20 product categories, their study provides the first comprehensive field analysis of how CMPs impact sales in real-world retail environments. Below are the main findings:

CMPs Increase Sales on Average

On average, CMPs produce a 4.9% weekly sales increase while donating 3.2% of the product price. CMPs typically run for 11 weeks, creating sustained growth without the post-promotion dip seen in traditional price promotion (PP).

Who Should Use CMPs

The analysis reveals a large heterogeneity among different CMP campaigns. As CMPs might be overlooked at the point of sale, sales effects can double for categories where consumers notice the brand for factors other than the CMP itself:

- Category leaders
- Brands priced below category average
- Brands with fewer past price promotions
- Brands in simpler markets (fewer SKUs or less price dispersion)

When the setting does not suffice for a brand to enter the consumer's consideration set, a simultaneously executed price promotion can boost the CMPs' sales effects. Specifically, a 10% price reduction increases the CMPs' sales lift by an average of 6.64% over and above the main effect of the PP itself.

How to Make Your Next CMP Campaign More Impactful

- **For Leading/Low-Priced Brands:** CMPs can work well on their own.
- **For Non-Leading/Higher-Priced Brands:** Combine with price promotions.
- **For All Brands:** Time PPs and CMPs in parallel as opposed to subsequently.

The logic behind this is simple: consumers can only respond to cause-related marketing that they actually notice. In crowded retail environments, shoppers quickly screen products using obvious cues, such as brand names and prices, so CMPs often go unnoticed unless the brand is already likely to be considered for other reasons. In other words, brands need to enter the consideration set to make CMPs work. CMPs do not drive the consideration set on their own.

We interviewed three of the authors to better understand the complex complementarity of CMPs and PPs and explore aspects of the research beyond what is reported in the article. Christina, Mark, and Yuri emphasized the role of price promotions in making CMPs a success in the FMCG sector, one of the largest and most diverse industries in terms of product categories, SKUs, and global turnover.

Q What makes your research particularly valuable to both practitioners and researchers, and what surprising insights have emerged from it?

A The main point of the paper is twofold. First, the average effect of CMPs is small, donations are modest, and sales gains are limited. Many brands do not repeat CMPs possibly because of insufficient economic returns. However, because these campaigns last longer than typical promotions, the total effect over time is not negligible. Other forms of promotion, such as price promotions, would experience diminishing effects over longer periods. Second, we found heterogeneity in CMP effects and studied why some cause-related marketing promotions work well while others do not. When you get it right, cause-related marketing has the potential of way higher effects than the average suggests.

Another special aspect of this study is that it tackles a phenomenon mainly studied in lab experiments, where the effects might appear larger than in the actual market. Rather than focusing on campaign design elements, it examines contextual factors such as pricing and competition—variables that are harder to test in lab settings but crucial for understanding what drives CMP success in the real world. With the actual data, we are able to study the actual economic returns of CMP.

Q Typically, when brands run CMPs, they add to the marketing cost. Further adding PPs could end up hurting gains in the long run. Can brands boost their CMP performance with other marketing tactics, such as store positioning and in-store promotions?

A We do not have data on marketing tactics, such as store positioning or in-store promotions, but our evidence suggests that improving product visibility and consumer consideration would theoretically enhance CMP effects. We find that price promotions are particularly effective in ensuring consumer consideration. At first sight, they might seem like a conceptual mismatch that appeals to egoistic consumer motives rather than the altruistic motives CMP relates to. However, consideration is critical to ensure that CMPs do not pass unnoticed limits. Combining these factors creates a synergistic benefit. Note that the additional CMP effect due to price promotions comes at the top of the regular price promotion effect.

Importantly, we also do not observe post-promotional dips with CMPs; once customers buy because of cause-related marketing, their sales levels do not fall below regular sales. Since brands typically need to work with retailers to conduct price promotions while CMPs are fully under their control, we recommend better coordination and timing. If you are doing both promotions anyway, align them for maximum benefit, rather than running them separately.

Q Based on market evidence, do you think brands should take care of maintaining a logical match—like toilet paper brands supporting forest projects—to make their CMPs perform better, sales-wise?

A Empirically, fit as a moderator is difficult to objectively code in hindsight. For example, a German beer brand donated to rainforest conservation. While this might not seem to be a high fit, advertising and brand positioning might influence fit perceptions over time and suggest otherwise to consumers. A cause-related marketing meta-analysis (Schamp et al., 2023) found that fit is one of the most researched phenomena in lab settings; however, it has only a small effect on consumer response. In a preliminary analysis based on subjective coding of fit, we found similar small effects of fit but did not include them in the paper due to interpretational challenges. Conceptually and based on our findings, we would expect factors such

as visibility, concurrent price promotions, and being a leading brand to play a more dominant role than fit, which individual consumers might perceive very differently. Also note that until now, there has not been much competition in terms of simultaneous CMP campaigns in one category in a given time, which might help to make fit considerations more salient.

From an NGO perspective, this could be good news. It might very well open up many more possible collaborations, such as the beer brand's effort for rainforest conservation, that marketers might otherwise rule out due to concerns about a possible lack of fit. When negotiating with brands, we further recommend that NGOs focus on the duration of the campaign rather than just the donation amount. Since we see a constant weekly sales lift over the campaign period, focusing on campaign length creates a win-win for both brands and nonprofits.

Q This study focuses on the FMCG sector, which has its own challenges. What kind of sales boost do you expect from CMPs in other product sectors such as apparel, cosmetics, and electronics?

A One of the reasons we studied the FMCG sector was its one-of-a-kind nature. FMCG is roughly 14 trillion USD in global industry, marking about 10% of the global economy. This is important not only from an industry perspective but also from an NGO awareness perspective. Pretty much all of us go grocery shopping. Running the right collaboration with leading brands, brands with attractive price positions, or those willing to add price promotions has a good chance of reaching many people who might be interested in supporting charitable causes but due to different reasons might fail to do so otherwise.

While we lack data, we could try to draw some logical conclusions from our findings regarding other industries. For example, in electronics, Apple is a well-recognized brand; therefore, if they run a reasonable CMP, they would have a good chance of making a sizeable impact. Conversely, one of the many USB drive brands on Amazon risks smaller effects because CMPs do not attract consideration on their own. Therefore, in terms of generalization, we would not be able to differentiate industries but would think more about the actual shopping experiences and the complexity of consumers' decision-making processes. Whenever consumers apply consideration-then-choice decision making, several factors such as the ones we observed should help CMPs boost sales and promote ethical consumerism. Of course, other factors not part of our investigation could play an additional role in other categories and would need to be considered in addition to these considerations.

Q Some of the data are more than 10 years old, and consumer consumption has changed considerably since then in terms of increased digital retail and consumers' rising awareness about societal issues. If this study were done today, what could be the possible differences in the results?

A To investigate this, we controlled for time effects within our dataset and did not observe a strong shift in CMP effectiveness over time. Moreover, other ongoing projects have shown similar effect sizes. Regarding the role of consideration, we do not expect this to change over time. However, it is important to distinguish temporary cause-related marketing promotions specifically designed to boost short-term sales from brand positioning around ethical consumerism or corporate social responsibility (CSR). When any regular brand adds CMPs, consumers can only find them once they inspect these brands in more detail. However, ethically conscious consumers are often aware of sustainable brands and are likely to consider these without the need for additional price promotions or the necessity of being a market-leading brand. These brands may have profited from the rising awareness of societal issues.

Note that very recently, the attention to CSR may have slowed somewhat, but as *Forbes* notes, "sustainability isn't in a recession; it's graduating from high school." More brands are adopting these approaches and consumers are becoming more selective, requiring brands to be more informed about CSR execution and point-of-sale communications. A similar study of long-term CSR might shed further light on when and how to excite consumers with CSR. **MN**

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READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Christina Schamp, Mark Heitmann, Yuri Peers, and Peter S.H. Leeflang, "Cause-Related Marketing as Sales Promotion," *Journal of Marketing Research.*

How Family Size Shapes Education Spending

BY PHYLLIS XUE WANG, CE LIANG, AND QIYUAN WANG

A recent report from the European Large Families Confederation highlighted the dramatic growth of single-child households worldwide, now accounting for nearly half of all families in many developed economies. This shift has far-reaching implications, particularly for education markets, because parents' decisions about spending on education products are closely tied to family size.

A new *Journal of Marketing* study reveals that parents of single children are more likely to invest in deficit-based education products, such as remedial tutorials aimed at addressing weaknesses. In contrast, parents with multiple children prefer strength-based options like STEM enrichment programs, which focus on growth and development. These choices reflect differences in how family size shapes parenting goals, priorities, and decision-making strategies.

Key Findings: Family Size and Education Spending

- **Single-Child Parents Favor Deficit-Based Products:** Single-child households are more likely to view their child's weaknesses as critical areas to address, prompting them to invest in solutions like remedial programs or tutoring. This preference stems from a desire to avoid failure or setbacks for their only child, who often carries heightened expectations.

- **Multi-Child Parents Prioritize Strength-Based Programs:** In families with multiple children, parents focus on building strengths rather than addressing weaknesses. They are more likely to invest in programs that promote future-oriented skills, such as STEM camps or advanced enrichment classes. This approach reflects their broader goals of maximizing opportunities for all children in the family.

- **Perfectionism Plays a Role:** Parents with higher levels of negative perfectionism—who are more focused on avoiding failure—show a stronger preference for deficit-based education products, regardless of family size. Positive perfectionism, on the other hand, aligns more closely with strength-based decisions.

How It Works: The Psychology Behind the Decisions

Parenting decisions are driven by a combination of psychological, social, and economic factors. Single-child parents often view their child as a singular opportunity, leading to an "all-in" approach that prioritizes addressing perceived deficits. These parents are more risk-averse, focusing on loss prevention and ensuring their child does not fall behind.

In contrast, multi-child parents adopt a more balanced perspective. With limited resources spread across multiple children, these parents focus on growth-oriented opportunities that yield long-term benefits for the entire family. Strength-based programs align with this forward-thinking mindset, emphasizing skills that prepare children for future success.

Negative perfectionism also amplifies deficit-focused behavior. Parents who fear failure or judgment are more likely to invest in products that promise to "fix" their child's weaknesses. This dynamic can override typical family size patterns, leading some multi-child parents to prioritize deficit-based options when negative perfectionism is high.

Practical Insights for Education Marketers

The findings from this study provide valuable guidance for education providers and marketers:

- **Tailor Messaging to Family Size:** Education products should be positioned differently depending on the target audience. For single-child parents, messaging should emphasize addressing specific challenges or areas for improvement. For multi-child households, highlighting growth opportunities and future-oriented benefits will resonate more effectively.

- **Recognize the Role of Perfectionism:** Marketers can address perfectionism by offering reassurance and framing their products as solutions that reduce stress for parents while supporting their goals. For example, deficit-based products can be positioned as proactive tools for ensuring readiness, while strength-based options can be promoted as ways to unlock potential.

- **Segment Products for Diverse Needs:** Providers should consider developing distinct offerings tailored to the unique preferences of single- and multi-child families. Bundled programs that cater to multiple children or adaptive solutions that address both weaknesses and strengths can appeal to broader audiences.

Implications for Policymakers and Educators

Policymakers and educators must also consider these insights to ensure equitable access to education resources:

- **Support for Single-Child Families:** With single-child households becoming more prevalent, education systems should develop programs that address their specific needs, such as targeted tutoring initiatives or tailored support for skill gaps.

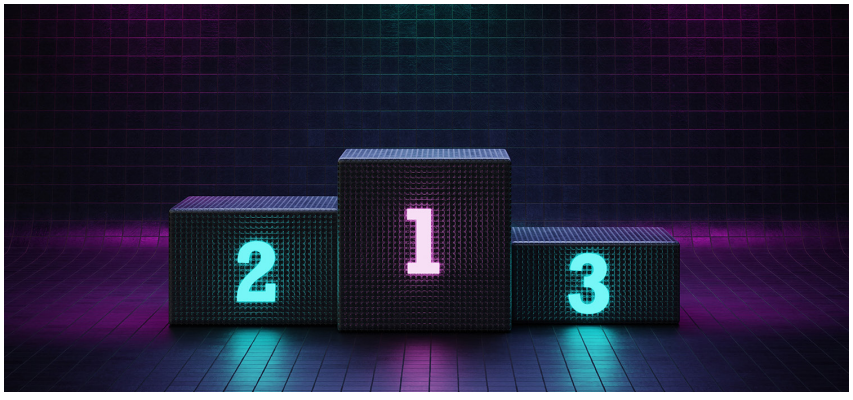
- **Promote Balance in Education Approaches:** Schools and policymakers should encourage families to adopt balanced strategies that focus on both addressing weaknesses and building strengths. Providing clear guidance on the benefits of different education products can help parents make informed decisions.

- **Accessibility for Multi-Child Families:** Multi-child households may face economic constraints that limit their ability to invest in premium education products. Offering subsidized enrichment programs or scalable solutions can ensure these families have access to growth-oriented opportunities.

As single-child households continue to grow in number, their influence on the education market cannot be overlooked. Education providers, marketers, and policymakers must recognize the unique challenges and priorities faced by these families. At the same time, multi-child families remain a significant segment of the market, with distinct preferences that require tailored approaches. By addressing the needs of both groups, stakeholders can create more inclusive and effective education solutions that empower all children to succeed. **MN**

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Phyllis Xue Wang, Ce Liang, and Qiyuan Wang, "Fixing Onlies Versus Advancing Multiples: Number of Children and Parents' Preferences for Educational Products," *Journal of Marketing*.



Research Insights

Quick Takes from AMA Journals Research

BY T.J. ANDERSON

Sales Contests Are Broken—Here's How to Make Them Effective

In a typical sales contest, salespeople compete against one another on a pre-set metric. Proponents argue that these contests satisfy the innate human need to compete, serve as tools to foster agile behaviors within the sales force, and enable firms to offer flexible and responsive steering strategies. But critics argue that such contests motivate only the top salespeople since middle and bottom performers may not have a fair chance to win.

This study investigates the efficacy of two types of sales contests: **single-segment** and **multi-segment**. In a single-segment sales contest, a salesperson competes against all other salespeople in the organization. In a multi-segment sales contest, salespeople are segmented into homogeneous segments (e.g., similar past performance) and a salesperson competes only against salespeople from their segment.

The findings reveal that, on average, single-segment contests do not outperform a no-contest situation, whereas multi-segment contests enhance not only the average performance but also the performance across the segments. This performance improvement is due to a higher perceived chance of winning in the multi-segment contest.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Single-segment sales contests, where all salespeople compete in one segment, do not boost performance.
- Multi-segment contests, where salespeople are segmented based on past performance and compete only within their segment, enhance not only the total performance but also the performance within each segment.
- The performance improvement in multi-segment contests is due to a higher perceived chance of winning.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Raghu Bommaraju, S. Arunachalam, and Sebastian Hohenberg, "Multi-Segment and Single-Segment Sales Contests: Evidence of Their Effectiveness and the Underlying Mechanisms," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 62 (3), 447–65. doi:10.1177/00222437241307577.

Consumers Perceive Star Ratings to Be Higher Than Numerals

What seems higher: four-and-a-half stars on Yelp or a rating of 4.5 on Uber Eats? A *Journal of Marketing Research* study shows that our brains don't interpret every rating format the same way: When we see partially filled stars, our brains can't help but "complete" them (raising the perceived rating), while numeric ratings make us fixate on the leftmost digit, subtly pulling the rating down. The researchers quantified these biases, finding that fractional star ratings often appear about 0.12 points higher than they really are (so 3.5 might feel more like 3.62). In contrast, numeric fractions get pulled down by around 0.05 points, making 3.5 seem closer to 3.45. In other words, star ratings create a mild "rose-tinted glasses" effect, whereas numbers are slightly deflated.

To capitalize on this, marketers can use shapes like stars, circles, and bars to show product ratings, effectively boosting how consumers perceive products. At the same time, policymakers may want to consider standardizing rating formats to avoid such inflation of consumers' expectations. The researchers show that by removing the obvious partial outlines—so the half star doesn't look incomplete—people are less tempted to mentally "complete" the shape. The findings suggest this design tweak can rein in the tendency to overestimate star ratings, thereby presenting customers with an accurate picture.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Our brains tend to fill in missing shapes, making fractional star ratings seem higher than they actually are and presenting an opportunity for marketers to subtly influence consumer choices.
- Numeric ratings seem about 0.05 points lower due to our focus on

the leftmost digit (e.g., 3.5 feels like 3.45), meaning a numeric format provides a more accurate reflection of the true rating.
- Presenting a fractional star as a filled-in portion of a whole, "visually complete" star negates both the overestimation and underestimation of the rating.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Deepak Sirwani, Srishti Kumar, and Manoj Thomas, "Overestimating Stars, Underestimating Numbers: The Hidden Impact of Rating Formats," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 62 (5), 937–57. doi:10.1177/00222437251322425.

Didn't "Have" Time or Didn't "Make" Time? Using the Right Language to Boost Consumer Motivation

The fitness tracker that sits in a drawer. The language app that remains unopened. The book you were eager to read that gathers dust. When asked why we fail to meet such personal goals, the answer is nearly universal: "I just didn't have time." But what if the key to regaining motivation isn't about finding more hours, but about reframing how we talk about time? This study shows that a simple linguistic shift—from "I didn't have time" to "I didn't make time"—can significantly increase motivation to reengage after failure.

Across studies in fitness, finance, learning, and social media, people who said "I didn't make time" were far more motivated to try again. This is because "didn't have time" treats time as an external, uncontrollable force. It suggests the failure was inevitable. In contrast, "didn't make time" acknowledges choice—it implies that time was available but priorities differed. This subtle change boosts perceived control, restoring a sense of agency and drive. The effects extend beyond mindset. In one field study, participants using the "make-time" framing were 12 percentage points more likely to complete a real-world goal within a week (51% vs. 39%) and did so faster.

For marketers and designers, the research shows that carefully crafting the words in a notification or post can help consumers feel capable, motivated, and loyal—without extra incentives.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Describing time as something consumers make (rather than have) increases their perceived control and motivation.
- Encouraging "make time" framing in post-performance messages, app notifications, or follow-up prompts can help maintain engagement and perceived agency.
- Users who adopt "make-time" framing view fitness or budgeting apps as more effective and are more willing to recommend them. Exposure to others' "make time" posts on social media also increases viewers' motivation and interest in related products.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Luis Abreu, Jordan Etkin, and Holly Howe, "Didn't Have Time or Didn't Make Time? How Language Shapes Perceived Control over Time and Motivation," *Journal of Marketing Research*. doi:10.1177/00222437251394122.

How Simple Living Helps Consumers Weather Crises

When the COVID-19 pandemic upended daily life, many consumers suddenly found themselves unable to buy familiar products. For some, forced product restrictions sparked stress, frustration, and a sharp drop in life satisfaction. But others navigated the same shortages with surprising ease. This study suggests that a "voluntary simplicity" mindset can help consumers navigate crises.

Drawing on data from more than 8,600 consumers surveyed between 2020 and 2022, researchers found that people who intentionally embraced simpler, less consumption-driven lifestyles before the crisis were far more resilient during it. Instead of feeling deprived, voluntary simplifiers relied on self-sufficiency, nonmaterial sources of fulfillment, and flexible problem solving.

From a policy perspective, the study emphasizes that governments should not rely solely on restrictive measures during crises but should also promote consumer self-responsibility and self-determination. Instead of focusing only on enforcing prohibitions, policymakers can encourage voluntary simplicity through public education campaigns, incentives for sustainable consumption, and policies that reduce overreliance on material goods for well-being.

For marketers and managers, the insights from this research highlight the growing importance of aligning brand messaging with values of sustainability, mindful consumption, and resilience. Companies can position themselves as allies in fostering consumer well-being by promoting products and services that emphasize durability, reusability, and self-sufficiency.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Promote voluntary simplicity: Highlight the benefits of self-sufficiency and mindful consumption to enhance consumer resilience during crises.
- Balance restrictions and empowerment: Policies should not just impose limits but also promote consumer self-determination to reduce stress.
- Anticipate crisis-driven shifts: Brands should prepare for changing consumer behaviors by offering products that align with sufficiency and sustainability.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Stefan Hoffmann, Ingo Balderjahn, and Felix Reimers, "How Voluntary Simplicity Evokes Resilience in Times of Crisis," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44 (4), 506–24. doi:10.1177/07439156251325559.

Patients Trust AI More When the News Is Bad

Artificial intelligence has the potential to transform health care—speeding diagnoses, improving access, and easing pressure on overstretched systems. Yet despite these benefits, many consumers remain uneasy about letting an algorithm assess their health. This research sheds light on why that skepticism persists and when patients are most (and least) willing to trust AI-driven medical advice.

Across five studies, the researchers found a surprising pattern: People are less willing to follow AI recommendations when the diagnosis is good news (e.g., "your symptoms don't require medical care"). When AI tells them something is wrong, they're more inclined to listen. This is because good-news assessments from AI feel less trustworthy, especially among consumers with high health anxiety.

Anxiety plays a powerful role: People who fear getting seriously ill place significantly less trust in AI-based diagnoses, even when those diagnoses indicate the person is fine. But the study also reveals a solution. Social proof—such as testimonials or data showing many satisfied users—helps anxious consumers feel more comfortable relying on AI and increases their willingness to follow its recommendations.

For health care managers and marketers, AI acceptance isn't just about accuracy—it's about psychology. With the right messaging, design choices, and patient segmentation, AI can become a trusted partner in care.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Consumers are less willing to follow medical recommendations from an AI (vs. human) when the medical diagnosis is good (i.e., "your symptoms don't require medical care") vs. bad (i.e., "your symptoms are worrisome, and you may require urgent care").
- Health care providers could prioritize the use of AI-based recommendations for patients with no previous history of health anxiety problems.
- In health care marketing, social proof (e.g., the number of satisfied customers recommending the AI service) can be a highly effective tool to ease the minds of worried consumers and build trust in AI-based recommendations.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Piotr Gaczek, Rumen Pozharliev, Grzegorz Leszczyński, and Marek Zieliński, "Overcoming Consumer Resistance to AI in General Health Care," *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 58 (2–3), 321–38. doi:10.1177/10949968221151061.

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