

40398 - CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR I

Course Logistics:

Classroom: TBD

Dates: See detailed calendar

Office Hours: By appointment only

Instructor:

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Course objectives

- Establish a strong theoretical and empirical foundation in psychology, marketing, and key areas of behavioral science research relevant to consumer behavior.
- Develop the ability to critically evaluate theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and empirical findings in behavioral research.
- Strengthen skills in conceptualizing, operationalizing, and developing research ideas, while identifying opportunities for original contributions to the field.
- Enhance the ability to systematically review, synthesize, and present research, fostering rigorous academic discourse and engagement.

Course description

This Ph.D. seminar provides a rigorous foundation for critical thinking and research on the information processing and social psychology aspects of consumer behavior. The course explores key theoretical frameworks, empirical research, and methodological approaches drawn from marketing, psychology, and related disciplines.

Seminars will center on in-depth discussions of assigned readings, with each session organized around a foundational topic in consumer behavior research. Students will be expected to critically evaluate the theoretical contributions, methodological rigor, and empirical support of each paper. Special emphasis will be placed on the craft of academic writing, examining how research ideas are structured and communicated effectively.

To develop essential research skills, the course includes exercises in reviewing, synthesizing, and presenting research, helping students refine their ability to engage with the academic literature and contribute meaningfully to scholarly discourse. As a culminating component, students will integrate the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the course to develop a research proposal, positioning their ideas within the broader field of consumer behavior.

Grading

- Class participation: 40%
- Discussion sheets of assigned readings: 10%
- Research paper: 50%

Class participation (40%). Individual participation will be evaluated based on your ability to lead and contribute to an engaging and informative discussion during seminars. There are two aspects of this class participation. First, for some readings, you will briefly introduce the article and then lead the entire discussion of the article. Second, for all other readings, you will act as a discussant rather than leader. You should come to the seminar prepared to present your perspective about the major ideas, contributions, and/or shortcomings of each article. You must actively listen and think critically about the concepts and issues discussed, and for each reading, you must be willing and able to present your analysis and viewpoint to the class.

Discussion Sheets of Assigned Readings (10%). It is very important that you read all

of the assigned papers thoroughly. They will form the basis for the class discussion. For each topic, I have made a conscious effort to select review or conceptual papers that provide a broad overview, classic empirical papers, and contemporary empirical papers.

To help you organize and clarify your thoughts about the readings, you must submit a Discussion Sheet for each assigned paper unless specified otherwise. Discussion Sheets are brief summaries (1–2 pages, single-spaced) of the key aspects of the article, any questions that arise from the article, and any further thoughts that the article inspires. The summary is intended to assist you in introducing the article to the class and discussing it. Do not use summaries that students wrote in previous years or generative AI platforms (e.g., ChatGPT); writing the summaries yourself is what will help you form clear thoughts about the papers. Note: Discussion Sheets must be submitted to the professor before each seminar starts.

Research Proposal Paper (50%). Each student will develop a research proposal addressing a novel and meaningful question in consumer behavior. The proposal should introduce an original research idea, situating it within existing literature and outlining a structured plan for empirical investigation.

Specifically, the proposal should:

- **Define the research question** and provide a concise review of relevant literature. This review should establish the study's contribution rather than serve as an exhaustive summary, focusing on (a) how the research builds on prior work and (b) how it informs hypothesis development.
- **Develop a conceptual model**, clearly identifying and defining the key constructs under investigation.
- **Formulate testable hypotheses**, grounded in logical reasoning and existing research, that articulate expected relationships within the conceptual model.
- **Design a research plan** to empirically test these hypotheses through at least three studies. This section should specify (a) the study design, (b) the procedures participants will follow, and (c) the independent, dependent, mediator, moderator, and control variables, including how they will be manipulated or measured.
- **Outline the data analysis strategy**, detailing the statistical techniques that will be used to evaluate the hypotheses.

Structure this research proposal similarly to an academic journal article (e.g., JCR). Actual data collection is not required.

The proposal will be assessed based on:

- (a) Completion of key components: How well each of the above tasks is executed.
- (b) Creativity and originality: The extent to which the project presents an innovative and thought-provoking research idea.
- (c) Logical and empirical grounding: The use of sound reasoning and established research principles to develop the study.
- (d) Clarity and effectiveness of writing: The proposal should be well-organized, articulate, and adhere to academic writing standards

The evaluation criteria will align closely with those applied to the academic papers discussed throughout the course.

Classroom Etiquette

Checking and/or using a mobile phone during class is extremely rude and disrespectful to others. Such behavior is strictly forbidden during our seminars, and failure to fully engage in the discussions at all times will result in a grade of zero for class participation.

Faculty Bio

I am a social scientist and Associate Professor of Marketing at Bocconi University in Milan, Italy. I conduct interdisciplinary, empirical research that investigates adoption of artificial intelligence as a tool for social good, with direct applications for companies, law, and policy. A secondary area of research looks at the determinants of positive behavior change and the drivers of sustainability and climate action.

Sessions by Topic & Assigned Readings — TBC

Session 1: Introduction & Overview of Behavioral Science Research: What it is, How to do it, and How to make it interesting

Simonson, Carmon, Dhar, Drolet & Nowlis (2001). Consumer research: In search of identity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52(1), 249-275 (<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.249>)

A foundational review that asks what consumer research is, what its objectives should be, and how it differs from related disciplines like psychology and economics. The authors trace the field's evolution, identify competing "camps" and intellectual traditions, and examine the consequences of the field's ambiguous identity for the scope and quality of its contributions.

McGuire (1997). Creative hypothesis generating in psychology: Some useful heuristics. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48(1), 1-30 (<https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.psych.48.1.1>)

A catalog heuristics for generating creative hypotheses, organized into five categories, from noticing oddities in everyday life to reversing banal predictions to find boundary conditions. McGuire argues that methodology training overemphasizes hypothesis testing and neglects the equally important (and teachable) skill of hypothesis generation.

Watts (2017). Should social science be more solution-oriented? *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1(1), 0015 (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-016-0015>)

Watts argues that social science has generated an enormous number of theories but has failed to reconcile inconsistencies among them, and that this "incoherency problem" stems from prioritizing theory advancement over solving practical problems.

Golder, Dekimpe, An, van Heerde, Kim & Alba (2023). Learning from data: An empirics-first approach to relevant knowledge generation. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 319-336 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00222429231158089>)

A recent manifesto for starting research from data patterns and empirical puzzles rather than from existing theory. A modern descendant of the McGuire tradition, applied specifically to the marketing discipline.

Calder & Tybout (2016). What makes a good theory practical? *AMS Review*, 6(3-4), 116-124 (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13162-016-0084-1>)

Explores the role of imagination in building good theories and argues that theories, though imagined, should be treated as real because they offer valuable viewpoints for solving practical problems. The key insight is that research designed to build and test theory must be kept separate from research designed to evaluate the efficacy of theory-inspired interventions in the real world.

Session 2: Cognitive & Affective Factors

Adams et al. (2021). People systematically overlook subtractive changes. *Nature*, 592, 258-61. (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-03380-y>)

Demonstrates a robust cognitive bias: when trying to improve objects, ideas, or situations, people systematically default to adding new elements rather than removing existing ones, even when subtraction is the better solution.

O'Donnell & Evers (2019). Preference reversals in willingness to pay and choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 45(6), 1315-30 (<https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/45/6/1315/5033711?redirectedFrom=fulltext>)

Shows that consumers' preferences can reverse depending on whether they express them through willingness to pay or choice, revealing that these two common dependent measures tap different psychological processes and can yield contradictory conclusions.

Dunn, Aknin & Norton (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319(5870), 1687-1688 (<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1150952>)

Demonstrates across correlational, longitudinal, and experimental designs that spending money on others (prosocial spending) produces greater happiness than spending on oneself. **Note:** This finding has been replicated across diverse cultures and income levels, including a pre-registered replication by Aknin et al. (2013) in countries ranging from Canada and South Africa to Uganda and India, making it one of the more robust findings in

affective science.

Scott et al. (2023). Revealing and mitigating the effects of racial bias and discrimination in financial services. *Journal of Marketing Research* (<https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437231190874>)

An applied reading that shows cognitive and affective biases have real stakes: documents how racial bias operates in financial services contexts and tests interventions to mitigate discrimination, grounding the session's foundational mechanisms in consequential marketplace outcomes.

Foundational readings with caveats:

Lerner & Keltner (2000). Beyond valence: Toward a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice. *Cognition & Emotion*, 14(4), 473-493 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/026999300402763>)

Challenges the dominant valence-based approach to emotion (positive vs. negative) by showing that emotions of the same valence can have opposing effects on judgment: fear makes people pessimistic about risk while anger makes them optimistic, consistent with their distinct cognitive-appraisal profiles. **Note:** A 2024 registered replication report (N = 780) found support for the core appraisal-tendency predictions regarding risk optimism overall and for positive and ambiguous events, though not for risk preference or risk optimism for negative events specifically.

Schwarz & Clore (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(3), 513-523 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.3.513>)

A foundational empirical demonstration that people use their current mood as information when making judgments, with the sunny/rainy day studies showing that life satisfaction ratings shift with weather, but the effect disappears when people are prompted to attribute their mood to the weather itself. **Note:** A major replication attempt by Yap et al. (2017) failed to replicate the key finding, and a study by Lucas & Lawless (2013) with nearly a million participants found no meaningful effect of weather on life satisfaction. Nine separate replication attempts consistently failed to reproduce the effect, with weather manipulations also failing to reliably affect mood in the first place. Schwarz & Clore have argued these aren't true replications because the original study was about mood misattribution, not weather per se.

Session 3: Memory & Identity

Kyung & Thomas (2016). When remembering disrupts knowing: Blocking implicit price memory. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 53(6), 937-953 (<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.14.0335>)

Demonstrates that attempting to explicitly recall information can paradoxically block the implicit memory consumers could otherwise use to make accurate judgments. In the domain of price comparisons, trying — and failing — to recall a past price produces a "feeling-of-not-knowing" that disrupts implicit memory, making judgments less accurate than if consumers had never tried to recall at all. Introduces the concept of metacognitive memory blocking.

Winterich et al. (2017). Keeping the memory but not the possession: Memory preservation mitigates identity loss from product disposition. *Journal of Marketing*, 81(5), 104-120 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242917733956>)

Shows that consumers resist disposing of identity-linked products because disposition threatens their sense of self, but that preserving the memory associated with the product (e.g., through photographs) reduces the perceived identity loss and increases willingness to let go.

Sheehan & Dommer (2020). Saving your self: How identity relevance influences product usage. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(6), 1076-1092 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucz040>)

Demonstrates that consumers use identity-relevant products less frequently and more carefully in order to extend the product's lifespan, because the product's deterioration or depletion threatens the aspect of identity it represents.

Trudel et al. (2016). The recycled self: Consumers' disposal decisions of identity-linked products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(2), 246-264 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw014>)



Foundational readings:

Belk (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139-168 (<https://doi.org/10.1086/209154>)

The seminal paper on identity and consumption: argues that possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities, and that the "extended self" — the incorporation of objects, people, places, and experiences into one's sense of self — is a richer construct than prior self-concept/brand-choice formulations. One of the most cited articles in JCR's history, it provides the theoretical foundation on which all four empirical readings in this session build.

Alba & Hutchinson (1987). Dimensions of consumer expertise. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(4), 411-454 (<https://doi.org/10.1086/209080>)

A comprehensive review of the psychology of memory and knowledge as it applies to consumers, identifying five dimensions of expertise — cognitive effort, cognitive structure, analysis, elaboration, and memory — and showing how they interact to shape consumer judgment. One of the most cited papers in the field (~4,500 citations), it provides the foundational framework for understanding how consumer knowledge is stored, structured, and retrieved.

Shows that consumers prefer recycling over trashing products linked to their identity, because recycling allows the product — and the identity it represents — to continue in transformed form rather than being destroyed, preserving a sense of symbolic continuity.

Session 4: Attitudes, Persuasion, & Goals

Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 135-146 (<https://doi.org/10.1086/208954>)

The foundational consumer behavior test of the Elaboration Likelihood Model: demonstrates that under high involvement, argument quality drives persuasion (central route), while under low involvement, source characteristics like celebrity endorsement matter more (peripheral route). **Note:** One of the most robust frameworks in the field, supported by meta-analyses covering 200+ studies.

Campbell & Kirmani (2000). Consumers' use of persuasion knowledge: The effects of accessibility and cognitive capacity on perceptions of an influence agent. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(1), 69-83 (<https://doi.org/10.1086/314309>)

A direct empirical test of Friestad & Wright's Persuasion Knowledge Model, showing that consumers activate persuasion knowledge and adjust their evaluations of salespeople when they have both the accessibility of ulterior motive inferences and the cognitive capacity to use them. Demonstrates that persuasion coping is resource-dependent, not automatic.

Kivetz, Urminsky & Zheng (2006). The goal-gradient hypothesis resurrected: Purchase acceleration, illusionary goal progress, and customer retention. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(1), 39-58 (<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.43.1.39>)

Uses field experiments with real loyalty programs to show that consumers accelerate effort as they approach a reward goal, and that even the illusion of progress (e.g., a 12-stamp card with 2 bonus stamps vs. a 10-stamp card) increases purchase frequency. A robust demonstration of goal-gradient effects in consumer behavior with real behavioral data.

Bonezzi, Brendl & De Angelis (2011). Stuck in the middle: The psychophysics of goal pursuit. *Psychological Science*, 22(5), 607-612 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611404899>)

Challenges the classic goal-gradient hypothesis by showing that motivation can dip at the midpoint of goal pursuit, depending on whether people monitor progress from the starting state or the end state. Complements Kivetz et al. (2006) by identifying a boundary condition — the "stuck in the middle" vulnerability — to the monotonic goal-gradient prediction.

Foundational readings:

Friestad & Wright (1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), 1-31 (<https://doi.org/10.1086/209380>)

Proposes that consumers develop knowledge about persuasion tactics over time and use

this knowledge to cope with marketers' influence attempts. A highly generative theoretical framework that shifted the field's perspective from viewing consumers as passive targets to active, strategic agents of their own persuasion.

Tormala & Briñol (2015). Attitude change and persuasion: Past, present, and future directions. *The Cambridge Handbook of Consumer Psychology*, ed. Michael I. Norton, Derek D. Rucker, and Cait Lambertson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 29-64 (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cambridge-handbook-of-consumer-psychology/attitude-change-and-persuasion/70D02DDFA0584C4B81A7BB8589BA4AB1>)

A comprehensive review that synthesizes decades of attitude change research, covering dual-process models, attitude strength, resistance to persuasion, and metacognitive processes.

Session 5: AI & Technology

Dietvorst, Simmons & Massey (2015). Algorithm aversion: People erroneously avoid algorithms after seeing them err. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 144(1), 114-126 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000033>)

The paper that coined "algorithm aversion" and demonstrates that people lose confidence in algorithmic forecasters more quickly than human forecasters after seeing them make identical mistakes, even when the algorithm objectively outperforms the human.

Longoni, Bonezzi & Morewedge (2019). Resistance to medical Artificial Intelligence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 46(4), 629-650 (<https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article-abstract/46/4/629/5485292?redirectedFrom=fulltext>)

Documents consumer resistance to medical AI and identifies uniqueness neglect as the driving mechanism: consumers believe AI providers are less able than human providers to account for their unique characteristics, circumstances, and symptoms. Resistance is stronger among consumers who perceive themselves as more unique, and diminishes when AI care is framed as personalized, when the decision is made for others rather than the self, or when AI supports rather than replaces a human provider.

Castelo, Bos & Lehmann (2019). Task-dependent algorithm aversion. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 56(5), 809-825 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719851788>)

Identifies a key boundary condition to algorithm aversion: people are more averse to algorithms for tasks perceived as subjective (e.g., recommending jokes) than objective (e.g., forecasting weather), and this effect is driven by the belief that algorithms lack the ability to perform subjective tasks. Reframing subjective tasks as more quantitative reduces aversion.

Tully, Longoni, & Appel (2025). Lower Artificial Intelligence literacy predicts greater AI receptivity. *Journal of Marketing* (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00222429251314491>)

Finds that consumers with lower AI literacy are more receptive to AI — not because they perceive AI as more capable, ethical, or less threatening, but because they perceive AI as magical and experience awe when AI executes tasks that seem to require uniquely human attributes. The effect attenuates for tasks not assumed to require distinctly human attributes.

Foundational readings:

Dawes, Faust & Meehl (1989). Clinical versus actuarial judgment. *Science*, 243(4899), 1668-1674 (<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.2648573>)

The classic review establishing that statistical/actuarial methods consistently outperform human clinical judgment in predicting behavior — across nearly 100 comparative studies. Provides the intellectual foundation for the entire algorithm aversion and AI resistance literature: if algorithms are demonstrably superior, why do people resist them? Every empirical paper in this session is, in some sense, answering this question.

Bonnefon, Shariff & Rahwan (2024). The moral psychology of Artificial Intelligence. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 75(1), 653-675 (<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-030123-113559>)

A broad review covering how people perceive AI moral agency, make moral judgments about AI decisions, and respond to ethical dilemmas involving autonomous systems. Provides the theoretical landscape for understanding consumer reactions to AI across

domains from self-driving cars to medical diagnosis.

Session 6: Research Proposal Workshop

