

Zicheng (Alex) Zhao

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GMAT: 700

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Consumer behavior; Mating motives & signaling; Sunk cost bias; Judgment & decision making; Appearance–function tradeoffs; Product anthropomorphism; Social distance.

EDUCATION

University of California, Davis

2024–2025

M.S., Business Analytics; GPA: 3.37/4.00

San Francisco, California

Relevant coursework: Statistical Exploration & Reasoning (BAX 441); Advanced Statistics (BAX 442); Machine Learning (BAX 452); Analytic Decision Making (BAX 443); Data Design & Representation (BAX 422); Big Data (BAX 423).

Xiamen University

2020–2024

B.S., Marketing; GPA: 3.56/4.00

Xiamen, China

Relevant coursework: Consumer Behavior; Social Psychology; Marketing Research; Marketing Strategy; PhD Seminar in Consumer Behavior (audited), Instructor: **Yanli Jia** — full attendance and active participation.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant (not a co-author), Field Experiment (Study 6)

2023–2024

Chen, R., Sun, H., Guo, Z., & Chen, H. (2025). *He Loves the One He Has Invested In: Mating Cues and Men's Sunk Cost Bias*. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 51(6), 1098–1119.

- Secured a campus coffee-shop field site and handled permissions, day-to-day logistics, and staff coordination for the 7-day membership-promotion study window.
- Contributed to on-site materials and flow: collaborated on membership-card design (romantic cue vs. neutral) and signage; aligned implementation with the authors' protocol and venue constraints.
- Provided on-site execution support: briefed staff, promoted sign-ups to eligible customers, recorded daily counts/protocol notes, and transferred clean participant logs to the research team.

Undergraduate Thesis: Beauty or Utility? Mating Motive and Gendered Preferences for Product Appearance vs. Functionality (Advisor: Rui Chen)

2023–2024

- **Question & setup:** Tested whether a *mating-motive* prime shifts men's vs. women's tradeoffs between *appearance-advantaged* and *function-advantaged* options, and whether effects persist in a *private* use context (bearing on mimicry vs. signaling accounts). Led end-to-end: theory, design, materials, fielding, SPSS analysis, and write-up.
- **Pretest** ($N=100$, Credamo): validated appearance- vs. function-advantaged pairs and public (headphones) vs. private (speakers) contexts; Wilcoxon on choice calibration $p<.001$; category check by t -tests $p<.01$.
- **Experiment 1** (between-subjects, headphones/public; $N=830$): mating-motive vs. control; **Gender** $\times$ **Motive** interaction ($p = .044$). Men chose the appearance option more under mating motive ($\chi^2(1)=4.09$, $p = .043$); women unchanged. (Choice DV; random assignment on Credamo; attention checks applied.)
- **Experiment 2** (between-subjects, speakers/private; $N=300$): replicated **Gender** $\times$ **Motive** ($p = .046$). Men again favored the appearance option under mating motive ($\chi^2(1)=12.96$, $p < .001$); women unchanged.

- **Interpretation & rigor:** Persistence of the male effect in a *private* category supports a *mimicry* (vs. pure signaling) mechanism; robustness via pretest validation, large samples, platform-level randomization, and prereg-style reporting of tests and decision rules.

Course Project: How Media Channel (Paper vs. Own Smartphone) Shapes Involvement via Perceived Social Distance 2023

- **Theory & question:** Starting from third-person–effect logic and construal/social distance, asked whether *message valence* (good vs. bad news) changes *involvement* via *perceived social distance*, and whether presenting the same news on one’s *own smartphone* collapses that distance (dampening the valence effect).
- **Design & materials:** Randomized 2×2 between-subjects with undergrads ($N=160$; valence × channel: paper vs. own phone) using validated course-change news stimuli; *pilot* pretest ($N=63$) established that “gain” vs. “loss” versions did not differ in absolute utility change (independent-samples test ns). *Rule-out* study ($N=80$) varied page size (A3 vs. A2) to test a display-size alternative.
- **Measures & analysis:** Multi-item 7-point indices for *involvement* and *perceived social distance* (reliability not reported in the files); Study 1 used ANOVA with simple effects; mediation tested via Baron–Kenny steps and Sobel (indirect path significant, Sobel $p<.001$). *Rule-out* measured involvement by writing length (words).
- **Findings & boundary:** On *paper*, good > bad for involvement (e.g., simple effect significant; sample report shows $F=4.380$, $p<.001$); on *own phone*, the valence difference disappears (ns). Mediation: perceived social distance partially carried the valence → involvement link. *Rule-out*: A3 vs. A2 produced no difference (33.45 vs. 35.00 words; independent-samples test $F=0.814$, $p=0.370$), supporting a *social-distance* rather than *size* account.

Course Project: Anthropomorphic Product Expressions & Perceived Control — Effects under Luxury Framing 2022

- **Question & theory:** Drew on anthropomorphism, perceived control, and luxury framing to test whether product expression (positive vs. negative) and luxury cues shift purchase intentions, with perceived control as a mediator.
- **Design & materials:** Led end-to-end work and created bag stimuli and validated expression valence; ran Study 1 as a between-subjects test (negative $n=32$ [16F/16M] vs. positive $n=35$ [17F/18M], total $N=67$) and Study 2 as a 2×2 (expression × luxury) between-subjects experiment on Wenjuanxing ($N=74$; high-lux $n=38$, low-lux $n=36$).
- **Measures & analysis:** Purchase intention (3 items, 7-pt; $\alpha=0.885$); perceived control (4 items adapted from Desirability-of-Control; $\alpha=0.845$); affect checklist as control ($\alpha=0.851$). Used t-tests/ANOVA and bootstrapped mediation (PROCESS Model 4).
- **Findings & boundary:** Study 1—positive expression increased purchase intention; perceived control did not mediate. Study 2—luxury framing raised purchase intention (e.g., $p=0.032$) with partial mediation via perceived control; aloof/“cold” expressions were effective when framed as luxury. Corroborating check: from perceived control to purchase intention regression $F=40.880$, $p<.001$.

Case Study (Competition): Anti-Counterfeiting Strategy & Consumer Verification — YiMa Fangwei (Co-author; Advisor: Yuetao Gao) 2021

- Framed the core trade-off—raising counterfeiters’ costs without deterring genuine customers from scanning—drawing on deterrence logic and participation incentives.
- Worked with two teammates to conduct a semi-structured CEO interview, map the end-to-end verification journey, and surface practical risks (e.g., spoofed QR portals); recommended *official-channel anchoring* plus light, immediate incentives to lift scan rates.
- Defined a simple KPI kit (scan/query rate, unique-user share, repeat-scan flags, counterfeit-hit ratio) and governance uses (POS spot checks, distributor audits, takedown playbook).

- Documented early rollout results at a flagship brand: higher scan participation, faster follower growth on the official account, and more actionable counterfeit tips—informing channel-control policy.

METHODS & SKILLS

Experimental design (field/lab/online), manipulation & pretesting, random assignment & protocol compliance, site coordination, data cleaning & de-identification; analyses: logistic regression, χ^2 , ANOVA/*t*, nonparametric tests (Wilcoxon).

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Rugby

Sep 2021–Present

- Competed in **2** national games in China (representing Xiamen University) and **1** in the U.S. (representing San Francisco); as club president, planned and delivered a **500**-player tournament; FIT-certified referee.
- Rugby has shaped my commitment to **integrity**—impartial calls, ownership of decisions, and strict protocols. Separately, running a 500-player tournament built the operational skills I use to coordinate **field experiments**.

REFERENCES

- **Rui Chen**, *Professor of Marketing*, Xiamen University.
- **Jun Ye**, *Professor of Marketing*, Xiamen University.
- **Yanli Jia**, *Associate Professor of Marketing*, Xiamen University.
- **Hao Sun**, *Associate Professor of Marketing*, University of Science and Technology of China.