Research Highlights
'Interview'

Self-Introduction

- **Briefly introduce yourself, the department and school that you are in.**

*I am **Assistant Professor Chen Lou** in the **Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information** (WKWSCI). My research mainly focuses on social media advertising. I conduct experiments in most of my research and recently have been applying a big data approach to analyze topics and sentiment in social media advertising.*

Elaboration

- **Share with us what is your research project.**

Brands' investments in influencer marketing have been escalating over the past few years. One of my recent studies proposes and explicates how two similar and comparable sets of advertisements, namely influencer- vs. brand-promoted ads (i.e., influencer-generated ads and brands' reposting/featuring of influencer ads), can affect consumer engagement, consumer sentiment, and topics of comments differently.

Results of text analysis show that influencer-promoted ads enjoyed significantly higher engagement in terms of consumer liking and commenting than that of brand-promoted ads among apparel brands on Instagram. Consumers expressed a significantly higher percentage of negative sentiment and a lower percentage of positive sentiment in their comments on brand-promoted ads than on influencer-promoted ads. Consumers also demonstrated cult-like appreciation for influencers' product sharing and showed high involvement in the advertised products in influencer-promoted ads.

- **What inspired you to embark on this research project?**

The growing popularity of online and social media, as well as their integration into people's daily lives in comparison to traditional media, provides marketers with the opportunity to transform their strategies to adapt to this new trend. Among a multitude of innovative marketing strategies with which marketers have been experimenting, influencer marketing has emerged to be a cost-effective approach for brands to have more direct and organic contacts with potential consumers. Whether and how influencer-promoted ads outperform other types of ads (i.e., brand-promoted ads) is yet to be examined.

User-generated content (e.g., comments and reviews) and social media posts have become valuable sources for sentiment analysis to generate useful results for brand management, product evaluation tracking, and monitoring of consumer dissatisfaction. Moreover, recent research advocates using topic modeling to extract useful trends or topics from online reviews/texts, which can facilitate many applications in brand management and/or advertising practices. This study explores the techniques of sentiment analysis and topic modeling when examining influencer-vs. brand-promoted ads.

- **What is/are the most interesting finding(s) of this project?**

Influencer-promoted ads indeed spurred higher engagement and gleaned more positive sentiment from their followers when compared with that of the identical ads being re-disseminated by brands. Influencer-promoted ads, in general, garner glowing comments and appreciation from their followers. Brands-promoted ads, on the other hand, received slightly less applause from their followers but increased the followers' interest in the advertised products.

The types of disclosure (i.e., no disclosure, ambiguous, or clear disclosure) in influencer-promoted ads did not influence consumers' engagement activities. However, consumers expressed slightly less positive sentiment in their comments on influencer ads with ambiguous disclosures than on ads without disclosures or ads with clear disclosures.

- **How do you think your research can impact society?**

Brands are advised to emphasize on disclosure transparency when promoting influencer-generated content, which may contribute to positive consumer perceptions. When assessing influencers' market value, besides assessing an influencer's reach, brands should take into consideration the "stickiness" of the audience, namely, the behavioral engagement that an influencer post typically gets and the strength of the influencer-follower relationship.

Additionally, brands should monitor consumers' focuses by tracking consumers' comments and sentiment, and accordingly coordinate their online or offline practices (e.g., online store, products offering, etc.). Influencers should also try to provide more detailed disclosures to boost sponsorship transparency.

Future Plans

- **Tell us about your future research plans and if you are looking for any research collaborators!**

Besides conducting experiments, I plan to continually apply a big data approach to study social media advertising and consumer behaviors, including investigating consumer sentiment and topics across a variety of marketing scenarios and using computer vision to understand consumer psychology and behavior patterns.

Therefore, for future research collaborations and/grant applications, I am looking for social science scholars or researchers from other disciplines who have a good understanding of psychology theories related to consumption behaviors and/or those who are skilled in applying data analytics in research.