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| **TITLE : AI technology and the shaping of ethical consumer agency** | |
| **Employer :** University of Lille | |
| **Hosting Research unit 1**  LUMEN  Adresse : 104 Avenue du Peuple Belge, 59800 Lille  Website: https://iaelille.fr/# | **Hosting Research unit 2**  Consumption, Culture and Commerce research unit – University of Southern Denmark |
| **Principal Supervisor**  Prof. Nil Özçaglar-Toulouse | **Co-supervisor**  Prof. Domen Bajde |
| **Abstract (max 300 words):**  While artificial intelligence (AI), the capacity of various technologies to function aptly and with foresight in their environment (Nilsson 2009), has been around since the 1950s, it has recently gained considerable traction due to its growing potential to create value for diverse constituencies, including consumers and business (Pillai et al. 2020). Yet, the development and use of AI also raises a number of social and economic challenges. On the one hand, AI can help businesses offer valuable benefits to consumers, such as advice with recommendation systems, health monitoring with wearable devices, and convenience with digital assistants; on the other hand, it gives rise to problems of exploitation and alienation, associated with the capture of private data, and replacement of human actors with technology (Puntoni et al 2020). Puntoni et al. (2020) conceptualize AI as an ecosystem comprising three fundamental elements: data collection and storage, statistical and computational techniques, and output systems that enable AI products to perform tasks typically understood as requiring human intelligence and autonomous decision making (see also Agrawal,Gans, and Goldfarb 2018). They identify four types of consumer experiences with AI (i.e., data capture, classification, delegation, and social), each riddled with various benefits, costs, and tensions. For example, consumers might be served and empowered, or exploited and disenfranchised by AI products and services. Further research into consumer interactions and experiences with AI is required to mitigate negative effects and experiences, and to make sure that the potential of AI can truly be harnessed. The phd project should aim to address these gaps by investigating how AI technologies shape the agency of ethical consumers, thereby contributing to research on consumer agency (Beckett 2012, Bajde 2013) as well as to research on ethical consumption (Eckhardt et al. 2010, Ozcaglar-Toulouse 2007, Shaw et al. 2017). | |
| **Keywords :**  artificial intelligence (AI), ethical consumption, acceptability | |
| **Objectives of the PhD Project:**  What is at stake in this PhD project are not just consumer experiences with AI, but also the varied ways in which AI impact how consumers and citizens engage with social problems, such as social inequality, or climate change. AI products and services can impact consumers' agency to act as ethical subjects, putting pressure on consumers to act ethically by problematizing their consumption, and facilitating ethical action by endowing consumers the agential capacities to address pressing social and environmental problems (Fuentes and Sørum 2019, Contissa et al. 2018). Conversely, AI might reduce consumers ethical reflexivity and agency as certain actions and decisions become delegated to technology. Research looking into the specific effects of AI on consumers' ethical reflexivity and agency remains scarce, and lags behind the fast-paced development and use of AI in consumption contexts. What is more, there is limited research into consumer perceptions of the social impacts of AI technology more broadly (e.g., perceptions of AI as a force for good vs. AI as a burden to the environment and society).The recent proliferation of AI-enhanced digital assistants provides a good example. Amazon, Google, Baidu, and other tech giants have launched AI platforms with increasingly skilled digital assistants that cab revolutionize the way consumers interact with the marketplace (Dawar 2018, Sciuto, et al. 2018). They are becoming an increasingly influential channel through which people get information, goods, and services, and play a central role in consumer decision making (Moriuchi 2019). For example, the 'Microvist skill' helps Alexa users "to make small, positive, individual changes for the planet" by inspiring them with a series of "fun and approachable" challenges. Users who do not wish to commit to a challenge, can instead ask the Microvist skill for tips on how to live "a more eco friendly life". Parallel to these technological developments, new smart devices are being developed to help consumers measure and optimize ecological footprints.  Yet, the impact of these assistive and sensory devices on consumers ethical reflexivity and ethical agency is yet to be explored. How do AI technologies become entangled in consumers' efforts to consume more sustainably? What kind of perceptions, expectations and visions do consumers have when it comes to the social and environmental impacts of AI? Can AI contribute to solving the limitations of consumers' ethical agency (Deviner, Auger and Eckhardt 2010)? We consider that acceptability is not related to the capacity of the system to be understandable for users or to be predictive. It is also related to the capacity of the tools to generate more positive impacts for humanity, in terms of ethics or sustainability, for example. Through this PhD project, we would like to explore how AI can enable consumers to be more ethical in their everyday life, as well as how AI can help us address the limitations of consumers' ethical agency and responsibility. Finally the project will focus on proposing practical solutions and managerial implication to improve AI's contribution to the sustainably while these technology could be criticize about their negative outputs for sustainability. | |
| **Expected profile of the candidate:**  Candidates are expected to have a background in Marketing or in Social sciences with interest on markets and consumption and competences on qualitative methods (in depth interview, ethnography…)  We are expecting from the candidates: high level previous academic performance (prizes, publication, and participation in international programs…); experience in research in higher education or in business; adequacy between the profiles of the candidate with the research project. | |
| **Additional Information:**  The University of Southern Denmark and The University of Lille are organizing, in conjunction with two other University in the UK and in Turkey, a certifying European doctoral programme for doctoral students in marketing research associated with current Consumer Culture Theory. The Phd Student will benefit from these seminars for her/his training (<http://cctweb.org/cct-doctoral-training/upcoming-doctoral-seminars>).  The “Consumption, Culture and Commerce” research unit of the University of Southern Denmark in Odense and The LUMEN research unit of the University of Lille are both interested in studying consumption and market dynamics, with a particular focus on global socio-economic challenges and the social life of technology. | |
| **Grant:**  A full PhD Grant will be offered for the PhD candidate, including salary and research support.  The PhD student will benefit from a research stay at University of Southern Denmark, with whom the University of Lille has a strategic partnership. | |