

SPRING 2025

PROFILES AND PERSPECTIVES



BUSINESS FACULTY RESEARCH



# RESEARCH ISSUE



# From the DEAN

Alumni and Friends,

On behalf of the Tennessee Tech College of Business, I am delighted to share the Spring 2025 edition of the Research Issues magazine with you. Focusing on the achievements of some of our newest faculty, this publication highlights their research contributions and how they make a positive difference in the lives of the students, organizations and communities we serve.

Reflective of our college's commitment to research that bridges the gap between academia and practice, this issue addresses consumer behavior, corporate governance, financial decision-making, marketing strategy and creative team building. Through their research, our faculty are shaping business practices, remaining current in their disciplines and enriching the classroom experience.

The magazine features transformative initiatives that support mentorship and community engagement. These provide practical experience while fostering a sense of civic responsibility. At Tennessee Tech, teaching, research and service are connected. Together, they build students' communication and critical thinking skills and prepare them to be better employees and community leaders.

As you explore these stories, I hope you are inspired by the ingenuity and commitment of our faculty. At Tennessee Tech, it's personal, and your continued engagement and support enable us to enhance the impact and relevance of our research and provide exceptional opportunities for students.

Together, we are shaping the future of business education and preparing tomorrow's business and community leaders. Thank you for being part of our aspirational journey.

Wings Up!



Thomas H. Payne, Ph.D.  
Dean, College of Business



# BUSINESS FACULTY RESEARCH

## UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

*Hyewon Park*

4

## SERVICE LEARNING FOR STUDENT LEADERS

*Chelsea T. Dowell*

5

## BRIDGING WORLDS: INTERDISCIPLINARY INSIGHTS INTO CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

*Joohun "Justin" Lee and Kyle Turner*

6-7

## REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

*Morteza Momeni*

8

## ECONOMICS AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

*Rachel Mannahan*

9

## GENERATING CREATIVE TEAMS

*Jeremy L. Schoen*

10

## CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND THE CLASSROOM

*Yi Peng*

11

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## UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

As an accomplished assistant professor of marketing at Tennessee Tech, Hyewon Park, Ph.D., is a pioneer in service industry research. Park's research has applied game-theoretic modeling and economic experiments to better understand consumer and service sector employee behavior. Her research has also focused on sales and alternative corporate governance strategies.

Her work explains how sales control systems can foster creative selling and employee engagement, each of which can enhance sales performance. Her research also indicates the importance of employees' work-life balance, showing that relaxation and recovery play a key role in delivering better service.

Park also finds that an organizational commitment to ethics and stewardship fosters consistent safety behaviors among frontline employees. This underscores the importance of these values in organizational culture and marketing strategy.

Overall, her work provides valuable insights into enhancing service quality, promoting employee well-being and developing effective strategies that incorporate digital marketing. Through her research, marketing managers are provided with ways to improve organizational and team climates and select salespeople and service workers with suitable personalities, equipping them with the necessary tools and perspectives. Furthermore, her work offers critical guidance to design effective sales control systems and manage service operations in the era of digital markets.



**Hyewon Park**

*Hyewon Park is an assistant professor of marketing, with a Ph.D. in management from Korea University and a Ph.D. in marketing from the University of California. Leveraging her expertise in game-theoretic modeling and economic experiments, her research has significantly advanced society's understanding of marketing, consumer behavior and service employee performance. A prolific scholar, Park's research has been published in prominent outlets such as the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Journal of Service Theory and Practice, and Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, among others, all of which are major publications in the field of Marketing. She has been recognized with multiple research and teaching awards and serves as a reviewer and guest editor for numerous business journals.*

## SERVICE LEARNING FOR STUDENT LEADERS

Chelsea Dowell, D.B.A., is a business economist with a heart for service and a passion for teaching.

An innovative and engaging teacher, Dowell incorporates competitive games and humor in the classroom. She inspires students who often promote the application of economics in everyday life on campus with posters and sidewalk chalk. She publishes research on these teaching innovations so other faculty can incorporate them into their classes, like her work in the International Review of Economic Education.

Most recently, she has joined the Economic Education Network for Experiments, which pools data collection from universities nationwide to overcome the traditional small sample size issues. Dowell and her network co-authors presented a research paper on the "Impact of Relevance, Belonging, and Growth Mindset on Academic Outcomes" at the Southern Economic Association's Annual Conference.

Dowell brings her research into the classroom by performing experiments. Students get a firsthand look at how economic experiments are structured, and Dowell gains insights into student motivation, engagement and learning that inform her research. Her focus on economic pedagogy includes research recently published in the Journal of Economic Education. Dowell also provides students with the opportunity to attend economic conferences where they have won awards for their own research presentations.

Dowell is an advisory board member for the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland's Economic Scholars Program, a student-run economics conference for undergraduates. Her research mentees have gone on to medical school, law school and master's programs in environmental management, sports management and business administration. Her recent consulting research with a local HIV/AIDS clinic won the Outstanding Applied Doctoral Project Award at Indiana Wesleyan University. Her work led to improvements in patient attendance rates and increased the efficiency of the clinic's administration, thereby improving the health and quality of life of many people living with HIV. Dowell recently published this application-oriented research in the International Journal of Healthcare Management.

While modeling civic behavior in her own research, Dowell provides opportunities for her students to do the same. Her students have analyzed data, formulated solutions and provided presentations to leaders of local homeless shelters, community theater groups, senior centers and other organizations. These interactions also provide students with feedback on their work and how their solutions are being implemented.

"Students swell with pride and compassion when they see how their research can impact people's lives for the better," Dowell said. "That is my favorite day. That is the day service learning creates servant leaders."



**Chelsea T. Dowell**

*Chelsea Dowell earned her doctorate in business administration from Indiana Wesleyan University in 2023 and her master's in economics from the University of Kentucky in 2011. She has published papers on innovative technology usage in the economics classroom and has working papers assessing teaching interventions' impacts on learning outcomes and professional skill development. She serves on the advisory board for the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland's Economic Scholars Program.*

# BRIDGING WORLDS: INTERDISCIPLINARY INSIGHTS INTO CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



**Kyle Turner**

*Kyle Turner earned his Ph.D. in organizations and strategy from the University of Tennessee. His primary research interests include the strategic implications of corporate social responsibility and alternative corporate governance strategies, the nature and outcomes of competition among organizations, and the influence of perceived risk among managers in relation to organizational actions. He primarily teaches business strategy at the undergraduate and graduate levels and has also taught international management.*

Kyle Turner, Ph.D., assistant professor of management, and Justin Lee, Ph.D., assistant professor of finance, both study how corporations contribute to society, but from different angles. Turner examines corporate strategy and its dynamics, while Lee focuses on the financial impact of alternative corporate governance strategies. Seeing the connection between their fields and research interests, they decided to collaborate.

Focusing on the financial value of beneficial behaviors from a portfolio management perspective, their partnership resulted in a paper published in the *Social Responsibility Journal*. Their findings indicate that corporate governance strategies can enhance performance by addressing the diverse needs of stakeholders. Turner and Lee also found that frequent changes in corporate governance strategies can harm performance, as stakeholders may view them as insincere.

Turner and Lee also explored how strategic corporate giving impacts a company's financial success. They studied whether purposeful, rather than randomly selected, philanthropy can contribute to a business's bottom line. By analyzing data from thousands of company reports, Turner and Lee discovered that those organizations that carefully target their charitable efforts tend to perform better financially. The key is being strategic - not just writing checks, but thoughtfully choosing where and how to give.

Their research suggests that businesses should treat philanthropy like an investment strategy. Instead of spreading donations everywhere, companies should focus on specific issues that matter to their key stakeholders. This targeted approach can make charitable giving a win-win: helping communities while also potentially boosting the company's performance. The study recommends that organizations think of philanthropic efforts as a carefully managed portfolio, always looking to

optimize their social contributions for maximum impact.

Lee and Turner also study how the makeup of a company's board of directors influences their social responsibility efforts. Assessing board members' characteristics and backgrounds - including age, gender, education and how long they've been with the company, they uncover patterns in how these factors affect decision-making. Their preliminary findings suggest that boards with more diverse members tend to make more focused and impactful social contributions.

This means that when a company has directors with different perspectives and experiences, they're more likely to make smarter, more impactful choices about giving back to the community. Lee and Turner are continuing to investigate why this happens, hoping to understand how board diversity can lead to better corporate governance.

Turner and Lee are committed to advancing the understanding of corporate governance through interdisciplinary collaboration. Their efforts are providing valuable insights and paving the way for informed decision-making among corporate board members.



**Joohun "Justin" Lee**

*Joohun "Justin" Lee, assistant professor of finance, earned his Ph.D. in finance from Georgia State University after attending Seoul National University for his master's in finance. His research interests include empirical corporate finance focusing on corporate social responsibility, corporate governance and the integration of machine learning and financial management. His teaching experience includes corporate finance, investments, portfolio management and other subjects such as derivative securities.*

## REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Morteza Momeni, Ph.D., assistant professor of finance, conducts important, practical research on consumer credit—particularly within auto loan markets—where families and individuals often make some of their most significant financial decisions. His work has consistently garnered recognition at the highest levels of academia, including multiple invitations to present at the prestigious American Finance Association (AFA) Annual Meeting.

By examining how lenders assess risk, price loans and influence consumer borrowing behavior, Momeni's research offers practical insights that affect both everyday borrowers and the broader financial community. His research helps families secure reliable transportation through fair financing while guiding policymakers and financial institutions toward more responsible lending practices. He has also shown how a significant tariff policy—like certain metal tariffs—can make car manufacturing more expensive and lead to higher interest rates, disproportionately affecting families with fewer resources. Momeni's research advances the understanding of how to keep these costs fair and ensure all families can afford safe, reliable transportation.

Beyond his research endeavors, Momeni is committed to excellence in teaching and mentorship. He brings his expertise in consumer credit markets into the classroom, offering students a unique opportunity to learn from real-world applications and cutting-edge

financial technology research. In his classes, his research findings help students grasp the economics of consumer credit markets more comprehensively. By integrating theory with practical insights, he equips his students with the analytical tools and knowledge they need to understand the complexities of consumer lending, financial decision-making and market dynamics. Momeni's teaching approach is highly interactive, encouraging students to engage critically with the material, participate in discussions and apply learning to real-world scenarios.

### Morteza Momeni

*Morteza Momeni is a researcher specializing in consumer credit markets, with a particular focus on auto loan markets. With a Ph.D. in finance from the University of Kentucky, he has dedicated his academic and professional career to understanding the intricacies of consumer lending, financial behavior and market dynamics.*



## ECONOMICS AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

As an assistant professor of economics, Rachel Mannahan, Ph.D., studies topics including self-esteem, reciprocity, altruism and image concerns within behavioral economics. She combines insights from psychology with the formal frameworks and policy focus of economics.

Mannahan focuses on the study of strategic interactions, also known as game theory, which demonstrates how people behave when their choices affect (and are affected by) the decisions of others. For example, her research points out that someone's self-esteem is affected when they gain information about themselves. Because this information can be shaped by the choices of others, strategic settings are natural for studying self-esteem.

The desire to protect self-esteem can lead people to engage in a behavior known as self-handicapping, which involves getting in the way of their own success to blame any resulting failures on their choices rather than their ability. For example, if a person does not study for an exam, they never find out whether they could have succeeded if they had tried. Perhaps counterintuitively, by failing, they preserve the belief that success may have been possible.

Mannahan is one of the first to formalize this behavior using an economist's toolbox. The benefit of modeling self-handicapping is that behavioral economists can make predictions about how those prone to this behavior act in a variety of situations. Mannahan uses her model to investigate how to design exams that improve student effort and to show how some self-handicappers may opt in

or out of a job search depending on the framing of a job advertisement.

While some of Mannahan's research – such as her work on self-esteem and self-handicapping, reciprocity in auctions, and image concerns in global pandemics – is theoretical, she also has projects that apply behavioral theories to data. In behavioral economics, data-driven research often comes in the form of experiments in which subjects are paid based on the outcomes of their decisions. In her work with co-authors Jin Sohn and Lia Flores, she explores a phenomenon known as “the Abilene Paradox.” This occurs when a group of people make a decision that no one prefers because each person wants to try to make others in the group happy. Mannahan and her co-authors show theoretically that this happens because everyone cares about the others in the group, but no one knows what the others actually want. They then use data from a lab experiment to test their theory and they find that the likelihood of the paradox is affected by the first group member to speak up.

Mannahan is using her expertise in experimental methods to help start an experimental research program in the College of Business. She is the chair of the new Behavioral Research Lab Committee, which oversees the design of a new experimental lab space and program for the renovated Johnson Hall.

### Rachel Mannahan

*Rachel Mannahan earned her Ph.D. in economics at the University of Arizona in 2022 after attending the University of Alabama for her undergraduate and master's programs. Her fields of expertise include behavioral economics, game theory and experimental economics.*



# GENERATING CREATIVE TEAMS

Jeremy Schoen, an assistant professor in decision sciences and management, set out with a research team to answer a basic question: “Are creative people helpful in teams, or do they cause problems?” What they discovered is that creative individuals help teams solve problems, and rather than causing dysfunctional conflict, teams with creative individuals engaged in a form of team conflict better characterized as lively debate.

They identify two major problems in answering this question. First, previous researchers often asked people to report on their own personality, but these self-reports are notoriously unreliable. To overcome this problem, Schoen and his colleagues use a measure that captures how differences in creative personality affect how people reason (e.g., creative individuals often overvalue novelty while ignoring implementation challenges).

Second, team processes are often difficult to capture. Team processes often come with task-oriented problem-solving, which leads to conflicts over personalities or values, frustration and hurt feelings. To address this, Schoen and his colleagues analyze team culture profiles, ranging from productive task-focused conflict to dysfunctional dynamics with minimal task conflict but significant relationship conflict.

To test their ideas, Schoen and his colleagues collected data from over 240 international student project teams made up of nearly 1,000 participants. These teams were involved in semester-long projects with valuable outcomes. For example, one group of teams designed and executed events to raise money for a chosen charity, while another group worked on engineering projects where their grades determined priority for selection of their college major.

The results indicate that one individual with a highly creative personality is not enough to affect team processes and

performance. Instead, the combination of team member personality is the driving factor of team processes. Those teams with higher average creative personality engage in more functional forms of conflict involving lively debate. These teams subsequently perform better than their peers. Teams with lower average creative personality are more likely to engage in dysfunctional conflict that leads to lower performance.

Ultimately, this research concludes that a creative individual is not a bull in a china shop. Instead, a lone actor – a highly creative individual – is mostly inconsequential for teams. Additionally, the required team culture and lively debate that generates success is not as likely to develop for teams with a lone creative individual. Instead, high-performing teams require multiple individuals with a creative personality.

The work of Schoen and colleagues has important implications for workplaces. Importantly, team processes matter. Interventions related to conflict management combined with training for group problem-solving, such as the Nominal Group Technique and Devil’s Advocacy, can help teams develop a culture of lively debate when properly implemented. Leaders should focus on how teams are getting their work done as much as if they are producing. Also, team member composition has an important effect on team processes and outcomes. A lone creative person is not enough to help change a culture. Leaders may want to use reasoning-based measures of personality as a tool when they consider assigning different individuals to workplace teams.

# CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND THE CLASSROOM

The scholarly pursuits of Assistant Professor Yi Peng, Ph.D., can be categorized into three areas, how culture affects consumer behavior, customer and employee experiences, and sales management.

Her research explores the influence of cultural values and emotions on marketing while emphasizing that understanding culture is crucial for international marketing. Culture influences marketing strategies and consumer behavior across global markets. Her work gives students an enhanced understanding of how emotions drive different cognitive reactions and behavioral consequences.

In a study published in the Journal of International Business Studies, Peng; Stanford Westjohn, Ph.D.; Peter Magnusson, Ph.D.; and Hyeyoon Jung, Ph.D.; shed light on how cultural values influence consumer behavior. By analyzing six different experiments, the researchers found that certain cultural traits – specifically collectivism and long-term orientation – can reduce the negative impact of consumer animosity on purchasing decisions. In other words, people from cultures that prioritize group harmony and future planning are less likely to avoid products from a country about which they have negative feelings.

Another study, published in the Journal of International Marketing, examines how cultural values influence consumer trust and behavior. Peng found that people from collectivist cultures develop trust differently and that marketing strategies are able to activate these tendencies. Her work, which won the 2022 S. Tamer Cavusgil Award, also revealed that consumers from collectivist cultures are more sensitive to product sizing differences and less likely to purchase when discrepancies occur.

These studies provide valuable insights into how cultural backgrounds influence consumer decisions– thereby bridging academic research with real-world issues. By examining how cultural values impact trust and purchasing behavior, Peng’s research helps businesses better understand and navigate international markets.

Peng’s second area of research centers on customer and frontline employee experience. Her research published in the Journal of Services Marketing delves into the service climate’s effect on customer gratitude and its subsequent outcomes, enriching the understanding of service management.

Sales management is the third area of focus in Peng’s research. Her work published in Industrial Marketing Management examines the psychological climate of competition among salespeople. Her research on services and sales enhances her Principles of Marketing course, where she emphasizes the psychological and relational aspects of marketing strategies.

Additionally, she is investigating how employee empathy affects customer experiences and how workplace emotions like employee envy impact workplace dynamics. Peng is passionate about her research and enjoys incorporating relevant and current research into her classroom discussions. Her teaching provides a rich educational experience that bridges theoretical concepts and practical applications.

## Jeremy L. Schoen

*Jeremy L. Schoen, an assistant professor of management, earned his Ph.D. at Georgia Tech. Prior to his academic career, Schoen was an electrical engineer with experience in Fortune 500 companies. His interests include implicit personality, creativity, measurement and the link between the philosophy of science and research methods.*



## Yi Peng

*Yi Peng is an assistant professor of marketing. She earned her Ph.D. in marketing from the University of Alabama in 2020. Her research centers primarily on the areas of cross-cultural consumer behavior, frontline employee services and sales management.*





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