

# PhD Opportunity

Responsible virtual assistant for effective marketing communication

## Supervisory team

Dr Sajad Rezaei, Dr Ria Wiid

## Director of Studies:

Dr Sajad Rezaei, Interpersonal Relationships and Wellbeing Research Group  
Research Group, Worcester Business School, University of Worcester

## Supervisors:

Dr Ria Wiid, Interpersonal Relationships and Wellbeing Research Group  
Research Group, Worcester Business School, University of Worcester

**Research Group:** [Interpersonal Relationships and Wellbeing Research Group](#)

## The PhD Opportunity:

This self-funded Ph.D. opportunity seeks to contribute to current research in the field of marketing communication, Artificial intelligence (AI) related technologies, and consumer behavior and well-being.

The proposed research should relate to addressing the current challenges and opportunities in demonstrating responsible virtual service assistants. The research should focus on marketing communication and interactions to explore the theoretical and empirical implications for consumers' engagement and well-being.

AI-powered assistants are intelligent products and services that have been discussed in previous studies (Guo & Luo, 2023; Kang & Shao, 2023; Kot & Leszczyński, 2020; Sprengholz & Betsch, 2021); as the last decades have seen substantial growth in the use of digital service assistants (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2021; Hoyer, Kroschke, Schmitt, Kraume, & Shankar, 2020). However, the use of AI-powered virtual assistants may pose potential pitfalls (Ha, Chen, Uy, & Capistrano, 2021; Paul, Ueno, & Dennis, 2023) and increase the risks to consumer well-being (Banker & Khetani, 2019). Hence, the research proposal should focus on how a responsible virtual assistant mechanism would mitigate risk, enhanced consumer journey, service, and interaction, and enhanced social media campaign strategies and trust.

Therefore, finding in this area would contribute to improving our understanding of responsible virtual assistants for effective marketing communications and consumer well-being.

### Sources and further readings

Banker, S., & Khetani, S. (2019). Algorithm overdependence: How the use of algorithmic recommendation systems can increase risks to consumer well-being. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 38(4), 500-515.

Fernandes, T., & Oliveira, E. (2021). Understanding consumers' acceptance of automated technologies in service encounters: Drivers of digital voice assistants adoption. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 180-191.

Guo, W., & Luo, Q. (2023). Investigating the impact of intelligent personal assistants on the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers: The moderating role of brand credibility. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 73, 103353.

Ha, Q.-A., Chen, J. V., Uy, H. U., & Capistrano, E. P. (2021). Exploring the privacy concerns in using intelligent virtual assistants under perspectives of information sensitivity and anthropomorphism. *International journal of human-computer interaction*, 37(6), 512-527.

Hoyer, W. D., Kroschke, M., Schmitt, B., Kraume, K., & Shankar, V. (2020). Transforming the customer experience through new technologies. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 51(1), 57-71.

Kang, W., & Shao, B. (2023). The impact of voice assistants' intelligent attributes on consumer well-being: Findings from PLS-SEM and fsQCA. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 70, 103130.

Kot, M. T., & Leszczyński, G. (2020). The concept of intelligent agent in business interactions: is virtual assistant an actor or a boundary object? *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 35(7), 1155-1164.

Paul, J., Ueno, A., & Dennis, C. (2023). ChatGPT and consumers: Benefits, pitfalls and future research agenda. In (Vol. 47, pp. 1213-1225): Wiley Online Library.

Sprengholz, P., & Betsch, C. (2021). Ok Google: Using virtual assistants for data collection in psychological and behavioral research. *Behavior Research Methods*, 1-13.

### Application Process

To begin the application process please go to <https://www.worcester.ac.uk/courses/business-mphilphd> and click on 'How to Apply' in the top menu. This PhD could be carried out on a part time or full time basis so please select the relevant application link. On the application form, please make it clear that you are applying for one of our advertised projects so we can direct it straight to the relevant people.

### The Interview

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Research School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

## Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Student Support Scheme to support dissemination costs associated with your research, up to £500 a year.

## Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

## Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023 in which we ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Research School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station

- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

### **Research Group**

Our shared research and endeavours are further informed by the conceptual frameworks and strategies provided by Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning. We see merit in approaches that seek to better understand learner experiences and that encourage learner engagement in design processes.

### **Interpersonal Relationships & Wellbeing Research Group**

The Interpersonal Relationships and Wellbeing Research Group draws together internationally renowned academics from across Psychology, Business and Criminology, with partners in Industry, third sector organisations and local government. Research activity is organised around four themes: Wellbeing for Life; Customer Interactions; People and Work; and Trauma and Violence Prevention.

We study interpersonal relationships, wellbeing and their inter-connectivity from an inter-disciplinary perspective, to generate applied, solution-focussed research. Our research explores how individual, social and environmental factors influence relationships and wellbeing within different contexts, such as in workplaces, schools and online spaces. We are interested in understanding how interpersonal relationships contribute to mental health (construed as both trauma/mental ill-health, and as wellbeing) and how they shape individual and team behaviour in consumer and organizational settings. In doing so, we explore both the 'dark' and 'light' side of relationships and human behaviour more broadly.

### **Widening Participation**

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

**For further information** or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Sajad Rezaei (Director of Studies) via email at [s.rezaei@worc.ac.uk](mailto:s.rezaei@worc.ac.uk)