Michael W. Lever, Ph.D.
Research Statement

My research agenda examines fundamental marketing relationships and consumer behaviour through service-based contexts, mainly focusing on digital engagement, brand advocacy, and consumer-brand relationships. I use advanced methodological approaches - from eye-tracking technology to latent class analysis - to investigate how emerging digital technologies and social platforms reshape consumer experiences and marketing practices. This research contributes to core marketing theory while offering practical insights for service organizations navigating an increasingly digital landscape.

My work spans three interconnected streams that contribute to marketing scholarship:

1. **Digital Consumer Engagement and Brand Relationships**: Drawing on social media data and netnographic approaches, I examine how consumers develop and express brand relationships in digital spaces. My work published in the Journal of Business Research reveals how technological interfaces (e.g., service robots) influence consumer-brand evaluations, while my Journal of Travel Research publication demonstrates how social media sharing behaviours vary across consumer segments, advancing understanding of digital engagement patterns. This research stream has implications for relationship marketing theory and digital consumer behaviour.

2. **Visual Marketing and Consumer Attention**: I investigate how consumers process and respond to visual marketing elements through innovative methodological approaches, including eye-tracking technology. Published work in the Journal of Destination Marketing & Management identifies distinct visual processing segments, contributing to marketing theory on information processing and consumer heterogeneity. This work extends traditional models of consumer attention while providing practical guidance for visual marketing design.

3. **Brand Advocacy and Consumer Identity**: My research examines the relationship between consumer identification, brand perceptions, and advocacy behaviours. Using structural equation modelling and netnographic analysis, I've demonstrated how consumer

identification influences brand advocacy through cognitive and affective pathways. This work, published in outlets like the Journal of Vacation Marketing, advances the theoretical understanding of consumer-brand identification and word-of-mouth marketing.

My current research portfolio includes several projects that extend these themes while pushing into new theoretical territory. I am examining how artificial intelligence tools influence consumer decision-making in service contexts, mainly focusing on how AI-enabled service interactions affect consumer trust and brand relationships. Simultaneously, I am investigating consumer response to sustainability messaging across different digital platforms, exploring how message framing and platform characteristics influence message effectiveness and consumer engagement. Additionally, my research explores how virtual and augmented reality technologies reshape consumer experiences and brand relationships, contributing to our understanding of how immersive technologies transform traditional marketing paradigms.

Looking ahead, I am particularly interested in examining:

1. How emergent technologies (AI, VR/AR) transform consumer-brand interactions and relationship development
2. The role of digital platforms in shaping consumer identity expression and brand community formation
3. Visual marketing effectiveness across different technological interfaces and consumer segments

My research employs diverse methodological approaches - from advanced quantitative methods (structural equation modelling, latent class analysis) to qualitative techniques (netnography, rhetorical/semiotic analysis). This methodological breadth allows me to examine marketing phenomena from multiple angles, providing richer theoretical insights.

While my work often uses hospitality and tourism contexts as a lens, the theoretical contributions extend broadly to marketing scholarship in digital consumer behaviour, brand relationship theory, visual marketing and consumer attention, identity-based marketing, technology adoption, and consumer experience. I aim to produce research that advances marketing theory while providing actionable insights for practitioners navigating an increasingly digital marketplace. My publication record in leading marketing and service journals (Journal of Business Research, Journal of Travel Research) demonstrates this commitment to rigorous scholarship with practical relevance.