Abstract:
In the retail context, mannequins signal society’s current beauty standards. Across five studies, we demonstrate that a female mannequin has negative implications for consumers low in appearance self-esteem (ASE). In particular, consumers who are lower in ASE evaluate a product displayed by a mannequin more negatively as compared to consumers higher in ASE. As mannequins signal the normative standard of beauty and low ASE consumers believe they fail to meet this standard, when exposed to a mannequin, these consumers become threatened and in response denigrate the product the mannequin is displaying. Evidence for the underlying process is provided in three ways: 1) the finding that the effect for low ASE consumers only arises when the mannequin is displaying an appearance-related product, 2) through mediation analysis that demonstrates that the mannequin conveys society’s standard of beauty and this negatively impacts product evaluations, and 3) the mitigation of the effect by removing the presence of threat via a self-affirmation task or decreasing the mannequin’s beauty (i.e., marking its face, removing its hair, or removing its head). Multiple avenues for future research are forwarded.