

Chaofan Zhai

PhD Candidate, Information Systems

🏛️ University of Minnesota | ✉️ zhai0045@umn.edu

EDUCATION

- **University of Minnesota** 2020-present
PhD in Business Administration, Department of Information & Decision Sciences Minneapolis, MN
- **University of Southern California** 2018-2020
M.S. in Applied Data Science Los Angeles, CA
- **Shanghai University of Finance & Economics** 2013-2017
B.S. in Information Systems Shanghai, China

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- **Topics:** AI + Learning, Online Education, Influencer Economy
- **Methodologies:** Machine Learning, Field/Online Experiments, Analytical Modeling

HONORS & AWARDS

- **WITS Best Dissertation Award** 2024
Dissertation: "Three Essays on Overcoming Cognitive Frictions in Online Education"
- **Selected Participant for ICIS Doctoral Consortium** 2024
Represents the University of Minnesota as its sole nominee in the field of Information Systems
- **Carlson School of Management Dissertation Fellowship (\$32,000)** 2024
Selectively awarded to top PhD students within Carlson School of Management
- **Google Cloud Research Grant (\$1,000)** 2024
- **Dean's Small Grant for Research, Carlson School of Management (\$10,000)** 2023
- **Ph.D. Student Teaching Award, Carlson School of Management** 2023
- **Ph.D. Student Conference/Travel Fellowship** 2020-2024
- **Carlson and Willoughby IDS Ph.D. Fellowship** 2020-2024
- **Ph.D. Student Summer Research Fellowship** 2020-2024

WORKING PAPERS

- **Reinforcement Learning for Sustainable Learning in Online Education: Validation Through a Field Experiment** *In preparation for submission to Management Science*
Chaofan Zhai, Yicheng Song, Ravi Bapna
 - Carlson School Dean's Small Grant (\$10,000), 2023
- **A Customer-Aware Recommendation Framework for Influencer Economy: Validation Through a Field Experiment** *Under Review at Management Science [SSRN]*
Chaofan Zhai, Xuan Bi, Angela Aerry Choi, Chad Yi-Chun Ho
 - Supported in part by National Science Foundation, 2024
- **Human-Generative AI Collaboration in Business Analytics Problem Solving: A Large-Scale Online Experiment**
Chaofan Zhai, Ravi Bapna, Alok Gupta
 - Google Cloud Research Grant (\$1000), 2024
- **Pricing Strategies in Online Education**
Chaofan Zhai, Amit Mehra, Ravi Bapna
- **Incentivization of Federated Learning: A Novel Stackelberg Game**
Chaofan Zhai, Xuan Bi, Mochen Yang

TALKS

- Zhai C, Bi X, Choi A, & Ho C. A Customer-Aware Recommendation Framework for Influencer Economy: Validation Through a Field Experiment. *Statistical Challenges in Electronic Commerce Research (SCECR)*, Cyprus, 2025.
- Zhai C, Song Y, & Bapna R. Reinforcement Learning for Sustainable Learning in Online Education: Validation Through a Field Experiment. *Workshop on Information Technologies and Systems (WITS)*, Bangkok, 2024.
- Zhai C, Song Y, & Bapna R. Reinforcement Learning for Sustainable Learning in Online Education: Validation Through a Field Experiment. *INFORMS Annual Conference*, Seattle, 2024.
- Zhai C, Song Y, & Bapna R. Reinforcement Learning for Sustainable Learning in Online Education: Validation Through a Field Experiment. *Statistical Challenges in Electronic Commerce Research (SCECR)*, Lisbon, 2024.
- Zhai C, Song Y, & Bapna R. Reinforcement Learning for Sustainable Learning in Online Education: Validation Through a Field Experiment. *Production and Operations Management Society (POMS) Annual Meeting*, Minneapolis, 2024.
- Zhai C, Mehra A, & Bapna R. Pricing Strategies in Online Education. *Conference on Information Systems and Technology (CIST)*, Indianapolis, 2022.
- Zhai C, Bi X, & Yang M. Incentivization of Federated Learning: A Novel Stackelberg Game. *INFORMS Annual Conference*, Indianapolis, 2022.

TEACHING

INSTRUCTOR

- **IDSC 4444: Descriptive and Predictive Analytics**(Undergraduate Core) Spring & Fall 2023
Fall 2023: Instructor Evaluation (Student Rating of Teaching): 5.61/6; Response Ratio: 100%
Spring 2023: Instructor Evaluation (Student Rating of Teaching): 5.53/6; Response Ratio: 74.42%
2022-2023 Carlson School of Management Ph.D. Student Teaching Award

TEACHING ASSISTANT

- **CMBA 5832: Business Analytics for Competitive Advantage**(EMBA) Spring 2023
- **MABA 6431: Advanced Topics in Business Analytics** (MS) Fall 2022, Fall 2021
- **MSBA 6430: Advanced Issues in Business Analytics**(MS) Summer 2022, Summer 2021
- **IDSC 4110: Data Engineering for Business Analytics** (Undergraduate Core) Fall 2020

GUEST LECTURES

- **Six Tips For Teaching**, PhD Student Brownbag Spring 2024
- **How to Become a Data Analyst**, USC Graduate Student Association Spring 2020

SERVICE

JOURNAL REFEREE

- Information Systems Research (ISR) 2023-present

CONFERENCE REFEREE

- International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) 2021-present
- Conference on Information Systems and Technology (CIST) 2022-present
- Workshop on Information Technologies and Systems (WITS) 2024-present
- INFORMS Workshop on Data Science 2024
- ACM International Conference on Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining (KDD) 2024

OTHER

- Student Coordinator for Friday Seminar Series of IDSC Department 2023-2024
- PhD Student Brownbag Organizer 2023-2024

INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

Calabrio (US), TeamLease (India), Shanbay (China), Maimemo (China)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Amazon

Data Analytics Intern

2018

Shanghai, China
- City University of Hong Kong

Research Assistant

2017

Hongkong, China
- eBay

Business Analytics Intern

2016-2017

Shanghai, China

SKILLS

- GenAI / LLM: Vibe Coding, RAG, MCP
- PROGRAMMING: Python, R, Stata, SQL, JavaScript
- SOFTWARE: Mathematica, Matlab, \LaTeX