

Can't Touch Me: The Effect of Loneliness on Preference for Haptic Consumption Experiences

Elena Fumagalli, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, Argentina
Jaehoon Lee, Florida International University, USA
L. J. Shrum, HEC Paris, France

Simposio de investigación en management
25 Noviembre 2019

Reason Why: Loneliness Epidemic

22% US adults

Often feel lonely, left out or isolated

< 50 years old

Majority of people reporting loneliness

3 in 10

Say their loneliness has led them to think about harming themselves

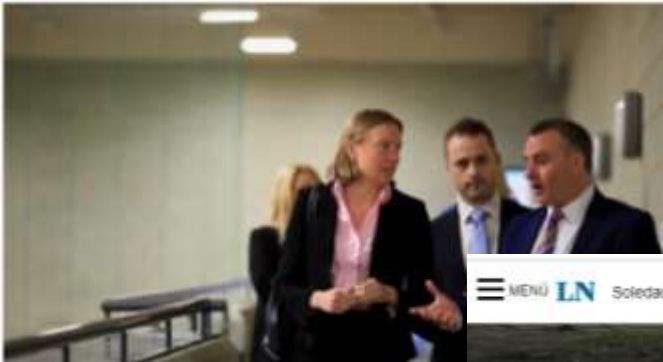


Kaiser Family Foundation/Economist Survey, 2018

Reason Why: Loneliness Epidemic

The New York Times

U.K. Appoints a Minister for Loneliness



≡ EL PAÍS

EDUCACIÓN MEDIO AMBIENTE IGUALDAD SANIDAD CONSUMO ASUNTOS SOCIALES LAICISMO COMUNICACIÓN

SOLEDAD |

Se compran amigos y abrazos: la epidemia de soledad en EE UU ya es un negocio

Las autoridades alertan de que sentirse solo es tan dañino como fumar 15 cigarrillos diarios. El problema ha alumbrado a una pequeña industria para combatirlo

The
Economist

Topics ▾

Current edition

More ▾

All the lonely people

Loneliness is a serious public-health problem

The lonely are not just sadder; they are unhealthier and die younger. What can be done?

MENU LN

Soledad: Una epidemia, pero también una carencia



SUSCRIBIRSE

Soledad. Una epidemia, pero también una carencia

Forbes

lonely

Business

Small Business

Lifestyle

Lists

Millennials And The Loneliness Epidemic



Neil Howe Contributor @Patsy

Reason Why: Consumer Products & Services



Research Question

Will a **lonely consumer** be more likely to favor consumption experiences with an **interpersonal touch component**?

- ▷ Social reconnection to reduce social pain (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
- ▷ Soothing function of touch (Mohr, Kirsch & Fotopoulou, 2017)

HOWEVER...

Theoretical Framework: Missing Reconnection

- ▷ Social anxiety, hypervigilance, prevention-focused motivation (Molden and Maner, 2003)
- ▷ Self-reinforcing loneliness loop (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008) = withdrawing from others to avoid the potential of further rejection.

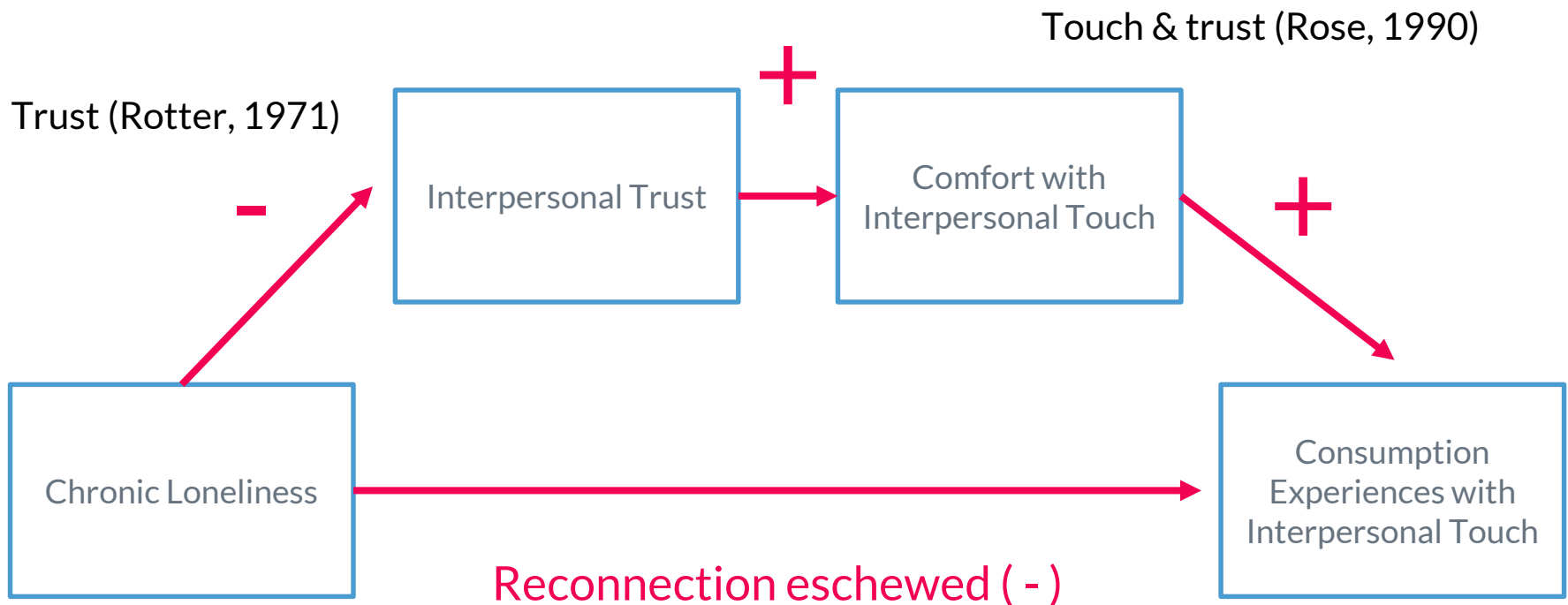
Lonely individuals will **eschew, rather than seek,** social reconnection opportunities such as consumption experiences with an interpersonal touch component.

Theoretical Framework: Interpersonal Touch & Trust

- ▷ Touching implies that the individuals involved trust each other (Rose, 1990)
- ▷ Trust = an individual's perception that other people will not do anything that will harm her interest (Rotter, 1971)

Interpersonal trust and comfort with interpersonal touch will **serially mediate** the effect.

Theoretical Framework: Our Conceptual Model



Method:

Main Constructs Measurement

Chronic Loneliness

20-item / 8-item UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1978)
“I lack companionship”, “I feel left out”

Interpersonal Trust

6-item Generalized Trust Scale (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994)
“Most people are basically honest”, “I am trustful”

Comfort with
Interpersonal Touch
(CIT)

6-item comfort with interpersonal touch scale (Webb & Peck, 2015)
“I feel more comfortable initiating touch than most people;”
“I don’t mind if someone touches my arm”

Consumption
Experiences –
Interpersonal Touch

Study 1 - Touch-related vs. Non-touch-related consumption activities
(appeal and self-reported frequency)
Study 2 – In-store Interpersonal vs. Non-interpersonal Interactions
Study 3 – Touch-related vs. Non-touch-related consumption scenarios
Study 4 – In-store interpersonal touch interactions

Study 1 - Design

DV

- How **appealing** are the following activities to you?
- How **often** do you...
 - ✓ 4 Touch-related consumption activities (adapted from Webb & Peck 2015)
 - ✓ 4 Non-touch related consumption activities



Main Measures

UCLA Loneliness Scale



Study 1 - Results

Prolific, n = 200

We found a negative correlation between chronic loneliness

- And appeal of touch-related activities ($r(198) = .60, p < .001$)
- And self-reported frequency to engage in touch-related activities ($r(198) = -.32, p < .001$)



Study 1 - Results

Prolific, n = 200

We found no significant correlation between chronic loneliness

- And appeal of non-touch-related activities ($r(198) = -.31, p = .75$)
- NOR self-reported frequency to engage in non-touch-related activities ($r(198) = -.87, p = .38$)



Study 2 - Design

DV

Preferences for both interpersonal and non-interpersonal interactions in a retail setting (4-items)

- I like when a store is designed to encourage **sales personnel** to approach **customers**
- I like when a store is designed to encourage **customers** to touch **products**



Main Measures

Loneliness, Trust & Comfort with Interpersonal Touch

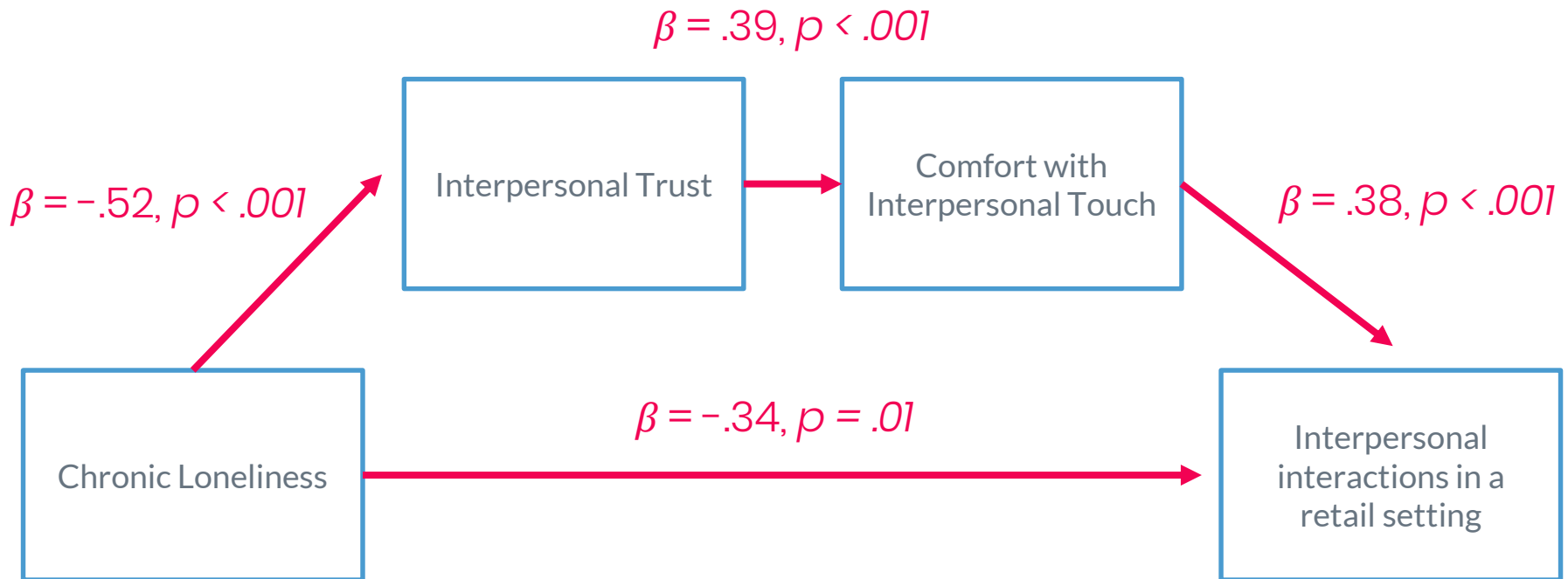
Other Measures

Fear of contamination (Deacon & Olatunji, 2007)
Social risk taking (Blais & Weber, 2006)
Need for product touch (Peck & Childers, 2003)



Study 2 - Results

Prolific, n = 199



$\beta = -.08, SE = .03, 95\% CI [-.16 -.03]$; Hayes Process Model 6

Controlling for Other Measures, $\beta = -.06, SE = .03, 95\% CI [-.12 -.02]$; Hayes Process Model 6

**We ran a CFA and we found support for discriminant validity using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the correlations approach (Henseler et al. 2015)*

Study 3 – Active/Passive Coping

- ▷ Active: frustrated need (situational changeable) > increased motivation > connect
- ▷ Passive: hypersensitivity to social exclusion (internal stable) > decreased motivation > eschew

Adopting active coping strategies will mitigate the negative effect of chronic loneliness on interpersonal trust thus eliminating the overall conditional indirect effect of loneliness on preference for touch-related consumption.

Study 3 - Design

DV

Preference for touch-related and non-touch-related consumption activities

- T: Getting a massage
- NT: Buying books online



Main Measures

Loneliness, Trust & Comfort with Interpersonal Touch

Other Measures

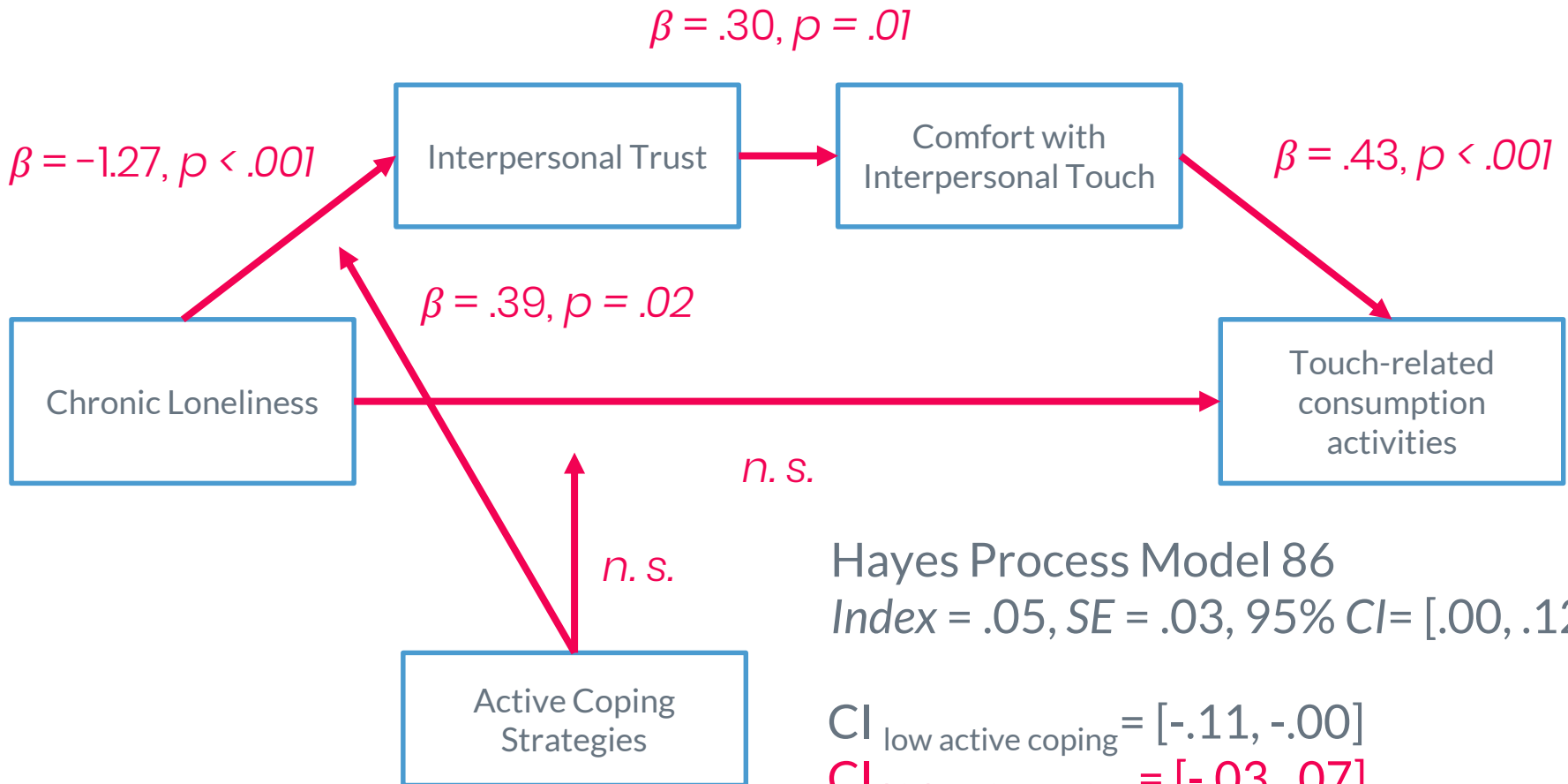
Active/passive coping strategies (Gentina et al., 2016)

- A: “consider the problem a challenge”
- P: “fleeing into fantasies”



Study 3 - Results

Prolific, $n = 201$



Hayes Process Model 86
Index = .05, SE = .03, 95% CI = [.00, .12]

CI_{low active coping} = [-.11, -.00]

CI_{high active coping} = [-.03, .07]

Study 4 - Design



Trust Manipulation

Trust Boost Present vs Trust Boost Absent (moderation-of-process)

- TBP: “People Are More Trustworthy than We Think”
- TBA: “Shelf Effacement: How Not to Organize Your Bookshelves”

DV

Preference for in-store haptic interactions (9 touch-related scenarios; 7 filler scenarios)

- Functional Touch: salesperson taking your measurement
- Imposed Touch: salesperson bumping into you

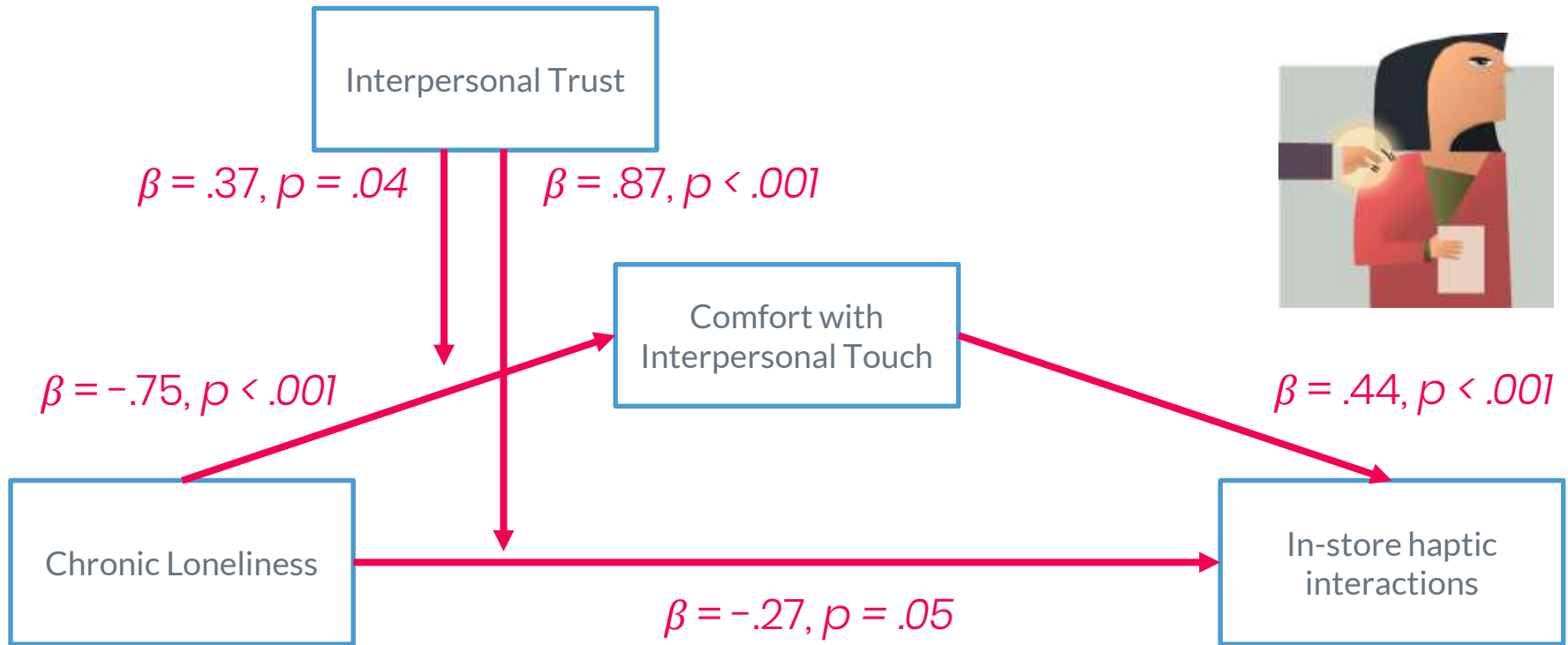
Main Measures

Loneliness & Comfort with Interpersonal Touch



Study 4 - Results

Prolific, $n = 203$



Index = .39, SE = .14, 95% CI = [.11, .65], Hayes Process Model 8

CI_{trust boost present} = [-.15, .24]; CI_{trust boost absent} = [-.52, -.14]

Summing Up

STUDY 1

Chronically lonely participants display **lower preference for and lower tendency to engage** in touch-related consumption activities ✓

STUDY 2

Chronically lonely participants display **lower preference for interpersonal interactions** in retail setting ✓

Sequential Mediation Model ✓

No correlation with **social risk-taking** or **contamination fear** ✓

STUDY 3

Chronically lonely participants display lower preference for touch-related consumption activities ✓

Sequential Mediation Model ✓

Actively coping with loneliness eliminates the effect ✓

STUDY 4

Chronically lonely participants display **lower preference for in-store haptic interactions** ✓

Moderation-of-process, trust boost ✓

The indirect effect holds for both functional and imposed in-store touch ✓

Contribution



- ▷ Consequences of chronic loneliness on preferences for interpersonal touch
- ▷ Motivational process influencing behaviour of chronically lonely consumers
- ▷ Chronic loneliness affects consumption preferences and expectations contrary to apparent assumptions of marketers

Thanks!

Any questions?

efumagalli@utdt.edu

