

Consumer engagement, stress, and conservation of resources theory: A review, conceptual development, and future research agenda

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Abstract

While scholarly acumen of consumer engagement, defined as a consumer's resource investment in his/her brand interactions, is burgeoning, its theoretical interface with consumer stress remains tenuous, exposing an important literature-based gap. Specifically, consumers' engagement with brands, or brand-related elements (e.g., online brand communities, frontline staff, service robots, social media pages, etc.), may either induce, or ensue from, individuals' consumption-related stress (e.g., through perceived resource depletion, brand-related performance anxiety, choice overload, pandemics, climate change, supply shortages, etc.). Addressing this gap, we develop a conservation of resources theory-informed framework of the consumer engagement/stress interface that identifies consumer engagement as either (i) a consumer stressor (e.g., by placing demands on consumers, including in self-service or coproduction tasks), or (ii) a stress-reducing coping mechanism (e.g., by facilitating the development of brand-related learning, skills, or resilience). We, then, introduce the articles contained in this section, which are also linked to the proposed framework. We conclude by outlining avenues for further research in the integrative area of consumer engagement/stress.

KEYWORDS

challenge stressor, conservation of resources theory, consumer engagement (CE), distress, eustress, hindrance stressor, stress

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the *consumer engagement* concept, defined as a consumer's resource investment in his/her brand interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2019), has seen rapid growth (Feddemma et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2019). Consumer engagement is thought to foster enhanced buyer outcomes, including their heightened empowerment, self-brand connection, and value co-creation (e.g., Giakoumaki &

Krepapa, 2020; Sprott et al., 2009), while also boosting firm performance (e.g., Beckers et al., 2018; Brodie et al., 2011).

Despite these positives, consumers' engagement with brands, or brand-related objects (e.g., brand communities, frontline staff, service robots, or social media pages) can also be accompanied by, or generate, negative outcomes for consumers (e.g., Clark et al., 2020), including stress (e.g., Keeling et al., 2022). In contemporary consumption environments, consumer stress is on the rise, including due to

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economic, social, and/or technological factors, among others (e.g., inflation, the rising cost of living, staff- and supply shortages, and [pandemic-related] health and safety concerns; Bazzoni et al., 2022; Itani & Hollebeek, 2021).

Consumer stress refers to an individual's perceived pressure, or strain, related to his/her consumption activity (Berry et al., 2015; Sujan et al., 1999), which may arise from endogenous and/or exogenous factors. First, endogenous stressors include actual, or perceived, brand engagement requirements (e.g., company/brand-driven policies, co-production requests) that may induce issues, including consumer-perceived resource depletion, firm/brand-related performance anxiety, schema-inconsistent dynamics, or information- or choice overload, and so on (Fletcher-Brown et al., 2021; Mathmann et al., 2017). For example, Burger King's "Have It Your Way" campaign solicits consumers' active participation in service delivery, while pay-what-you-want models can spark consumer-perceived pressure regarding what is a fair price for specific offerings (Roy & Das, 2022), in turn potentially inducing stress (e.g., owing to uncertainty or lacking perceived self-efficacy or skills).

Second, exogenous stressors include external changes or shocks, including the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, or supply chain issues, which can, likewise, affect buyers' engagement (e.g., Moldes et al., 2022; Pfeifer et al., 2021). For example, customers who shifted to purchasing online (vs. in-store) during the pandemic have a reduced opportunity to assess various brand-related (e.g., tactile/olfactory) product cues before purchase, in turn potentially triggering stress. Relatedly, online purchasing can see an elevated rate of unwanted product returns or cyber security concerns (e.g., Zhang, 2018), reflecting further potential stressors.

While consumers' engagement with brands may, in some cases, generate stress to the individual, as outlined, it may, likewise, be leveraged to deal, or cope, with stress (e.g., Coiro et al., 2017). In this vein, Kuo et al. (2006) *engagement coping*, which comprises action, optimism, and relaxation, suggests engagement's key role in stress management (Pienaar & Willemsse, 2008). Here, consumers' resource investment (i.e., engagement) in handling, or overcoming, stress makes an important contribution to their wellbeing (Rothmann, 2008), in turn impacting their consumption behavior (Hollebeek and Belk, 2021). For example, consumers' regular investments in their digital interactions are expected to build their technology literacy and -competence, in turn lowering their technostress (Kumar et al., 2022), illustrating engagement's parallel, pivotal role in stress management and alleviation (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017).

However, despite this emerging insight, the role, and effects, of consumers' engagement in the face of brand, or consumption, related stress remain tenuous (e.g., Garbas et al., 2023; Lunardo et al., 2022), exposing an important literature-based gap. Specifically, the literature remains hazy regarding consumer engagement's (a) potential role as a consumer-perceived stressor (e.g., through elevated self-service requirements; Bulmer et al., 2018), and (b) potential insulating role against the formation, or development, of stress (e.g., by fostering perceived self-efficacy, skills, or resilience; Crego et al., 2016), thus warranting further investigation. In response to these issues, this

article, and broader Special Section, explore the theoretical interface of consumer engagement and stress, which merits further scrutiny.

This review article makes the following main contribution to the consumer engagement and stress literature. First, we deploy Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory (CORT) to develop a conceptual framework that explores the associations of challenge (vs. hindrance) stressors, consumers' positive and negative brand-related engagement, and eustress (vs. distress) in the case of consumer engagement as (i) a source of consumer-perceived stress, and (ii) a stress-reducing coping mechanism, thus extending the work of authors, including Merino et al. (2021), Mende et al. (2017), Halbesleben et al. (2009), and Moschis (2007) in the consumer engagement context. Specifically, while these authors assess the interface of eustress and/or distress and engagement in the work, study, civic, or broader consumption contexts, the association of consumer engagement and eustress/distress remains nebulous (e.g., Kumar et al., 2022), exposing a pertinent literature-based gap. More generally, acumen of consumers' engagement with brands, or brand-related elements (e.g., the brand's online communities, social media pages, or sales reps), and their respective link to consumer stress lags behind (e.g., Lunardo et al., 2022), warranting further investigation. Conversely, though prior authors, like Beh et al. (2020) or Hassan and Suki (2022), explore the interface of consumer behavior and the CORT, these fail to disentangle specific engagement-based effects in the context of consumer-perceived challenge (vs. hindrance) stressors and eustress (vs. distress), as, therefore, explored in this article.

We identify consumer engagement as either (i) a consumer-perceived stressor (e.g., by placing role-related (e.g., coproduction/cocreation) demands on consumers; Choi et al., 2019; Etgar, 2008), or (ii) a stress-reducing coping mechanism (e.g., by facilitating the development of role-related learning, skills, or resilience; e.g., Cheung & Lee, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2019), as shown in a proposed conceptual framework, thus unveiling novel insight into the consumer engagement/stress interface. Overall, our analyses not only contribute novel acumen to the integrative topic area of consumer engagement and stress, but also expose elevated managerial importance, given the rising levels of consumer stress in contemporary consumption environments (e.g., Bazzoni et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2022), as outlined.

The article unfolds as follows. In Section 2, we review important literature on the stress-based CORT and consumer engagement, followed by the development of the proposed conceptual framework, and an associated set of Propositions in Section 3. Section 4, then, outlines the papers featuring in this Special Section, followed by an overview of further research avenues addressing the consumer engagement/stress interface in Section 5.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Conservation of resources theory

CORT is a stress theory that explains, or predicts, the human motivation to maintain one's current resources and pursue, or attain,

new ones (Hobfoll, 1989; Neveu, 2007). Here, a *resource* denotes a valued item, or attribute (e.g., an object, state, condition, or idea), revealing the different tangibility levels that resources may have (Barney, 1991). Hobfoll (1989) posits that stress, defined as an individual's perceived pressure or strain, transpires in the presence of:

- (i) A threat to one's resources (i.e., threat of resource loss). For example, a consumer may experience stress worrying about this/her property being impacted by an impending natural disaster (Longmire et al., 2021);
- (ii) An actual net loss of resources. For example, consumers may experience stress following the theft of their items from their hotel room (e.g., Korgaonkar et al., 2021); or
- (iii) A lack of acquired resources following the expenditure of resources. For example, a university graduate may experience cognitive dissonance relating to the completion of his/her college degree based on a sense of limited learning versus a substantial student loan (e.g., Li & Choudhury, 2021).

The theory is based on two key principles. First, *resource investment* implies that individuals invest their resources (i.e., engage; Hollebeek et al., 2019) in an attempt to reduce their stress level (Beh et al., 2020), suggesting engagement's role as a coping mechanism, or its capacity to alleviate stress (Perera & McIlveen, 2014), as outlined. Specifically, the theory posits that individuals tend to invest resources to protect themselves against resource loss (e.g., by purchasing an insurance policy), to recover from resource loss (e.g., by undertaking a post-cyclone tidy-up), and/or to gain resources (e.g., by purchasing a laptop to develop one's skillset or C.V.; Hobfoll, 2011).

Second, *primacy of resource loss* implies that a loss of resources tends to yield greater levels of stress to the individual than that a corresponding resource gain would to alleviate stress (Bilal et al., 2022; Hobfoll, 2001). Based on the theory's postulation that consumers tend to first and foremost value holding on to their current resources (vs. attaining new ones), they will primarily value the acquisition of new resources *if* their current resources are also maintained. Correspondingly, we infer that consumers will chiefly *engage* to conserve their current resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). We next review prior literature on eustress, distress, and coping.

2.2 | Eustress, distress, and coping

The literature differentiates the concepts of eustress and distress (e.g., Kumar et al., 2022; Selye, 1974). While *eustress* denotes stress that benefits the individual (e.g., by posing a challenge that prompt him/her to learn; Mende et al., 2017), *distress* refers to an individual's perceived pressure or strain without the associated personal developmental or growth benefit, thus, typically, depleting his/her resources (Nelson & Simmons, 2003; Rodríguez et al., 2013). In the consumption context, eustress may occur through a consumer's brand-related skill development (e.g., by learning how to use a brand's digital platforms, in turn lowering the individual's technostress;

Kumar et al., 2022), while distress may transpire through the consumer's perceived undesirable pressure on him/her (e.g., stress experienced while standing in service-based waiting lines, or by consuming unsought medical services; e.g., Miller et al., 2008).

The development of eustress has been thought to arise from *challenge stressors*, or positively perceived stressors that generate feelings of achievement and fulfilment, including through challenges in one's learning environment, high levels of responsibility, or opportunities for task accomplishment and personal growth, thus providing a motivating force to the individual (Hollebeek & Haar, 2012; LePine et al., 2004). Conversely, distress is commonly associated with *hindrance stressors*, or negatively perceived impediments to the individual's goal fulfilment (e.g., a perceived role-related inefficiency or burden), thus typically lowering the individual's role satisfaction (Biggs et al., 2017). Though eustress and distress exist as distinct theoretical entities, they may mutually affect, or converge into, one another (e.g., at high levels, eustress can turn into distress, or vice versa).

To overcome, or deal with, eustress and/or distress, individuals may deploy coping mechanisms or strategies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Nikolova, 2022), which are either adaptive, or maladaptive, in nature (Hershcovis et al., 2018; Lunardo et al., 2022). *Adaptive coping strategies* reduce stress, and distress in particular, thus leaving a typically positive effect on the individual. However, while *maladaptive coping strategies* may reduce (dis)stress in the short-run, they tend to raise it long-term (Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996), revealing their detrimental effects on the individual. For example, consumers may end up feeling exhausted as a result of their excessive purchase-related cognitive dissonance (Menasco & Hawkins, 1978), while over-exposure to an experience, technology, interface, or stimulus can also yield saturation and stress (Haenlein et al., 2022).

2.3 | Consumer engagement

The consumer engagement concept, which has gained traction in the marketing literature in the last 15 years (Hollebeek, Sharma, et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022), has been defined as a consumer's resource investment in his/her brand interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2019), exposing its theoretical alignment with the CORT (e.g., Hu et al., 2023). Despite debate surrounding the concept, authors typically agree regarding several of its theoretical hallmarks, as discussed further below.

First, consumer engagement represents an inherently interactive concept that transpires during the consumer's interactions with a brand, or relevant brand-related elements (Brodie et al., 2013; Temerak et al., 2023). In these interactions, consumers may invest varying amounts of resources, with their greater resource investments reflecting their higher engagement, and vice versa (Fletcher-Brown et al., 2021; Hollebeek & Belk, 2021).

Second, consumer engagement is commonly regarded as a multi-dimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral facets (e.g., Harrigan et al., 2018; Saarschmidt & Dose, 2023). That is,

while a consumer's cognitive (emotional) engagement denotes his/her thought-based (affective) resource investment in his/her brand interactions, his/her behavioral engagement represents his/her investment of time, energy, and effort in these interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Though some authors add a social consumer engagement dimension (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Vivek et al., 2014), this is not germane across contexts (e.g., it lacks relevance for privately consumed brands; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

Third, consumer engagement may transpire with a positive and/or negative valence (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014). While positive engagement reflects the consumer's favorable brand-related interactions (e.g., by thinking positively about the brand, displaying a passion for the brand), negative engagement denotes the individual's detrimental brand engagement (e.g., by sabotaging the brand or disseminating negative brand-related word-of-mouth; Heinonen, 2018). Moreover, consumers' positive, or negative, engagement can transfer, or spill over, from one to the other (e.g., positive engagement can turn negative, or vice versa; Bowden et al., 2017). We next introduce the proposed conceptual framework.

3 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We next draw on the reviewed literature to develop a CORT-informed framework that outlines the theoretical association of consumer engagement, perceived challenge/hindrance stressors, and eustress/distress. We propose that the associations of these theoretical entities transpire differently in the case of consumer engagement as (i) a consumer-perceived stressor, and (ii) a stress-reducing coping mechanism, as discussed further in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 below, respectively.

3.1 | Consumer engagement as a stressor

Consumers may experience eustress and/or distress from various activities required in the execution of their customer roles (Roy & Jain, 2020; Saarschmidt & Dose, 2023), as outlined. For example,

factors, including the current inflationary climate, the pandemic, supply chain issues, or the adoption of automated store checkouts may incur consumer stress (e.g., Bazzoni et al., 2022; Bulmer et al., 2018), revealing engagement's role as a potential stressor to the individual (see Figure 1a).

The literature classifies stressors as challenge- or hindrance stressors (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Hollebeek & Haar, 2012), as outlined, where *challenge stressors* represent a positively perceived motivating force to the individual (e.g., through role-related learning), while *hindrance stressors* are negatively perceived role-impeding strains or burdens (Haldorai et al., 2022; LePine et al., 2004). Given engagement's role as a stressor in this scenario, we integrate the notions of challenge- and hindrance stressors with consumer engagement to develop the new concepts of consumers' *challenge engagement* and *hindrance engagement*, respectively. These new concepts extend the work of authors, including Rai (2018) and Bakker and Sanz-Vergel (2013), who have previously linked the notions of challenge/hindrane stressors and engagement in other contexts (e.g., organizational behavior). Blending, and extending, the consumer engagement (e.g., Hollebeek, Sharma, et al., 2022) and challenge/hindrane stressor literature (e.g., Biggs et al., 2017; LePine et al., 2004), we define consumers' *challenge engagement* as:

A consumer's resource investment in tackling positively perceived role-related stressors that generate feelings of achievement and fulfilment (e.g., learning/skill development).

Conversely, we conceptualize *hindrance engagement*, as follows:

A consumer's resource investment in tackling negatively perceived role-related impediments or burdens (e.g., red tape or inefficiencies).

That is, the proposed notions of challenge- and hindrance engagement imply that the consumer's engagement *represents* (or *is*) the experienced challenge- or hindrance stressor, respectively,

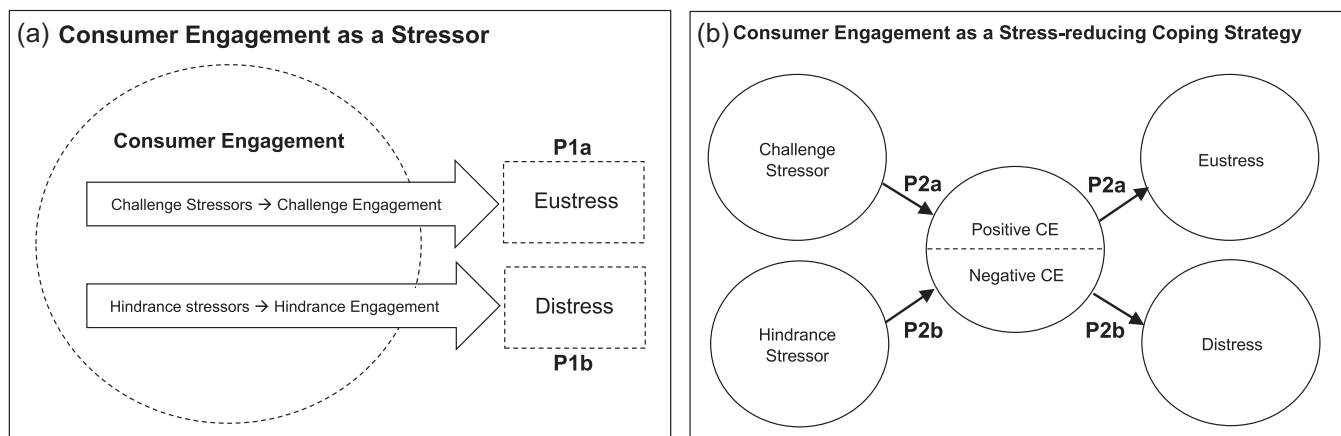


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework of the consumer engagement/stress interface. CE, consumer engagement.

consistent with Saarschmidt and Dose's (2023, p. 2) observation that "customer engagement can be perceived as stressful." The proposed concepts of challenge- and hindrance engagement also align, theoretically, with Hollebeek, Kumar, et al.'s (2022) identified varying volitionality levels characterizing engagement. That is, while individuals' challenge engagement tends to transpire more voluntarily (e.g., owing to the attainment of perceived benefit/value from one's engagement, such as through role-related learning; Hammedi et al., 2021), their hindrance engagement will tend to see a lower volitionality level (e.g., by requiring individuals to deal with undesired role-related strains or impediments; Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013).

We predict consumers' challenge engagement to predominantly drive the development of their positively perceived eustress, while their hindrance engagement is expected to primarily trigger their consumption-related distress, thus adding to current consumer engagement, eustress/distress, and CORT-informed insight (see Figure 1a). Our analyses extend the work of authors, including Keeling et al. (2022), Merino et al. (2021), Wendling et al. (2018), and Nelson and Simmons (2003), among others. Specifically, given engagement's role as a stressor in this scenario, it is depicted as an antecedent to eustress and distress, respectively, in Figure 1a. Based on the CORT, consumers are predicted to primarily invest their resources in those brand-related interactions that will see them conserve, or augment, (vs. deplete) their personal resources (Hobfoll, 2011), which is represented in the framework by their positively perceived challenge (vs. hindrance) engagement that sees them build, or expand, their stock of valued resources (e.g., through the development of their personal skills, or resilience, through learning; Bilal et al., 2022; Hollebeek et al., 2019), even if other resources are expended in this process. We theorize:

P1: *When a consumer's brand engagement acts as a stressor to the individual, his/her (a) challenge engagement will be conducive to the development of his/her role-related eustress, and (b) hindrance engagement will be conducive to the development of his/her role-related distress.*

Overall, Figure 1a incorporates challenge- and hindrance stressors as part of consumer engagement's domain, given engagement's role as a stressor in this scenario, as outlined. In other words, engagement-based stressors cultivate the development of consumers' challenge- and hindrance engagement, which we posit to uniquely impact consumer-perceived eustress and distress, respectively. We next outline engagement's potential alternate role as a stress-reducing coping mechanism, or strategy.

3.2 | Consumer engagement as a stress-reducing coping mechanism

In contrast to the scenario depicted in Figure 1a, consumers' engagement with brands, or brand-related elements, may also serve

as a coping mechanism or strategy (e.g., Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Keeling et al., 2022), lowering their role-related stress levels, as outlined. For example, consumers may invest their (e.g., cognitive/temporal) resources to build their role-related skillsets (e.g., by learning how to order online, allowing them to bypass physical waiting lines), in turn reducing their stress in this regard (e.g., Perera & McIlveen, 2014; Wolter et al., 2023).

This scenario is, therefore, characterized by the consumer's proactive, motivational stance in reducing his/her own role-related stress levels, in line with Brodie et al.'s (2011) widely cited *motivational* nature of engagement. However, unlike the scenario outlined in Section 3.1, which implies engagement as a key role-related stressor (Olugbade & Karatepe, 2019), the current scenario sees the prior emergence of (a) role-related challenge- or hindrance stressor(s), which the consumer, in turn, tries to tackle by constructively *engaging* with the stimulus (Wolter et al., 2023), as shown in Figure 1b. Consumer engagement, therefore, acts as a stress-reducing coping strategy in this scenario (e.g., Keeling et al., 2022), contributing to the development of consumer-perceived value.

In other words, unlike the scenario depicted in Figure 1a, in which consumer engagement represents a consumer-perceived challenge- or hindrance stressor, that shown in Figure 1b sees the prior emergence of a consumption-related challenge- or hindrance stressor, which—in turn—drives consumers to engage with the stressor, in an attempt to remove, or reduce, it. Consequently, in this scenario, stressors are viewed to only affect the consumer *if* (s)he engages with them, suggesting that individuals who do not engage with a stressor remain unaffected by it, thus failing to generate either eu- or distress in the individual. This observation is depicted in Figure 1b through engagement's mediating role in the association of challenge/hindrance stressors on the one hand, and consumer-perceived eustress/distress on the other (i.e., for a challenge/hindrance stressor to induce eustress or distress in an individual, (s) he must first engage with it).

We argue that positively perceived challenge stressors are conducive to generating consumers' positive engagement, or their favorable role-related interactions (e.g., by striving to improve their role performance; Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013; Hollebeek & Chen, 2014), which we postulate to, in turn, drive the development of eustress (Mende et al., 2017), as shown in Figure 1b. Conversely, negatively perceived hindrance stressors will tend to generate individuals' more negative brand-related engagement (e.g., Bowden et al., 2017), which we posit to yield distress, as also shown in the framework (see P2b). We postulate:

P2: *When a consumer's brand engagement acts as stress-reducing coping mechanism to the individual, (a) perceived challenge stressors will tend to yield his/her more positive brand engagement, in turn fostering eustress, while (b) perceived hindrance stressors will tend to yield his/her more negative brand engagement, in turn fostering distress.*

Overall, the scenario depicted in Figure 1b proposes the initial emergence of perceived challenge- or hindrance stressors, which are predicted to shape the consumer's positive or negative engagement, respectively, if the individual engages with the stressor. Then, consumers' positive or negative engagement is, in turn, expected to foster their eustress, or distress, respectively. In sum, the framework adds to the consumer engagement, and stress, literature by proposing novel theoretical effects characterizing the interface of these concepts. In particular, we identified engagement's role as (i) a consumer-perceived stressor, and (ii) a stress-reducing coping mechanism, which we posit to each generate unique effects, as outlined. We next introduce the articles featuring in this Special Section, while also highlighting their respective association to the proposed framework.

4 | OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES IN THE SPECIAL SECTION ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT/STRESS

We next introduce the six articles that feature in this Special Section, which may appear in differing issues of the journal, as also summarized in Table 1. We also link these articles to the proposed framework, as discussed further below. Our first article titled "Consumer (Dis)engagement Coping Profiles Using Online Services in Managing Health-related Stressors" by Debbie Keeling, Ko de Ruyter, and Angus Laing explores the effects of consumers' exposure to health-related stressors, and their appraisal of such stressors, in line with our proposed view of consumer engagement as a stress-reducing coping strategy (see Figure 1b). The authors also identify engagement- and disengagement-focused coping profiles that impact consumer stress and wellbeing. Drawing on a sample of 623 consumers, the authors' empirical findings suggest that health consumers' engagement-based coping efforts are largely focused on the direct management of health stressors (e.g., through active planning). The results also show how consumers combine multiple coping mechanisms, as formalized in a set of distinctive consumer coping profiles. The paper concludes with a discussion of key implications that arise from the authors' analyses.

Our second article titled "Relating the Dark Side of New-age Technologies and Consumer Technostress" by V. Kumar, Bharath Rajan, Uday Salunkhe, and Shreekant Joag develops the *technostress* concept, defined as "the result of negative experiences faced by customers when interacting with firm-based new-age technologies" (p. 2242). Technostress, which comprises six stressor sub-types (i.e., techno-invasion, -complexity, -uncertainty, -dependence, -vulnerability, and -inferiority), is proposed to impact consumer engagement, reversing engagement's predicted effect on consumer-perceived eustress/distress, respectively, in Figure 1b. The authors also propose that (i) a nonlinear relationship exists between customer technostress and customer engagement, (ii) an increase in firms' marketing efforts of new-age technologies will help mitigate the effect of customers' negative experiences on customer technostress, (iii) customers' rising familiarity with new-age technologies will help mitigate the effect of

their negative experiences on their ensuing technostress, and (iv) compared to reactive and proactive coping strategies, adaptive coping strategies will have a greater mitigating influence on the nonlinear relationship of customer technostress and engagement. The authors conclude by extracting pertinent implications from their analyses.

Our third article titled "Observing Consumer Stress and Engagement: An Intercultural Perspective" by Mohamed Temerak, Ruby Zhang, and Cristiana Lages, likewise, observes the triggers, and effects, of consumer stress on their engagement with brands across consumers of differing ethnical profiles, thus also reversing the associations proposed in Figure 1b. The authors report on two sequential scenario-based experiments examining specific stress triggers (i.e., information availability about an incivility incident, and ethnic similarity between the observing customer and the mistreated employee), which are viewed to impact consumer engagement in cross-cultural service encounters. In study 1, the authors compare customers' exposure to full (vs. partial) incivility incident-related information, which demonstrates that full information raises observers' psychological stress, in turn lowering their behavioral and emotional engagement. In study 2, the authors investigate how white (vs. black) observers respond to ethnic similarity across the observing customer and the mistreated employee. The results show that incivility triggers outward psychological stress in white and black observers. However, while black observers' outward stress reduces their behavioral engagement, white observers' behavioral engagement is reduced by both their inward and outward stress.

Our fourth article titled "Customer Engagement in Idea Contests: Emotional and Behavioral Consequences of Idea Rejection" by Mario Saarschmidt and David Dose addresses the effect of firms' rejection of consumer ideas generated in idea contests, which is viewed as a stressor, on these individuals' future engagement behavior with the firm. The authors' analyses, therefore, align with our identified role of consumer engagement as a stressor (e.g., Figure 1a). Drawing on cognitive dissonance literature and stress appraisal theory, the authors conduct two empirical studies. Study 1 experimentally assesses the different effects of the firm's appreciation of the consumer's engagement (i.e., idea acceptance vs. rejection) and tests consumers' emotional responses to the stressor of idea rejection, as well as the moderating effects of firm acknowledgment. In study 2, the authors conduct a randomized field experiment to assess differences in firm acknowledgment versus individualized firm feedback in a real-world setting. Taken together, the studies highlight the importance of the firm's communication strategy in informing consumers regarding the rejection (vs. acceptance) of their idea. Key implications are also discussed.

Our fifth article titled "Engagement in Vice Food and Beverage Consumption: The Role of Perceived Lack of Control" by Renaud Lunardo, David Jaud, and Esther Jaspers investigates why stress induced by low perceived control leads to consumers' engagement in unhealthy, or vice, food consumption, thus also inverting engagement's proposed effect on eustress/distress in Figure 1b. However, consumers' engagement with vice food consumption may, likewise, be viewed to generate (further) consumer stress (e.g., by feeling guilty about consuming these foods; Ketron et al., 2021), fitting with our

TABLE 1 Overview of articles featured in this Special Section.

Author(s)	Article summary
1. Keeling et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors examine the effects of consumers' exposure to health-related stressors, and their appraisal of such stressors. o Engagement- and disengagement-focused coping profiles are also identified, which affect consumer stress and wellbeing. o Using a sample of 623 consumers, the findings suggest that health consumers' engagement-based coping efforts center on the direct management of health stressors (e.g., through active planning). The results also show how consumers combine multiple coping mechanisms, as formalized in a set of distinctive consumer coping profiles.
2. Kumar et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors develop the <i>technostress</i> concept (i.e., "the result of negative experiences faced by customers when interacting with firm-based new-age technologies;" p. 2242). o Technostress is proposed to comprise six stressor sub-types, including techno-invasion, -complexity, -uncertainty, -dependence, -vulnerability, and -inferiority. o The findings suggest that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Technostress impacts consumer engagement. o A nonlinear relationship exists between customer technostress and -engagement. o A rise in firms' marketing efforts of new-age technologies will help mitigate the effect of customers' negative experiences on customer technostress. o Customers' growing familiarity with new-age technologies will help mitigate the effect of their negative experiences on their technostress. o Adaptive (vs. reactive/proactive) coping strategies have a greater mitigating influence on the nonlinear relationship of customer technostress and -engagement.
3. Temerak et al. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors report on two sequential scenario-based experiments examining specific stress triggers (i.e., information availability about an incivility incident, and ethnic similarity between the observing customer and the mistreated employee), which are viewed to impact consumer engagement in cross-cultural service encounters. o Study 1 compares customers' exposure to full (vs. partial) incivility incident-related information, which shows that full information raises observers' psychological stress, in turn lowering their behavioral and emotional engagement. o Study 2 explores how white/black observers respond to ethnic similarity across the observing customer and the mistreated employee. The results show that incivility triggers outward psychological stress in white <i>and</i> black observers. Yet, while black observers' outward stress decreases their behavioral engagement, white observers' behavioral engagement is lowered by their inward and outward stress.
4. Saarschmidt and Dose (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors address the impact of firms' rejection of consumer ideas generated in idea contests (i.e., a stressor) on these individuals' future engagement behavior with the firm. o Using cognitive dissonance literature and stress appraisal theory, the authors conduct two empirical studies. o Study 1 experimentally assesses the different effects of the company's appreciation of the consumer's engagement (i.e., idea acceptance vs. rejection) and tests consumers' emotional responses to the stressor of idea rejection, as well as the moderating effects of firm acknowledgment. o Study 2 reports on a randomized field experiment to investigate differences in firm acknowledgment versus individualized firm feedback in a real-world setting. o Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of the firm's communication strategy in informing consumers regarding the rejection (vs. acceptance) of their idea.
5. Lunardo et al. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors explore why stress induced by low perceived control over their life yields consumers' engagement in unhealthy (vice) food consumption. o Using self-licensing theory, they theorize that perceived lacking control raises consumer stress, in turn fueling their need to escape through self-indulgence (i.e., by engaging in vice food/beverage consumption). o A survey is conducted in France, followed by two experiments in the United States and the United Kingdom. o The findings indicate that when consumers perceive a lack of control, they experience stress, seek an escape from this stress, and end up self-indulging through the consumption of vice food/beverages.
6. Garbas et al. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The authors draw on transactional stress theory to explore whether customers are able to cope with the cognitive demands characterizing professional services. o Specifically, they examine whether employees can provide coping support to lower customer stress associated with their role-related behavioral engagement (participation). o The findings of a time-lagged study with customers of a German bank suggest that individuals' pre-encounter coping is ineffective in mitigating the effect of their anticipated cognitive demands on their behavioral engagement stress. o Instead, the findings from the field study and a follow-up experimental study show that a level of employee coping support is critical in successful service encounters. o Based on the results, the authors advise professional service firms to empower their frontline staff to provide emotional coping support to customers to attenuate the unfavorable effect of perceived role-related cognitive demands on their behavioral engagement stress.

proposed view of engagement as a stressor, as shown in Figure 1a. Deploying self-licensing theory, the authors theorize that a perceived lack of control prompts consumers to engage in vice food and beverage consumption, because lacking control raises consumer stress and, consequently, a need to escape through self-indulgence. To test their hypothesized associations, the authors conducted a survey-based study in France and two experiments in the United States and the United Kingdom, the results of which consistently support their predictions. Specifically, the findings indicate that when consumers perceive a lack of control over their life, they experience stress, seek an escape from this stress, and end up self-indulging through the consumption of vice food and beverages.

Our final article titled "How Can Customers Cope with Cognitive Demands of Professional Services? The Role of Employee Coping Support" by Janina Garbas, Marah Blaurock, Marion Büttgen, and Zelal Ates draws on transactional stress theory to explore whether customers are able to cope with the cognitive demands characterizing professional services. Specifically, the authors examine whether employees can provide coping support to lower customer stress associated with their role-related behavioral engagement

(participation). The results of a time-lagged study with clients of a German bank suggest that customers' pre-encounter coping is ineffective in mitigating the effect of their anticipated cognitive demands on their behavioral engagement (participation) stress. Instead, the findings attained in the field study and a follow-up experimental study show that a level of employee coping support is critical in successful service encounters. Based on their findings, the authors advise professional service firms to empower their frontline staff to provide emotional coping support to customers to attenuate the unfavorable effect of perceived role-related cognitive demands on customers' behavioral engagement (participation) stress. We next outline pertinent avenues for further research on the consumer engagement/stress interface.

5 | FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

We conclude by outlining opportunities for further research that arise from our analyses, as summarized in Table 2 and discussed further below. First, the purely conceptual nature of our analyses

TABLE 2 Future research agenda.

Research avenue	Sample research questions
1. Empirical testing and validation of the Propositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o When a consumer's brand engagement acts as a stressor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How, or to what extent, will his/her challenge engagement be conducive to the development of his/her role-related eustress (P1a)? o How, or to what extent, will his/her hindrance engagement be conducive to the development of his/her role-related distress (P1b)? o When a consumer's brand engagement acts as a stress-reducing coping mechanism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How, or to what extent, will the individual's perceived challenge stressors tend to yield his/her more positive brand engagement and how does this impact his/her eustress (P2a)? o How, or to what extent, will the individual's perceived hindrance stressors tend to yield his/her more negative brand engagement and how does this impact his/her distress (P2b)?
2. Adoption of (an) alternate theoretical lens (es) to explore the consumer engagement/stress interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Based on stress appraisal theory, how does a consumer's appraisal of firm- or brand-related challenge (vs. hindrance) stressors drive the development of his/her (e.g., positive/negative) challenge/hindrance engagement with the firm or brand (e.g., Keeling et al., 2022)? o Drawing on the theory of emotion (e.g., Moors, 2022), how, or to what extent, may consumer-perceived stressors drive the development of consumers' emotions, including fear, anger, joy, or sadness, and how do these impact their engagement with the firm or the brand? o Based on the theory of stress and coping (e.g., Folkman, 2020), how may a consumer-perceived imbalance between experienced internal/external demands and the perceived personal/social resources (s)he has to address these affect the individual's challenge/hindrance, or positive/negative, brand engagement and eustress/distress, respectively? o Using resource depletion theory, how does a consumer's reduced capacity for volition (e.g., initiative, choice, or self-regulation) affect his/her boundedly volitional engagement with the brand or firm (see e.g., Hollebeek, Kumar, et al., 2022)?
3. Exploration of the consumer engagement/stress interface in relation to other literature-based concepts or constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o The inclusion of alternate, or further, concepts/constructs in scholars' proposed future nomological networks of the consumer engagement/stress interface may glean further insight. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How do consumers' (e.g., adaptive or maladaptive) coping strategies with brand-related eustress and/or distress impact their future engagement with the brand or firm (see, e.g., Lunardo et al., 2022)? o How, or to what extent, may consumer-perceived brand-related stress spill over, or transfer, to others (e.g., frontline employees) and what is effect on their respective role-related engagement (Bowden et al., 2017; Buck & Neff, 2012)? o How may consumer self-regulation impact their brand-related engagement (e.g., Higgins & Scholer, 2009)?

renders a need for their further empirical testing and validation (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2023). For example, to further explore, or refine, the Propositions, scholars may wish to undertake follow-up qualitative studies, including by adopting in-depth interviewing, or focus group, techniques (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For example, future scholars may uncover additional theoretical richness regarding the interface of challenge/hindrane stressors, consumer engagement, and eustress/distress (e.g., by identifying cross-cultural or personality-based consumer profiles, or by examining tools that may be used to manage, or reduce, consumer stress), thus extending the insight developed in this article. For example, how might firms' adoption of gamified applications, which center on fun, playfulness, and/or enjoyment (e.g., Leclercq et al., 2020), be used to lower consumer-perceived eustress and/or distress? Moreover, to test the Propositions, authors may deploy survey-based research (e.g., by deploying structural equation modeling; e.g., Hair et al., 2010), or they may wish to track the development of the proposed associations over time by using longitudinal approaches (e.g., Menard, 2002). Additional research questions are also provided in Table 2.

Second, while we adopted Hobfoll's (e.g., 1989, 2011) CORT, alternate theoretical lenses may be used to explore the consumer engagement/stress interface, including stress appraisal theory (e.g., Keeling et al., 2022; Saarschmidt & Dose, 2023), stress theory (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2022), the theory of emotion (e.g., Leventhal, 1980; Moors, 2022), the theory of stress and coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Garbas et al., 2023), or resource depletion theory (e.g., Huizenga et al., 2013), to name a few. Specifically, future researchers may wish to examine the commonalities, and areas of departure, of their findings based on alternate theory (vs. the current CORT-informed analyses), permitting the development of further theoretical advances in this integrative topic area.

Third and relatedly, while the proposed framework incorporates relevant stress-related concepts (i.e., challenge/hindrane stressors; eustress/distress), the inclusion of other, or additional, (related) concepts, such as adaptive (vs. maladaptive coping) or stress appraisal (e.g., Folkman, 2020; Zeidner & Saklofske, 1996), is expected to yield further insight. In addition, though this paper, and most of the articles in this Special Section, examine the effect of consumer stress on the individual's own brand-related engagement, it would also be of interest to assess its effects on others' role-related engagement (e.g., that of fellow customers or service employees; Clark et al., 2020), offering another worthwhile avenue for further study. Moreover, while consumers' role-related engagement has been shown to be impacted by social influence (Hollebeek, Sprott, et al., 2022), little remains known regarding potential stress transfer, or spillover, effects across consumption-related stakeholders (e.g., Barton et al., 2018), thus also meriting further investigation. For example, how may a consumer's role-related stress impact an employee's role-related engagement, or vice versa?

Overall, we have enjoyed working on, and compiling, this Special Section, which we expect to serve as a pertinent collection of reference works, and theoretical foundation, for further consumer engagement/stress researchers. In particular, given the contemporary

rise in consumer-perceived stress levels, we hope this Special Section will be a valuable resource to researchers, and we look forward to it sparking discussion, debate, and further advances in our academic communities.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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