

Invitation

You are cordially invited to the public defense to obtain the academic degree of

DOCTOR OF BUSINESS ECONOMICS

by Bieke Henkens

**Ready to Unlock the Smartness Potential? –
Engaging Customers, Employees and Organizations with Smart Products in Service Systems**

Supervisor:

Prof. dr. Katrien Verleye and Prof. dr. Bart Larivière

On Tuesday, 31 May 2022 at 17h00

in the 'Faculty Boardroom', 2nd floor, Tweekerkenstraat 2, 9000 Ghent

or online via live stream

(The day of the public defense you will receive a link via email to attend the online meeting.)

Please confirm your attendance no later than Friday 20 May 2022 by email to

Bieke.Henkens@UGent.be

EXAMINATION BOARD

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Abstract

In myriad industries, a service is increasingly provided through smart products such as smart watches and smart glasses. As a result, smart service systems emerge in which different actors – including customers, employees and organizations – are connected to each other through smart products. However, smart products can only realize their "smartness potential" if the actors involved in the service system engage with the smart product. Therefore, this doctoral research aims to provide insights into how different types of actors (i.e. customers, organizations, employees) engage (I) with other non-technological actors in direct and indirect/technology-based service systems and (II) with smart products in smart service systems.

The first study attains to the first research aim by unraveling the roles through which third-parties engage in service encounters between a customer and a service provider, resulting in service triads. These roles of a third party in this study can be performed by different types of actors including customers, employees and organizations. In addition, we reveal the implications of adopting these roles by various actors for the three actors involved in the service triad. While revealing the third-party roles and their implications, we pay special attention to the direct service systems (e.g. other noisy customers at a restaurant) versus indirect or technology-enabled service systems (e.g. connecting with a running community via a smart watch). Given the lack of knowledge related to indirect service systems in which technologies – such as smart products – connect different actors, the following studies focus on these actors (i.e. customers, organizations, and employees) their engagement with smart product that enable smart service systems.

Consequently, the second study scrutinizes *customer engagement* with the smart service system by answering the question "The smarter, the better?". To address this question, we first of all conceptualized smartness along four essential characteristics (i.e. awareness, connectivity, actuation, and dynamism). Next, our scenario-based experiment revealed that higher levels of smartness go along with (1) personalization perceptions that exceed intrusiveness perceptions (2) through which especially cognitive, affective and behavioral customer engagement with the smart product is generated and to some extent even with the organization involved in the smart service system, (3) which results in improved customer well-being, especially (4) for customers with a high need for personalization. We thus conclude "The smarter, the better!".

Subsequently, the third study examines *organizational engagement* with smart service systems by providing insight into (i) how organizations configure smartness and communicate about the configuration via value propositions to customers as well as (ii) why organizations pursue specific configurations and value propositions based on their value co-creation logic. By means of a multiple case study of eight firms, our research unravels four pathways to smartness (i.e. all-the-way, customized, constrained, balanced). Each pathway encompasses a specific combination of smartness configurations and value propositions for customers along with value co-creation logics that underpin these combinations.

Finally, the fourth study examines *employee engagement* with a smart service system by unraveling the dynamic interplay between employees' socio-material practices or routine actions to the smart wearables as a specific type of smart products (material world), their socio-material practices or routine manners of interacting to other human actors through which they connect with one another (social world), and their engagement with the smart wearable (psychological world) in high-touch services. An ethnographic study in healthcare allows us to gain a complex and integrated insight into how a (mis)fit with socio-material practices to smart wearables and to other human actors shape and are shaped by employees' engagement (here, psychological world) along the smart wearable engagement journey over time.

Curriculum vitae

Bieke Henkens (°Lier, 1995) obtained a Master's degree in Applied Economic Sciences from the University of Antwerp in 2017. Directly afterwards, she started her PhD at the Department of Marketing, Innovation and Organization at the Faculty of Economics and Business of Ghent University. Her research focuses on the engagement of different actors with each other and with smart products in service systems. The first and second chapters of her dissertation were published in the *Journal of Service Management* and *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, respectively. The third chapter is "under review" at the *Journal of Service Research* and the fourth chapter will be sent to another international journal after the public defense.

Bieke presented her work at various international conferences, including *Frontiers in Service*, the *European Marketing Academy Conference (EMAC)*, *International Conference on Challenges in Managing Smart Products and Services (CHIMSPAS)*, *Belgian Service Research Day (BSRD)*, *Let's talk about Service (LTAS)*, and the *17th International Research Conference in Service Management (La Londe Conference)*.