

Bobbie Rathjens, Ph.D.

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PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Strategic communication and marketing leader with over 20 years of experience in multiple industries including higher education, healthcare, and hospitality. Expert in shaping institutional narratives, managing crises, and strengthening brand reputation through data-driven storytelling. Faculty member at Michigan State University's Broad College of Business, mentoring MBA students in executive communication and persuasive leadership. Holds a Ph.D. in Communication from Michigan State University, where research introduced the Influencer Dissonance Model, explaining how antinormative messages drive persuasion and attitude change. Combines academic insight with proven leadership to elevate organizational reputation and strategic impact.

ACADEMIC, INDUSTRY, AND LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Michigan State University | East Lansing, MI

2024 – Present

Fixed-Term Faculty, Business Communication (MBA) and Digital Marketing

- Teach *Managerial Communication Strategies and Tactics* and *Designing and Delivering Impactful Presentations* in the Full-Time MBA program, guiding graduate students to master executive presence, persuasive storytelling, and high-stakes communication delivery.
- Instruct undergraduate students in *Digital Marketing*, emphasizing integrated communication planning, brand strategy, and analytics-based audience engagement across digital channels.
- Serve as MBA Case Competition Coach, mentoring student teams on strategic analysis, executive messaging, and boardroom presentation design to enhance clarity, persuasion, and professionalism under pressure.
- Mentor MBA students individually on leadership communication, crisis response, and presentation strategy, preparing them for executive and managerial roles requiring refined communication judgment.
- Integrate applied research in influencer credibility, digital engagement, and organizational communication to enhance classroom learning and elevate student performance in professional settings.

Michigan State University | East Lansing, MI

2021 – 2024

Research and Teaching Assistant

- Supported faculty research on strategic communication, brand credibility, and audience engagement, authoring multiple peer-reviewed journal publications in hospitality and marketing communication.
- Course development and instruction for *Group Communication* and *Human Communication*, emphasizing collaboration, message framing, and professional presentation skills.
- Partnered with faculty on data analysis, manuscript preparation, and presentation design, ensuring research findings were communicated effectively to both academic and industry audiences.
- Provided academic mentoring and communication coaching for students, reinforcing leadership, teamwork, and applied communication techniques.

The Highlands | Harbor Springs, MI
Director of Marketing

2016 – 2021

- Led all strategic communications and brand storytelling initiatives for one of Michigan's premier four-season resorts, reporting directly to the General Manager, Chief Marketing Officer, and executive team.
- Directed crisis communication strategy and media response following the December 2016 Main Lodge fire, coordinating messaging with first responders, local officials, and internal teams to protect brand reputation and community trust.
- Collaborated with the executive team on crisis communication strategy during a Russian cyber-attack incident, developing transparent updates for guests, employees, and media to preserve trust in resort operations.
- Oversaw resort-wide public relations, internal communication, and stakeholder messaging, ensuring consistency across owned, earned, and paid channels.
- Drove a data-informed content and marketing strategy that increased season-pass revenue 125%, paid skier visits 24%, lift-ticket revenue 65%, dinner-theatre sales 16%, and advance dining sales 71%.
- Developed the concept and strategy for new resort experiences, including the popular Happiness Card and Chef's Table Dining Experience, both rooted in data-driven guest insights.
- Provided executive-level counsel on messaging during COVID-19 closures, reopening communications, and ongoing guest-confidence campaigns.
- Represented the resort as spokesperson and liaison to the Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce, advancing regional tourism and community partnerships.

Active Marketing | Traverse City, MI
Senior Account Manager and Strategist

2015 – 2016

- Led strategic communication, branding, and content development for a national portfolio of healthcare and behavioral health clients, managing creative direction across internal teams and external partners.
- Directed integrated marketing and message strategy, ensuring brand consistency, narrative cohesion, and measurable impact across digital and print channels.
- Conducted user experience research (including mouse and eye-tracking studies) to shape content architecture, design flow, and audience engagement strategies.
- Translated behavioral insights into actionable storytelling frameworks that improved user retention and strengthened client brand perception.
- Served as a key client liaison and executive communicator, synthesizing research insights into persuasive reports and presentations for leadership teams.

Afia, Inc. | Ann Arbor, MI
Social Media Strategist and Consultant

2014 – 2015

- Established and launched the company's healthcare social media service division, developing strategy, structure, and brand voice from inception.
- Designed and implemented integrated communication strategies for healthcare clients, combining digital storytelling, audience analytics, and data-driven content planning.
- Authored and executed the full communication strategy for a \$75,000 fundraising initiative supporting autistic children, achieving donation goals through targeted social campaigns and emotionally resonant messaging.

- Led online reputation management and crisis response protocols for multiple healthcare organizations, monitoring sentiment and crafting high-stakes responses to protect institutional credibility.
- Partnered with executive leadership and clinical teams to align patient-facing communication with organizational values and compliance standards.

McLaren Health Care | Flint and Petoskey, MI

2011 – 2014

Corporate Social Media Strategist and Electronic Media Specialist

- Developed and executed the communication strategy for McLaren's groundbreaking Twitter Surgery event, the first of its kind in the health system, generating national media coverage and over 100,000+ views on YouTube.
- Partnered with hospital executives, physicians, and compliance officers to ensure risk-aware public messaging and adherence to HIPAA and organizational communication policies.
- Crafted corporate social media governance and staff training programs, establishing consistent tone, ethics, and engagement protocols across multiple hospitals and clinical teams.
- Produced quarterly ROI and analytics reports for executive leadership, translating data insights into strategic recommendations for digital engagement and brand positioning.
- Managed multi-platform paid and organic campaigns that strengthened McLaren's online reputation, patient engagement, and thought leadership visibility.
- Served as a key communications liaison between corporate and regional hospital leadership, aligning messaging with system-wide marketing and reputation objectives.

JBR Graphics, Inc. | Charlevoix, MI

2002 – 2012

Founder and Principal, Strategic Communication and Web Development

- Founded and scaled a full-service communication and web design firm serving more than 200 clients across varied industries, specializing in digital storytelling, branding, and ecommerce strategy.
- Oversaw all aspects of business operations including client relations, staff recruitment and training, budget management, and vendor negotiation, demonstrating comprehensive leadership and organizational management skills.
- Designed and coded high impact websites and e-commerce platforms that advanced client visibility and engagement through clear, persuasive content and intuitive user experience.
- Developed and led social media and digital marketing workshops in partnership with local chambers of commerce, training business leaders and teams in effective communication, customer engagement, and online reputation management.
- Consulted with C-suite leaders and board members to align brand presence, internal communication practices, and digital transformation initiatives.
- Cultivated a collaborative, performance-driven culture that emphasized creative problem solving, strategic planning, and client satisfaction.

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Communication

2025

Michigan State University – Department of Communication, East Lansing, MI

- Developed the *Influencer Dissonance Model*, a theoretical framework demonstrating how antinormative or potentially harmful messages can be highly persuasive when delivered through credible communicators and online influencers.
- Focus areas include strategic communication, audience psychology, and message design, persuasiveness of social media influencers, online reviews and manager response, connecting theory to real world applications in brand reputation, leadership messaging, and institutional storytelling.

M.S. in Marketing Research

2019

Michigan State University – Eli Broad College of Business, East Lansing, MI

- Specialized in data-driven marketing strategy, consumer insight analysis, and communication effectiveness.
- Gained advanced skills in interpreting analytics to shape persuasive messaging and stakeholder engagement strategies.

B.F.A. in Visual Communication

2014

American InterContinental University, Schaumburg, IL

- Concentrated on visual storytelling, design thinking, and user experience communication, blending creative direction with strategic brand presentation.

SELECTED PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH

Rathjens, B. L. (2025). *The influencer dissonance model* (Order No. 32164513). Available from Dissertations and Theses @ Big Ten Academic Alliance; ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. (3230367912).

Rathjens, B., Wu, A., Zhang, L., and Wei, W. (2024). When social media influencer endorsement backfires: Unpacking fallout from explicit endorsements across brand equity levels. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*.

Rathjens, B., Van Der Heide, B., Pham, D., Earle, K., Ulusoy, E., Mason, A. J., Zhang, Y., and Bredland, A. (2023). Negative online reviews and manager response: Applying expectancy disconfirmation theory in a CMC context. *Communication Reports*, 36(2), 110–122.

Pham, D. (Tyler), Van Der Heide, B., Zhang, Y., Earle, K., Rathjens, B., Ulusoy, E., Mason, A., and Bredland, A. (2024). Testing the effect of sending an evaluative message on perceiving others in computer-mediated communication. *Media Psychology*, 1–25.

Rathjens, B., Zhang, L., and Cha, J. (2025). Airline chatbot: Examining the response of outcome- and process-focused individuals for customer service requests. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print).

Zhang, L., Wei, W., Rathjens, B., and Zheng, Y. (2023). Pet influencers on social media: The joint effect of message appeal and narrator. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 110, 103453.

Rathjens, B., Gunden, N., Zhang, L., Jain, G., and Law, R. (2025). A Systematic Review of Contactless Technologies Research in Hospitality and Tourism During the COVID-Pandemic. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 49(2), 351–365.

SELECTED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Rathjens, B., Rhodes, N., and Zhang, L. (2024). *When influencers recommend and their followers disagree: The effects of race and vicarious dissonance*. The 29th Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism. Miami, FL.

Rathjens, B., Van Der Heide, B., Zhu, R., and Pham, D. (2024). *Motivations unveiled: How altruism and self-interest shape exaggeration behavior*. Central States Communication Association (CSCA) Annual Convention. Grand Rapids, MI.

Rathjens, B., Zhang, L. and Cha, J. (2023). *Chatbots for customer service requests: Investigating goal orientation and task complexity*. The 7th World Research Summit for Hospitality and Tourism. Orlando, FL.

Rathjens, B. (2024). *The power of group membership in influencer marketing: Anonymity's role in antinormative recommendations*. Communication Science Futures. East Lansing, MI.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Graduate School Dissertation Completion Fellowship **Spring 2025**
Michigan State University

- Awarded for exceptional doctoral research introducing the Influencer Dissonance Model, advancing understanding of persuasive communication.

Broad MBA Fellowship **Fall 2024 and Spring 2025**
Michigan State University

- Granted as part of faculty appointment within the Full-Time MBA program to support teaching and professional development in managerial communication.

Kasavana and Schmidgall Research Grant **Spring 2024**
Michigan State University

- Funded project examining audience perception and message design in digital persuasion contexts.

Greater Lansing Accessibility Grant **Summer 2023**
Greater Lansing Convention and Visitors Bureau

- Supported collaborative research in tourism communication and accessibility messaging.

Best Graduate Student Poster Award **Fall 2022**
CentralCHRIE Spirit of Hospitality Conference, Purdue University

- Recognized for excellence in visual communication and research presentation on the topic of social media influencers.

INVITED LECTURES AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Rhyming, Timing, and Priming: Persuasion's Triple Threat

Spring 2025

Michigan State University

- Lunch and Learn Talk given to members of the MBA Entrepreneurship Association.

The Customer Journey: Personalization in Digital Marketing

Spring 2024

George Washington University School of Business

- Teaching presentation given to professors in the Department of Marketing.

Technology Failures and Crisis Communication in Hospitality

Spring 2023

University of Central Florida, Rosen College of Hospitality Management

- Presentation given to seniors about how to handle crisis communication.

PROFESSIONAL SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS AND PANELS

Targeting, Measuring, and Optimizing in a Data-Driven Marketing Landscape

2018

Midwest Ski Area Association Conference — Harbor Springs, MI

- One of three experts fielding questions on best practices in hospitality digital marketing and communication strategy.

Using Social Media for Large Scale Events and Fundraising

2015

Mental Health Corporations of America Annual Conference — San Diego, CA

- Presentation in cooperation with the CEO of Valley Behavioral Health due to the success of our communication strategy execution and resulting \$75k in donations.

COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Board Member and Secretary | Harbor Springs, MI

2019 – 2021

Harbor Springs Chamber of Commerce

- Represented The Highlands in regional tourism and business development initiatives.

Board Member | Petoskey, MI

2018 – 2019

McLaren Northern Michigan Patient and Family Advocacy Board

- Contributed to organizational communication and patient-engagement strategies.

Director of Communications | International

2013 – 2014

Social Media Club

- Led community engagement and professional development for digital media practitioners across the globe in various industries.

SKILLS AND CORE COMPETENCIES

- **Strategic Communications Leadership** – Proven success developing and executing comprehensive communication strategies that elevate institutional reputation and stakeholder trust.
- **Crisis Communication and Reputation Management** – Expert in guiding organizations through high visibility events with clarity, transparency, and confidence.
- **Executive Messaging and Brand Storytelling** – Skilled at crafting compelling narratives for senior leadership, donors, media, and public audiences.
- **Media and Public Relations** – Experienced spokesperson and media liaison with a strong record of building productive relationships with journalists and community partners.
- **Digital and Content Strategy** – Advanced knowledge of audience engagement, multi-platform storytelling, and analytics-driven content planning.
- **Team Leadership and Mentorship** – Experienced in leading cross-functional teams, mentoring professionals and students, and fostering collaborative, inclusive communication cultures.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Institutional Alignment** – Adept at aligning message, mission, and vision across complex organizations to drive shared understanding and momentum.
- **Data Informed Decision Making** – Leverages research, analytics, and behavioral insight to optimize communication impact and measure effectiveness.
- **Presentation and Executive Communication Coaching** – Trains leaders and MBA students to deliver persuasive, high stakes presentations and communicate with authenticity and impact.
- **Academic and Thought Leadership** – Combines research expertise in persuasion and message framing with applied practice to advance institutional storytelling and credibility.