

Current Topics for Master Theses at the Department of Sales & Services Marketing

Advisor: Seongmin Park, M.Sc.

Topic	Customer advantages of the direct sales model in the automotive industry (English Only)
Abstract	<p>Traditional OEMs (automotive companies) have been selling their cars by using an indirect sales model with dealers as independent entrepreneurs (The cars are sold from an OEM to dealers, and then from dealers to end-customers). However, because dealers are independent of OEMs, the OEMs were lacking customer relationships and data. Since TESLA appeared in the automotive markets with its innovative business model (direct sales model with an eCommerce platform), the traditional OEMs are looking for ways to survive in the new competition. The direct Sales Model (or agent model) has been mentioned as the solution for traditional OEMs to survive this competition. In the new model, dealers will be directly hired by OEMs as “agents” and deal with customers on behalf of OEMs. This paper aims to evaluate if the direct sales model fits better with new customers’ demands and journeys.</p>
Topic	What causes status quo bias among car dealers? (English Only)
Abstract	<p>It has been proven that the direct sales model provides a better fit for the future and advantages to all related stakeholders – OEMs, customers, and dealers. Lately, the profit structure of dealers was fluctuating because of the unstable economy of the world. Shortage of semi-conductor did not secure as much sales margin as they have received before. Delays in shipping and shortage in stock increased their costs as well. In the direct sales model, the dealers’ profit will be mainly from remuneration and therefore a certain amount of profit is secured in the new model. However, every individual has “status quo bias” and dealers are no exception from it. No matter what kind of advantages they receive from the new model, they still prefer the old model because they are used to it. Status quo bias is caused by many different factors – dealers are maybe too optimistic about the future with the current model and do not see any reason to have a change. Or dealers are just too scared if they can perform</p>

	as well as now with the new model. This thesis focuses on what can be the underlying reason of status quo bias in car dealers.
Topic	The anxiety of Learning (English Only)
Abstract	Change is always difficult. When individuals face a change situation, most of them prefer to stick to the current solution and situation. This phenomenon is called status quo bias. There are many underlying reasons why individuals want to stick to the current solution: maybe because they are already used to it and feel comfortable, or maybe because they don't see any reasons to look for another solution. One of the possible reasons is the anxiety of learning. Learning always involves a certain degree of anxiety. Individuals think that learning something new can harm their performance. However, they also ask themselves if they can survive in the future if they do not learn something new. This paper aims to go deeper into the notion of "the anxiety of learning" and find out some practical insights related to it.
Topic	Can nudging influence the anxiety of Learning (English Only)
Abstract	Individuals have two different kinds of anxiety/feelings against a change. Learning Anxiety indicates that individuals are afraid of accepting a change as they won't perform well under a new circumstance. On the other hand, they also are afraid of failing if they do not accept the change. This topic aims to investigate if nudging/debiasing methods can influence degrees of each anxiety of learning and make a change easier.
Topic	Dealer advantages of the direct sales model in the automotive industry (English Only)
Abstract	This research aims to compare the advantage of dealers in the automotive industry between the traditional indirect sales model vs. the new direct sales model as agents.
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Advisor: Yasid Soufi, M.Sc.

Topic	Personalized Nudging Interventions
Abstract	It has been shown that consumers are not fully rational and that cognitive biases do influence decisions reaching from what toothpaste to buy to far-reaching risk assessments when choosing financial products. In this master thesis you should discuss the concept of ‘nudging’ as an approach to modify decision making and how personalization/targeting can be successfully applied to this concept.
Topic	Predicting Green Purchase Behavior
Abstract	Sustainable consumption is more important and popular than ever. However, it is not perfectly clear what drives ‘green’ purchase decisions under which context factors. You should discuss these factors that drive sustainable consumption and assess how well latter can be predicted using Big Data & Artificial Intelligence.
Topic	Heterogeneous Treatment Effects for Targeting Strategies in Marketing
Abstract	The estimation of heterogeneous treatment effects for (marketing) interventions is extremely useful for personalized strategies. You should discuss approaches to the estimation of heterogeneous treatment effects that were applied in marketing research. Further, you should give an overview of the newest state of the art methods for their estimation and discuss whether these methods have already been or could be applied to marketing problems. Examples of these methods are causal forests or double machine learning algorithms.
Topic	The Dawning Era of the Retail Investor
Abstract	Meme stocks like Gamestop, AMC and many others have recently been shaking the financial markets. Nowadays, companies and financial institutions acknowledge the relevance of retail investor trading. In this master thesis you should discuss the spillovers of product and financial markets. More specifically, you should examine whether retail investor popularity can impact on product market goals such as sales revenue amongst others.

Topic	What makes a Successful Blockchain Project?
Abstract	The success of blockchain projects heavily depends on the number of adopters and platform members. Attracting necessary capital to finance blockchain projects as well as the critical mass of users and members remains the most important challenge for blockchain entrepreneurs. You should discuss what (potentially) drives the adoption of products and services that are enabled by the blockchain, e.g., the level of decentralization or innovativeness of a project.
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Advisor: Mengmeng Niu, M.Sc.

Topic	The impact of spending vs. saving intentions on donation (English only)
Abstract	It is common that donation appeals are appeared purchasing, e.g., at the cashier. Normally, consumer donates small changes after the payment with cash. However, there are some donation appeals aiming to ask people to donate after “saving” or “earning” money. An example is a donation box at the return of the deposit machines for empty bottles. When people return the deposit of the bottles, they have a feeling of “earning” or “saving” money. Would the differences between spending money after purchasing and saving or earning money after getting money back impact the likelihood of consumers’ donation behavior? This topic is aiming to summarize existing research on donation behavior and the position of donation appeals. Based on the extant literature, students should make a sound assumption.
Topic	How does the distance between production site and an outlet store impact brand perception of luxurious brands? (English only)
Abstract	Research by marketing consulting company shows that when an outlet store is located next to the production site of the brand, the discounted price at the outlet store won’t damage consumer’s perception of a luxurious brand. However, this has not been investigated by academic research. This topic is aiming to fill this gap in the field of retailing by investigating the impact of the distance between production site and an outlet store on brand perception.
Topic	Option Framing and Goal Conflicts (English Only)
Abstract	Option framing is a type of framing effect in psychology. It manipulates the valence of the choice task by asking decision makers to either accept/add or reject/remove certain options. This topic investigates whether conflicting an existing goal (e.g., losing weight) would impact the perception of task difficulty when people are asked to add or remove certain ingredients for purchasing a healthy food (vs. an unhealthy food).

Topic	Option Framing and Compatibility (English Only)
Abstract	Option framing is a type of framing effect in psychology. Research shows that choosing a certain object is more compatible with positive features, while deleting matches negative features better. A recent research has found the opposite: adding certain ingredients actually matches healthy food while removing ingredients fits unhealthy food. Is the current finding contradictory to previous research? This topic aims to use empirical study to investigate the question.
Topic	Positive Events Lead to Donation Intention (English Only)
Abstract	Many donation appeals tend to use sad stories to stimulate people's compassion and kindness. However, recent research found that positive event with a happy ending leads to higher donation intention than tragedies. This topic is aiming to summarize existing research on donation behavior and the valence of donation appeals. Based on the extant literature, students should make a sound assumption and conduct an empirical study to test it.
	Please contact Mengmeng Niu, M.Sc. (mengmeng.niu@uni-mannheim.de) for further information.

Advisor: Ann-Kathrin Polenz, M. Sc.

Topic	Selling through the Ages - How the Nature of Business-to-Business Sales Conversations has Changed
Abstract	The nature of business-to-business (B2B) sales conversations has changed tremendously within the past decades. While earlier the focus of a successful sales conversation has been relationship building, the main purpose nowadays primarily lies on selling insights. But how does this look in practice? This master thesis shall provide empirical insights on how B2B sales conversations are tackled nowadays, which goals are pursued, which problems occur, and how firms and sellers try to solve them.
Topic	Becoming a Top Salesforce – Problems and Training Opportunities
Abstract	In business-to-business (B2B) contexts, sales conversations are still an omnipresent tool to close deals. However, the market and the demands of customers have changed over the years. Sellers face even greater challenges in meeting these demands. In this master's thesis, the candidate will be instructed to derive empirical insights on recent problems and challenges in sales conversations by conducting a survey and/or qualitative interviews. Based on these findings, the candidate shall derive training opportunities that help organizations to train their salesforce.
Topic	Business-to-Business Online Reviews – a New Source of Information for Buyers?
Abstract	Online reviews have become an integral part of business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing. In recent years, however, it has also become established to publish online reviews in business-to-business (B2B) contexts. This master thesis shall summarize current literature on B2B online reviews and underlying publication motives as well as address the issue of how B2B online reviews differ from B2C online reviews. Furthermore, the master thesis shall contain an empirical part to investigate which factors make B2B reviews especially persuasive (such as publisher industry, publisher company size, etc.).
Topic	Business-to-Business Firms and Social Media Use

Abstract	<p>Social Media has become an important business-to-business (B2B) marketing tool – firms use platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok to reach a wider audience. This master thesis shall examine the target audience of social media channels in a B2B setting and what content is used to address them. Which elements and media are most suitable in B2B social media use? The candidate will be instructed to design an experimental study to test the derived hypotheses.</p>
	<p>Please contact Seongmin Park, M.Sc. (seongmin.park@mercedes-benz.com) for further information.</p>