

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

Advisor: Ann-Kathrin Polenz, M. Sc.

Topic	Exploring Minority Experiences Online: An Eye Tracking Study
Abstract	Within this thesis, the student investigates minorities and perceptions of minorities in user-generated content using eye tracking technology. By focusing on attention patterns, we aim to uncover the challenges and opportunities faced by minorities online. The study will be conducted at least partly in Mannheim.
Topic	The Impact of Review Platform Design Choices on Consumer Decision-Making
Abstract	Online reviews play an important role in shaping consumer decisions. This study investigates how the design of online review systems influences consumer perceptions and subsequent consumer decision making. To do so, empirical research in form of online experiments is conducted.
Topic	How do Minorities vs. Majorities Express their Viewpoints Online?
Abstract	Within this thesis, the student examines how the expression of opinions differs between members of minority vs. members of majority groups. Does being part of a minority group change what we share, or how we share it? To find out more about this, empirical research in form of an online experiment is conducted.
Topic	Corporate Sociopolitical Activism – State of the Art in Germany
Abstract	This thesis examines the emerging role of corporations in sociopolitical activism, focusing on their motivations, strategies, and impacts. It analyzes how German corporations navigate the intersection of commerce and

	advocacy, weighing the benefits and risks of such involvement. This master thesis uses a qualitative approach to investigate current developments.
	Please contact Ann-Kathrin Polenz, M.Sc. (ann-kathrin.polenz@uni-mannheim.de) for further information.

Advisor: Giuliana Francesca Manganaro, M.A.

Topic	One Industry, Many Models: Benchmarking Impact Business Models for Sectoral Success
Abstract	This Master's Thesis investigates the effectiveness of various impact business models—impact-centred, impact through operations, cross-subsidy, and donation—within a single industry context. Focusing on one sector, the research aims to determine which model best aligns with consumer expectations, brand trust, and perceived authenticity. The study will use a structured survey design to gather quantitative insights into stakeholder preferences and perceived brand credibility across the different models. The findings will provide industry-specific guidance on selecting the most resonant impact approach, offering brands a strategic pathway to combine purpose with performance. If you are eager to shape how industries deliver impact meaningfully, this thesis invites you to dive deep into the business of doing good—strategically.
Topic	Branding for Good: Matching Impact Strategies to Brand Traits
Abstract	This Master's Thesis explores how different impact business models—impact-centred, impact through operations, cross-subsidy, and donation—perform when aligned with distinct brand personality types based on Aaker's framework (e.g., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness). Through a comprehensive survey, the study will assess consumer perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and brand appeal across various brand traits and impact strategies. The objective is to uncover which impact model best complements each personality dimension, enabling brands to express purpose in a genuine and strategically sound way. If you are fascinated by how values-driven business can be fine-tuned through brand identity, this thesis offers a unique opportunity to map the intersection of branding and impact.
Topic	Comparing Annual Disclosure Formats: A Sectoral Study of G7-Listed Companies
Abstract	Uncover how industries defined by the Global Industry Classification Standards (GICS) differ in their approaches to annual reporting within G7-listed companies. This research will categorize the types of documents provided—such as Annual Reports, Annual Information Forms, and 10-K filings—and explore the factors influencing these choices. The study will highlight sector-specific preferences and pinpoint their implications for stakeholders. This thesis offers an exciting opportunity to examine how

	regulatory, cultural, and industry factors shape reporting across diverse economic contexts and, thus, is perfect for students passionate about corporate transparency, global reporting standards, and financial communication.
Topic	Are You Believing in It if You Are Aligned? The Psychology of Interpersonal Fit through Values and Personality
Abstract	<p>This Master's Thesis explores how alignment between individuals—based on the Big Five personality traits and Schwartz's Basic Human Values—affects interpersonal resonance, trust, and perceived credibility. Grounded in psychological theories of value congruence and personality complementarity, the study investigates whether people are more likely to believe in, trust, or connect with someone whose traits and values mirror their own. Using a vignette-based survey design, participants will assess hypothetical or real counterparts whose psychological profiles vary in similarity. The empirical results aim to identify which combinations foster the strongest sense of alignment and belief—offering insights into communication, leadership, team dynamics, and marketing personas. If you're curious about what makes people click—and believe—this thesis uncovers the psychological blueprint behind human connection.</p>
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Advisor: Vladislav Kucher, M. Sc.

Topic	Enhanced Market Analytics: Harnessing Network Analysis in Graph Theory
Abstract	Graph theory is a branch of mathematics examining the structures and modeling the relationships between objects. Within the scope of this study, graph analysis can be thought of as (1) a method of predictors extraction that relies on graph theory and (2) a powerful tool for discovering valuable information about relationships in complex data, which present significant business opportunities. This study will leverage the power of graph analysis to infer and optimize different strategies in the domain of marketing.
Topic	Driving Marketing Success: The Integral Role of Recommender Systems
Abstract	This thesis explores the comprehensive application of recommender system (RS) algorithms across various facets of marketing. The focus is on showcasing their potential to revolutionize marketing strategies and operations. By integrating RS algorithms into marketing practices, businesses can achieve goals such as personalized customer experiences, optimized product pricing, and efficient inventory management. The study highlights the role of RS in enhancing customer engagement, increasing sales, and improving operational efficiencies. It also examines the use of RS in market segmentation and predictive analytics, enabling marketers to anticipate customer needs and tailor their strategies accordingly. Overall, this study establishes the indispensable value of recommender systems as a tool for achieving marketing excellence and driving business growth in an increasingly competitive market environment.
Topic	Exploring Machine Learning Approaches to Enhance Business Performance Through Predictive Analytics
Abstract	Marketing analytics often employ a variety of machine learning models, each with distinct characteristics that make them optimal for specific applications. Fine-tuning these models is a key element in the data mining process. In data-driven marketing, the methodology involves applying multiple models to a particular case, adjusting their hyperparameters, and assessing their performance. This thesis will focus on a specific marketing use case, where we will conduct a data-driven analysis and compare the effectiveness of various machine learning models, while emphasizing on the technical aspects of each algorithm.

Topic	Inference, Explainability, Causality and Generalization in Machine Learning: Enhancing Algorithmic Understanding and Efficiency
Abstract	<p>The traditional CRISP-DM process starts with understanding the business context, followed by data collection, model development, and deployment. While causality can be part of this process, it is often overshadowed by the focus on improving predictive accuracy. However, recent advancements in both algorithmic techniques—particularly in causal inference—and the field of explainable AI (XAI) have equipped 21st-century marketing researchers with tools that not only predict outcomes but also explain the performance of complex machine learning models. In this study, we will develop and evaluate various machine learning models to address key marketing research questions, with an emphasis on interpreting model outputs, deriving and validating causal relationships, and ensuring robustness and generalizability.</p>
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Advisor: Smriti Kumar, Ph.D.

Topic	Consumer Preferences for Providing Personal Information to Firms
Abstract	This study investigates whether consumers prefer to provide their own personal information or let the firm scrape it off from other sources and the reasons behind this decision. What factors (moderators) affect this decision? This study will employ empirical research in the form of interviews and online experiments.
Topic	Effect of (active vs. passive) transparency about ‘right to delete’ on consumers’ willingness to share data with the firm, and their relationship with the firm
Abstract	Privacy regulations have asked firms to give consumers an option to delete their data from the firm’s databases. This research explores whether actively (vs. passively) offering an option to delete data to consumers has any effect on the extent of their information sharing (i.e. how much data they delete), their trust, satisfaction, loyalty towards the firm. This study will employ empirical research in the form of interviews and online experiments.
Topic	The effect of asking ‘Why’ vs. ‘Why Not’
Abstract	This research question explores the psychological mechanism behind asking ‘Why’ or ‘Why not’ in a consumer context. This research will explore a) which defaults get triggered when we ask ‘Why’ vs. ‘Why not’, and b) how can we leverage that to consumer well-being. This empirical research will employ qualitative (interviews) as well as online experiments to test the research questions.
Topic	(Not) deleting my data: Is this a hoarding behavior?
Abstract	This research project will explore why people do not delete their data and how deleting information is similar or different from the hoarding (extreme ownership) behavior of the (physical) products. To do so, empirical research in the form of interviews and online experiments will be conducted.

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