

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.
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Advisor: Fabian Schedel, M. Sc.

Topic	Alone vs. Together: Social Presence Effects on Headline Believability and Truth Discernment
Abstract	This project proposes to examine how social settings (being alone versus in groups) influence the believability of news headlines and truth discernment. It will adapt and apply relevant theories (e.g., Social Influence Theory, perceived social presence, dual-process accounts) to headline evaluation, using pre-tested stimuli with believability ratings and true/false judgments to test clear, theory-driven hypotheses.
Topic	Social Proof Throttling: When Like Counts Distort Credibility
Abstract	This study examines how variations in the visibility and configuration of engagement indicators within digital interfaces influence users' evaluation of brief informational content. Employing a between-subjects design, participants assess pre-validated, neutral statements for perceived plausibility and factual accuracy. The study tests whether prominently displayed interaction metrics amplify perceived social context and, in turn, elevate credibility judgments while diminishing accuracy discrimination, compared with conditions where such cues are concealed or de-emphasized. The results are expected to clarify under which interface conditions social endorsement signals bias evaluative processing and to inform evidence-based design choices for accuracy-relevant information environments.
Topic	Accountability Cues Reduce Credulity: Real-Name and Provenance Badges Improve Truth Discernment
Abstract	This project investigates how cues related to the visibility and traceability of information sources affect individuals' evaluation of short informational statements. Drawing on theoretical perspectives on accountability, cue utilization, and reflective versus heuristic processing, the study examines whether contextual markers indicating author identifiability and content origin enhance discernment between accurate and inaccurate information. Using systematically varied textual stimuli, participants will provide believability and veracity judgments, enabling a theory-based assessment of how identifiable context features influence evaluative precision in information processing.

Topic	Contextual Dynamics in Information Evaluation: How Situational Factors Shape Cognitive Judgments of News Content
Abstract	<p>This project explores how situational contexts influence individuals' evaluation of short informational statements resembling everyday news content. Building on established psychological and communication frameworks concerning social contexts, cognitive processing, and subjective assessment, the study examines how variations in interpersonal environment affect perceived credibility and accuracy judgments. Using pre-tested textual stimuli, participants will provide evaluations along key perceptual dimensions, allowing for a theory-based analysis of contextual effects on evaluative reasoning.</p>
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Advisor: Giuliana Francesca Manganaro, M.A.

Topic	Impact or Return? Moral Decoupling in Investment Decisions under Market Uncertainty
Abstract	This Master's Thesis investigates how private and professional investors assess moral and impact-related KPIs and how these evaluations shift with changing market volatility. Using a 2×2 vignette experiment that varies moral KPI performance (high vs. low) and market conditions (stable vs. volatile), the study examines whether investors deprioritize ethical considerations when uncertainty increases. The findings will provide insights into decision-making behavior, value trade-offs, and communication strategies for organizations aiming to effectively position their impact performance.
Topic	Algorithmic Moral Decoupling: How AI Weighs Impact KPIs
Abstract	This Master's Thesis explores how AI-driven investment tools incorporate moral and impact KPIs into their analyses and how market volatility shapes their recommendations. In a 2×2 experimental setup manipulating moral KPI performance (high vs. low) and market volatility (stable vs. volatile), the study examines whether AI systems exhibit forms of moral decoupling similar to human decision-makers. The results will offer guidance for developing more transparent, responsible, and impact-sensitive AI tools in financial decision support.
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: 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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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	Same but Different: Digital Twins in Market Research
Abstract	Marketers have long relied on customer surveys as a primary method for understanding consumer preferences. Insights derived from self-reported data inform the development of marketing measures, policies and strategies that shape both academic research and corporate decision-making. Recent advances in the field of generative artificial intelligence (e.g., large language models) open a new frontier in market research – the creation and deployment of <i>digital twins</i> (DTs) of real entities as a promising tool of marketing analytics. This thesis aims to (1) examine the general phenomena, (2) explore DTs properties and (3) deploy them in real world marketing scenarios.

Topic	Inference, Explainability, Causality and Generalization in Machine Learning: Enhancing Algorithmic Understanding and Efficiency
Abstract	<p>The traditional data mining 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 artificial intelligence (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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