

HOW DO SENSORY PERCEPTIONS SHAPE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR?

Consumer literature provides many examples of how perception shapes consumer behavior in situated ways. To illustrate, recent research in our lab has shown that body postures can influence consumption, that touching products may facilitate visual perception and choice of products or that activating a broad scope of attention increases exploratory shopping. Understanding how perceptions shape consumer behavior is critical for marketing because a) it reveals a lot about the nature of human mind and b) perceptions can be used as subconscious triggers to influence consumer behavior. Your thesis will investigate a specific topic which depends on the supervisor's current research project and your preferences. Writing a thesis will also require to conduct a lab or field experiment and analyzing the data with SPSS. Your supervisor will guide you through the critical steps.

Please contact Dr. Streicher for a current list of topics and relevant literature.

VISUAL BRAND ASSEMBLAGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Visual consumer brand rhetorics

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Pinterest provide a virtual space for consumer-brand relations and offer opportunities for brand meaning (re)construction (Cova and Pace 2006; Avery and Fournier 2011; Rokka and Canniford 2016). Brand meaning in online environments is no longer unilaterally created by the brand, but rather actively co-constructed by a multitude of stakeholders, such as consumers, through their social interaction (Vallaster and Von Wallpach 2013; Mühlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008). Recent research in branding is evolving around continuous growth of social media networks and increased attention towards visual content being shared in digital environments (Rokka and Canniford 2016; Schröder 2002).

This thesis aims to investigate into consumer visual rhetorics about brands and how they strategically use brands for the construction of their visual online presence. In the empirical study, exploring the well-known fashion brand Hollister, consumer interviews are planned that are auto-driven by their brand posts.

Relevant literature:

Avery, Jill and Susan Fournier (2011), "The uninvited brand," *Business Horizons*, 54 (3), 193-207.
Cova, Bernard and Stefano Pace (2006), "Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case "my Nutella the Community""", *European Journal of Marketing*, 40 (9/10), 1087-1105.

DeLanda, Manuel (2006), *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London: Continuum.

Parmentier, Marie-Agnès and Eileen Fischer (2015), "Things Fall Apart: The Dynamics of Brand Audience Dissipation," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (5), 1228–1251.

Muehlbacher, Hans and Andrea Hemetsberger (2008), "What the heck is a brand? An attempt of integration and its consequences for research and management", *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress Marketing Trends*, Venice 2008.

Rokka, Joonas and Robin Canniford (2016), "Heterotopian selfies: how social media destabilizes brand assemblages," *European Journal of Marketing*, 50 (9/10), 1789–1813.

Schröder, Jonathan (2002), *Visual Consumption*, London and New York: Routledge.

Vallaster, Christine and Sylvia von Wallpach (2013), An online discursive inquiry into social dynamics of multistakeholder brand meaning co-creation, *Journal of Business Research*, 66, 1505–1515.

THE FUTURE OF BRANDS

Brands as mediators in a networked world

Due to changes in technology, media, and consumers, the consumer marketplace is rapidly evolving. As the marketplace changes, questions of how consumers and brands interact arise. In recent years brands have gone from being defined and managed by brand strategists to be negotiated, contested, fluid and dynamic, with brand meaning often dependent on consumer context and audience. What will the future of brand relationships look like? How will consumers, brands and other important stakeholders co-create brand meaning and manifestations?

This thesis draws on Hemetsberger and Mühlbacher's perspective of brands as mediators to conceptualize and broaden the view of brands and branding, based on a summary and development of prior branding approaches. The thesis will further analyze branding examples, which strongly reflect recent societal, technological and marketplace changes, and draw conclusions on the future of brands and their protagonists, and their relationships with consumers and stakeholders.

Relevant literature:

Mühlbacher, Hans and Andrea Hemetsberger (2012). Brands as Complex Social Processes and their Outcomes, Festschrift for the 60th Anniversary of Prof. Klaus Grunert.

Hemetsberger, Andrea, Hans Mühlbacher and Eric Arnould (working paper). "Representations and Mediations: Brands as Processes"

Kornberger, Martin (2010). Brand Society: How Brands Transform Management and Lifestyle. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wegerer, Philipp and Andrea Hemetsberger, special session on "Brands as Mediators", special session chairs and abstract, accepted for the North American ACR conference, 2018 in Dallas.

BRAND PORTFOLIO STRATEGIES

Almost in any one market (here defined as a product category in a country) different brand portfolio setups will be encountered. Some corporations will own one brand (which may boast sub-brands to target specific market segments), others will boast multiple brands that aim to strategically address different segments or compete against each other like brands owned by different companies do.

This thesis will review the literature on previous research regarding the respective benefits of each approach, examine conditions which impact the incidence of either setup and examine whether their respective benefits (if any) for a large global brand database.

The thesis will require a reasonable interest and level of proficiency in statistical analyses.

Praxisdiplomarbeit



Omicron, Weltmarktführer im Bereich Prüfsysteme für Energieversorger und eines der dynamischsten Unternehmen in Österreich mit Sitz in Klaus/Vorarlberg, publiziert mehrmals jährlich ein Kundenmagazin, in vier Sprachen mit einer Gesamtauflage von knapp 20.000 Stück.

Diese Diplomarbeit soll

- (a) aufzeigen, welche spezifischen Erwartungen ein Magazin im B2B-Marketing (nicht) erfüllen kann.
- (b) evaluieren, wie diese Form der Kommunikation im Vergleich zu anderen Instrumenten abschneidet.
- (c) dem Unternehmen Anregungen für eine Optimierung aufzeigen (bis hin zu Ideen für alternative Kommunikationsformate).

Bei Interesse bitte meldet euch bei oliver.koll@uibk.ac.at.

TRUST(ING) CONSUMERS

Consumer's everyday lives are full of situations where they need to trust or are expected to trust. Their relationships rely on it, no matter if these are with their partners, friends, other consumers, experts, brands or political leaders. Still, trust is not guaranteed; it can be destroyed, needs to be build and maintained (Humphreys and Thompson 2014; Thompson 2005; Tumbat and Belk 2013). In many situations, it is not optional but required to trust, for example, when it comes to the accuracy of hazard warnings or similar expert information.

Data that has been collected in the context of ski touring indicates that consumer's unreflected trust is not only present when it comes to expert systems but also in consumer-to-consumer relationships. Even though their own lives might depend on it, they leave decisions in high-risk environments to others they sometimes do not even know.

This thesis will therefore investigate deeper into the phenomenon of interpersonal trust in high-risk situations. More specifically into how consumers trust and how they experience trust. Previous experience with qualitative methods, especially with qualitative interviews is an advantage.

Relevant literature:

Celsi, Richard L., Randall L. Rose, and Thomas W. Leigh (1993), "An Exploration of High-Risk Leisure Consumption through Skydiving," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20 (1), 1–23.

Humphreys, Ashlee and Craig J. Thompson (2014), "Branding Disaster: Reestablishing Trust through the Ideological Containment of Systemic Risk Anxieties," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (4), 877–910.

Stephen, Andrew T., Michel T. Pham, and Tamar Avnet (2012), "Consumers' Trust in Feelings as Information," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (4), 720–35.

Thompson, Craig J. (2005), "Consumer Risk Perceptions in a Community of Reflexive Doubt," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32 (2), 235–48.

Tumbat, Gülnur and Russel W. Belk (2013), "Co-construction and performancescapes," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 12 (1), 49–59.

MAN DOWN! AN EXPLORATION INTO THE FUTURE OF (NEW) MASCULINITIES

What does it mean to be a man today? Nowadays, masculinity is under fire, decried as toxic by some, hegemonic by others and obsolete by still others. Thus, our collective understanding of what it means to be a man is undergoing a radical shift. As gender relations are reconfigured in the wake of the #metoo uprising of 2017, new, more nuanced versions of masculinity are emerging that go beyond constricting notions of physical strength and dominance.

This thesis aims to investigate and decode the contemporary shift of masculinity from a stereotype-infused ideology to a more liquid, fluid and ambiguous construction of masculinities, that is, a combination of gracile feminine features with masculine traits (soft masculinity), or a focus on human strengths associated with masculinity, i.e. caring, leading, mentoring (positive masculinity). Employing a visual netnographic methodology, this thesis analyzes how men negotiate, (re-)construct and reconfigure masculine identity and aesthetic in contemporary society.

Relevant literature:

- Goffman, Erving (1976), *Gender Advertisement*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., UK: London.
- Schroeder, Jonathan E. and Detlev Zwick (2004), "Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 7 (1).
- Elliott, Richard and Elliott, Christine (2007), "Idealized images of the male body in advertising a reader-response exploration," *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 11 (1).
- Landreth Grau, Stacy and Yorgos C. Zotos (2016), "Gender stereotypes in advertising: a review of current research," *International Journal of Marketing Communications*, 35 (5).
- Avery, Jill (2012), "Defending the makers of masculinity: Consumer resistance to brand gender-bending," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29 (4).
- Patterson, Maurice and Richard Elliott (2010), "Negotiating Masculinities: Advertising and the Inversion of the Male Gaze," *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 5 (3).

What do Mouse Movements tell us about the customer?

Most major web pages use mouse tracking in order to improve the customer journey. But according to new studies, there is more valuable information included about the customer as well as the decision process. Using MouseTracker, we want to approximate decision difficulty for individual customers in an e-commerce environment. We use a laboratory experiment in an e-commerce setting (similar to Amazon). The data can be analyzed using R, Matlab or similar statistical software. Please be aware that basic statistical or coding knowledge is required.

Relevant literature:

Hehman, E., Stolier, R. M., & Freeman, J. B. (2015). Advanced mouse-tracking analytic techniques for enhancing psychological science. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430214538325>

Incera, S., Markis, T. A., Incera, S., Markis, T. A., & McLennan, C. T. (2013). Mouse-Tracking Reveals When the Stroop Effect Mouse-Tracking Reveals When the Stroop Effect Happens. *The Ohio Psychologist* 2013.August (2013): 33.

Schneider, I. K., & Schwarz, N. (2017). Mixed feelings: the case of ambivalence. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 39–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2017.05.012>

Xiao, K., & Yamauchi, T. (2017). The role of attention in subliminal semantic processing: A mouse tracking study. *PLoS ONE*, 12(6), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0178740>

BRAVE NEW MARKETS

Before the advent of social media, it was mainly organizations that had the resources to connect with large numbers of people via means of advertising or PR (Asmussen et al. 2013). Nowadays, basically any internet literate user can potentially connect with thousands of users worldwide (McQuarrie et al. 2012). In this sense, social media are egalitarian in nature (Peters et al. 2013). The power of marketers erodes (Asmussen et al. 2013, Mangold and Faulds 2009), and at the same time consumers are empowered (Labrecque et al. 2013).

In this thesis you investigate how social media users influence market dynamics (cf. Dolbec and Fischer 2015, Scaraboto and Fischer 2012). You apply a mixed method approach, drawing on digital methods, like social network analysis (Robins 2015) or automated text analysis (Humphreys and Wang 2017), in combination with qualitative research techniques (Flick 2018).

Relevant literature:

Asmussen, B., S. Harridge-March, N. Occhiocupo, and J. Farquhar (2013), "The multi-layered nature of the internet-based democratization of brand management," *Journal of Business Research*, 66 (9), 1473-1483.

Dolbec, P.Y. and E. Fischer (2015), "Refashioning a field? Connected consumers and institutional dynamics in markets," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41 (6), 1447-1468.

Flick, U. (2018), *An introduction to qualitative research*: Sage Publications Limited.

Humphreys, A. and R.J.H. Wang (2017), "Automated text analysis for consumer research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44 (6), 1274-1306.

Labrecque, L.I., J. von dem Esche, C. Mathwick, T.P. Novak, and C.F. Hofacker (2013), "Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age," *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27 (4), 257-269.

Mangold, W.G. and D.J. Faulds (2009), "Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix," *Business horizons*, 52 (4), 357-365.

McQuarrie, E.F., J. Miller, and B.J. Phillips (2012), "The megaphone effect: Taste and audience in fashion blogging," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40 (1), 136-158.

Peters, K., Y. Chen, A.M. Kaplan, B. Ognibeni, and K. Pauwels (2013), "Social media metrics—A framework and guidelines for managing social media," *Journal of interactive marketing*, 27 (4), 281-298.

Robins, G. (2015), *Doing social network research: Network-based research design for social scientists*: Sage.

Scaraboto, D. and E. Fischer (2012), "Frustrated fashionistas: An institutional theory perspective on consumer quests for greater choice in mainstream markets," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39 (6), 1234-1257.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS BRAND: INVESTIGATING ITS EFFECTS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Despite the fact that family businesses are the dominant form of organizational businesses all over the world, scholars have paid little attention to the associations and effects that arise when communicating the family firm nature. While some family businesses have started to actively promote and underline their family firm nature (e.g. *SC Johnson – a family company*) many other family businesses do not communicate it to the outside world (e.g. Nike, BMW). The possible effects, whether positive or negative, remain largely unclear. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing interest in studying the effects of the family firm nature from a marketing perspective - especially to what extent family businesses can leverage their unique family firm nature as a competitive advantage when interacting with stakeholders.

Your thesis will investigate a specific topic in this area which depends on the supervisor's current research project and your personal preferences.

Relevant literature:

Botero, I. C., Astrachan, C. B., & Calabrò, A. (2018). A receiver's approach to family business brands. *Journal of Family Business Management*, 8(2), 94–112.

Hauswald, H., Hack, A., Kellermanns, F. W., & Patzelt, H. (2016). Attracting New Talent to Family Firms: Who Is Attracted and Under What Conditions? *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*.

Lude, M., & Prügl, R. (2018). Why the family business brand matters: Brand authenticity and the family firm trust inference. *Journal of Business Research*, 89, 121–134.

Sageder, M., Mitter, C., & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, B. (2018). Image and reputation of family firms: a systematic literature review of the state of research. *Review of Managerial Science*, 12(1), 335–377.

HUMANIZING FOOD PRODUCTS

Anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics to nonhuman objects is a popular marketing strategy. Companies frequently promote food products by creating humanlike brand characters (e.g., Mr. Peanut, Tony the Tiger, M&M mascots) and by endowing food products with humanlike characteristics, Nestlé promotes its cinnamon toast crunch cereals by making the cereals appear alive, and Dunkin' Donuts recently introduced a smiley face donut. In addition, governmental institutions such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) endow fruits and vegetables with human characteristics to promote healthy eating.

Using quantitative methods (i.e., experimental designs), this thesis investigates consumption-related consequences of this strategy. The main research question is how anthropomorphizing a food product influences consumption-related outcomes.

Supervisor: Dr. Roland Schroll (roland.schroll@gmail.com)

Literature:

- Epley, Nicholas, Adam Waytz, and John T. Cacioppo (2007), "On Seeing Human: A Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism," *Psychological Review*, 114 (4), 864–86.
- Hur, Julia D., Minjung Koo, and Wilhelm Hofmann (2015), "When Temptations Come Alive: How Anthropomorphism Undermines Self-Control," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42 (2), 340–58.
- Gray, Heather M., Kurt Gray, and Daniel M. Wegner (2007), "Dimensions of Mind Perception," *Science*, 315 (5812), 619–19.
- Waytz, Adam, Kurt Gray, Nicholas Epley, and Daniel M. Wegner (2010b), "Causes and Consequences of Mind Perception," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 14 (8), 383–88.