

## Topics for the Master thesis – winter term 2025/26

### General information

- Below you will find an **overview of topics** from which you can select your preferred topics for your Master thesis.
- Please select at least four topics and prioritize them (→ indicate topic number and title) in your CV together with the usual information.
- We will do our best to consider your prioritizations as much as possible.
- Students who have indicated our chair as priority 1 will be given preference in the allocation of topics.
- **The specific design of the topic will be discussed in the individual meetings with your supervisor.**
- The papers should preferably be written in English – writing in German is also possible.

### Topics for the Master thesis

#### 1. **Query Recommenders and Choice Overload: An Experimental Investigation of the Moderating Role of User Indecisiveness and Recommendation Scope**

This thesis investigates the conditions under which query recommenders might exacerbate or alleviate choice overload. It will focus on the moderating roles of user indecisiveness (as a personality trait) and the scope of recommendations (e.g., number of suggestions, narrowness vs. breadth). After a literature review and conceptual model development, an online experiment will be conducted. Participants will use a mock e-commerce site where the query recommender's scope is manipulated. User indecisiveness will be measured. Dependent variables might include perceived choice difficulty, satisfaction with the chosen product, cart abandonment rates, and decision time.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

#### 2. **The Influence of Product-Related Comments and Influencer Responses on Vicarious Product Engagement and Purchase Intentions: An Experimental Study**

This thesis investigates how observing product-related comments (e.g., questions about features, positive experiences) and the influencer's responses to them in the comment section of a video ad affects other viewers' (vicarious) engagement with the product and their purchase intentions. A conceptual framework drawing on social proof and parasocial interaction will be developed. An experiment will

be conducted using static screenshots or interactive mock-ups of an influencer video with manipulated comment sections (e.g., generic comments vs. product-focused Q&A).

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

### **3. Can Transparent Advertising of Product Limitations and Necessary Precautions Build More Resilient Brand Trust than Exaggerated Quality Claims? An Experimental Study**

This thesis experimentally compares the long-term effects of two advertising approaches on brand trust and customer loyalty, especially after a minor product-related issue is experienced: 1) transparent advertising that honestly presents a product's average quality and limitations while clearly outlining necessary user precautions, versus 2) advertising that makes exaggerated quality claims and downplays risks. Participants would be exposed to ads, then a scenario involving a minor product issue, and subsequent trust/loyalty measures taken.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

### **4. Mitigating Perceived Selection Bias through Seller Responses: An Experimental Study on the Impact of Response Style and Price Level on Consumer Judgments of Experience Goods**

This thesis examines whether and how sellers' responses to online reviews (especially negative or sparse ones) can mitigate consumer perceptions of selection bias and influence their judgment of an experience good's quality, particularly in conjunction with the product's price. Different seller response styles (e.g., defensive, empathetic, problem-solving) to a set of reviews will be manipulated alongside product price in an experimental setting.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

### **5. Consumer Response to Review Incentivization Disclosure: An Experimental Study on Perceived Bias, Quality Inferences, and the Role of Price for Experience Goods**

This thesis examines how disclosing that reviews were incentivized (e.g., "Reviewer received a discount for this unbiased review") affects consumers' perception of review bias, their quality inferences for an experience good, and the extent to which they then rely on price as an alternative quality signal. A conceptual framework on persuasion knowledge and source credibility will be developed. An experiment will be conducted where disclosure type, review valence, and product price are manipulated.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**

- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **6. Design variations of PWYW pricing for sustainable business practices**

This thesis examines the design variants of “Pay-What-You-Want” (PWYW) pricing models and their application to promote sustainable business practices. By exploring different approaches to the design of PWYW models - such as additional donations or transparency on how payments contribute to sustainability goals (for example) - the study aims to identify how to best influence consumer purchasing behavior. The study draws on insights from behavioral economics, marketing psychology and sustainability management and evaluates the effectiveness of these variants in balancing profitability and sustainability. The findings will provide actionable recommendations for companies seeking innovative pricing strategies that drive consumer engagement and support sustainable development goals.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **7. The Influence of Non-Profit Marketing Expenditures on Donor Perceptions and Giving Behavior**

This thesis examines how the marketing expenditures of non-profit organizations influence the willingness of (potential) donors to donate. The investigation begins with a systematic literature review and the application of relevant theories to derive hypotheses and develop a conceptual study model. Based on this, an empirical experiment is conducted to collect and analyze data on the perception and reaction of individuals to the marketing activities of non-profit organizations. This analysis will reveal the relationships between donors' perceptions of marketing expenditures and their giving behavior. The results will help nonprofits optimize their marketing strategies, communicate their mission effectively, and encourage donor support and engagement.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **8. Driving Change: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Sustainability Campaigns in Shaping Consumer Behavior**

This thesis examines how sustainability campaigns influence consumer behavior, focusing on their effectiveness in promoting environmentally conscious action and purchasing decisions. By integrating insights from consumer psychology, behavioral economics and sustainability marketing, the key elements that make such campaigns successful are examined. The study includes the design and execution of an experimental study. For example, sustainability campaigns with different messaging strategies, such as emotional appeals, social norms and tangible benefits of sustainable behavior, could be investigated. The results will provide actionable insights for companies and organizations looking to design effective sustainability campaigns that not only resonate with consumers but also inspire them to behave in environmentally friendly ways, contributing to broader environmental goals.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

#### **9. Optimizing Tipping Behavior: Experimental Investigation of Default Setting Designs in Digital Tip Recommendations**

This thesis investigates how the design of default settings in digital tipping contexts influences customers' tipping behavior. Building on existing research on tip recommendations (Alexander, Boone, & Lynn, 2021) and the use of visual cues such as emojis (Lefebvre, Boman, & Orłowski, 2024), this study aims to identify additional promising design variations that could further optimize tipping outcomes. The thesis begins with a systematic literature review on tipping defaults, behavioral nudges, and user interface design, and uses relevant behavioral economic and psychological theories to develop a conceptual study model and derive hypotheses. An experimental study will then be conducted to test various new default design options and measure their impact on tipping behavior as well as further variables related to consumer perception and intention. The results will provide practical insights for businesses and platforms seeking to implement effective and ethically sound tipping defaults that enhance customer experience while supporting service staff income.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

#### **10. The Power of the Unreal: Consumer perception of Virtual Influencers on Social Media**

Virtual influencers are playing an increasingly prominent role in social media marketing, capturing audience attention, driving engagement, and shaping consumer relationships with brands in the digital environment. This thesis investigates how consumers perceive virtual influencers and examines how these perceptions influence brand trust, user engagement, and purchase intentions. Through a combination of literature review and empirical research, the study aims to identify a relevant research gap and address it by conducting an experimental study.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

#### **11. Smart Collaboration: The Role of AI in Co-Creation**

Artificial intelligence (AI) presents new opportunities for involving and supporting consumers in value co-creation processes, such as product design, content generation, or personalized service experiences. This thesis examines how AI-enabled tools facilitate active consumer participation and how these interactions influence consumer perceptions and behavior. Through a systematic review of the existing literature on AI-driven co-creation, this study aims to identify a relevant research gap and address it through a targeted experimental investigation.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **12. Shades of Green - A comparison of sustainability**

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important. However, sustainability is also an elusive concept: what exactly is sustainability? The key question for companies and therefore also for our society: Does consumers differentiate between different shades of green? Does a higher level of sustainability bring positive benefits for companies? For example, are „greener“ products perceived more positively than products that are „green“ but less „green“? Are consumers willing to pay more for a higher level of sustainability? These central questions will be analyzed with the help of an empirical study.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **13. Do Consumers Care Where It Comes From? Marketing Perspectives on Supply Chain Sustainability**

This master's thesis analyses how consumers perceive the sustainability of supply chains and how this influences their perception of brands. It begins with an overview of the current academic literature on consumer perceptions of sustainable supply and marketing strategies. Building on this, an empirical experiment will be conducted to expand this knowledge. The aim is to extend the existing research and derive practical implications for a company's sustainability strategy along its value chain, as well as the associated marketing strategy.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

## **14. Persuasion Tipping Points in E-Commerce**

Marketers use various tactics to stimulate purchases. Some may leverage scarcity or social proof cues within webshops, while others may design interfaces in a way to manipulate user behavior (i.e., use dark patterns). While both benefits and risks of these approaches have received great attention from past research, it remains unexplored how to balance persuasion attempts in business practice. The goal of this research is to advance the discipline by exploring “persuasion tipping points”, shedding light on how different persuasive elements are perceived, how users react to combinations of these elements and points beyond which more persuasion attempts backfire. The student is free to choose specific webshop elements for this purpose. Programming expertise is not required for this research..

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**

- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**

#### **15. AI-Generated Reviews? Effects of Bot vs. Human Reviews on Trust and Purchase Intention: An Experimental Study**

This study examines the impact of visual elements in reviews, such as profile pictures, product images, and review design, on perceived authenticity, user trust, and behavioral outcomes, including clicks, likes, and purchase intent. The study incorporates visual manipulation as a core variable and compares conditions featuring stock photos, realistic avatars, and no images. Programming expertise is not required for this research.

- Literature review: **yes**
- Development of a conceptual framework: **yes**
- Development of a study set-up (without testing): **yes**
- Empirical testing (data collection & analysis): **yes**