



Topics Previously Offered for Bachelor's Theses in Behavioral Marketing

Last updated: 18 February 2019

Do not distribute this document.

© 2019 Prof. Miguel Brendl, University of Basel, miguel.brendl@unibas.ch

We make the topics available to inform students interested to write a thesis with us, but we do not want these topics made public. Thus, this document is solely for your own use to help you make an informed decision. If someone without access to ADAM asks you for this document, ask him or her to request it directly from us.

Contents

Fall 2018 BA Thesis Topics.....	3
Iconic Products.....	3
Theses Based on This Topic.....	3
How can companies use the feeling of gratitude to their advantage?	4
Theses Based on This Topic.....	4
What company actions make people most angry, and why?	5
Theses Based on This Topic.....	5
What makes some purchases embarrassing, and what can be done about it?	5
Locally Produced Goods	6
Theses Based on This Topic.....	6
Online Piracy.....	7
Theses Based on This Topic.....	7
Placebo Effects in Consumer Behavior.....	8
Theses Based on This Topic.....	8
Psychological Principles of Gamification	9
Theses Based on This Topic.....	9
Do marketers systematically exploit features that make faces attractive?	10
Theses Based on This Topic.....	10
How do food manufacturers systematically exploit features that make foods attractive?	11
Theses Based on This Topic.....	12

Below are the topics that we offered for bachelor's thesis students along with the abstracts of submitted theses in Fall 2018.

Fall 2018 BA Thesis Topics

Iconic Products

What do the Coca-Cola bottle, converse sneakers, and the safety pin have in common? All of these designs endured the test of time and achieved iconic status. What makes a product design iconic? Conduct a literature search to identify common factors that iconic designs share. Make your own critical assessment: Are there designs that contain these factors but failed to become iconic? If so, why? Are there designs that have achieved iconic status but do not share the factors that you identified? If so, what explains their iconic status?

Theses Based on This Topic

Literature review: Why do products achieve an iconic status and how does product design contribute to this?

— *Beyza Gizem Arikan*

Abstract

The following literature review synthesizes theories on behavioral marketing instruments and those on product designs. With the theoretical basis, the review aims to answer the main questions on why products gain an iconic status, how they endure time and how product design correlates with the success and eventual iconic status of products. After defining the key terms and carrying out the relevant design principles and behavioral concepts, the theoretical knowledge will be transferred to example products. The diagram contains six products: four products are commonly known iconic products (Coke-Bottle, Converse Sneakers, Safety Pin and iPhone). One product (broom) will be used as a representative for products that share the same attributes as iconic products, but are not acknowledged as icons. And at last, the Gillette razor will be an example for a product that does not share the majority of the analyzed attributes, however, still has become iconic. With this visualization, the following questions are aimed to be answered: (1) what do iconic products have in common, what are the differences? (2) are there products that do share these attributes but still are not iconic, if so why? (3) are there products that do not share these attributes but still have become an icon, if so why?

Iconic Products: Common Factors and Consumer Behavior to Achieve Iconic Status

— *Flakron Jasari*

Abstract

What do the Coca-Cola bottle, Converse sneakers, and the safety pin have in common? All these designs have endured the test of time and achieved iconic status. What makes a product design iconic? This literature review shows the influence of product design elements, authenticity, aesthetics, and multifinality

on several products, and the consumer behavior that has helped them to achieve iconic status. Furthermore, it makes clear how psychological factors of brand strategy influence the achievement of iconic status. The main finding of this thesis is that functionality, aesthetics, and symbolism are key factors within product design. A positive start on the market front and a long, successful rally against time and competitors determines which design and product makes the cut. What is left is the design that has endured the test of time and achieved iconic status.

How can companies use the feeling of gratitude to their advantage?

Gratitude is a warm feeling that companies might want to utilize to strengthen their relationship with customers. The feeling might come up, for instance, when a firm utilizes the classic persuasion technique *reciprocity* (see Robert Cialdini's 6 principles of persuasion), donates to charity on behalf of their customers, or when a salesperson helps out a customer in an extraordinary way. What are the effective ways to evoke gratitude, and how does that help the firm?

Theses Based on This Topic

How can companies use the feeling of gratitude to their advantage?

— Dario Eberle

Abstract

Highly effective and still strongly neglected. The talk is about gratitude. Those companies who include gratitude are rewarded with positive resulting performances. Others who ignore this valuable emotion, might never witness the entire impact of customer relationship investments. Only a wishful thought of creating a long-term mutual beneficiary customer relationship or plain potentiality in benefiting from customer relationships? On the basis of literature, this paper reveals insights on the characteristics of gratitude and its psychological aspects. This manifests a basic understanding of the term gratitude and its ability to influence relationships and prosocial behavior. That forms the foundation for a strategy approach and shows that consumer behave favorably towards extra effort investing companies. Given this strategy approach, further findings contemplate companies should avoid persuasive motives, as this will reverse the effects of gratitude and its resulting positive performance outcomes. Finally, the paper illustrates that trust, commitment and altruistic values are mediated by gratitude. These factors help to maintain customer relationships and stand as supporting features for the strategy approach.

How can companies use the feeling of gratitude to their advantage?

— Philipp Meyer

Abstract

The target of the following literature review was to get an up to date overview of the current state of gratitude in literature and what are its key components, effects and factors which affect it. Whereas the

literature worked on is also covering publications of the last century, the focus is on literature after the turn of the millennium. Starting with setting gratitude in a broader context, it will be narrowed by defining it, showing which effects and factors affect it and of what one must be aware of. This literature review will ultimately try to answer the following question: “How can companies use the feeling of gratitude to their advantage?”. The review is supported by the findings and investigations by various sources (e.g. Morales (2015), Palmatier (2009) and more). Within this review effects which cause, amplify or inhibit gratitude and potentially competing effects are discussed. Further, the scope and (non) usage of gratitude and the effects coming with it are tried to be set. Besides answering the central question there will be given a short overview of some papers and their studies. The results seem rather clear and there seems to be a surprisingly so far underestimated big effect of gratitude on our behavior. Firms can, if done right, use gratitude to earn (additional) benefits. But this possibility comes with certain conditions from which not all lie in the hands of the company. Nonetheless one must notice that the research in this field is still in progress. A deeper investigation with repeating or modifying experiments could lead to a better understanding or open completely new perceptions on gratitude. This does not have to necessarily include a following possibility for implementations, it should primarily contribute to a better understanding. Yet the research done so far builds a potential groundwork which gives advice how to persistently continue with research.

What company actions make people most angry, and why?

There seems to be an abundance of ways companies can make us mad: from long lines to defective products, rude service people to contributing to child obesity or climate change. Classify the company actions that make people angry and explain what it is that makes these acts evoke anger in people.

Theses Based on This Topic

What company actions make people most angry, and why?
— Marc Gürtler

Abstract

The present literature review investigates the various company actions that can potentially trigger anger in individuals and where they are originated. Assumption 1 elucidates the relationship between dissatisfaction and anger, and to what extent they are connected. Building on this, assumption 2 tries to exemplify the extent to which anger is based on rationality. Aforementioned findings derive from several preceding work on customer satisfaction, customer emotions and coping strategies.

What makes some purchases embarrassing, and what can be done about it?

Have you ever bought hemorrhoid cream or adult diapers from a store? Most people can tell you a story in which they felt embarrassed in a shopping context. What makes some purchases embarrassing, and what can be done about it? Answers to these questions might help improve consumer experience and help businesses that sell potentially embarrassing products or services.

Locally Produced Goods

There is growing interest in purchasing locally produced goods, especially locally produced food such as locally grown fruits and vegetables. It looks like people prefer locally produced goods over similar goods produced elsewhere. Where does this preference come from? Why are people willing to pay a premium for locally produced goods? Is the preference for locally produced goods different from country of origin effects (e.g., the labels Swiss Made, or Made in China)? If so, how? Are there disadvantages to local production? If so, how do consumers view those disadvantages?

Theses Based on This Topic

Locally Produced Goods: Recent Demand and Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior

— *Anomila Lucas*

Abstract

Globalization has improved consumer choice by providing access to a variety of products from various parts of the world. However, despite the benefits that the choice brings, there has been a growing interest in purchasing locally produced goods. This has been especially true for food items. In this study, the factors influencing the preference for locally produced goods among consumers are investigated. It is found out that freshness, safety, and variety were key factors among purchasers of food items. The factors confirm consumer perceptions regarding the advantages of purchasing locally produced food. Affordability was another identified factor. However, studies showed that affordability as a factor did not apply to all customers since some locally produced goods attract higher prices. Lastly, consumer ethnocentrism and lifestyle choices were factors affecting the purchase of locally produced goods outside of the food category. The study also investigated whether a country of origin had a significant effect on the purchase of local foods. It was found out that the country of origin has a significant influence on the consumers especially among product categories that were common and superior in select countries. Another purpose of this research is to evaluate whether the pros and cons of local production had an impact on consumers decisions to purchase local goods, it has been established that there was a correlation but no direct impact. It is suggested that future research dwell on different categories of consumers rather than the general population to determine whether a direct relationship can be established. In this study it is hypothesized that consumers are purchasing locally produced goods to promote sustainability and curb negative environmental impact

Locally Produced Goods: Exploring the Concept of Consumer Behavior to Identify the Resulting Preference

— *Jana Ortlieb*

Abstract

In recent years, there has been a tendency in consumer preferences to buy locally produced goods, especially in terms of food. Therefore, numerous studies have been prompted in this field. Nevertheless, their focus was on specific products or certain regions only. This study considers a wider perspective and provides an overview of the influencing factors on consumer behavior. Additionally, it examines the willingness to pay higher prices for local produce. The results show that psychological aspects are of great importance when looking for reasons for this behavior and the resulting choices of preference. Furthermore, the importance of the emotional component in relation to local products is an interesting finding in this literature review. The willingness to pay premium prices for certain attributes that are associated with locally produced goods, such as quality, connectedness and support for the local economy confirms these reasons which are decisive for the purchase of local products.

Online Piracy

People generally find theft immoral, wrong, and harmful, but online theft such as downloading music or movies illegally seems to be regarded as less offensive. Your task is to investigate how people view copyright violations (online piracy/theft). What factors determine how offensive such transgressions are regarded?

Theses Based on This Topic

Online Piracy - Factors Influencing People's Online Piracy Behavior

— Jennifer Vogel

Abstract

This thesis aims to evaluate and summarize existing literature on consumer behavior towards online piracy. The focus lays on factors which can potentially determine why an individual feels less remorseful stealing online than stealing in person. Apparent lack of victims, social norms and moral obligation were found to be essential factors. Furthermore, the lower value of digital goods as well as weaker property rights and the ideological view of free ideas on the internet showed significant results contributing to this phenomenon. The different studies that were consulted will be discussed based on their limitations and the findings serve as foundation to evaluate implications that could lead to lower engagement in online piracy.

You Wouldn't Steal a Car: Comparison of Moral Perception Between Online Piracy and Theft

— Milos Jovanovic

Abstract

You wouldn't steal a car. Statements like these are brought up by copyright law enforcement facilities, thus, comparing digital piracy with theft. But, is digital piracy actually theft? People generally find theft immoral, wrong, and harmful. Yet, transgressions such as pirating (i.e. illegally downloading music, software, or film), seem to be regarded as less offensive. What types of individuals engage in piracy? What

factors determine how wrongful such an act is perceived? Is there a moral difference between theft and online piracy? This literature review tried to find and explain adequate psychological theories and social phenomena in order to answer these questions. The main findings are that physicality, difference in the valuation of digital and physical goods, level of physical activity, and tangibility of the underlying matter, influence the moral or ethical perception of behavior such as theft and digital piracy.

Placebo Effects in Consumer Behavior

Once considered an annoying factor to be ruled out in drug trials, placebo effects now emerge as fascinating demonstrations of what the mind is capable of. Placebo effects arise in consumption contexts as well. For instance, a more expensive energy drink might reduce fatigue more effectively simply because the person believes that expensive products work better, and not because the ingredients are any different. What do we know about placebo effects in consumer behavior? How can firms/governments/consumers utilize them?

Theses Based on This Topic

Marketing Placebo Effect: How Brands Influence Consumer Behavior
— Lorena Madarena

Abstract

The following literature review focuses on the question of how firms, companies and brands can integrate the knowledge of marketing placebo effects into their marketing actions to influence consumer behavior. There has been a lot of research on multiple marketing actions playing a role in consumers' perception of a product but so far there is not much research on marketing placebo effects and to what extent such marketing-based measures can influence actual consumer behavior or even distort and manipulate consumer behavior. In earlier research several experiments have been examined proving that marketing action can have an impact on the actual efficacy of a product without changing the composition of the product. Since the effect is the same as that of a placebo effect, the term was adopted in marketing. As already mentioned, the phenomenon of the marketing placebo effect has not yet been intensively investigated and forms a new topic for future research. The given literature review shows which marketing actions contribute to a consumers' choice of one specific product out of a compilation of identical products. It also shows how a marketing placebo effect influences the actual efficacy of the product and to what extent consumer expectations contribute to this. This literature review aims to show how fundamental the understanding of marketing placebo effects is for brands to be able to influence consumer decisions and contribute to greater consumption.

Placebo Effect in Marketing
— Ilona Sarkis

Abstract

In this paper the placebo effect is examined in the area of marketing, which is in fact a little different from the medical approach. This study includes several topics, which are reaching from the formation of the effect to the triggers and up to the individual differences in the responsiveness. Besides this, a summary about what is already known about the consequences and benefits for firms, consumers and the government as a cause of the placebo effect is conducted. Therefore, a selection of various studies was necessary in order to maintain a scheme for the topic. As a result, different drivers appeared to trigger the placebo effect. Hardly believable, but sometimes one just has to expect a product to work. In other cases, only beliefs, expectations or motivations are able to have an impact on the perception of consumers. Occasionally, the marketing placebo effect can even have physiological outcomes. On one hand it can be seen as a damage for consumers, because their purchase decision can be manipulated by marketers and firms. On the other hand, there are also gains for consumers mentioned. Further research could be made in observing the government dealing with the placebo effect.

Psychological Principles of Gamification

Your main task is to review managerial books on games/gamification in terms of what principles of gamification they claim. Your secondary task is to try to map these gaming principles to psychological principles. For instance, games often have multiple success levels. This gaming principle could map onto several psychological principles, such as, sub-goal setting, achievement motivation, signaling social status to co-players. The secondary task is labeled secondary because you could spend a very long time on this. So the expectation is not that you provide a complete account of all psychological principles, but rather, that you interpret gaming principles from a psychological perspective and this way speculate why they might be effective.

Theses Based on This Topic

Psychological Principles of Gamification — Eric Fäh

Abstract

In recent years gamification, the implementation of game design elements in a non-gaming context has become one of the most popular marketing topics. This literature review aims to evaluate and summarize existing literature on gamification and the psychological mechanics behind the game design elements. The focus lays on assembling the current data of psychological evidence of the most traditional game elements used in gamification. These are points, levels, leaderboards, badges, and avatars. Points motivate the user with immediate feedback. Levels give the user clear goals and provide a sense of accomplishment through mastery. Leaderboards incentives the user with motivations explained in goal-setting theory and social comparison theory. Badges use the theory of flow and just as leaderboards the social comparison theory to engage more with the user. Lastly, avatars enhance social relatedness and the feel-

ing of autonomy. The findings suggest that gamification can improve human motivation but only if implemented correctly. Furthermore, it can have adverse effects if not executed properly. Consequences for further research and limitations to this literature review are also discussed in the conclusions.

Why Gamification Is Effective: Explaining the Psychological Mechanism

— *Sewin P. Therampilly*

Abstract

Implementing game elements, also called gamification, has become quite popular. Gamification has been proven to be motivating, which means more engagement with a product or better performance in a task. The question remains why gamification is so effective. Few studies have analyzed the psychological mechanism behind it, focusing more on the behavioral outcomes. This paper collects the current data of psychological explanations on the most well-known game elements. These are points, levels, leaderboards, badges and avatars. The most frequently used psychological theories are self-determination theory, goal-setting theory and flow theory. Results from past studies that use these theories have been mapped onto each game element. The research shows that points satisfy competence need and serve as real-time feedback. Levels do not have enough conclusive data but likely serve as a goal. Badges satisfy social relatedness and competence. Leaderboards, depending on the competitive nature of the individual, form desirable goals and increase competence satisfaction. Lastly, avatars are shown to increase flow, social relatedness and autonomy. Giving definite answers to the why is not possible, since studies vary greatly in their testing methods and how researchers determine their results. This literature review synthesizes the results and serves as an orientation point.

Do marketers systematically exploit features that make faces attractive?

Review the gender literature and find out which facial features determine attractiveness (e.g., high cheek bones, red lips, etc.). Explore if you see your results reflected in marketing materials, e.g., in face images used in perfumes, clothing, or other domains where physical attractiveness may matter a lot. You may look at actual materials, or consult publications that may have asked this question. If there is research on what effect particular features have, report that, too. For instance, does a feature make a face aesthetically pleasing or does it arouse sexual desire?

Theses Based on This Topic

Perception and effects of facial attractiveness in advertising

— *Jennifer Vogel*

Abstract

A considerable amount of print advertisements depict human faces. The purpose of this thesis is to examine whether marketers make systematic use of faces with attractive features in their advertising in order

to increase its effectiveness. Typical characteristics of a beautiful face are identified as averageness, symmetry and gender-dependent facial features. Generally, attractive individuals induce more positive reactions. They are perceived as more independent and self-confident and are therefore more successful in influencing and persuading their social environment. Consumers perceive advertisements with attractive models as trustworthy sources of information. As a consequence, the message's credibility is enhanced, which results in more effective advertisement. However, some consumers, such as self-critical women, might not react as intended to attractive models. Furthermore, it is crucial that the advertised product type must be related to attractiveness.

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, which advertisement has the most attractive model of them all?" Examining the exploitation of facial attractiveness in advertising

— *Claudia Francesca Lattarulo*

Abstract

We spend money on products we desire, persuaded by models about whom the only thing we know is their appearance. Prominent cheekbones, full lips, and an extended jawline: beauty standards shape society's beauty ideals. Is this transmissible for products too? This paper presents an approached and mixed understanding of the marketing strategy that uses attractiveness as a deceptive tool in advertising, pre-eminently in the beauty market. Its hotly debated purpose is examined in three steps: first by defining attractiveness, then by examining the psychological effects of traits that make faces attractive, and finally by debating its use and effectiveness. In particular, the extraction of the psychological effects of attractive faces is useful in determining why marketers might exploit features that make faces attractive. Attractiveness as a tool seems to be a controversial winner, but its use should be wisely designed. Highly attractive models should be chosen for attractive enhancing products (e.g., cosmetics) rather than for problem-solving problems (e.g., acne remover). However, beauty advertisement is still stereotyped with highly attractive models, yet trends are moving in other directions aimed at creating unique strategies (e.g., beauty for all). The advertisers who use classical beauty needs to be aware of a new face: the trendy one.

How do food manufacturers systematically exploit features that make foods attractive?

Review how food color affects perceptions of food attractiveness and attempt to find categories of attractiveness, e.g., energy vs. palatability. Explore if you see your results reflected in food packaging and advertising. For example, red and yellow color is preferred in many foods, e.g., gummi bears are more often red than other colors. Yellow signals more fat, e.g., yellow butter is preferred, cheddar is artificially colored, so is vanilla ice-cream. Vanilla is black, not yellow. People do not like black foods. You should structure your review in claims practitioners make versus claims for which you find scientific evidence.

Theses Based on This Topic

How do food manufacturers systematically exploit features that make foods attractive?

— *Sharen Wen*

Abstract

Consumers are moving through complex and visually challenging environments, when purchasing goods. Especially with food products, they are exposed to a variety of colors, which often serve as a function to manipulate consumers into buying the specific product. Statistics show that food colors influence the ability of consumers to correctly identify flavors. Appropriate coloration of foods and beverages increases this ability, whereas inappropriate coloration has indicated to decrease it. Several studies have also shown that red enhances the sensitivity for sweetness, while green does the same for tartness. Furthermore, food colors enable consumers to make judgment on the pleasantness of foods. Depending on the type of food product, different variables are responsible for its perceived pleasantness. Applying the proper color can intensify these variables and thus make the product more preferable as a whole. To differentiate a food product by altering its color is crucial, but not as easy to implement. Three suggested methods on how to successfully launch novel colors on food products will therefore be examined. The end of this paper will provide examples and trends to underline the findings and an outlook on potential future research.