



## **Topics Previously Offered for Master's Theses in Behavioral Marketing**

Last updated: 13 December 2018

**Do not distribute this document.**

© 2018 Prof. Miguel Brendl, University of Basel, [miguel.brendl@unibas.ch](mailto: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

Spring 2018 MA Projects .....	3
Fake News.....	3
Theses Based on This Topic .....	3
Cleaning up the Brand Image .....	4
Preference for Locally Produced Goods .....	4
Iconic Products .....	5
How Your Language Affects Your Wealth and Health .....	5
Measuring Motivation and Predicted Pleasure via Size Bias and Affect Misattribution .....	6
Spring 2017 MA Projects .....	7
Clickbait: How and why does it work? .....	7
How does Motivation Change Perception? .....	8
Theses Based on This Topic .....	8
Why do Irrelevant Options Affect Choices between Relevant Options? .....	10
Theses Based on This Topic .....	11
Identifying Opposite Emotions .....	12
Brand Image Crises and Centrality of Goals to Brands .....	13
The Desire for Money .....	13
Theses Based on This Topic .....	14
Implicitly Measuring Brand Attitudes .....	14
Theses Based on This Topic .....	15
Fake News.....	15

Below are the topics that we offered for masters seminar students along with the abstracts of masters theses that have been completed since. Other theses are currently underway.

## Spring 2018 MA Projects

### Fake News

Piggybacking on the power of social media, fake news recently became a force that shapes public opinion. Public figures and many institutions including businesses are influenced. For instance, in 2016 Pepsi stock fell sharply and did not recover for months after Trump supporters called for a boycott following false claims that Pepsi CEO did not want their business. Public discussion centers around exposing fake news by rapidly labeling it as fake and educating the public. Facebook, for instance, recently expanded its workforce responsible for flagging fake content. Based on previous research findings on the psychological effects of hypothetical questions and data that our group collected, however, we suspect that simply telling people to discard some news will not erase its effect. We suspect that people can discard information that they know is false when they make deliberate decisions and use their reasoning, such as when they state their opinion about a brand. Nevertheless, how they feel about the brand on a visceral level might still be influenced by the false information.

This project involves developing a prediction as to what kind of behaviors are influenced by exposure to information that is revealed to be false later on, and proposing an experiment to test that prediction. You will focus on one of three types of behavior: (1) effort exerted to obtain a product, (2) level of impatience to have a product now as opposed to later, (3) amount of product consumed once it is purchased/obtained. All of these types of behavior are potentially influenced by people's intuitive feelings and are therefore potentially vulnerable to fake news.

Fitzsimons, G. J., & Shiv, B. (2001). Nonconscious and contaminative effects of hypothetical questions on subsequent decision making. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(2), 224-238.

Peters, K. R., & Gawronski, B. (2011). Are we puppets on a string? Comparing the impact of contingency and validity on implicit and explicit evaluations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(4), 557-569.

### Theses Based on This Topic

*How Fake is "Fake News" to the Consumer? The Impact of False Information on Impatience*  
—Valerie Hennes

### Abstract

Fake news is frequently discussed across the media and in public. Although false information is usually refuted by authorities, it influences people. This paper, therefore, aims to further investigate under which circumstances consumers fail to process information correctly.

Findings on indirect evaluations indicate that subjects favor positively described products, independent of the correctness of information, results on explicit attitudes and direct measures reflect the real value of information in their decisions. A lot of decisions are based on impulse and reflect unconscious evaluations because of little deliberation. In order to better understand the influence of false information on impulsive behavior, the consequences of incorrect information on time preference were analyzed. In an experiment, subjects were asked to indicate their impatience to obtain a product after they have received information of different valence and validity.

Results indicate consumers have difficulties processing false information correctly. Contrary to previous studies, however, subjects reflect truthful information in their impatience to obtain a product but disregard the value of product descriptions. This indicates subjects favor products described with true information even if this information about a product is negative.

### Cleaning up the Brand Image

Brands often suffer from revelations of unethical or immoral behavior. Examples include Volkswagen cheating on emissions tests Facebook's privacy breach, and child labor on Nestlé farms. Even when brands act to address concerns about wrongdoing, a negative emotional residue might remain in people's minds. Previous research showed that there is a psychological connection between moral cleanliness and physical cleanliness. For instance cleaning hands with an antiseptic wipe reduces the negative emotional effects of remembering a past unethical deed (Zhong and Liljenquist, 2006).

Building on these ideas, your task is to propose an experiment to test whether a physical cleanliness intervention could help restore the image of a brand suffering from claims of violating moral norms.

Folkes, V. S., & Kamins, M. A. (1999). Effects of information about firms' ethical and unethical actions on consumers' attitudes. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 8(3), 243-259.

Zhong, C. B., & Liljenquist, K. (2006). Washing away your sins: Threatened morality and physical cleansing. *Science*, 313(5792), 1451-1452.

### Preference for Locally Produced Goods

Locally produced goods such as locally grown fruits and vegetables seem to have an allure. Often people seek such products and are willing to pay a premium for them over similar products shipped from elsewhere. Common reasons that people mention for this preference include freshness and a preference to support local producers. This project investigates a potentially more fundamental psychological reason.

Previous research has shown that products that are connected to the self are valued more than similar products that lack such a connection, even though the connection is superfluous. This project will investigate the possibility that local production establishes such a connection between the product and the self (via shared location) and therefore adds subjective value.

Brendl, C. M., Chattopadhyay, A., Pelham, B. W., & Carvallo, M. (2005). Name letter branding: Valence transfers when product specific needs are active. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 405-415.

Perkins, A. W., & Forehand, M. R. (2011). Implicit self-referencing: The effect of nonvolitional self-association on brand and product attitude. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 142-156.

Reich, B. J., Beck, J. T., Price, J., & Lamberton, C. (2018). Food as Ideology: Measurement and Validation of Locavorism. *Journal of Consumer Research*.

## Iconic Products

What do the glass 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? Although this seems like a complicated problem with different types of products addressing different design challenges, this project focuses on one potential factor: the interaction between form and function. Form refers to how the object looks; function refers to how effectively it performs its work or purpose.

This project investigates the hypothesis that an iconic design fuses form and function. In other words, the same design element provides a functional advantage (e.g., makes the product easy to use, more durable, faster, lighter, etc.) and also nice to look at. Develop this idea based on previous research and propose an experiment that tests whether this aspect of design is indeed a hallmark of being an iconic product.

Bloch, P. H., Brunel, F. F., & Arnold, T. J. (2003). Individual differences in the centrality of visual product aesthetics: Concept and measurement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 551-565.

Hoegg, J., Alba, J. W., & Dahl, D. W. (2010). The good, the bad, and the ugly: Influence of aesthetics on product feature judgments. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(4), 419-430.

Veryzer Jr, R. W., & Hutchinson, J. W. (1998). The influence of unity and prototypicality on aesthetic responses to new product designs. *Journal of consumer research*, 24(4), 374-394.

## How Your Language Affects Your Wealth and Health

Recent research (Chen 2013) provided correlational evidence that the structure of the language people speak influences their future oriented behavior. Resisting our impulses for immediate pleasure is often the only way to attain the outcomes that are important to us. We want to keep a slim figure but we also want that last slice of pizza. We want a comfortable retirement, but we also want to drive that dazzling

car, go on that dream vacation, or get those gorgeous shoes. Some people are better at delaying gratification than others. Those people have a better chance of accumulating wealth and keeping a healthy life style. They are less likely to be impulse buyers or smokers, or to engage in unsafe sex.

Some languages strongly distinguish the present and the future. Other languages only weakly distinguish the present and the future. Chen's (2013) recent research suggests that people who speak languages that weakly distinguish the present and the future are better prepared for the future. They accumulate more wealth and they are better able to maintain their health. The reason may be that the way these people conceptualize the future is similar to the way they conceptualize the present. As a result, the future does not feel very distant and it is easier for them to act in accordance with their future interests.

Although Chen's (2013) findings are consistent with these ideas, the ideas have not yet been tested experimentally; therefore it is not clear whether the language-future oriented behavior relationship is causal. This project will investigate the problem, and propose an experiment to test Chen's (2013) hypothesis.

Chen, M. K. (2013). The effect of language on economic behavior: Evidence from savings rates, health behaviors, and retirement assets. *American Economic Review*, 103(2), 690-731.

Hershfield, H. E., Goldstein, D. G., Sharpe, W. F., Fox, J., Yeykelis, L., Carstensen, L. L., & Bailenson, J. N. (2011). Increasing saving behavior through age-progressed renderings of the future self. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(SPL), S23-S37.

### Measuring Motivation and Predicted Pleasure via Size Bias and Affect Misattribution

This thesis contributes to a project in which we examine how the mind represents utility. We draw on the seminal conceptualization of predicted utility, decision utility, and experienced utility (Kahneman, Wakker, & Sarin, 1997). *Decision utility* reflects how much a decision maker values a choice option when actually choosing as well as how much a person is motivated the moment he pursues an outcome. *Experienced utility* is the actual hedonic experience during subsequent consumption, such as pleasure while eating. The project asks whether people are always motivated to seek what they predict will give them pleasure, or more generally, whether predicted utility always maps onto decision utility. We have some evidence that conditions exist when motivation is high, despite predicted pleasure being low. One challenge in examining the relation between predicted pleasure and motivation is that people seem to be very poor at self-reporting this subtle difference. The objective of the thesis is to examine ways to measure these two reactions without requiring self-report.

In our past research we have successfully used two indirect measures and we believe that they may be suitable to assess motivation versus predicted pleasure respectively. Inspired by the classic study of Bruner and Goodman (1947), Brendl, Markman, and Messner observed that cigarette deprived smokers judge cigarettes to be longer than sated smokers (Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2003). You may recall from our lecture this year that thirsty students judged water glasses to be larger than non-thirsty students. This type of size bias has been replicated many times with various needs and it may reflect motivation.

The second measure we have worked with is inspired by the AMP, the Affect Misattribution Procedure (Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005). Kristina Gött has successfully used it in an ongoing master's project where respondents judged how much they liked various fonts of brand names, being instructed to ignore their evaluations of the brands, but their liking of the fonts was nevertheless influenced by the brands. The purpose of this project is to examine the literature to assess whether the perceptual size bias could be used to assess motivation and the fonts measure could be used to assess pleasure and to then conduct an experiment to test the specific idea.

Kahneman, D., Wakker, P. P., & Sarin, R. (1997). Back to Bentham? Explorations of experienced utility. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *112*(May), 375-405.

Payne, B. K., Cheng, C. M., Govorun, O., & Stewart, B. D. (2005). An inkblot for attitudes: Affect misattribution as implicit measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *89*(3), 277-293.

## Spring 2017 MA Projects

### Clickbait: How and why does it work?

Clickbait is a term used to describe the questionable practice of attracting web traffic to businesses, media pages and personal blogs, by the use of over-sensationalist or attention grabbing headlines and hyperlinks. This content regularly fails to deliver on its promise, yet many people still seem to click on it:

- “This one weird trick will let you write your thesis in less than a week!”
- “These students chose an awesome project on Clickbait. You’ll never guess what happens next”
- “27 reasons why doing this seminar is amazing. (#11 will make you cry with joy)”

Advertisers and content generators are often incentivized by the number of page-clicks received, and this has led to very low quality but highly viewed content, as well as the rise of fake-news.

Although this is a big problem and many internet firms have tried to tackle this with detection software, very little is known about the psychological processes underlying the irresistible urge to click. This project would involve exploring one of the many common features of clickbait to attempt to understand how and why it is effective at generating clicks.

This thesis will be about understanding one or more of the powerful attention grabbing and temptation techniques used in modern day online advertising.

Chakraborty, A. Paranjape, B. Kakarla, S. & Ganguly, N. (2016), Stop Clickbait: Detecting and Preventing Clickbaits in Online New Media, *IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Network Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)*, doi:10.1109/ASONAM.2016.7752207.

Loewenstein, G. (1994), The Psychology of Curiosity: A Review and Reinterpretation, *Psychological Bulletin*, *116*, 75-98.

## How does Motivation Change Perception?

An infamous study in the 1940s demonstrated that poorer children judged coins to be larger than richer children. This led to some theories about how motivational states (such as hunger, thirst or sexual arousal) can change our perception of the size of certain objects. For example, hunger makes the cake look bigger and thirst makes the glass look fuller, but this effect only occurs with objects relevant to the goal. It has even been shown that aroused men judge female breast size as larger than unaroused men.

This field of study has recently been revived and raises some very important questions about how wanting or needing something can change our subjective experience of it. We do not know if this perceptual change occurs in features only relating to spatial size, or if all motivationally relevant attributes appear better (e.g., quality of goal object, cost of acquiring, etc.). A recent finding published in the *Journal of Marketing Research* suggests that owning the object causes the reverse, so that when you are hungry and already own a cake, it appears smaller. Understanding these strange effects may generate deeper insights into motivation and the drivers of behaviour.

This thesis will be about exploring the extent and the causes of these well-known but poorly understood effects.

Balcetis, E. & Dunning, D. (2010), Wishful Seeing: More Desired Objects are seen as Closer, *Psychological Science*, 21, 147-152.

Den Daas, C. Häfner, M. & de Wit, J., (2012), Sizing Opportunity: Biases in Estimates of Goal-Relevant Objects Depend on Goal Congruence, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4, 362-368.

Dai, X. & Hsee, C.K. (2013), Wish Versus Worry: Ownership Effects on Motivated Judgement, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50, 207-215.

## Theses Based on This Topic

*The Effect of Stress: How Biases in Visual Perception Predict Candy Consumption*  
—Melina Dürr



### *Abstract*

Although people assume that they see their surrounding environment the way it really is, a substantial amount of evidence shows that visual perception is influenced by internal psychological states. An abundance of research has explored the effect of motivational states on visual perception like size or distance estimates. However, a direct link between perception and behavior has only been demonstrated in very few cases. Previous research has shown that under circumstances that foster the impulsive system, visual perception is linked to behavior. For the present study, 103 undergraduate university students were recruited to test whether this relationship depends on the interplay of two behavioral processes (reflective system vs. impulsive system). I expected to find a relationship when the relative influence of the impulsive system on behavior is enhanced by a stressful situation. I tested the effect of feelings of hunger on the participants' estimates of the amount of chocolate candy and also probed the link between the amount estimated and the amount of candy consumed for participants who were stressed by the Sing-a-Song Stress Test (impulsive system) and for participants who stayed in a neutral control condition (reflective system). Contrary to the prediction, participants in the stress condition did not perceive a significantly larger amount of candy than participants in the neutral condition. Although a significant positive relationship between perception and behavior was found, participants' stress level had no influence on this effect. Overall, the findings show that there exists a significant dynamic between perception and behavior, but whether or not it depends on the interplay of the two behavioral processes could not be demonstrated in the present study.

### *Influence of Attitude on Size Perception of Objects related to Motivational States* —Kevin Stauffer

### *Abstract*

Previous research has shown that people unconsciously perceive the size of objects related to their motivational states in a goal congruent way. Thus, hungry people should perceive the size of a cereal bar as larger than if they were not hungry. However, I hypothesized that if people have a negative attitude towards an object related to their motivational states, they will unconsciously perceive the size of this object in a goal non-congruent direction to avoid undesired and possible negative consequences (worryful thinking). In contrast, if people have a positive attitude, they will unconsciously perceive the size of this object in a desired and goal congruent direction (wishful thinking). In the presented experiment, participants with a high need to eat and a negative attitude towards genetically modified food estimated the length of a genetically modified cereal bar as significantly shorter, relative to participants with a low need to eat. However, participants in the positive attitude manipulation group with a high need to eat didn't estimate the length of the cereal bar as significantly longer, relative to participants with a low need to eat, probably

because they still reported a negative attitude towards genetically modified food. The results of the presented experiment suggest that people's attitudes play an important role in the process of motivation and visual perception.

### *Influence of Success on Size Perception* —Cyrill Biemann

#### *Abstract*

A couple of experiments show that success in sports influences size perception of goal relevant objects. They observe that successful athletes perceive their environment in a goal congruent direction. Based on these findings, for example a CAN should be perceived as bigger to successful CAN smashers than to people that are less successful. This study tries to show this effect by manipulating success. In a throwing experiment participants are made winning or losing by playing against an invented opponent. I hypothesize that participants that were made successful perceive goal relevant objects in a goal-congruent size and participants that were made unsuccessful in a goal incongruent size. However, the experiment fails at showing any effect of success or unsuccess on size perception of goal relevant objects or on spatial layout perception.

### **Why do Irrelevant Options Affect Choices between Relevant Options?**

Not all of our decisions are as logically consistent as they should be. Take the following example: A person is shopping for some new sunglasses and they have a choice between X: a low quality pair for 20 francs, and Y: a high quality pair for 100 francs. A third option, Z: a medium quality pair for 100 francs, is an irrelevant alternative, as it is clearly dominated by option Y (worse quality, same price), but it surprisingly has the effect of increasing the likelihood they will spend their money on option Y. This robust effect violates one of the fundamental axioms of Expected Utility Theory and ideas of rational choice.

The effect has led to the categorization of a number of different violations of rational choice (effects which include decoy/attraction, compromise, similarity and phantom decoy) which may or may not be related. Recent studies have suggested that the effect may emerge only work for numerical attributes but others suggest that this is a universal phenomenon, being observed in animals too. There are few theories on why these effects occur, but it remains one of the most significant and important experimental findings from marketing and an interesting topic to study, with lots of possible projects to explore.

This thesis will be about attempting to further our understanding about the possible causes and scope of these strange influences that cause apparent mistakes in our decision making.

Frederick, S., Lee, L. & Baskin E., (2014), The Limits of Attraction, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 51, 487-507.

Shen, A. & Liu, S. (2016), Asymmetric Dominance and the Stability of Constructed Preferences, *Judgement and Decision Making*, 11, 213-222.

Simonson, I, (1989), Choice Based on Reasons: The Case of Attraction and Compromise Effects, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16, 158-174.

## Theses Based on This Topic

*Drivers of the Attraction Effect: Number of Attribute Dimensions and Stimuli Description*  
—Jonas Pfefferle

### *Abstract*

The attraction effect (AE) is one of the most researched context effects. However, its robustness has recently been questioned. Frederick, Lee, and Baskin (2014) found that using pictorial or verbal stimuli instead of numeric stimuli eliminates the AE. This thesis investigated the mitigating role of additional attribute dimensions on the AE. In typical experiments, numeric descriptions provide information on only two attribute dimensions (e.g. window view rating = 87/100 and floor space = 530 ft. of an apartment). This shortage of information, according to the hypothesis of this paper, leads to a high degree of uncertainty about the right decision. Participants try to reduce the uncertainty by utilizing the (misleading) decoy as additional information. However, pictorial/verbal descriptions incorporate multiple attribute dimensions which reduces the influence of the decoy and allows making a more certain decision (e.g. assessing air/noise pollution from a picture of the actual window view). It was argued that this is independent of the type of stimuli description. An online experiment was conducted with 480 US-based participants recruited via Amazon MTurk. Number of available attribute dimensions were varied in both, numeric and pictorial/verbal settings. Analyzing choice shares and performing a logistic regression, the results are four-fold. First, the AE was found for both, two-dimensional and multidimensional settings, rejecting the hypothesis. Second, it was confirmed that stimuli description does not mitigate the AE. Third, uncertainty was found to play a key role. Fourth, high-quality products gain choice share when described pictorially/verbally instead of numerically. The results show that the AE can emerge with realistic stimuli, but choice shares differ from their numeric counterparts. However, the data quality was questionable, attenuating the meaningfulness of the results. It is argued that participants rushed through the task, optimizing hourly earnings. A modified experimental design is suggested and theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

*The Attraction Effect With Perceptual Stimuli*  
—Jérôme Schwarz

### Abstract

This paper explores the conditions required to find an attraction effect with perceptual stimuli in high-level decision tasks, such as gambles. The attraction effect refers to “...instances in which the addition of an inferior option to a choice set (a decoy brand) increases the choice share of the option it most closely resembles” (Frederick, Lee, & Baskin 2014, p. 487). While it has been widely demonstrated in experiments using stylized stimuli (e.g., product attributes only represented by numeric values), its existence with perceptual stimuli or in real-world settings has been subject to debate.

Three hundred respondents from TurkPrime.com participated in a hypothetical game of chance represented by stimuli featuring two attributes, money and probability of winning, both represented perceptually. A robust attraction effect was found between counterbalanced three-option choice sets, each including a decoy inferior to a different core option.

### Identifying Opposite Emotions

Brands and consumer products often evoke certain emotions such as joy (e.g., from driving a car) or sensory pleasure (e.g., pleasure associated with tasty food).

Some emotion pairs may be considered opposites of each other, e.g., joy and sadness. Notice that one emotion being positive, the other negative is not enough for a pair of emotions to be opposites. For instance pride and anger are not opposites of each other even though one of them, i.e., pride, is usually considered positive whereas the other, i.e., anger, negative. Similarly, fear and trust are not opposites even though one of them is positive, the other negative. It is important to understand the structure of emotions because brands often find themselves associated with negative emotions and opposite emotions may play a special role in reversing the negative effects of these associations. 3

Previous research has identified some emotion pairs as opposites, e.g., joy-sadness, disgust-sensory pleasure. Your task is to identify another pair of emotions that are opposites of each other. Develop your hypothesis based on previous research and propose an experiment to test whether the emotions you suggest are indeed opposites of each other.

Rolls, E. T. (2005). *Emotion explained*. Oxford University Press, USA. (Ch 2: The nature of emotion)

Clore, G. L., & Ortony, A. (2000). Cognition in emotion: Always, Sometimes, or Never (pp. 24-61), *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion*, eds. Lane, R. & Lynn, N., Oxford University Press.

Ortony, A., Clore, G. L., & Collins, A. (1990). *The cognitive structure of emotions*. Cambridge University press.

## Brand Image Crises and Centrality of Goals to Brands

Brands often suffer from mishaps. Recent examples include Pepsi's withdrawn ad campaign that was accused of trivializing political dissent, and United Airline's handling of a passenger who refused to give up his seat on an overbooked flight. A challenge in those cases is to predict the damage that those issues would inflict on the brand. Seemingly similar offences can lead to severe damage or virtually no damage at all. How do people judge the damage that a brand would suffer after a mishap? How accurate are these judgments?

Customers care about brands because brands often help them achieve their goals or fulfil their needs. The main goal that a brand serves for most of their customers, however, may not be something people spontaneously consider. In this thesis you are meant to explore the relationship between a central goal for a brand and the amount of damage it suffers from a mishap. If there is a relationship, are observers aware of it? How can we assess if a goal is central for a brand? Knowing answers could help brands assess the magnitude of damage that a mishap may have.

Cropanzano, R., James, K., & Citera, M. (1993). A goal hierarchy model of personality, motivation, and leadership. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 15, 267-267.

Dawar, N., & Pillutla, M.M. (2000). Impact of product-harm crises on brand equity: The moderating role of consumer expectations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37, 215-226.

## The Desire for Money

Money is a strong motivator, and a uniquely human phenomenon. People strive to have money. In this thesis you will explore the psychological basis of the desire for money. People can convert money to goods and services, but does that entirely explain people's drive for money? Are there fundamental social-psychological needs that money helps fulfil?

Since there are probably several such needs, your proposal can concentrate on only one of them, e.g., power. Power is a positive feeling state associated with having an influence over other people. Your thesis may explore power as a goal that underlies the desire for money. Money has different functions such as being a store of value (saving) and serving an exchange function (spending). Consider the possibility that saving and spending could serve different psychological needs. In other words, an underlying goal such as having power might increase the desire for saving but not spending.

Lea, S. E., & Webley, P. (2006). Money as tool, money as drug: The biological psychology of a strong incentive. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 29, 161-209.

Mead, N. L., & Stuppy, A. (2014). Two sides of the same coin: Money can promote and hinder interpersonal processes. In *The Psychological Science of Money* (pp. 243-262). Springer New York.

## Theses Based on This Topic

### *Desire for Money: How Power and Status Needs Influence Financial Behavior* —Meike Kakas

#### *Abstract*

Money is a major element in people's life as it serves the purpose of fulfilling needs. This thesis investigates whether experimentally activated needs for power (exerting control) and status (being admired by others) increase the desire for money in order to satisfy these needs. In particular, it is hypothesized that the need for power increases the desire to save more than the desire to spend and, by contrast, the need for status increases the desire to spend more than the desire to save money. Three measures involving 152 US residents revealed that individuals with a power or status need do not differ from baseline participants in their desire to spend or save. This finding provides a first step towards an understanding of psychological needs in the context of financial desires.

### **Implicitly Measuring Brand Attitudes**

Marketers and researchers are often interested in learning people's attitudes toward brands, i.e., how positively or negatively people regard particular brands. Although directly asking people is one solution to the problem, it has some drawbacks. People may conceal their true attitudes, or the things they remember at the moment may influence their answer while they do not have access to their own inner attitudes. How can one measure people's implicitly held brand attitudes without asking them direct questions?

Your thesis will develop and test an implicit brand attitude measure. A potentially fruitful area to explore is the affect misattribution paradigm. In this paradigm, people evaluate unrelated objects, such as characters from the Chinese script immediately after considering an object that the researcher is interested in such as a brand. People's evaluation of the unrelated objects is unintentionally influenced by how they feel about the object of interest. Therefore the evaluation of the unrelated object serves as an implicit measure of the object of interest.

Payne, B. K., Cheng, C. M., Govorun, O., & Stewart, B. D. (2005), An inkblot for attitudes: affect misattribution as implicit measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 277.

Fazio, R. H., Jackson, J. R., Dunton, B. C., & Williams, C. J. (1995), Variability in automatic activation as an unobtrusive measure of racial attitudes: A bona fide pipeline?, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 1013-1027.

Ferguson, M. J., & Bargh, J. A. (2007), Beyond the attitude object: Automatic attitudes spring from object-centered-contexts, (pp. 216-246), In *Implicit Measures of Attitudes*, eds. Wittenbrink, B. & Schwarz, N., The Guildford Press, NY.

## Theses Based on This Topic

### *Implicitly Measuring Brand Attitudes –*

*What Is a Good Implicit Measure and What Can Be Captured with This Measure Compared to an Explicit One?*

—Kristina Gött

#### *Abstract*

How are attitudes formed and how do they change? How can one measure and assess attitudes, especially implicitly held ones? And can people's implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) attitudes diverge?

In an attempt to deal with these questions an experiment was conducted, where participants were provided with either positive or negative information about four different brands. However, with some delay the information provided about two of the brands turned out to be false. Subsequently, participants' attitudes toward all four brands were examined using both an explicit and a new implicit attitude measure.

Results from this experiment provide evidence for the fact that people's implicit and explicit attitudes can diverge from each other and may therefore capture something different.

### **Fake News**

There has been recent interest in the phenomenon of fake news, especially in the context of fabricated stories about politicians. But brands also suffer from fake news as McDonalds did when the false claim that the fast food chain used worms in their meat widely circulated. Are people influenced by these stories even after they are presented with information that debunks the news? If so, what makes people vulnerable to being influenced by fake news and how should the target of the fake news respond?

Your thesis may explore the idea that a negative emotional residue is left in people's minds even after they learn that the news was fake. If that is true, arguing against the fake news may be ineffective because the problem is not reasoning but emotions. Consequently, presenting people an emotional appeal that attempts to create the opposite emotional associations might work better, and your thesis may test this possibility.

Ortony, A., Clore, G. L., & Collins, A. (1990), *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press.

Rolls, E. T. (2005), *Emotion Explained*, Oxford University Press, USA.

Tybout, A. M., Calder, B. J., & Sternthal, B. (1981). Using information processing theory to design marketing strategies, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18, 73-79