M.S. Advertising Projects (ADV598 – 6 credits)
The Professional Project is the culmination of the master’s degree in advertising. A project is required unless a student has received permission from the department to write a thesis. The project is designed to allow the student to demonstrate his/her mastery of advertising, focused on brand, strategy, creative, or media, as well as provide a quality tool to assist in gaining industry employment. The final product must reveal competency in whatever medium of expression the student chooses. Dr. Michelle Nelson has supervised these projects with assistance from other faculty who advised students in method or content areas. Below you will find the students’ names and abstracts of their projects.


This research assesses the impacts of communications technology on military deployments. Previous research associates a service member’s communication with families back home as a way to increase morale and maintain positive emotional well-being while deployed. While this research supports that idea, negative impacts from this communication also arise, such as miscommunication between loved ones, breeches of operational security, and distraction. By honing in on three key areas: the service member, the unit representative, and the spouse, a qualitative analysis of 10 in-depth interviews was conducted. Concepts and events such as “protective buffering” and “River City” are also investigated. The goal of this research was to determine the positive and negative effects of having more convenient access between service members on deployment and their spouses back home, and identify any materials that are available to help families manage communications expectations during the deployment cycle. The findings supported that there are both positive and negative consequences to this increased access to communication, and education during pre-deployment will help during deployment. Based on the findings, a “best practices guide” was developed, with the purpose of educating service members and their families on what to expect before, during, and after deployment.

2. Xuedan (Crystal) Chen, “Not That Complicated: How College Students Use Multiple Social Media?”

Social media is a big issue nowadays. Previous research showed that people tended to employ a range of tools for communication and social media usage can be explained by motivations under the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Besides, geographic movement affected people’s social media usage. This pilot research used qualitative methods (interview and focus group) to explore college students’ social media usage, the underlying motivations and the effects of geographic movements. Research found that college students used multiple(1-5) social media platforms, but they were just active on one or two channels and Facebook and Twitter were most people’s priorities; they had different activities which fell into different ladder of user classifications and interacted with different people though there was a small overlap across different social media platforms; social-needs, self-image building, professional purposes and diverse information seeking were categorized as the main four motivations of multiple social media usage. And, geographic movements didn’t significantly influence people’s social media usage except for Chinese international students. Implications for practitioners and future research were also made.
3. Yangyaoxi He, “Exploring Viral Videos with the Content of Branded Entertainment on YouTube”

With increasing number of brands producing web videos to add in their digital entertainment properties, branded entertainment is rising on YouTube, one of the most important entertaining platforms nowadays. Some branded entertaining clips went viral and turned out to be great success, making companies more interested about investing in them. However, concerns about advertising with branded entertaining videos remain, since their effectiveness and what contribute to their viral success remain uncertain. This study intends to find consumers’ experience, reactions and expectations towards the branded entertaining videos. In order to better explore their advertising potential, the researcher want to know what makes the audience watch and share these videos and how these videos influence their perceptions about the brands or products. Five representative viral videos with the content of branded entertainment are selected and the comments on them are analyzed. 10 semi-structured interviews are also conducted to generate in-depth data. The results indicate some certain patterns that contribute to viral success. And increasing brand awareness and likeness are found to be the major influences of branded entertaining videos in this study. Based on these findings, suggestions are made about how to strategically using branded entertaining videos to advertise on YouTube.


Sonic branding, also known as acoustic or sound branding, has been introduced as a new strategy to the realm of branding. Although the concept of sonic branding is relatively new to the industry, the application of music or special sound effects in commercials are very common. Focus groups were used to explore the underlying similarities or differences from a cross-cultural perspective. Participants from Western (Europe and North America) and Asian cultural backgrounds listened to two music excerpts of Asian classical and Western classical, followed by a blind test of four sonic logos. They were asked to picture the music excerpts in their minds, to write down or draw out their thoughts, to identify the four sonic logos, and to select and discuss their favorite ones. Comparisons among the four groups have revealed valuable insights into participants’ perceptions of music. Although there are cross-cultural differences and similarities, the differences and similarities are somewhat ambiguous. The results are generally inclined to support the notion that people’s interpretations of music are largely grounded by their native cultures. Furthermore, this study also suggests that people’s understanding of music could be very different, even if their affective responses are similar. The primary target audience for this professional project is practitioners from the branding industry, such as branding strategists, branding consultants, or creative directors that have a specific focus on the use of music to build brand identities. As sonic or acoustic cues have been widely used as attention-gathering tools in multisensory marketing, this project will also touch on best practices of sonic branding.


Food-related behavior is an essential part of any culture and it will change accordingly with an individual moving to a new culture. This article explores food acculturation process of Chinese sojourners studying in the United States. Interviews and accompanied shopping were conducted with 7 Chinese graduate students, including both newly arrived and returning students. Verbatim transcripts and field notes were analyzed using qualitative coding methods. A conceptual grocery shopping decisions model is developed through a cross-case comparison and concept mapping. By drawing attention to the ways in which Chinese graduate students prepare their daily meals, participate in food-oriented social activities and make grocery store food choice decisions, this research depicts the dynamic changing process through which sojourners maintain the tradition, absorb new skills and adapt to American consumption culture. The findings suggest targeting strategy for marketers and activity design for educational institutions.

6. Jason Nesbitt, “Getting Ripped or Getting Ripped Off: A Look At the Use and Effects of Disclaimers on Dietary Supplements”

This project will look at what influence disclaimers have on consumers’ perceptions of the product’s claims and effectiveness. This project will use in-depth interviews with participants with prior exercise and dietary supplement experience. The interviews will be used to determine how disclaimers can change potential consumer’s views within the realm of the dietary supplement industry. However, findings may be applicable to other industries and product categories that include disclaimers with a product as well. Ultimately, the end product will be a best-practices guide with the use of disclaimers relating to dietary supplements. Again, the content in this best-practices guide may find to be applicable to other industries as well, increasing the scope of this project.

Location-based advertising (LBA), which is currently boosting in the U.S., has just taken off in Chinese market. The quantum leap in this innovative industry is largely contributed by the recent popularity of wireless technology and portable Internet devices, such as smart phones and tablet computers. The aim of this project is to analyze Chinese customers’ adoption of previous wireless tech based devices and services and to compare American and Chinese customers’ usage and behavior of Location-based Advertising services. Twenty in-depth interviews (10 with Chinese, 10 with American) have been made in this study. Both U.S. and Chinese consumers’ usage and concerns of adopting LBA services are discovered and both group use location-based services for entertainment and social connection. The results also demonstrated that the in-group influence was the most significant factor in affecting Chinese consumers adoption of devices and applications. Moreover, the U.S. and Chinese people showed significant difference in using LBA services to acquire information under problem solving condition. According to the findings, this study moved further in providing suggestions and recommendations for future Chinese LBA developers and advertisers in terms of developing and promoting LBA in Chinese market. Undiscovered potential opportunities for LBA are discussed as well.


This project set out to explore the role that product aesthetics play in terms of spreading Word of Mouth (WOM). “The term product aesthetics refers to the visual appearance of a product, following criteria such as symmetry, color, texture and clarity.” In general, it was hypothesized that individuals will be more likely to spread WOM about products that are high in aesthetics, as compared to products that are low in aesthetics. Additionally, there was a focus on electronic devices, to find out whether product aesthetics is an important factor to share WOM as compared to other design features. Since the research was exploratory in nature, survey methodology was used where the survey link was shared through social networking sites. The results indicated that people are likely to share information about a product that is aesthetically pleasing but aesthetics is not as important when it comes to electronic devices. For electronic devices, functionality was the main reason to share about it through WOM. Implications and limitations are provided in the paper along with suggestions for future research.


When mentioning the Asian American market, it is not surprising to hear some complaints, such as “The size is too small,” “There are too many languages to deal with” or “They are too hard to reach by mass media” (Kumaki, and Moran, 2010). However, truths are far beyond that. Being titled a “model minority” (Taylor and Stern, 1997), highly educated Asian Americans have huge spending power; therefore, the Asian American market is an attractive target to every marketer. In this paper I conduct focus groups to explore appropriate advertising practices for this segmentation. Asian American millennials are different from their parent immigrant generation. Adopting bicultural identities, Asian Americans are seeking for recognition from advertisers that they are part of this country. Speaking of advertising content, English is preferred language, and stereotypical Asian images are not favorable for Asian American millennials. Creative and fun commercials are what Asian American looking for.

10. Xinran (Effie) Zhao, “A Cultural Comparison of In-game Advertising on Social Networks”

In-game ads have been studied for years as the video game industry grows tremendously. As a promising area for advertising, research has explored the effectiveness of in-game ads, but the introduction of Facebook and its third party application creates a brand new type of gaming experience: social network games, which represents a more casual gaming experience. The easy-going and less intense games swept the world, providing an even bigger chance for advertisers to engage their consumers. Not only should different gaming experiences be considered when implementing in-game ad campaigns, with the ambition to expand the brands globally, the understanding of cultures is equally important. This article is a qualitative study that aimed at acquiring an understanding of consumers from both western and eastern cultures. Based on a thorough literature review on existing work of in-game product placement, social networks and cultural comparison, netnography and individual interviews were conducted and the results show both similarities and differences of American and Chinese players in regard of their purpose of using social network, their gaming behaviors and their attitudes towards ads in general as well as specific ad genres.
M.S. Theses (ADV599)

Students who anticipate entering a doctoral program as well as some who may wish to pursue a career in research may find the thesis option to be a preferred choice. A thesis will serve as better preparation for most Ph.D. programs and may be required or preferred for admission to some doctoral programs. In the second semester of their graduate degree, students must complete a petition and proposal for review by members of the advertising graduate faculty. Below you will find three students completing their thesis by May 2013.

1. Enrique Carmona Cortes, “Collateral Damage: The Impact Of In-Language Spanish Advertising Among Mono-Lingual English Speakers”; Adviser: Dr. Brittany Duff

The US Hispanic population has grown both in numbers and influence to the point where marketers recognize the advantages of capturing them as loyal consumers. Because of this, companies are increasingly spending large sums of money trying to target specific consumer minorities. While the effectiveness of ethnic-targeted advertising (such as the use of in-language advertising) among relevant minority markets is well accepted, there is an implicit belief in the industry that “non-targeted” markets are likely to just “ignore” a message that is not aimed at them. Past research has provided the support for two theoretical bodies of knowledge: Brand Personality in Self-Image and Culture/Ethnicity in In-group Recognition. Together, these two concepts support the possibility that ethnic-targeted advertising (through its extensive use of out-group cues) may in fact disturb existing relationships of self-categorization between brands and mono-linguistic Anglo-Americans. The present study seeks to help determine whether the use of an unspoken, foreign language (such as in the case of in-language ads) can serve as an out-group categorization cue for a brand, thereby resulting in “out-group” associated behaviors (such as negative brand attitudes and decreased brand-self identification). In other words: are we running the risk of alienating the majority in our efforts to better reach a minority?

2. Yoojin (Gina) Song, “The Role of Expectation in Psychological Reactance in an Advertising Context”; Adviser: Dr. Brittany Duff

Many people watch TV contents online or with DVR nowadays, giving viewers more control over ads. My thesis hypothesizes that having control over ads in the middle of TV shows increases viewers’ expectation of a freedom to watch TV without ad interruptions, compared to having no control. It also posits that the increased expectation of freedom will consequently lead to greater reactance and willingness to restore that freedom. A pretest and an experiment will be conducted, which shows participants Modern Family episodes with ads inserted every 4 minute. The two conditions in the experiment will be the same except that in one condition participants can skip the ad, whereas in another condition they cannot. The expected result is that the participants in the skipping condition would have greater reactance and willingness to restore freedom to watch TV without ad interruptions, compared to not-skipping condition. It emphasizes the role that expectation of freedom plays in reactance, which is under conceptualized in the literature, and provides ideas on how to reduce viewers’ reactance towards ads in the middle of TV shows.


Advertising avoidance has long been considered as an active elimination of ad effect after conscious processing. However, recent research demonstrates that ignoring (passive avoidance) is also a common strategy used by internet viewers when they encounter a distracting ad. The act of ignoring due largely to our limited processing capacity (Lang, 2000) induces unconscious processing of ads, which are found to negatively affect subsequent evaluation of these ads. This process is named “distractor devaluation” in both cognitive psychology (Fenske & Raymond, 2006) and advertising research (Duff & Faber, 2011). Although recent research has focused on the influence of task-distractor similarity, task-distractor distance and task difficulty on distractor devaluation (Duff & Faber, 2011), a potential factor, task load, is still under exploration. This research aims at examining how different task loads influence distractor devaluation by using internet games to represent a typical task that involves perceptual and cognitive load.