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.


Since Time Magazine named Kickstarter as one of the 50 Best Inventions in 2010, this online crowdfunding website has already successfully funded 52,583 creative projects. However, the underlying experiences among Kickstarter backers have not been fully explored and understood. Thus, this research aims at understanding the process and decision-making factors among backers for making a pledge on Kickstarter. The researcher conducted 8 in-depth interviews of Kickstarter backers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and found that Kickstarter is a place to spread innovation and it treats its backers as early customers. Findings suggest that Kickstarter backers are different from the ‘crowd’ (mainstream customer) - they are novelty-seeking, they love innovation and they are more open to experiences. In sum, the researcher found that making a pledge is an alternative way for new product adoption and the consumer’s role has changed under the context of Kickstarter.

2. Muyao (Summer) Guo: “Attitudes Toward and Effectiveness of Augmented Reality Advertising Based on Mobile Devices Among Chinese Users”

Augmented reality (AR) is an innovative technology used in the advertising industry with higher requirements for equipment. AR advertising is increasingly put into practical use especially in the United States due to its high technical support and prosperous economic conditions. However, in China, which has lower economic levels and less technical development, it is hard to directly copy the AR strategy from the U.S. market. This project is specifically designed to test the effectiveness of and attitude towards augmented reality advertising in the Chinese market by conducting a recall test of AR Advertising. The differences in recall performance between two groups: participants viewing a print ad and those interacting with AR app, are compared. The results indicate the potential effectiveness of AR Advertising in the Chinese market. Furthermore, suggestions are given on using AR Advertising in the Chinese market and how to focus on this target group.
3. Yao (Grace) Hou: “The Role of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Social Network Sites in the Relationship between Fast-Fashion Brands and Young Consumers”

In Web2.0 era, social networking sites (SNS) become an indispensable part of daily life and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on those sites has influential impact, which should be valued by companies and brands. Additionally, the brand-consumer relationship is the core of relationship marketing developed recently, the strategy that has received more and more attention. Previous studies failed to comprehend eWOM’s role in developing brand-consumer relationships. Specifically, this study focused on eWOM on SNS and brand-consumer relationship between fast fashion brands and young consumers. This study delved into the role of eWOM in developing brand-consumer relationships from a qualitative perspective by conducting netnography and face-to-face interviews. Findings demonstrated that eWOM on SNS was effective in building, maintaining, and enhancing brand-consumer relationships between fast fashion brands and young consumers in terms of three dimensions-brand expression, mutual communication, and emotional exchange. Also, implications to optimize the impact were provided for fast-fashion brands.


Mobile-first has been the most discussed marketing topic in 2013. Over years after the start of mobile marketing, academia and industry have all been discussing the significance of mobile in marketing. Both sides provide insightful findings; however, a bridge bringing all these valuable pieces together is still missing. Is there a framework that serves as the bridge, which is practical in use but still makes the most of what academics have contributed in the same field? The purpose of this project is to consolidate the essence from both ends and provide a framework for marketing practitioners to rethink how ‘mobile’ they should go while building their marketing strategy. To extract the needed pieces, this project reviews over 40 academic studies and 50 industry articles about mobile marketing. STP marketing process (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) is used as the groundwork and a new framework, CSSPP, for this mobile-first age is proposed.

5. Ruiyun Hu: “Known brand or Unknown Brand? The Influences of Brand Familiarity on Advergame Effectiveness”

Advergames are increasingly used by companies as their marketing strategy. To investigate whether advergames are more suitable to enhance brand impressions or build awareness of products that are new to a target audience, this study examined the relationship between brand familiarity and the advergame’s effectiveness in the short-term and long-term. A one-month long study was conducted to statistically test and compare the effectiveness of the advergame for a known brand and an unknown brand. Also, the study made comparison between the results of long-term effectiveness and short-term effectiveness. The results suggested that the game players perceived significantly greater brand recall, brand attitude and purchase intention for the familiar brand in the long-term. The study reached a conclusion that advergames may work more effectively for brands that are already known to the consumers than brands that are new to them in some ways. The study results have both theoretical and practical implications.

6. Zhiyue (Travis) Hu: “Improving Consumers’ Online Apparel Shopping by Applying a Hypothesis eBay Apparel Searching Model”

This research focused on exploring consumers’ search habits related to their apparel shopping behavior on the Internet. It aims to find out the factors that could impact people’s apparel shopping experience during the search process. A fictitious eBay apparel searching model has been applied in this research to gauge people’s acceptability of different kinds of searching processes. Online survey and individual interviews were used to generate consumer insights. The findings suggest that consumers prefer a simpler search process than a more informational style when shopping for apparel online. Besides, they are willing to use the eBay apparel searching model for it could simplify the apparel search process while providing a much wider range of products. And their chances of shopping on eBay (through the apparel searching model) increased significantly even though it did not change their negative attitudes towards eBay. Recommendations are provided for apparel retail websites based on the findings.
7. Ningzi (Liz) Li: “Please Retweet! Marketers’ Twitter Use and Consumers’ Engagement”

Among social media platforms, Twitter has its unique advantages and special features, enabling social interaction that is more dynamic and less time-consuming. Marketers make great efforts to build connection and relationships with consumers through Twitter, yet academic research addressing the marketing use of Twitter has been scarce. This study undertakes an exploratory content analysis, focusing on how marketers’ Twitter use can influence consumers’ engagement rate. Five hundred tweets related to 50 global brands from September 30th to October 31st 2013 are analyzed. The findings indicate that by attributing human characteristics to brands through conversations and interactions on Twitter, marketers can animate and humanize their brands. In addition, providing a variety of types of information can also elevate the status of the brand from a passive object to a full-fledged relationship partner. Overall, marketers should try to shape and increase consumer brand knowledge using cohesive messages in the context of Twitter.

8. Qiong (Emma) Li: “How Do You Interpret Consumer’s Perception of Luxury? Understanding Luxury Purchasing Behaviors of International Students”

Luxury consumption is growing rapidly in recent years. Meanwhile, more and more students choose to study abroad. These students are the potential targets of luxury in the future because of their economic and educational background; their current peers are more independent and wealthy compared with those in China; they live in a more open culture in the United States. These facts may cause changes in their luxury perceptions and behaviors. What are roles that culture and social power play in their perceptions of luxury purchasing? For this paper I interviewed 10 Chinese students studying overseas and found that people from this collective culture appear to be more easily influenced by their peers in various ways. Their perceptions of luxury varied depending on who is the consumer. Also, over-exposure to some brands such as Coach and Calvin Klein has impaired the brand images in these consumers’ minds. The culture of the United States reshaped their luxury consumption.

9. Weiyi (Will) Li: “Of the People, By the People, and For the People: Re-thinking the City Branding Communications of Shijiazhuang, China”

This study identified the communication gap of current branding activities in a second-tier city called Shijiazhuang, China. Though place branding has drawn significant attention today, second-tier cities in China have been largely left out of focus. Yet, city branding activities in China’s second-tier cities still have a lot to be improved in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. The research put the focus on the problems of current branding efforts from the aspects of the general mechanism, core message and target audience. A typical second-tier city, Shijiazhuang, was used as an example. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted to make comparisons with findings through web ethnography in order to examine the hidden problems. The study indicated several problems in Shijiazhuang’s city branding case and offered practical applications for the strategists to optimize communication approaches for the city.

10. Gabriela (Bobby) Nicolescu: “In the Beginning Was the Word” – Design Characteristics of Viral Christian Imagery”

The present study investigated the graphic design characteristics of Christian imagery that recorded the most interaction on the social network Pinterest within a given timeframe. An emergent, exploratory, qualitative model, the study analyzed elements such as image shape and size, human, landscape, or text content, focal point, chromatics, and conveyed emotion, in order to observe whether certain design techniques correlated with higher numbers of repins and likes, the network’s virality indices. Findings reveal clear trends for almost all analyzed elements, which means that certain graphic styles are clearly preferred by most users following religious topics. Overall, images in which text—often not from the Bible—is the dominant element were the most popular. Consequently, the findings of this project will help parishes, religious organizations, and individual Christians optimize the graphic content they create on the web, in order to appeal to increasing numbers of people.
Advertising is a force of abundance that is ever present in society today. The use of celebrity endorsements is thriving more than ever. Generally, the types of celebrities that are used to endorse products range from movie stars to athletes and more. This research assesses factors that influence people’s perceptions of celebrity endorsements. Previous work highlighted the roles of brand image, credibility, multiple endorsements, social influence, two sided effects, identification, internalization, attractiveness, and attention in regards to the relationship between a celebrity endorsement and the consumer. Using two methods of research: interviews and focus groups, a qualitative inductive approach is used to determine college students’ perceptions of celebrity endorsements. This study confirms past literature, and also allows for new themes to emerge. In general, using celebrities to endorse products is beneficial. In turn, both the advertising industry and companies who use celebrities as endorsers can benefit from this study.

12. Xin Xin (Starcy) Shi: “Selling Skincare Products to Chinese Women: Impact of Monetary Promotion, Buying Impulsiveness and Consumer Involvement on Impulse Buying Behavior”

This research investigates how immediate and delayed monetary promotion, buying impulsiveness and consumer involvement might affect Chinese female consumers’ impulse purchasing of skincare products. Using a real online store as shopping environment, a field experiment was conducted. The researcher manipulated the experiment product and promotion tools. An electronic survey measuring buying impulsiveness and consumer involvement was administered to a sample of 109 Chinese female participants between 18 and 34 years old. Additionally, subjects’ purchases were examined based on the sales records. The results showed that both of the two promotion tools were effective to stimulate impulse buying; however, there was no significant difference between them. Moreover, neither buying impulsiveness nor consumer involvement was found to have significant influences on participants’ impulse buying. Finally, buying impulsiveness was positively correlated with consumer involvement. The results show the vital role of sales promotion for skincare brands to expand market share in China.

13. Sarah Trapani: “What is a Facebook ‘Like’ Anyway? How Students Interact with Brands on Facebook”

Brands and agencies are always considering integrating social media into advertising campaigns. Many brands have begun using social media, especially Facebook. Previous research provides ideas of how brands should attempt to reach targets, but research fails to address if Facebook presence and interaction with customers actually works. The following research attempts to answer the question of how much the consumer values Facebook brand presence for the different product categories of household products, clothing and accessories, and mobile phones through an online survey. The research confirmed that people interact differently with each of the product categories on Facebook. Interacting with consumers on Facebook is not as simple as constantly pushing messages to users or as simple as getting a “like.” The meaning of the Facebook “like” is vague to advertisers and to Facebook users. In the ever-changing world of advertising and social media does the Facebook “like” mean anything?


“Well, I never used the brand in China, before I came to the US.” It has been a shocking yet interesting phenomenon that many Asian people who speak Mandarin flood into luxury shops in western countries, grab a dozen items (probably on sale) and rush to the cashier’s counter. You may be quite surprised when you hear some of them say they’ve never used such products before they come abroad. This research attempts to gain a good understanding of how the Chinese oversea consumers experience the brands that are available both in the US and in their home country. The academic literature of the brand experience construct is reviewed, and a study of 10 interviews with 10 Chinese consumers in the US is conducted. The analysis shows this group of consumers tend to be extremely price-sensitive, and may have different thoughts on the fact that the same brands were sold at different prices in both countries. Besides, four prototypes of Chinese oversea consumers were identified.

Black Friday shopping has become a must-do activity in the post-Thanksgiving celebration for Americans. Single’s Day is no longer for singles only, but an online shopping day for everyone in China. As a global medium, the Internet is gathering more and more businesses and consumers without time and geographical limits. Based on Zhou, Dai, and Zhang’s (2007) Online Shopping Acceptance Model, this research investigates the impact of cultural differences on online shopping intentions of American and Chinese online shoppers. Data were collected from 123 American and 79 Chinese university students through online self-administered questionnaires. The results indicate that these two groups scored differently on perceived outcomes and shopping orientations. Moreover, normative norms significantly impacted the intention to shop online for both groups. Marketing and advertising implications are discussed based on the findings.

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 2014.

1. Regina Ahn: "Would Hulu's Choice be Better for You? Impact of Ad Choice and Product Involvement on Psychological Reactance, Attitudes, and Purchase Intentions" (Advisor: Dr. Chang Dae Ham)

Today, consumers negatively respond to online video ads and try to intentionally avoid them. While advertisers have struggled with ad avoidance, Hulu, a website offering ad-supported videos of TV shows, movies, and other new media clips, has started providing “Ad Swap” that allows viewers to choose any ad they want among options. After launching its new ad format, Hulu research team has shown effectiveness of “Ad Swap” in terms of brand attitudes and brand familiarity. However, it is still doubtful whether it mitigates one’s reactance and enhances consumers’ online video experiences. Moreover, it is little known that involvement of advertised product reduces one’s reactance, and therefore positively impacts attitudes and purchase intentions. Therefore, I propose a systematic project that analyzes consumers’ reactions to ad selector ad format; the study will assess how ad choice and involvement influence reactance, attitudes and purchase intentions. In addition, the study will identify the role of reactance as a mediator on the relationship among them.

2. Eric (Xinyang) Liu: “To Buy or Not to Buy?: How Price-conscious Store Brand Users Respond to Upward Sub-branding” (Advisor: Dr. Patrick Vargas)

Sub-branding is a marketing strategy in which a firm markets a sub brand under the overall umbrella of the main brand to leverage its brand equity. However, companies may risk compromising their brand promise and alienating current brand owners in the process of attracting new buyers. Our study will investigate how price-consciousness may moderate consumer responses to price-based sub-branding and feedback to the parent brand. We propose that price-conscious consumers may respond less favorably than others to the sub brand that decrease monetary benefits store brands offer, and all of the consumers may rate the parent brand relatively low due to the presence of comparison between the parent brand and its new sub brand. Next semester, participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk will be randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups and participate in a 2x2 factorial design experiment created by the researcher.


This study tests the role of categorization on choice overload by looking at an undergraduate student course catalog. Past literature has shown that thematic categorization (external relations that occur across various objects, events, concepts, or people such as a picnic theme of basket, blanket, guitar) leads to more perceived similarity between choices in a choice set compared to taxonomic categorization (internal characteristics within a single entity providing common categorization based on those internal characteristics such as the taxonomy of a fish having fins, gills, and scales). This change in perceived similarity may lead to an ability to reduce choice overload effects when choosing from a large choice set. This study looks at the effects of categorizing courses either by taxonomic, thematic, or no categorization. Results are expected to show that thematic categorization of a course catalog (running a business, becoming a librarian, growing crops, etc.) will help reduce the effects of choice overload when choosing from a large set of class choices.