Master’s thesis seminar

Henri Weijo
Marketing Master’s Program Director
Agenda

- Elaborating the thesis process
- The supervising faculty for this fall
- Pitching potential thesis topics
The thesis project, in a nutshell

**PHASE 1 (10 ECTS)**
- Submit expression of interest

**PHASE 2 (10 ECTS)**
- Write a research plan and a literature review
- Collect and analyze data – write first draft of the methods and results section
- Write a Thesis Seminar paper on the methodology of your thesis (6 ECTS)

**PHASE 3 (10 ECTS)**
- Write the discussion and concluding sections, and finalize the thesis

Period III → Period IV → Period V → Summer → Period I → Period II

Period I → Period II → Period III → Period IV → Period V → Summer
What is the right time to start this process?

9-12 months before you want to graduate.

But you can also ”fast track” and do a thesis in a few short months.
When should I have my methods courses done?

It’s never too soon to do the methods courses.

At minimum, you should have completed all compulsory methods courses by the end of Phase 1 of your master’s thesis project.
The thesis project is 10+10+10+6 credits. At which points do I get the credits?

Ask your supervisor. The general idea is that you get:

• 10 credits for a research plan and a literature review,
• 10 credits when your first draft of results is ready, and
• the final 10 for a completed thesis.

Beyond these general principles, it is up to the supervisor to decide what counts as a “research plan”, a “first draft of results”, and so on. The supervisor decides on the criteria on the basis of what best supports your learning process.

The 6 credits are given when you hand in your thesis seminar paper.
What is a thesis seminar paper?

Thesis seminar paper is an essay-style paper, an *extended methodology section with a comparative angle*.

In the paper, you describe your methodological choices, with particular attention to how you could have done things differently, and with what consequences.

This might involve comparing your statistical analysis method to some alternatives, justifying your choice of empirical context vis-a-vis other contexts that could have been studied, or elaborating on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of your study.

Your supervisor gives you the specific thesis seminar paper instructions, again, on the basis of what best supports your learning process.
What kind of thesis can I write?

A theoretical piece. You begin by identifying a gap in the literature and look for a good research context to study this missing knowledge area.

An applied piece. You apply an established or self-developed theoretical framework to give recommendations, “test the model” or solve a practical issue.

In the future: ability to do 20, 30, and 40 credit theses(!)
How to approach the thesis project?

"I Did it My Way" pick a topic you are intrinsically interested in (e.g. from your favorite course) and "have fun doing it"

"Becoming an Expert" Choose the right hot topic and become one of the top 10 most knowledgeable people on that topic in Finland, at least for a while

"Git ’er done!” You just want to graduate or want a good grade
I’m going to do a student exchange, and plan to write my thesis there. Are there mandatory sessions in the seminar?

**Formally, no.** However, please note that supervisors have limited availability. For example, in case you are unable to attend scheduled group meetings with the supervisor, we cannot guarantee that the supervisor will arrange make-up appointments.
Do I need to have a research plan before I start the thesis seminar

**No.** You need to submit your "expression of interest", not a full-blown research plan. Your supervisor will give you guidance on writing a research plan.

The "expression of interest" must be sent to henri.weijo@aalto.fi by **September 30th**!

Please see: https://into.aalto.fi/display/enmarketing/Master%27s+thesis+2018-2020
Dean's thesis grant – School of Business

- Aalto University BIZ offers funding for outstanding master’s students to complete their thesis and involve them in research already at an early stage.
- Students in this track gain experience of scholarly team-work, and consider academic career (doctoral studies) as an option for her/his future.
- The funding is for full time studies and the grant is divided in three stages, 2.000 euros each, following the grading scheme of the thesis work.
- Deadlines: February 28th, May 31st, August 31st or November 30th.
- The free-format grant application must include 1) a research plan, 2) supervisor’s statement including plan to link the student and his/her thesis to the department research work, 3) a plan to complete at least one doctoral course and 4) copy of study transcript.
Thesis topics!
Fall Instructors:
Alexei Gloukhovtsev
Pekka Töytäri
Ilona Mikkonen
Kushagra Bhatnagar
Hedon Blakaj
Tomas Falk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seminar format</th>
<th>Monthly meetings (compulsory attendance)</th>
<th>Monthly meetings (more frequent at the start of the seminar)</th>
<th>Monthly meetings</th>
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<td>Individual/groups</td>
<td>Seminar meetings in groups, individual meetings as needed</td>
<td>Mandatory group meetings, optional individual meetings</td>
<td>Individual meetings in the most recent cohort</td>
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<td>Presentations</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>Yes, same as assignments</td>
<td>Yes, same as assignments</td>
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<td>Timing of meetings</td>
<td>Agreed in the first meeting</td>
<td>During working hours, as agreed with participants</td>
<td>During working hours (plans agreed with participants in first meeting)</td>
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<td>Methodology orientation</td>
<td>Qualitative research methods</td>
<td>Primarily qualitative research. Open to quant topics that align with my research interests.</td>
<td>Primarily qualitative research. Open to industry-oriented quant research as well.</td>
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<td>Research interests</td>
<td>Consumer resistance, deviant consumer behaviors, gender issues Published in: Consumption Markets &amp; Culture, Journal of Marketing Management, Marketing Theory</td>
<td>Research topics that have concrete implications for consumer wellbeing and quality of life. Examples: consumer wellbeing and vulnerability; problems related to digital technology; healthcare services; sustainability; (un)ethical consumer behaviors.</td>
<td>Digital marketing, marketing’s impact on society, emerging markets, services management and marketing, branding, sociological research on marketing’s connection with gender, race, geography.</td>
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<td>Pekka Töytäri</td>
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<td>Meetings as agreed, usually every 3rd week</td>
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<td>Individual meetings</td>
<td>Seminar kick-off meeting + regular individual meetings per student needs/initiative</td>
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<td>• Status updates in meetings</td>
<td>Literature review + suggested readings</td>
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<td>• Reading materials (articles and earlier thesis as examples of method &amp; structure)</td>
<td>Research questions(s)</td>
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<td>Theoretical lens</td>
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<td>Methodology</td>
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<td>Preliminary findings</td>
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<td>Status updates</td>
<td>Same as above</td>
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<td>As agreed</td>
<td>Agreed with participants</td>
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<td>Qualitative methods</td>
<td>Qualitative methods</td>
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<td>Value creation &amp; value propositions, buying &amp; selling process, structures, methods, sales methodology, pricing methodology, sales quality &amp; volume management, sales management systems. Value constellations (networked value creation, ecosystems and supporting platforms as value constellations). Institutional theory &amp; dynamic capabilities theories mainly.</td>
<td>Consumer culture theorizing research</td>
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<td>Consumer and consumption driven market emergence and change</td>
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<td>Branding and marketing communications</td>
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<td>Cultural intermediaries (influencers)</td>
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Assistant Professor in Marketing

Qualitative research with social impact and concrete implications for consumer wellbeing and quality of life.

Some ongoing research projects:

- Reducing household food waste
- Understanding the privacy compromises consumers make in service interactions
- Improving the customer experience in online mental healthcare services

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School of Business
Some topics that I would be very interested in supervising

Alexei Gloukhovtsev
Recent master’s thesis topics:

Unpacking the relationship between voluntary simplicity and consumer well-being
   - In preparation for submission to Psychology & Marketing

Examining social media users’ engagement with eWOM related to mental health
   - In preparation for submission to Journal of Public Policy & Marketing
Theme for 2021-22: Social justice

Social justice and inequality in service provision and consumption

In everyday service encounters and consumption contexts, inequality can be present along many dimensions including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, religion, or geographic origin.

Injustice may result from outright discrimination or stem from structural inequality embedded into institutions and service systems – “the way things are done”.

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Sustainable consumption

Consumers are under pressure to address social issues via responsible consumption choices. Yet sustainable consumption may be a privilege that is not available to everyone.

Possible thesis topic:
How do low-income consumers experience and reconcile this tension?
How can sustainable consumption be more inclusive for everyone?
The experience of first-gen, older, low-income students

Free education that is accessible to all is an important principle in Finland. In practice, free education is more accessible to some than to others.

Possible thesis topic:

*What is the study experience like for ‘non-traditional’ students?*
Ethnic retailing

Policymakers want to encourage intercultural entrepreneurship. But small independent retail is in decline and ethnic retailers in particular face many challenges in the marketplace.

Potential thesis topics:
What challenges do ethnic retailers face?
What strategies and practices do the use to negotiate these challenges?
Urban redevelopment projects promise residents access to revamped service ecosystems while reducing socio-spatial inequalities. Yet such projects are often implicitly designed with a particular population in mind, with limited input from other stakeholders.

Potential thesis topics:

*How does service planning process marginalize particular stakeholders?*

*How can the voice of minority residents be amplified to encourage dialogical service planning?*
The template

Re-examine a substantive domain in marketing/consumer literature from a social justice angle.

Digital marketing
Healthcare services marketing
Sustainable consumption
Brand communities
...

Gender
Race
Ethnicity
Geographical location
...

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School of Business
Your idea

Qualitative research with social impact and concrete implications for consumer wellbeing and quality of life.

Feel free to discuss your ideas prior to submitting a formal statement of interest. Please drop me a line at alexei.gloukhovtsev@aalto.fi.
Ilona Mikkonen

DSc (PhD) Marketing
Senior Lecturer

Teaching:
Consumer Research (Bachelor level)
Bachelor Seminars
QBRM (Master level)
Master’s seminars
Academic reading and writing (DBA)

Research interests:
Gender studies
Consumer resistance
”The Dark Side” of consumer behavior and culture
CCT topics preferred, but any (qualitative) research topics are welcome

Methodological expertise:
Discourse analysis
WHO AM I

• Bachelor of Technology (Computer Science)
• MBA – Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

Why is Marketing Research interesting?

• Brands and marketing implicated in everyday stories of status, identity, nationality, class
• Closest thing to real magic
  • A suspension of disbelief (like in the movies)
Qualitative Methodologies

• Working with pictures and words, instead of numbers
• Deep engagement with Empirical material / data

• Approach Marketing/Consumption from a more socio-cultural lens
  • Not about individual choice and preference
  • But what shapes it
Preferred Research Contexts and Examples

• Ethnographies: Understanding less-discovered “small worlds”
  • E.g. South-Asian immigrants in Finland
  • The world of Investment bankers

• Interactions
  • Creating followership on social media
  • Crafting expertise through new styles of interaction

• Media Discourses
  • Future of Advertising in the review economy
  • The construction of a national myth
Past Projects Supervised

• How organizations “do” secrecy
• How do consumers make sense of financial products
• How do merged companies create organizational identification
• How do individuals craft personal brands on professional social networks
• Why do Finnish women struggle to participate in the financial investment market
Hedon Blakaj

• Consumer culture research
• Qualitative research methods
  • Interviews and ethnographic methods

• Main research interests:
  • How consumers and consumption activities change markets or results in the emergence of new markets

  • Cultural intermediaries (influencers) as cultural producers
Recommended topic:

- Relationship between intermediaries/influencers and technology, like algorithms
- How has this relationship unfolded over the past decade or so?
- What new can we learn about influencers and influencer practices in the age of AI/algorithms?

Approach:
- Interpretative qualitative research
- Interviews with influencers
- Perhaps, netnography depending on the research question and the theoretical framework (likely a praxiological informed theory)
Tomas Falk

**Education and academic positions**

2018  Full Professor of Marketing, Aalto BIZ  
2014  Associate Professor of Marketing, Aalto BIZ  
2011  Habilitation, German Postdoctoral Degree, University of Mannheim  
2010  Professor of Marketing, EBS Business School  
2006  Dr. rer. pol., University of Mannheim  
2002  Diplom-Kaufmann, University of Mannheim and Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration

**Topics and Methods (in alphabetical order)**

- Access-based services  
- AI in service  
- Collaborative consumption (peer-to-peer sharing)  
- Experiments  
- Interviews  
- Mixed-methods approaches  
- Mobility  
- Self-service technologies  
- Service robots  
- Structural equation modeling  
- Survey research