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| **Department** | | Business Management | |
| **Discipline** | | Business Management | |
| **Research Focus Area** | | **The digital business environment and user engagement** | |
| **Total capacity for 2025** | | **5 (3 Masters & 2 PhD)** | |
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| **Supervision Team details:** | **Academic Profile** | | **Capacity** |
| Module Leaders:  **Dr N van Huyssteen**  Email: [marxn@unisa.ac.za](mailto:marxn@unisa.ac.za)  Office: NS Radipere Building, Office 4-64  ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8831-7544>  Institutional repository link: [Browsing by Author "Van Huyssteen, Nadia" (unisa.ac.za)](https://uir.unisa.ac.za/browse?authority=b35f8687-3678-4769-9b92-bb84e5ad47e9&type=author)  **Dr A Pretorius**  Email: vlilla@unisa.ac.za  Office: NS Radipere Building, Office 4-64  ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1760-8314>  Institutional repository link: [Browsing by Author "Van Lille, Adele" (unisa.ac.za)](https://uir.unisa.ac.za/browse?authority=ecaed77b-3797-478b-b7f3-f1eb6b1242a2&type=author) | Dr Nadia van Huyssteen is a lecturer in Business Management at the University of South Africa. In September 2011, she joined Unisa as an academic assistant in the Business Management department. She obtained her master’s degree from the University of South Africa in 2014, and her PhD in 2022.  Dr Adele Pretorius is a lecturer in Business Management at the University of South Africa. In September 2011, she joined Unisa as an academic assistant in the Business Management department. She obtained her master’s degree from the University of South Africa in 2014, and her PhD in 2022. | | 1 Masters co-supervised  1 PhD co-supervised  1 Masters co-supervised  1 PhD co-supervised |
| **Team members** | | | |
| **Prof Rudansky-Kloppers**  Email: rudans@unisa.ac.za | Sharon Rudansky-Kloppers is a professor in Business Management. In January 1988, she joined Unisa as a lecturer in the marketing section of the Department of Business Management. She obtained a DCom degree in business management from Unisa in 2002. She is a member of several professional organisations. She is the author of a number of accredited articles and has presented papers at national and international congresses. She is the author and co-author of books dealing with business communication, marketing, and business management. | | 1 Masters co-supervised  1 PhD co-supervised |
| **Dr P Bester**  Email: bestep1@unisa.ac.za | Dr Petri Bester is a senior lecturer in Business Management at the University of South Africa She obtained her master’s degree from the University of South Africa in 2012 and her PhD in 2020. She is currently the head of the First Year Section: Business Management in the Department of Business Management. | | 1 PhD co-supervised |
| **Ms Magdel van Heerden**  Email: [legrams@unisa.ac.za](mailto:legrams@unisa.ac.za) | Magdel van Heerden is a lecturer in the Department of Business Management at the University of South Africa and has been with Unisa since 2013. She has co-authored various books on management and entrepreneurship and obtained her master’s degree from the University of South Africa in 2020. | | 1 Masters co-supervised |
| **Mrs Rachelle Reeler**  Email: deysert@unisa.ac.za | Rachelle Reeler is a lecturer in the Department of Business Management at the University of South Africa. She joined Unisa as an academic assistant in 2012, and obtained her Master’s Degree in Business Management (Cum Laude) in 2019. She is currently doing her PhD with a focus on the new world of work brought about by the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions. | | 1 Masters co-supervised |
| **Model of Supervision** | Our focus is on finding well-defined statements that showcase a strong research direction, and your perspective and enthusiasm towards the subject. If you are selected for this area of interest, you will be assigned one or two supervisors who will support you in refining your topic and help you to craft a research proposal and ultimately a dissertation or thesis. As per the standards of advanced degrees, you will be expected to work independently. | | |
| **Selection Criteria: Master’s/Doctorate** | In addition to the admission requirements to apply for a Master’s and Doctoral Degree, potential applicants must also submit a 5-page Research Outline that follows these guidelines:   1. Front Cover (Your name and contact details, your student number and the topic’s title) 2. Topic (½ page) 3. Short literature review (2 pages) 4. Potential contribution of the study which includes a clear problem/gap (½ page) 5. Potential unit of analysis and potential research approach (1 page) 6. Access to the research context (½ page) 7. Personal motivation to pursue studies in this topic (½ page) 8. List of references (use Harvard referencing method)   The page limit does not include the cover page or reference list. We are seeking clear and well-articulated expressions that demonstrate a strong research focus and reflect your knowledge, experience, and interest in the topic. If your application is accepted in this area, you will have the opportunity to discuss your topic further with your supervisor and develop it into a research proposal. If you have any questions regarding the focus area, feel free to reach out to any of the researchers involved via email. It's important to note that Research Outlines will not be reviewed until after the application deadline has passed. | | |
| **Selection Procedure** | The Research Outline will be evaluated based on the following criteria:   * Academic excellence: This includes the quality of the essay in terms of its originality, significance, and rigour, as well as the impact it may have in terms of its reach and significance. * Demonstrated higher-order thinking skills: This criterion evaluates the candidate's ability to analyse, synthesise, apply, and evaluate information. * Proficiency in academic writing: The extent to which the essay presents coherent and well-developed arguments that are supported by relevant, detailed, and convincing evidence; the logical sequence of paragraphs with content-based transitions; the use of appropriate language and tone, the constructive variation of sentence structures, and the use of correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax. * Academic and professional experience: This criterion assesses the candidate's strengths and relevance in relation to their opportunities and potential impact. | | |
| **Possible Alternative Opportunities for Unsuccessful Candidates** | The College Executive Committee will review the names of unsuccessful candidates and the reasons for their rejection for validation. If an applicant is denied admission, they have the option to appeal to the College Executive Management. The applicant must be provided with the reasons for the refusal.  For applicants who do not meet the generic admission requirements for CEMS, the following potential alternative opportunities are available:   1. Applicants who have degrees with structures that differ from the typical South African honours degrees, those whose degrees do not match the generic CEMS admission requirements (such as having no grade for previous dissertations or no clear evidence of completing a research-related module in their previous qualification), or those who do not meet the standard admissions criteria but have relevant research experience that may qualify them for admission to a master's degree will need to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The applicant's previous academic and research activities will be assessed according to formal Unisa RPL procedures, and the outcome of the RPL process will be submitted to and approved by the College Executive Committee. If the outcome of the RPL process is positive, the applicant may proceed with the admission application, subject to all relevant terms and conditions governing the admissions process. 2. Students who were denied admission due to limited capacity within the academic department where they applied may apply again in the future. 3. If a student has an average below 60%, they can submit a request to the Department for admission. To do so, the student must provide a written motivation that is no more than three pages in length. The Department will evaluate the application, taking into consideration the student's relevant experience (including work experience), alternative options for accessing the program, and any other factors that the Department considers relevant. | | |
| **Technical Requirements for Research Outline** | * Arial font size 12 * Justified lines * Page numbers * Standard margins | | |
| **Documents to Support Application** | One-page abbreviated CV, including:   * Academic qualifications: Academic record & copies of degrees * Work experience * Contact details * Expression of interest (see selection criteria) | | |
| **Relevant UNISA Catalytic Niche Area** | The catalytic niche area of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and Digitalisation at Unisa underscores the imperative of integrating disruptive technologies and building capacity in legal, commercial, and technological fields. This emphasis aligns with the research focus on the digital business environment and user engagement, where exploration into the profound impact of digital technologies on business operations and consumer behaviour aims to provide strategic insights for businesses navigating this dynamic landscape. | | |
| **Research Scope** | The rapid advancement of technology has revolutionised the business world, leading to the emergence of the digital business environment (Ellitan, 2020). Today, businesses rely heavily on digital technologies to conduct their operations, communicate with stakeholders, and interact with users/customers (Dana et al., 2022). This has significantly impacted consumer behaviour, as digital technologies have created new avenues for consumers to interact with businesses and make purchases.  With the rise of e-commerce platforms, consumers can now purchase goods and services from anywhere in the world, at any time of day, using their smartphones, tablets, or computers (Santos et al., 2022). Moreover, the prevalence of social media has created business value and allowed consumers to interact with businesses in new ways, enabling them to share their opinions, experiences, and recommendations with others (Ashraf & Azam, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020).  Previous research has shown that the convenience and accessibility of e-commerce have led to an increase in online shopping behaviour (Le-Hoang, 2020). Additionally, the ability of consumers to access information about products and services online has led to a shift in the balance of power between businesses and consumers, with consumers now having more control over the purchasing process (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020).  The impact of the digital business environment on consumer behaviour has significant implications for businesses. In order to succeed in this environment, businesses must adapt to the changing needs and expectations of consumers. Businesses must prioritise the user experience, ensuring that their websites, e-commerce and m-commerce platforms are easy to use, secure, and accessible on multiple devices (Vila, González, Vila & Brea, 2021).  The scope of this research will be to explore the impact of the digital business environment on user/consumer engagement. This will include an analysis of the various ways in which digital technologies are changing the way businesses operate, as well as the ways in which consumers are responding to these changes. The goal of this research is to provide insights into the complex interplay between digital technologies, business practices, and consumer behaviour, and to identify potential opportunities and challenges for businesses operating in this rapidly-evolving environment.  These topics can be explored through a range of research methods, including a literature review of relevant academic research, surveys, focus groups or in-depth interviews with consumers, and analysis of data from digital platforms such as social media sites. The insights gained from such research can help businesses and marketers to better understand the role of the digital environment in shaping consumer behaviour and inform their strategies for engaging with consumers on these platforms. | | |
| **References and Recommended Reading:**  **Subject Field** | **Research scope references:**   * Ashraf, S. & Azam, F. 2019. *The influence of social media’s marketing efforts on brand equity and consumer response.* Available at: [https://www.research gate.net/publication/335291550](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335291550) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Dana, L.P., Aidin S., Samira M., & Morteza H. 2022. Investigating the impact of international markets and new digital technologies on business innovation in emerging markets. *Sustainability,* 14(2):1-15. Available: [https:// www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/2/983](https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/2/983) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Ellitan, L. 2020. Competing in the era of industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0. *Jurnal Maksipreneur: Manajemen, Koperasi, Dan Entrepreneurship,* 10(1):1-12. Available: [https://ejournal.up45.ac.id/index.php/maksipreneur /article/view/657](https://ejournal.up45.ac.id/index.php/maksipreneur/article/view/657) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Santos, V., Augusto, T., Vieira, J., Bacalhau, L., Sousa, B.M. and Pontes, D. 2022. *E-commerce: Issues, opportunities, challenges and trends.* In: Promoting organisational performance through 5G and agile marketing, 224–244. Available at: [https://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve. aspx?doi=10.4018/978-1-6684-5523-4.ch012](https://services.igi-global.com/resolvedoi/resolve.aspx?doi=10.4018/978-1-6684-5523-4.ch012) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Zhang, H., Gupta, S., Sun, W. & Zou, Y. 2020. How social-media-enabled co-creation between customers and the firm drives business value? The perspective of organisational learning and social capital. *Information and Management,* 57(3):1-17. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378720618305901> [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Le-Hoang, P. V. 2020. Factors affecting online purchase intention: the case of e-commerce on lazada. *Independent Journal of Management & Production*, 11(3):1018-1033. Available at: [http://www.ijmp.jor.br/index.php/ijmp/ article/view/1088](http://www.ijmp.jor.br/index.php/ijmp/article/view/1088) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. 2020. Principles of marketing. 18th ed. Boston: Pearson. * Vila, T.D., González, E.A., Vila, N.A. & Brea, J.A.F. 2021. Indicators of Website Features in the User Experience of E-Tourism Search and Metasearch Engines. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research,* 16:18-36. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-18762021000100103> [Accessed: 2023, March 08].   **Recommended reading:**  This is a selection of articles and/or recent books in this research focus area. **‎**Further reading over and above these is essential:   * Schivinski, B. & Dabrowski, D. 2016. The effect of social media communication on consumer perceptions of brands. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 22(2): 189-214. Available: [10.1080/13527266.2013.871323](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.871323) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Barger, V., Peltier, J.W. & Schultz, D.E. 2016. Social media and consumer engagement: a review and research agenda. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10 (4): 268-287. Available: [https://doi.org/10.1108/ JRIM-06-2016-0065](https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-06-2016-0065) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Erkan, I. & Evans, C. 2016. The influence of eWOM in social media on consumers’ purchase intentions: An extended approach to information adoption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 61: 47-55. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.03.003> [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Huseynov, F., & Özkan Yıldırım, S. 2019. Online Consumer Typologies and Their Shopping Behaviors in B2C E-Commerce Platforms. SAGE Open, 9(2). Available: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019854639> [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Lee, S.M. & Lee, D.H. 2020. “Untact”: A new customer service strategy in the digital age. *Service Business,* 14(1): 1–22. Available at: [https://link.springer. com/article/10.1007/s11628-019-00408-2](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11628-019-00408-2) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Roggeveen, A.L. & Sethuraman, R. 2020. Customer-interfacing retail technologies in 2020 & beyond: An integrative framework and research directions. *Journal of Retailing,* 96(3): 299–309. Available at: [https://www. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7450253/pdf/main.pdf](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7450253/pdf/main.pdf) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Sethna, Z. & Blythe, J. 2019. *Consumer behaviour*. 4th ed. London: SAGE Publications. * Vahdat, A., Alizadeh, A., Quach, S. & Hamelin, N. 2021. Would you like to shop via mobile app technology? The technology acceptance model, social factors and purchase intention. *Australasian Marketing Journal,* 29(2): 187–197. Available at: [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/j.ausmj.2020. 01.002](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/j.ausmj.2020.01.002) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Zhao. J., Xue, F., Khan, S. & Khatib, S.F.A. 2021. Consumer behaviour analysis for business development. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 1-9.* Available: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2021.101591> [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Lim, W.M., Kumar, S., Pandey, N., Verma, D. & Kumar, D. 2022. Evolution and trends in consumer behaviour: Insights from Journal of Consumer Behaviour. Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 22(1):217-232. Available at: [https://online library.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cb.2118](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/cb.2118) [Accessed: 8 March 2023]. * Tazeen, F., & Mullick, N. H. 2023. The Impact of Social Media Platforms ‘Facebook and Instagram’ in Influencing Purchasing Behaviour of Green Products. *Vision: The Journal of Business Perspective,* 0(0). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629221133960> [Accessed: 8 March 2023].   ***Please note that you are not restricted to these sources alone. It is recommended that you conduct your own literature search.*** | | |
| **Recommended Reading:**  **Research Methodology** | This is a selection books on methodology. Further reading over and above these is essential:   * Adams, K.A. & Lawrence, E.K. 2019. *Research methods, statistics, and applications.* 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. * Chilisa, B. 2019. *Indigenous research methodologies.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications. * Ghauri, P., Grønhaug, K. & Strange, R. 2020. *Research methods in business studies.* 5th ed. New York: Cambridge University Press. * Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. & Anderson, R.E. 2019. *Multivariate data analysis.* 8th ed. Andover: Cengage Learning. * Hall, R. 2020. Mixing methods in social research: *Qualitative, quantitative and combined methods.* London: SAGE Publications. * Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. 2019. *Research methods for business students.* 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson International. * Williamson, K. & Johanson, G. 2018. *Research methods: Information, systems, and contexts.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Chandos Publishing. * Quan-Haase, A. & Sloan, L. 2022. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications. | | |
| **Resources: Scholar Community** | * Association for Information Systems (AIS): AIS is a global professional association for academics and professionals in the information systems field. They have a special interest group (SIG) on Digital Business and Social Media that focuses on exploring the impact of digital technologies on business and society. <https://aisnet.org/> * Association for Consumer Research (ACR): A non-profit organisation that promotes consumer research and advances the understanding of consumer behaviour. <https://www.acrwebsite.org/> * Digital Marketing Association (DMA): A global association for marketing professionals that provides research, education, and networking opportunities, with a focus on digital marketing and consumer behaviour. <https://www.dmaglobal.com/> | | |
| **Potential M&D research focus areas or research projects** | | | |
| **Unit of Analysis** | **Research Focus** | | |
| **User engagement in the digital business environment** | * Effective strategies for engaging users on digital platforms * Optimising user engagement in the digital business environment * Measuring user engagement in digital business environments * Exploring the impact of user engagement on business outcomes * Understanding the role of user-generated content (UGC) in driving user engagement * Examining the influence of social media on user engagement in the digital business environment * Investigating the effects of personalized content and recommendations on user engagement * Exploring the impact of user experience (UX) design on user engagement * Investigating the role of gamification in enhancing user engagement in digital business environments * Analysing the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) on user engagement in the digital business environment. * Analysing the role of personalised content and recommendations in driving customer engagement | | |
| **User satisfaction in the digital business environment** | * Investigating the impact of user experience (UX) design on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the digital business environment * Assessing the effectiveness of digital customer service in enhancing customer satisfaction and retention | | |
| **User experience in the digital business environment** | * Exploring the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) on customer experiences and behaviour in the digital business environment. * Understanding how digital experiences shape purchase decisions | | |
| **Business digitalisation and consumers** | * The effect of digitalisation on consumer trust and loyalty * The impact of digitalisation on consumer privacy and security concern * The role of digitalisation in shaping consumer decision-making * The influence of digitalisation on business models and its impact on consumer behaviour * Exploring the impact of digital platforms on customer trust and perceived credibility | | |
| **E-commerce and traditional retail** | * The rise of e-commerce and its impact on traditional retail * To investigate the challenges and opportunities that arise for businesses operating in the digital business environment | | |