Final Theses (Master) – Strategic Categorization by Uber and Airb'n'b

Topic:

Categories are used in a wide variety of contexts and can be found in almost all aspects of everyday life. For example, patents can be categorized into their technological classes (Wry & Lounsbury, 2013), restaurants into cuisine types (Kovács & Hannan, 2014), or movies into film genres (Hsu, 2006). Categories play a key role in imposing coherence on the social world by partitioning items into groups (Vergne & Wry, 2014).

A novel stream within category research is strategic categorization in which it is assumed that organizations can actively and purposively shape their categorical memberships. For example, Boeing (which is considered one of the largest military companies worldwide) actively manipulates their audiences' perception through overemphasizing its production of civilian aircrafts while minimizing the salience of its military productions (Vergne, 2012).

Within the realm of strategic categorization, Master students should examine how companies can avoid unfavorable categorization. The focus here lies on two sharing economy firms: Uber and Airb'n'b. Both largely have struggled with whether they are perceived as software companies or transportation respectively housing companies (being legally categorized as transportation/housing companies would have led to unfavorable legal obligations). Until today, Airb'n'b has succeeded in avoiding being categorized as software company while Uber is still struggling in several markets fighting at court (BBC, 2017; Nath, 2019).

In several Master theses, students are expected to collect historical data (official court statements, press releases, twitter tweets etc.) from both Uber and Airb'n'b to analyze and discuss their strategic approaches in several countries.

What we offer:

- Participation in an interesting and upising research topic
- Committed supervision and regular interaction
- Guidance on the method and structured thesis process

What we require:

- Commitment to high academic standards
- Excellent command of English
- Participation in our institute’s final thesis seminar (for next available dates, please see TUM online)

Desirable:

- First experience in empirical research and qualitative research

Next steps:

If you are interested, please send a full application including a motivation letter, current CV and an up-to-date transcript to Mr. Xian Xu (xian.xu@tum.de). Please also contact Xian Xu for any further questions on this topic.


