

Mannheim, August 10, 2021

List of seminar topics

Area Marketing & Sales

Below you will find a list of **76 topics** for your seminar thesis. The topics are clustered into 10 overarching categories. Please inform yourself about how to apply in the uploaded documents.

- I. **Marketing Strategy and Management**
- II. **Consumer Behavior and Psychology**
- III. **Price Management**
- IV. **Product and Innovation Management**
- V. **Brand and Communications Management**
- VI. **Sales Management**
- VII. **Digital Marketing**
- VIII. **Customer Relationship Management**
- IX. **Market Theory and Research Methods**
- X. **Marketing Analytics**

Basic Literature for all Topics:

Homburg, Ch. (2017), Marketingmanagement: Strategie – Instrumente – Umsetzung – Unternehmensführung, 6th Ed., Wiesbaden.

Homburg, Ch., Kuester, S., Krohmer, H. (2012), Marketing Management: A Contemporary Perspective, 2nd Ed., Maidenhead.

I. Marketing Strategy and Management

1. **What's next? Virtualization of products, services, and customer experiences – a short-term trend or a glimpse of our long-term future?*** (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Nowadays, businesses are facing tremendous pressures for digitalization in their internal and external environment. But what's next? The virtualization of products, services, and customer experiences in B2C and B2B settings offers a great potential for business as well as customers. Especially interesting and undiscovered is the application of Virtual Technologies, such as Augmented Reality in B2B settings. Therefore, the objectives of this seminar paper are threefold. (1) You should conduct a systematic literature overview of how virtual technologies can be used in B2B marketing (2) and identify which impact they have on B2B customer behavior and (3) finally derive suggestions for future research.

2. **In-store advertisement in online stores** (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Research has shown that in-store advertisements could be very effective to increase sales and loyalty. Many stores (especially grocery stores) apply to this strategy that they increase in-point sales among many others. In-store advertisement is a strategy that online stores can apply as well. Although many online stores advertise their brands and products in their "stores" and take advantage of this strategy, the researchers have studied this stream poorly. In this paper, we will seek the effects of in-store advertisement in online stores as well as we compare these effects with the effects of in-store advertisement in brick and mortar stores.

3. **Artificial Intelligence Applications in Advertising** (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly employed by companies to automatically process large volumes of data and improve the customer experience, e.g., through the use of recommendation systems or chatbots. Another promising application of AI might be in the field of advertising. In 2018, for instance, Lexus published the first fully AI-scripted ad based on past successful commercials. Drawing on recent marketing research literature, this seminar thesis should discuss whether and how AI can generally be used to further improve the advertising process.

4. **Fighting commoditization by servitization: The decisive success factor in B2B?*** (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Servitization, which describes the shift from a product-centric to a service-centric business model, has been a growing trend of B2B firms in recent years. By, amongst others, increasing revenue and customer loyalty, the concept promises improved business performance. However, servitization also includes various challenges for practitioners and might even harm business performance which in turn can lead to deservitization. Consequently, the aim of this work is (1) to review existing literature on (de)servitization in the B2B-context, (2) to demonstrate the opportunities and challenges of (de)servitization and to (3) derive implications for the practice of companies.

5. **Doing Well by Doing Good: Marketing and Sustainability** (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Traditional marketing focuses on growth, promotes an endless pursuit of satisfying needs and wants, and seems to view resources as always abundant. However, this view is no longer contemporary as the needs of our world are changing promoting an urgent demand for sustainability to create long term strategic benefits for society and the environment. Today businesses can create mutual benefits for the firm and the planet. In addition, using green products can improve consumption experience. In this seminar thesis, the student reviews existing literature on marketing and sustainability and the

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

responsibility of marketing in creating sustainable and society-relevant marketing strategies and the impact of a company's position on sustainability, cause marketing, and responsibility.

6. Learning from Failures: How Marketers and Salespeople Can Learn from Past Mistakes* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

In businesses, hardly everything always works out like it was planned. In this regard, marketers and salespeople have plenty of opportunities to learn from: From innovation flops, service failures to lost customers and failed cold-call acquisition attempts. This thesis takes a learning perspective on failures in the marketing and sales literature to illuminate how and when failures can be an important part of firms' and individuals' learning processes.

7. How Does Purchasing Device Change the Pain of Paying? (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Consumers feel psychological pain when they make payment. This is called the pain of paying in the literature. Although a huge amount of studies has focused on the reasons and results of the pain of paying, purchasing device isn't one of them. In today's world, consumers could prefer to purchase offline, online, mobile, and smart. In this paper, we will seek how the pain of paying changes through different purchasing channels.

8. Marketing in the Sharing Economy (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

The past decade has shown the emergence of the sharing economy and a rise of research on this topic inside marketing. Today, sellers and buyers are increasingly exchanging offers that involve temporary access rather than permanent ownership. In this seminar thesis, the student will review existing research on organizational implications of platform economics and the sharing economy for marketing (e.g. for institutions, such as consumer and firms, for processes, and for value creation) and how the sharing economy will affect customer experience and behavior (e.g. tipping for service?).

9. How can marketing be leveraged for a good cause? (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Marketing has the power to improve lives, sustain livelihoods, strengthen societies, and benefit the world at large. At the same time, marketing can have a dark side—it has the power to hurt consumers, employees, communities, markets, institutions, and the environment that surrounds us. This master seminar thesis aims to bring together wide-ranging research to assess, illuminate, and debate whether, when, and how marketing contributes to a better world.

10. Advertising Strategy and Competition (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Economists have long analyzed how different competitive situations affect firm strategy, but how should marketing efforts be ideally designed? Is advertising adapted to the faced competition, and if so how, or do firms neglect this aspect when conceptualizing their marketing strategy? In this seminar thesis, the student will review existing (marketing) research that discusses appropriate advertising strategies for different competition settings, potentially illustrating the academic findings with examples.

II. Consumer Behavior and Psychology

11. That's Mine! The Role of Psychological Ownership in Consumer Behavior* (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Psychological ownership describes a person's feeling that something is his or hers with or without legally possessing it. Consumers can experience psychological ownership toward a concrete object, such as a product they intend to purchase, or an abstract concept, such as personal data they are asked to provide in an online setting. The aims of this seminar thesis are (1) to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on psychological ownership with a specific focus on the consequences of psychological ownership for consumer behavior and (2) to derive implications for research and practice.

12. Do you really consume sustainable? Sustainable consumer behavior – a gap between attitudes and actions* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Nowadays, there is a trend towards the consumption of sustainable products & services. But there is a trade-off: Customers often pretend to be more environmental conscious on one hand but often actually hesitate to buy sustainable products on the other hand. Which reasons account for this trade-off in consumer behavior? Especially interesting is the attitude behavior gap and other underlying psychological mechanisms of consumers when buying sustainable products. Therefore, the objectives of this seminar paper are threefold. (1) You should conduct a systematic literature overview of sustainable consumer behavior (2) and identify which trade-offs play a role during sustainable buying decisions (3) and finally derive suggestions for future research.

13. Analytic Thinking and the Binary Bias* (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Recent research has highlighted consumers' tendency to dichotomize continuous data (i.e., binary bias). In the context of online reviews, this significantly influences the interpretation of customer ratings (Fisher, Newman, and Dhar 2018). However, which individual differences may change the strength of this bias remains widely unexplored. Thus, the goal of this seminar thesis is to summarize prior literature and derive hypothesis as to what extent cognitive reflection (the degree that consumers think analytically) undermines the binary bias.

14. Impact of Color on Marketing (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Color has an important role in marketing and researchers and marketers keep discovering innovative ways to use color. In this seminar thesis the student will review existing research in the multidisciplinary field of color psychology and marketing.

15. Always at the Fingertips: The Impact of Smartphone Use on Consumer Behavior* (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Smartphones have become consumers' constant companions. Consumers use these mobile devices to seek information and entertainment, socialize, and shop at nearly any time and place. Virtually everywhere, whether on public transit or even while crossing the street, consumers engage with their smartphones. The aims of this seminar thesis are to (1) synthesize literature on the effects of smartphone use on consumer behavior, (2) discuss managerial implications, and (3) outline future research directions.

16. Looking inside the customer - What advances exist in using neuroscience and biomarkers to understand customers and their behavior?* *(Chair Prof. Homburg)*

Understanding customer behavior is an ongoing challenge in academic research. With the help of neuroscience and biomarkers it is possible to analyze consumer behavior more precisely. The objectives of this seminar paper are threefold. (1) You should conduct a systematic literature overview of the application of neuroscience and biomarkers in consumer behavior analysis (2) and identify how this knowledge can help in creating successful marketing strategies (3) and finally derive suggestions for future research.

17. Sorry, we screwed this up! How consumers deal with service failures* *(Chair Prof. Kuester)*

Companies have a multitude of customer interactions in a single day. Therefore, it is not surprising that some interactions do not run as smoothly as possible or fail altogether. Especially scholars from service research have intensively investigated service failures, their consequences, and consumer reactions. Likewise, research in psychology has analyzed how individuals feel and behave if confronted with service failures. The objectives of this seminar paper are (1) to review relevant literature on service failure and (2) to outline how customers react when facing service failures. In doing so, the seminar paper shall also elaborate on potential repercussions on service providers that fail to provide their service. Finally, the seminar paper shall conclude by (3) deriving future research directions and managerial implications for service providers.

18. Decision making in the Sharing Economy* *(Chair Prof. Homburg)*

Despite the increasing importance of the sharing economy, little is known about its impact on customer decision making. There are various drivers for the participation at the sharing economy such as economic gain, enjoyment of sharing, lifestyle improvement and utility. Thereby, relevant decision-making processes of consumers might alter in contrast to a buying decision, for example the mental accounting of benefits and cost of sharing instead of owning a product might be tracked differently. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is (1) to analyze the drivers of decision-making in the sharing economy, (2) assess how providers of sharing offers can leverage these processes and (3) finally derive suggestions for further studies in future research.

19. Nudging *(Chair Prof. Kraus)*

"Human beings are rational": It has been a controversial topic for a long time. However, it was found out that human beings are not as rational as we think and therefore our choice can be affected by many factors such as cognitive boundaries, biases, or habits. It indicates that someone can affect (or nudge) the other's decision by simply providing a different context or options. For example, a mom, who is worried about her child's obesity, can lead her child to eat less by providing a smaller plate. Even in our daily lives, this nudging effect has been frequently used. We live in a world created by choice architects, who create backgrounds or contexts in which people make a decision. According to Thaler and Sunstein (2008), a nudge is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. The aim of this paper is to understand the general knowledge of nudging and think the possible practical implications in the business context.

20. Can errors make algorithms seem more human?* *(Chair Prof. Kuester)*

"To err is human" is a common saying implying that committing mistakes is normal and can be even expected. But what about technology committing mistakes? This question becomes of particular interest with more algorithms influencing consumers' everyday lives. Moreover, numerous documented incidents and academic studies have proven that algorithms commit mistakes. However, it remains

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

unclear, how consumers perceive algorithms that err and how errors influence their attitudes and subsequent behavior about algorithms. Thus, this seminar paper (1) shall review the literature on erroneous algorithms within the marketing domain as well as the literature on anthropomorphism. Further, (2) the seminar paper shall evaluate the impact of algorithmic errors on consumers and, specifically, investigate whether errors make algorithms seem more human. Finally, (3) future research directions at the crossroads of erroneous algorithms and anthropomorphism shall be derived.

21. Let me show you how I use it: Gaining insights from customer usage behavior* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Many IoT-/Smart devices enable companies to track customer usage behavior. Academic literature describes the benefits for research and development, new product inventions, and improvements for the user interface. This circumstance may result in a massive amount of data that might be overwhelming for marketing practitioners and scholars. The objectives of this seminar paper are (1) a systematic overview of how customer usage behavior can be used in marketing, and (2) an evaluation of best practices in the industry with a categorial overview of devices that are most promising for the marketing field, based on academic literature.

22. Applying Double Standards: With Whom Do Consumers Share Data Online?* (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Due to data protection laws such as the General Data Protection Regulation established in 2018 by the EU, consumers must give their consent concerning which type of data they choose to share on websites. This regulation applies to for-profit as well as to non-profit organizations such as charities. Initial research findings suggest that consumers' willingness to share data online differs for profit companies and charitable companies. The aims of this seminar thesis are to (1) explore when and with which organizations consumers are willing to share their data online by reviewing the relevant literature on data disclosure and privacy, as well as on charitable giving. Additionally, it shall be examined how consumers' willingness to share data online determines their subsequent attitudes and behavior, e.g., the perception and evaluation of the respective company. Based on these findings, (2) managerial implications for website design and the design of data disclosure consent requests, as well as (3) future research directions shall be discussed.

23. Brand identification (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Corporate/brand identity is a critical factor for a brand to succeed. Therefore, companies take advantage of different marketing tools such as marketing campaigns, promotion, or social activity to create a positive brand identity. In the perspective of organizational behavior, the organizational identity is also important for employees. According to Halliday and Kuenzel (2008), so called "brand identification" is the process when individuals (customers or employees) identify themselves with their organization as a corporate brand. Once employees and customers identify themselves with the organization, they are showing brand loyalty and commitment. This paper aims to understand how individuals develop their brand identification and how companies can influence this process.

24. Customer adoption of artificial intelligence in health care* (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the healthcare sector. Today, algorithms outperform human experts in more and more healthcare tasks, such as diagnosing complex diseases. Nevertheless, little is known about patients' acceptance of AI in healthcare. Initial research findings suggest an unintuitive resistance of patients to medical AI even in situations in which AI outperforms human doctors. The aim of this seminar paper is (1) to provide a literature overview of the reasons for patients' resistance to AI. Within that context, the role of self-efficacy and digital health literacy for the adoption of medical AI shall be analyzed. Based on the findings of this review, (2) implications for marketing research and practice shall be derived regarding the design of medical AI.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

25. Nudges in Marketing (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Behavioral economists define a nudge as some characteristic of a choice design that affects individual behavior in a predictable manner. Since a nudge does not simply forbid certain options or significantly change the underlying economic incentives, it is easy and cheap to avoid by an individual. Interesting questions arise when considering whether different psychological factors affect an individual's susceptibility to nudges or if certain moderators affect consumer response, for example. In this seminar thesis, the student will review existing research on the use of nudges in marketing and explore exemplary applications.

26. The role of mHealth in promoting consumer health* (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

mHealth describes the use of mobile and wearable devices, such as mobile phones and smart watches, for health services. Often, mHealth includes elements of gamification. Gamification is the use of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts. The aims of this seminar thesis are to (1) review literature on gamified mHealth content on consumer behavior and (2) derive implications for the sustainable adoption of health-promoting behavior.

27. The World Wide Web a World Wide Warehouse? Exploring factors that drive online shopping among consumers* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Online shopping turned into a dominant alternative to traditional retail shopping and consequently receives increasing attention from both practitioners and academics. Without a doubt, e-commerce offers a plentitude of new marketing possibilities for firms. However, to understand whether it is a suitable strategy, it is of crucial importance to understand what drives consumers to shop online. Against this background, it is the aim of this seminar paper to examine relevant drivers of online purchase behavior and analyze industry-specific differences based on a systematic literature review.

28. The chance of making a first impression - When do first impressions matter most in customer experiences? (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Managing customer experience effectively is becoming one of the major goals of companies for securing customer loyalty. Thus, understanding which moments during a customer experience are more important for customers' subsequent evaluations of their experience can provide important insights for customer experience management. Prior research has shown that first impressions, which are initial moments during the customer experience (vs. moments that happen later during the customer experience), are especially important. Initial research findings indicate that certain factors influence the importance of first impressions in customer experiences. For example, customers pay more attention to these initial moments in contexts they share with others as compared to contexts when they have an experience on their own. The aim of this thesis is (1) to conduct a review of the literature on customer experience, customer experience management, and impression formation research to identify contexts and factors impacting the importance of first impressions for customers' subsequent evaluations of their experiences. Another aim is (2) to derive implications for marketing research and practice.

29. Debiasing and Marketing* (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

It has been long shown that economic agents are not fully rational decision makers. In this context, cognitive biases do influence a plethora of decisions reaching from what toothpaste to buy to far-reaching risk assessments when choosing insurance policies. In this thesis you should discuss the concept of 'debiasing' as an approach to re-rationalize decision making and how it has been applied to problems with relevance to marketing.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

30. An Apple a Day Keeps the Doctor Away – Beneficial proself behavior changes for good* (Chair Prof. Kuester)

Proself behavior is characterized as a behavior that benefits us, such as eating healthy or exercising regularly. There are multiple objectives for practicing proself behavior, some of them are short-term oriented, such as drinking a healthy juice, while others are long-term oriented, such as regularly saving money for retirement. The challenge is to adopt proself behavior in a sustainable way. The aim of this seminar thesis is (1) to provide a literature review about the research on proself consumer behavior and its objectives. Based on the findings, (2) implications for the sustainable adoption of proself behavior shall be derived.

III. Price Management

31. Context Effects and Pricing* (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Context effects have widely been established in the judgment and decision-making literature. For example, according to the compromise effect, adding a third option to a choice set increases the choice share of the 'middle option'. This seminar thesis is intended to summarize research on context effects in the pricing literature. Furthermore, the author should derive hypotheses as to how bundle options in the context of a separately sold product can be used as a strategy to influence consumers' purchase decisions.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

IV. Product and Innovation Management

32. Marketing and Innovation – How Firms Successfully Engage in Co-Creation? (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Without innovation, firms will no longer survive in today's ever changing business world. This is why innovation through co-creation, so the process in which organizations provide a platform to exploit creative ideas of their customers and then commercialize them into finished products, is increasingly adopted by many larger organizations as a key innovation strategy. Nevertheless, most cocreated innovations fail in terms of consumer adoption, calling into question the entire cocreation model to innovation. Because marketing communication is regarded as one major influence in innovation adoption, the student in this seminar thesis will review existing research on co-creation and clarify the question if firms should be involved in co-creation of product and content and, if so, how?

V. Brand and Communications Management

33. Give me a smile – The role of emoticons in commercial relationships* *(Chair Prof. Kuester)*

Various brands such as Nikon, Apple or Aldi integrate emoticons into their advertising campaigns. Emoticons are textual (e.g., :-), or pictorial (e.g., 😊) depictions of facial expressions. Emoticons are used in digital communications to convey emotions in form of nonverbal cues to influence customers' brand evaluations. The aim of this seminar thesis is (1) to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on the effect of emoticons on customer brand evaluations. Based on this state-of-the-art review, (2) implications for marketing research and practice shall be derived.

34. It's not simply „do it all“ - Optimizing Omnichannel presence to define where do brands really have to play - and where not *(Chair Prof. Stahl)*

With an abundance of available sales and marketing channels, brands need to define a concise strategy that not only creates a enjoyable customer journey and experience, but is also effective to generate sales, fits to the brand and is cost-efficient. In this work, the objective is to outline how consumers form platform and channel preferences, how organizations can influence such preferences how data generated by (potential) consumers can be leveraged to form a concise, effective and differentiating omnichannel strategy.

35. Shut Up and Take my Money – Consumers' Valuation of Corporate Social Responsibility* *(Chair Prof. Homburg)*

The current research suggests that the consumers' awareness of a company's CSR values plays a major role in the effectiveness of the CSR perception. Extensively communicating the company's steps towards a more sustainable future with the customer seems to be of increasing interest for companies, sometimes leading to hypocritical side-effects like greenwashing. In this regard, consumers' awareness was found to be low in previous studies, leaving room for the speculation that CSR might not be that relevant for customers when forming their purchase decision. The objectives of this seminar paper are (1) a systematic study overview of how customers form their purchase decision regarding personal values and (2) identification of potential shifts in consumer awareness, considering socio-economic factors.

36. Newcomer brands as a threat to the big guys – how can established brands defend market share against newly emerging small new entrants? *(Chair Prof. Stahl)*

In a world where new products and brands are relatively easily marketed through Instagram, Shopify-based online stores or even drop shipping, many brands face sometimes multiple new entrants as competitors. As an example, Sports clothing giants such as Adidas or Nike need to compete with Gymshark in some segments, a brand intensively built and marketed on Instagram. This work should look at what characteristics of industries, market segments and sales channels make big brands especially vulnerable to new entrants and at what point in time new entrants can be classified as a real threat to the big players. Further, strategies to defend market share against smaller entrants should be evaluated.

37. Consumer-based brand equity and employee-based brand equity *(Chair Prof. Stahl)*

Consumers have certain perceptions about companies. Similarly, employees have certain perceptions about companies. But is being a highly-valued brand by customers automatically related to being a

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

great place to work? In this master seminar thesis, it will be your task to collect literature about these two topics and research how they might or might not be related.

VI. Sales Management

38. Can Sales Systems be Flexible and Stable at the Same Time?* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Ambidexterity—a recent concept in the management literature—affirms this question. According to first definitions, ambidextrous firms pursue both explorative (such as flexibility) and exploitative activities (such as stability) at the same time. But can this be also transferred to sales systems? Against this background, the superordinate goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on ambidexterity, (2) to identify potential consequences of its effective usage, (3) to transfer this concept to the sales practice, and (4) to discuss the implications for researchers as well as for practitioners.

39. Direct sales model in the automotive industry (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Traditional OEMs (automotive companies) have been selling their cars by using an indirect sales model with dealers as independent entrepreneurs (The cars are sold from an OEM to dealers, and then from dealers to end-customers). However, because dealers are independent from OEMs, the OEMs were lacking customer relationship and data. Since TESLA appeared in the automotive markets with their innovative business model (direct sales model with an eCommerce platform), the traditional OEMs are looking for ways to survive in the new competition. Direct Sales Model (or agent model) has been mentioned as the solution for traditional OEMs to survive this competition. However, this model still leaves many considerations - how to motivate existing dealers/ how to manage the new business model and so on. This paper aims to compare the indirect model vs. direct model and analyze the advantages of the direct sales model.

40. The Formalization of Channel Systems: Blessing or Curse?* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Today's multichannel sales systems are highly complex and often very difficult to manage. Therefore, many firms rely on rules and standardized processes in their channel management approaches. But: Does it really ameliorate organizational performance; or does it rather harm it? Against this background, the superordinate goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on formalization in sales, (2) to identify potential consequences of its implementation, and (3) to discuss the implications for researchers as well as for practitioners.

41. E-commerce and product shipping – the elaboration of a perfect shipping policy (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Free shipping and returns are key facets of online shopping and play a major role in removing uncertainty within the buying process of online customers but also tend to motivate the customer to imprudent purchases. What are the main drivers of product returns? Which role does the shipping fee play in the buying and returning process? This master seminar thesis sets out to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature within this field of research. Based on the insights generated, important implications for both research and practice shall be derived.

42. Determinants and Consequences of Multichannel Sales* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Multichannel sales systems have become “the rule rather than the exception” (Frazier 1999; p. 232). However, research regarding the antecedents and consequences of multichannel sales is relatively scarce. Against this background, the superordinate goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on multichannel sales systems, (2) to identify potential antecedents and consequences of various aspects of channel decisions (e.g., length, width, and depth), and (3) to discuss the implications for researchers as well as for practitioners.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

43. Product returns – A necessary evil? (Chair Prof. Stahl)

Depending on the product category, it can be that more than 50% of initially sold products are returned by customers for a variety of reasons. Especially nowadays with increasing eCommerce volume (accelerated once more by Covid19), the management of returns has become an important topic. Three major stakeholders are involved: First, the customers who generally value being able to return a product bought online. Second, companies that on the one hand feel obliged to offer a mostly gratuitous return policy, but on the other hand know that it may cost them quite a lot. Third, the environment that in the end has to bear the consequences of products sent back and forth across the globe. This master seminar thesis aims to summarize literature from different perspectives on this topic.

44. Stress, Effort, and Health in Sales* (Chair Prof. Homburg)

Salespeople often have a lot of tasks to juggle, be it acquiring new customers, retaining existing customers, winning-back lost customers or analyzing the market. Consequently, jobs in sales can be very challenging and stressful. In this context, this seminar thesis deals with stress, effort, and related topics from a sales perspective, also shedding light on health-related topics in the sales domain.

45. Killing me softly: Digitalization as the slow death of the salesperson?* (Chair Prof. Homburg)

Business-to-business (B2B) firms are increasingly introducing digital sales channels and are thereby transforming the role of their salespersons. Given the versatile applications, digital sales channels not only give rise to new opportunities for salespersons but also threaten their right to exist. Consequently, the aim of this work is (1) to review existing literature on the digitalization of the sales process, (2) to demonstrate the potential benefits and challenges for the salespersons and to (3) elaborate the future role of a salesperson in a digitalized B2B environment.

46. Selling and Cross-Selling: How important is the knowledge about the own firm's product portfolio?* (Chair Prof. Homburg)

There are many possible factors influencing a salesperson's sales performance. Knowing about the firm's product portfolio is one of them. It enables salespeople to adaptively adjust to the needs of their buyers and create a customer-oriented atmosphere. But are trainings towards broadening one's product portfolio and other measures worth their cost in the long-run? The goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on selling and cross-selling, (2) discuss the pros and cons of broadening salespeople's product portfolio knowledge, and (3) outline future research directions.

47. Supervisory-related versus organization-related influences: Which are more important for the Cross-Selling performance of salespeople?* (Chair Prof. Homburg)

The sale of additional products is very important in both B2B and B2C sales. Many studies have examined various supervisory- and organization-related influences on the Cross-Selling performance of salespeople. Some of them are easier to adjust than others, yet which ones have the biggest impact on the actual performance? The goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on cross-selling and its supervisory- and organization-related success factors, (2) discuss the pros and cons of the different influences, and (3) outline future research directions.

48. Salespeople stereotypes: what they are, why they do exist and why should we bother?* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

What comes to your mind when you think about salespeople? Is it the “used car salesman”, or the “real estate salesman”? Is the stereotype you do have in mind male and characterized by personality traits like “pushiness” “competitiveness” and “forcefulness”? Yes? Did you ever think about how these stereotypes influence your career decision (choosing a career in Sales) and your personal interaction with salespeople? Drawing on research in social psychology, the goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant literature on the role of stereotypes in Sales (origin, content, impact), and (2) outline future research directions.

49. To sell is (fe)male: Why are women still underrepresented in B2B Sales?* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Gender diversity has been shown to have a positive impact on both corporate culture and the company's profit line. These results contrast with the continuing under-representation of women in B2B sales. Among others, the persistence of gender stereotypes in sales has been shown to contribute to this phenomenon. However, research on gender stereotypes in sales is sparse. Against this background, the aim of the seminar paper is (1) to systematize relevant academic literature on gender stereotypes in sales and (2) identify barriers that prevent women from choosing a career in B2B sales.

50. Making salespeople happy to make customers happy? How workplace conditions affect salespeople performance* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Employees spend a significant portion of their lives at work while performing their jobs. Thus, the workplace environment affects their cognitive and emotional states, behavior, and abilities. However, research examining the role of workplace conditions in influencing salespeople's performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intention is scarce. Drawing on a job demands job resources framework, this paper aims to (1) outline the current state of research on the effect of workplace conditions on salespeople performance and (2) outline future research directions.

VII. Digital Marketing

51. Reaching for the Stars or Chasing the Tail? A Literature Review on The Long Tail Hypothesis* (Chair Prof. Kuester)

Digitalization has transformed the commercial landscape: Platforms, such as Netflix and Spotify, have infinite virtual shelf space available and customers can choose from an unmeasurable number of products. These platforms can provide niche offerings that are closely tailored to the customers' needs. The long tail hypothesis supposes that the availability of such niche offerings navigates customers away from hit products. The aims of this seminar paper are to (1) provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on the long tail hypothesis and (2) discuss the implications for research and practice.

52. Consumer Privacy Protection in Online Marketing (Chair Prof. Stahl)

Fueled by the current pandemic, the worldwide Internet usage continues to rise. Yet, more and more consumers have also become concerned about how companies are using the massive amounts of data they collect. Measures such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) may have alleviated these concerns, but in turn have created challenges for marketers in their online communications. This seminar thesis, therefore, aims to review recent privacy-related research and discuss the impact of increased data protection measures on a company's performance and future marketing practices.

53. Did you Get a Badge Yet? – Investigating the Role of Member Badges in eWOM (Chair Prof. Kuester)

The features incorporated in social networking websites keep improving. The global social networking website Facebook recently added another layer to members' engagement by introducing badges such as "Valued Commenter", "Top Fan", and "Admin" appearing above the names of selected Facebook users who are members of its online communities. It is, however, not yet clear which effects the use of these badges have on customer-related outcomes like electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Are these members viewed as opinion leaders and might they be perceived as more trustworthy by other members? This thesis aims (1) to analyze the existing literature regarding the role of "badges" in digital communication. Based on the generated findings, (2) theoretical implications regarding opinion leadership and implications for social media managers shall be derived.

54. Old vs. New – The competition between digital laggards and early AI adopters in marketing* (Chair Prof. Homburg)

The evolution and implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for service personalization will lead to a gap between early adopters and laggards. For early adopters, there will be additional challenges (e.g., high costs) associated with forging a new path in the largely uncharted application of AI in business. On the other hand, AI laggards will not face such challenges but might experience disadvantages since the customer experience they provide may not be as refined in comparison to the early adopters. The objectives of this seminar paper are (1) a systematic study overview of how AI can be used to leverage the customer experience and (2) an evaluation of potential threats to AI adoption success regarding the customers' perception of technology usage.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

55. Everyone is Online! The Effect of Corporate Social Media Communication on Brand Perceptions
(Chair Prof. Kuester)

With the rise of the Internet and social media worldwide, numerous transactions and information exchanges are happening online. At the same time, companies have entered the social media world: they have their own profiles and interact with their customers and other network users. The objective of corporate social media communications is to influence consumer-to-consumer communications like electronic word-of-mouth and raise brand awareness. However, little is known about customers' perceptions of these different interactions with companies. How do corporate social media communications impact brand perceptions? The aim of this thesis is (1) to provide a research overview on the impact of different corporate social media strategies on brand perceptions and (2) to derive managerial implications on how marketing managers should plan, target, and leverage corporate communication in social media.

56. What drives influencer marketing – trust or discount codes? (Chair Prof. Stahl)

Nowadays, brands are using influencers to promote their products and services because influencer marketing and its strategies have been witnessing an increased success lately by reaching a wider potential group of customers through influencers. When studying these new phenomena, one of the noticeable areas of interest regarding this topic is whether trusting influencers is what drives consumers to consider a purchase. Also, one of the main features of influencer marketing is using discount codes to promote brands. The purpose of this master seminar thesis is to investigate if either trust in influencers or the presence of discount codes is the main reason for consumers' purchase involvement.

57. Online Member Communities: Why Do Members Engage in Online Community Communication? (Chair Prof. Kuester)

In the era of human centric marketing, customers are strongly integrated into the marketplace through human connectivity. Online communities are playing a pivotal role in our lives and many individuals are members of one or more online communities. The members of these communities are exchanging opinions and ideas and offer inspiration to one another about products and services. This seminar thesis aims (1) to investigate why people join online member communities. Based on a literature review, (2) theoretical implications regarding member engagement and (3) practical implications regarding value creation for community hosts and companies shall be derived.

58. Online Reviews and Expertise* (Chair Prof. Kraus)

Online Word of Mouth (WOM) is more influential than ever. At the same time, consumers are increasingly motivated to find strategies to reliably assess reviewers' credibility. In contrast, retailers are interested in developing an understanding of the characteristics of reviewer expertise and to measure their persuasive power compared to novices. Therefore, the goal of this seminar thesis is to provide a summary concerning the characteristics of expert reviewers and to discuss strategies to identify them.

59. Co-Creation in Online Communities: The Way to Go? (Chair Prof. Kuester)

In the past years, co-creation online communities have gained in importance in company-customer interactions. Co-creation online communities involve enthusiastic customers in a company's development processes via networked interactions between the company and customers. These co-creation efforts reflect a shift in thinking from the firm as a definer of value to the participative customer. While companies so far have mostly tapped into their own firm-sponsored online communities, companies now increasingly try to connect with customers in member sponsored

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

online communities. The aim of this seminar thesis is (1) to review the literature on co-creation online communities by distinguishing firm-sponsored and member-sponsored online communities and (2) to derive implications for firms' effective co-creation using these online communities. Finally, (3) conclusions for future research and the management of co-creation online communities shall be derived.

60. External influences when online reviewing (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

When users write online reviews for hotels, restaurants, or employers do they really base their assessment on just their experiences or might they in fact be subconsciously influenced by other allegedly unrelated factors as for example previous reviews, their culture or even the current weather? Your task in this seminar thesis will be to collect research that analyzes if customers and users on the Internet are influenced by factors that actually have nothing to do with the reviewed instance. This seminar thesis may lead to a quantitative master thesis where you can analyze a dataset of more than 10 Mio online reviews and put them into perspective with other variables.

VIII. Customer Relationship Management

61. Is Customer Delight Worth It? (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

For decades, customer satisfaction has been a strategic imperative for many companies. However, a lot of marketing programs designed to increase customer satisfaction do not lead to the expected results. Therefore, some researchers suggest that the goal of customer satisfaction should be abandoned as a means to enhance firm performance, while others advocate the re-evaluation of the satisfaction-profit relationship. Prior research suggests that the effect of customer satisfaction on firm performance is asymmetric in nature and non-linear, which opens the door to investigating the threshold points for which a small change in customer satisfaction may lead to a disproportionate leap in the outcome measures, such as customer retention, customer engagement, or company profit. The goal of this paper is (1) to identify the conditions under which it is worth or not worth investing effort and resources to move from the stage of customer satisfaction to customer delight. By conducting a systematic review of the state-of-the-art literature, (2) implications for marketing practitioners and researchers shall be provided.

62. Customer Experience Management – Definition and Measurement (*Chair Prof. Kuester*)

Customer Experience Management (CEM) has been widely regarded as the primary source of firms' competitive advantage in the future. Despite its wide use in practice and academia, the CEM concept still suffers from ambiguity regarding its definition and measurement. While some researchers suggest that CEM is a multidimensional construct consisting of emotional, cognitive, social, sensorial, and behavioral responses of customers, others question its very need, arguing that CEM is "an old wine in a new bottle". Moreover, there is no consistent measurement approach of CEM that has been applied across different settings. By conducting a systematic overview of the state-of-the-art literature, this thesis aims to answer two important questions: (1) What is CEM and how is it different from related concepts, and (2) how can CEM be measured in different settings?

IX. Market Theory and Research Methods

63. Is the uncanny valley real? A literature review of the Uncanny Valley concept* *(Chair Prof. Kuester)*

The Uncanny Valley concept describes a characteristic dip in emotional response that can be observed in individuals when they encounter a robot that appears to be almost, but not quite, human. This concept was first hypothesized in 1970 by a Japanese roboticist but has recently surfaced in the marketing context due to the increasing popularity of robots and digital assistants such as chatbots in company-customer interactions. The aim of this seminar paper is (1) to conduct a review of the marketing literature that applies the Uncanny Valley concept. Based on the findings of this review, (2) implications for marketing research and practice shall be derived regarding the applicability of the Uncanny Valley concept in the context of company-customer interactions involving digital assistants such as chatbots.

64. Judging one's own performance: How valid are self-rating performance ratings in sales?* *(Chair Prof. Homburg)*

Getting a comparable measurement of salespeople performance proves to be quite difficult. Even though gathering objective data might make the most sense, it is mostly unfeasible or hard to compare between different companies. This is why in some sales literature, salespeople themselves are asked to provide an estimate of their performance (sometimes in comparison to their coworkers). But how valid and reliable are these subjective self-ratings? The goals of this seminar paper are (1) to review and systemize relevant academic literature on B2B and B2C sales, salespeople performance measures and data validity in general, (2) discuss the pros and cons of using self-rated performance measures and other possible performance measurement methods, and (3) outline future research directions and practical implications.

65. Beyond the buzzword hype – what machine learning can do for marketing now and where it is going *(Chair Prof. Stahl)*

Machine Learning has been an emerging technology with significant attention from media, businesses, and research for several years. High hopes and ambitions are often associated with machine learning and artificial intelligence, while explicit insights in use cases, tools, and possibilities to leverage the technology seem to be unclear to a broader audience beyond (technical) experts of the field. The work associated with this topic aims to review current practices in machine learning in marketing academia and practice. Further, a mid- to long-term potential for marketing application of machine learning will be defined, and a roadmap to capture this potential developed.

66. Understanding AI-induced Errors: Literature review and Taxonomy* *(Chair Prof. Kuester)*

Artificial intelligence (AI) is, unlike other technologies, characterized by its self-learning capabilities. As making mistakes is part of the learning process, AI-induced errors can and should be expected. Marketing scholars have begun to investigate erroneous AI, but do not provide a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive taxonomy of errors. By drawing on existing literature from marketing, psychology, information systems, and robotics, this seminar paper shall (1) develop a categorization that incorporates possible error types that AI can commit. Further, this seminar paper shall (2) identify research gaps and derive managerial implications.

*Topic can be prepared either in English or German.

67. Finding Meaning in Words: An Overview of Text Analysis in Marketing Research* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Within the last decade, machine learning methods have become state of the art in data analysis, particularly for examining large datasets, as they bear a sheer endless range of applications. Text analysis, as one of these methods, can provide valuable insights to both marketing researchers and practitioners and has regularly been applied by marketing scholars. The goal of this thesis is to create a systematic overview of major marketing-related studies using text analysis and applications of text analysis in marketing-related research generally.

68. Sentiment Analysis Methods Used in Marketing Research (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

In recent years, the popularity of social media has led to enormous amounts of publicly available data that marketers use to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior. One frequently applied approach is sentiment analysis, which is the automatic extraction of emotions conveyed in a given text or image. This seminar thesis should compare different methods commonly used to extract sentiment and summarize marketing research insights gained from their application.

69. Experimental methods in consumer research – State of the art* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

While being particularly common in natural sciences, experimental research methods start to gain firm ground in the marketing discipline as well, e.g., in the context of new product development. The aim of this seminar paper is to analyze the state-of-the-art of experimental research from a methodological standpoint in marketing research.

70. Image Analysis in (Marketing) Research (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

As an application of machine learning, image analysis has proven useful in various disciplines. For example, researchers have analyzed the faces depicted in print advertisements or assessed the complexity of advertising images. Compared to textual data, images can require a more intricate analysis due to the many dimensions used to characterize each instance. Hence, machine learning approaches could serve as improvements over traditional manual analysis. In this seminar thesis, the student will review existing (marketing) research using various image analysis approaches, comparing both manual and ML methods and contrasting the findings.

71. The role of self-determination theory in marketing science: An overview* (*Chair Prof. Homburg*)

Understanding what drives consumers in their purchase decisions is key to successful marketing campaigns. To better understand the cognitive processes involved in purchases, consumer researchers apply a variety of theories - most of which emanate from psychology. One such theory that is increasingly being applied in several consumer studies is self-determination theory. Given its increasing relevance, the aim of this paper is to provide a structured overview of the application of self-determination theory in consumer research.

X. Marketing Analytics

72. Blockchain, Cryptocurrencies and Marketing* (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

Most blockchain projects stand and fall with the number of adopters and platform members. Attracting the necessary capital to finance blockchain projects as well as attracting the critical mass of users and members remains one of the most important challenges for blockchain entrepreneurs. Marketing and promotional activities do play an outstanding role in this context (for the good and for the bad). You should discuss the marketing of blockchain projects based on both academic literature and practical examples/cases.

73. Using Computer Vision to analyze Advertisements (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Printed and online advertisements can be analyzed automatically using computer vision systems. This can be used to create novel products for the advertisement industry and it can help researchers to understand markets. In this seminar thesis the student will review existing research in the fields of computer vision and marketing. The student will gain a basic understanding of how modern machine learning systems are able to automatically extract marketing related information from advertisements and give an overview of the state of the art in research literature.

74. “Power to the Players”: The Retail Investor Revolution* (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

The phenomenon of meme stocks like GameStop, AMC and many others has recently been shaking the financial world. Companies and financial institutions do acknowledge the increasing relevance of retail investor trading. Companies with a strong retail investor base can profit from raising capital at increased share prices. AMC even targets their retail investor base with product offers. In this thesis you should discuss the development of the role of the retail investors for firms and financial markets and what drives retail investors' decision making. You should outline current (social media) marketing activities targeting retail investors and elaborate on possible new marketing strategies that are fit to the current new era of retail investing.

75. Machine Learning in Marketing (*Chair Prof. Stahl*)

Machine Learning techniques are increasingly being adopted in the field of marketing analytics, especially where large amounts of data about customers and markets can be acquired. In this thesis the student will create a literature overview of ML systems that researchers have proposed for marketing analytics.

76. Two-sided Markets: The Case of YouTube (*Chair Prof. Kraus*)

The firms who are active in two-sided markets have two types of income: advertising and user (subscription or purchasing). When these firms show too many ads, this decreases the number of users, accordingly the user income. When they show less ads, they have more users, however less ad income. In this case, they should find the optimal threshold. The aim of this paper is doing a literature review on two-sided markets and developing a simple model for the YouTube channels.