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GUIDELINE FOR YOUR MASTER THESIS

Note: These suggestions show considerable similarities with the recommendations of the Institute for Electronic Commerce (Prof. Dr. Bernd Skiera) and Marketing & Pricing (Prof. Dr. Karen Gedenk)

1. Time planning

- Within a week after consultation with your supervisor, you should decide whether you would like to accept the suggested topic. Otherwise, it might be assigned to someone else.
- After accepting the topic, you have a total of 6 months to finalize your Master thesis.
- Prepare a milestone plan early on!
- Clarify the aim of the thesis as soon as possible.
- Present the aim of your thesis in an exposé and send it to your supervisor. Overall, your supervisor will provide feedback on three different versions of your exposé. After each round you will have the opportunity to revise the exposé. We expect you to submit your exposé within four weeks after you accepted the topic.
- Do not postpone writing your thesis for too long. Only after starting the writing part, you may figure out that some points are still unclear. (This should not lead to "let`s just write something", although you have no idea what you want to write about.)
- Computer problems (crash, damaged disk, etc.) are no acceptable excuses for extending your deadline. Take proper security precautions!

2. Literature review and evaluation

- Options for literature review (not all of the following search strategies are relevant for all topics):
 - Reviewing new books about the topic

- Reviewing recent volumes of the most important journals: Management Science, Information Systems Research, Harvard Business Review, McKinsey Quarterly, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Research, Marketing Science, International Journal of Research in Marketing, ZfB, zfbf, DBW, Marketing ZFP, Business Information Systems Engineering (additional journals depending on the topic)
- Databases, e.g., EBSCO, JSTOR
- Cross references (therefore, look for recent articles first as the classics are cited everywhere)
- Important rule: First check the relevance of the article (introduction, figures and tables, conclusion), then include it.
- A hint regarding the latter: Start to think about the structure of your thesis early on. A good structure helps you to decide, which literature stream/article is important and which one is only marginally connected to your topic. Furthermore, you can easily identify items in your structure that are still not backed up by literature.
- Elementary rule: Do not trust anyone! Sources need to be evaluated, rather than accepting them without criticism. Even professors make mistakes sometimes.
- The literature provided by IMSM should help you to get started with the topic, no more than that! This literature is not necessarily the most important source for your topic. Many topics that we announce are new to us as well! Very often, we would like to learn about a new topic through your thesis, so please keep that in mind. Therefore, we may not always know, which resources are the most important ones. So, consider the provided literature critically as well.
- The quality of your literature research will not be evaluated based on how many sources you have cited, but rather on whether you cited sources relevant to your topic.
- Important sources must be read from the original. In adjacent fields, however, you can focus on the newest standard literature, e.g., on (a few and the newest) textbooks.
- Secondary citations are only allowed in very exceptional cases. This applies particularly to non-published sources (e.g., working papers): Only cite if you have really read it.
- If you literally “copy” from another source, it has to be marked as a quote. Correct citation shows scientific honesty. (In case of doubt, rather cite too much than too little.)
- Check whether a quote can still be interpreted in the right way when you take it out of the context and integrate it into your thesis.

3. Content structure of the thesis

- Of course, the structure of your thesis mainly depends on your topic. Therefore, only general hints are provided.
- The structure should be balanced. The length of a section should roughly reflect the importance of its content.
- (Sub-)Sections listed at the same level in the table of contents should have the same importance.
- The structure should not be too detailed. As a general rule of thumb, more than four structure levels are confusing.
- If a new section is introduced, at least two subsections should be covered. For instance: No 3.1.1 should not be used, if it is not followed by 3.1.2.
- Avoid wandering off the subject. Otherwise, you might leave the reader with the impression that the analyzed aspect did not fit into the structure. If an aspect does not fit into a structure, it is likely that (i) the structure is not appropriate or that (ii) the aspect is so unimportant that you can give up on it.
- The problem statement must answer the following questions:
 - What is the problem?
 - Why is it important?
 - Why is it not trivial to solve?
 - How do you want to contribute to solve it?

In essence, you need to answer the question: WHO can do WHAT better after reading your thesis? And HOW?

- In general, there is only little use in describing the historical development of a research problem.
- Select definitions based on whether they are suitable and necessary for your topic. (Of course, we expect you to use generally accepted definitions if they exist.) Definitions should be used to make clear what you are talking about in your thesis. It does not make any sense to list or discuss different variations of definitions used in the literature. Hint: After you finished writing your thesis, check whether you really used the initially presented definitions.
- Write the problem statement - especially the aim of the thesis - FIRST. Only then, target-oriented work is possible. Common mistake: A thesis covering irrelevant aspects. Hint: Really question whether a section/paragraph/sentence contributes to solving the initially stated research problem.
- In your conclusion (last section of every thesis), return to your problem statement. You need to give answers to the initially stated research question in this part of your thesis. In other words, in the conclusion, it has to become clear what the reader has learned throughout your thesis. Do not give a

philosophical outlook here. Once again, use this opportunity to make sure that all sections/paragraphs/sentences in your thesis are relevant. Question: Which sections contribute to present the findings in your conclusion?

- Three things that will help you to distinguish your thesis from other theses: Structure, structure and, once again, structure!
- Create tables and figures as often as possible. They are the best way to structure your thesis. Coming up with the figure or table first will inevitably help you to write the corresponding text later. Use a few figures and tables to structure your work, even though they might not make it into the final version of your thesis. In the thesis itself, you should use figures and tables because they make it easier for the reader to understand the material.
- In case you would like to provide an overview about different theories, models, methods or empirical studies in your thesis, categorize them first. Simply summarizing study after study or model after model is not useful at all.
- Categorizations should give a complete overview about different theories, methods, models, and studies in a field. In case of using only specific theories, methods, etc. and excluding others, you will need to point out that a selection has taken place (at least in a footnote). In addition, you need to make clear why those theories, methods, etc. were used and others excluded from further analysis.
- When evaluating different theories, methods, models, and studies, you will need to come up and develop criteria for evaluation in advance. Warning: For later evaluation, use only these criteria!
- When presenting different empirical studies, it usually does not make sense to present specific articles in great detail. It is often more useful to give an overview about different studies and establish how they relate to each other. In this case, tables are useful tools!
- When presenting different empirical studies, you need to analyze to what extent their results match or contradict each other.
- If results from different studies contradict each other, you will need to investigate how the difference can be explained. For instance, the method used can be one factor that could explain such differences. Please note that you do not need to come up with a general critique of different methods. Instead, you should try to analyze to what extent the studies differ in their methods used and whether or not these differences could explain the divergence in the results.
- Hypotheses, anecdotal evidence from practitioners, and theoretical viewpoints are not equal to empirical results and should be treated with caution!
- Phrasing has to be clear-cut. It is not appropriate to write about "relevant" data, resources or drivers. Do not vaguely refer to "the studies".

- Avoid non-differentiated judgements. Always justify evaluations and assessments. Your own judgements have to be distinguished from statements of facts. (You can still judge, but please justify your judgements!)

4. Formal structure of the writing

4.1 Dimensions of the thesis

- Maximum number of pages: 60-80 pages
- These include figures and tables, but not the opening page and table of contents.
- You can download a [template](#) for your thesis on the Master's program website.
- Space problems should not lead to moving important figures and tables to the appendix. Only information that is not important for understanding the text should be placed in the appendix. A figure or table that illustrates the context belongs to its appropriate place in the text.

4.2 Referencing and citation

- Please apply Chicago-styled referencing (Author-Date system).
- You can find more information about it here: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.
- Please use literal citations with care. Only make use of them if an author phrases facts especially concise. Otherwise, it easily gives the impression that you linked sources together but did not process them.
- Write literal citations in text between quotation marks and in a single line.
- Reproduce citations faithfully. Possible omissions are marked by consecutive points.
- In the list of references, articles are listed in alphabetical order. The program ENDNOTE provides an easy way to manage cited articles.

4.3 Figures and tables

- Figures and tables have to be numbered consecutively. The title should provide information about its content.
- Figures and tables must be understandable. If necessary, add captions and comments.

- References in tables and figures should be placed beneath the table/figure next to the word "Source:". If tables/figures are altered from the original, they have to be marked with "based on:"
- Tables/figures have to be arranged in a way such that they can be read without magnifying glass. Exclude a figure/table, which is not clearly legible.

4.4 Language

- Rather trivial, but possibly still not self-evident: Grammar, spelling and punctuation errors stand out and may lead to a decrease in your grade.
- Write objectively and professionally. A scientific article is not a feuilleton.
- Choose meaningful headings. Your structure should follow a red thread.
- Arabic numbers should be used for structuring (1, 1.1, 1.1.1, ...).
- Avoid abbreviations. Abbreviations for commonly used phrases ("etc.", "e.g.", ...) are accepted. Only in exceptional cases, it makes sense to abbreviate often used adapted phrases.

4.5 Terms

Use terms as consistently as possible throughout your thesis. An "attribute" stays and "attribute", if it was named this way once. An "attribute" should not be renamed "characteristic", "variable", etc. later on.

4.6 Models

- Generally, models consist of objective functions, constraints, variables and parameters. Mark and explain the elements in your model distinctly. In addition, make clear which variables are your decision-making variables.
- Models are solved by algorithms, which provide optimal values of the decision-making variables. Sometimes, there is a possibility to present your algorithms separately from your model.
- Number every equation in your thesis. Additionally, make it clear what the indexes of your equations are referring to. For example:

$$(1) \quad S_{j,r} = c_{j,r} \cdot t_{j,r}^{b_r} \quad (j \in J, r \in R),$$

where:

b_r : Sales elasticity at r^{th} geographic entity with respect to a change in visiting effort

$c_{j,r}$: Territory quality parameter of r^{th} geographic entity by assigning to j^{th} sales territory

J: Index set of sales territories

R: Index set of geographic entities

$S_{j,r}$: Sales in the r^{th} geographic entity by assigning to j^{th} sales territory

$t_{j,r}$: Visiting effort (visiting time und travelling time), which was put into the r^{th} geographic entity by assigning to j^{th} sales territory

4.7 Other

- Parts of your thesis:
 - Title page
 - Table of contents
 - List of tables/figures
 - List of abbreviations
 - List of symbols (if necessary)
 - Text
 - Appendix
 - References
 - Declaration of honor
- If symbols are used in formulas, a list of symbols should be placed at the beginning of the thesis. This does **not** replace the explanations of the symbols in the text.
- Create the structure/table of contents with the help of the index functions of your text-processing program. Headers and page numbers in the text must match exactly with the ones in the table of contents!
- In case of empirical work, please provide your supervisor with the raw data of your thesis (e.g., by email).

5. Consultation

- We offer a broad range of consultation possibilities. It is up to you to make use of them or not. If you want a meaningful consultation, please keep in mind that you need to get in touch with us in due time!
- The consultation is a "consultation" and no more than that. Our advice aims to improve your thesis. However, we never "approve" any part of your thesis before the final grading. The decision regarding the structure of your thesis is up to you. You are usually much deeper involved in the topic than we are. We can only get a good picture of your thesis as soon as we read the final version as one whole piece.