Guidelines for Seminar Papers and Degree Theses (BA/MA)

Faculty of Business Administration and Economics

Department of Marketing

Prof. Dr. Martin Eisend, Chair of Marketing

Prof. Dr. Katja H. Brunk, Chair of Marketing II

Last updated: January 2022

This guide provides students with essential information for writing seminar papers or degree theses (BA/MA) at the Marketing Department, which includes the Chairs of Prof. Eisend and Prof. Brunk.

1 Application

1.1 Seminar papers

In order to submit a seminar paper to the Chairs of Marketing, students must first apply for enrollment in the seminar. The seminar will be announced on ViaCampus several weeks before the application deadline. In case the number of applications exceeds the number of spaces available, students will be selected according to their grade average in marketing-related courses. In some cases, other selection criteria may apply, which will be clearly stated in the announcement of the seminar. After being accepted for supervision, students attend the first seminar meeting at the beginning of the semester, where topics will be assigned and a submission deadline announced. If the seminar paper is evaluated with a grade better than or equal to 4.0, the student will present her/his work during a seminar meeting. Accepting to participate in the seminar but **failing to hand in** a final thesis will result in a **grade of 5.0**. As a consequence, the **student will not be accepted for any future seminars** at the Marketing Department, should the number of applications exceed available capacity. Please note that students cannot receive course credits for the same seminar twice. Therefore, students need to ensure that they have not already received credits under the same examination number (Prüfungsnummer).

1.2 BA/MA theses

In order to submit a BA/MA degree thesis to the Marketing Department, students must first apply for supervision to the examination board. The **application deadline** is the 15th of March for the summer semester and the 15th of September for the winter semester. The application form for degree theses can be found on the examination board's website. The number of students who can be accepted for supervision depends on the number of researchers and research assistants working in the Marketing Department. In case applications exceed supervision capacity, students will be selected according to their performance. Other selection criteria (e.g. the duration of study) will not be considered. In case of rejection, students are allowed to re-apply in the following semester. However, since the same application and selection process applies, a re-application does not increase the chances of acceptance.

After being accepted for supervision by the Marketing Department, students **select a topic from a variety of thesis topics offered by the Chairs** (note: **students cannot propose their own topic**) and **participate in a colloquium.** After a few days of consideration time, the chosen topic will then be registered at the Exams Office. The topic selection list includes information on the prospective supervisor and hosting Marketing chair (either Prof. Eisend or Prof. Brunk). The colloquium takes place at the beginning of the semester as announced by the Chair. No alternative colloquium dates will be offered to master students. Bachelor students have the option to choose between two colloquium dates: one at the beginning of the semester and one in the middle of the semester. It is the students' responsibility to ensure that they have fulfilled all requirements to register their thesis at the time the colloquium takes place. If they fail to do so, the supervision agreement becomes void. The thesis preparation time is determined by the study regulations and starts with the registration of the thesis. **All students have to write their thesis in English**. Master students have to conduct an empirical study for their thesis. If students were accepted for supervision but did not register or did not write their thesis during the designated semester, they will not be accepted for supervision by the Marketing Chairs in the future.

2 Supervision

Supervision of the thesis takes place in **one-to-one meetings** during office hours (Sprechstunde) - **not via email or phone**. The student contacts the supervisor in advance to arrange a consultation meeting. To make optimal use of the allocated time slot and ensure the meeting is as productive as possible, students should consider the following:

- Students are required to be fully knowledgeable about the instructions provided in this document.
- Students must read and review the proposed literature provided for the topic to get a feel and basic understanding of the topic and/or the methodology.
- Students are expected to propose an agenda of the points/questions that they would like to discuss **two working days prior to the scheduled meeting**. E.g., if the purpose of the meeting is to discuss the outline of the thesis, the outline needs to be attached. This allows the supervisor to prepare for the meeting. In case students do not send this information on time, the **supervisor can postpone the meeting**.

Writing a **BA/MA thesis reflects the student's ability to work independently** on an assigned topic and will be evaluated as such. The final result must be a fair representation of the student's (not the supervisor's!) knowledge and problem-solving skills. Thus, while the supervisor provides general guidance, the expectation is that the student works self-sufficiently to find solutions/answers by consulting the many academic online/offline resources available.

3 General Information

3.1 General Requirements for Seminar Papers and Degree Theses

Seminar paper

Students should learn how to answer a research question independently by writing a seminar paper. This will primarily be achieved by evaluating relevant research literature. The aim is to produce a paper that fulfills academic research criteria in preparation for writing a degree thesis at a later point in the studies. The overall length of the seminar paper (introduction, body, conclusion, including all tables and figures, references and the appendix) must not exceed **10 pages**. Exceeding the page limit leads to a deduction of grading points. The seminar paper has to be written **in English** and must be handed in via Moodle (including any required attachments). Please note that divergent requirements might apply for specific seminars. In this case, this will clearly be stated in the seminar's syllabus.

BA/MA thesis
The MA/BA thesis is a written exam and constitutes an essential part of passing the degree. Students should check the up-to-date examination regulations before they start writing their thesis. This time-limited project must demonstrate the student's ability to work with scientific methods independently, to critically evaluate scientific literature, and to write in a scientific and precise fashion. The overall thesis length (introduction, body, conclusion, **including** all tables and figures, references and the appendix) must not exceed **40 pages** for master's theses and **20 pages** for bachelor's theses. The thesis has to be written **in English**. Bound copies of the final thesis must be handed in to the Exams Office (see study/exam regulations). In addition, a Word version of the thesis and required attachments must be supplied in digital form (e.g. CD-ROM, USB flash drive).

3.2 General Characteristics of a Thesis

A seminar paper or thesis is a scientific paper that should be transferrable across other cases, research contexts or consumer groups, thus not only address a specific problem in a very particular case (e.g. one company or brand). To fulfill this requirement, the topics to choose from will be determined by the supervisor. The chairs do **not supervise any topics provided by companies** as these may pose a conflict of interest.

The main focus of the thesis/seminar paper is **scientific argumentation**. A scientific study is characterized by **a theoretical orientation and a structured, focused, and critical argumentation.** Unless students are referring to well-known and commonly accepted facts, any statements made must be backed-up by referring to relevant academic literature sources, by presenting corresponding data or by using logical argumentation, thus a scientific paper must not include guesses or unfound suppositions. The evaluation of literature **sources** should meet up-to-date international standards.

4 Searching for and Evaluating Literature

As a basic principle, **scientific journals** are the main source of information for preparing a scientific thesis. They can be accessed via electronic databases, scholar.google.com or academic networking sites like ResearchGate. An essential step in the literature search and evaluation is assessing the **relevance** of articles. To that end, students do not have to read every single article in detail, because often the relevance of the article can already be assessed from its title and abstract, or its introduction and conclusion. Recency and quality of an article are important consideration factors for selecting literature. To assess the quality of the academic journal an article is published in, students can refer to the VHB-JOURQUAL journal ranking.

There is **no requirement with regards to the number of sources** listed in the reference list of a seminar paper or thesis. As a general guideline, a seminar paper has approximately 10, a BA thesis between 20 and 30 and a MA thesis between 30 and 50 reference. All sources must be international journals (in English). All papers cited in the thesis must be listed in the reference list/bibliography and vice versa.

5 Components of the Seminar Paper/Thesis

5.1 Sections of the Manuscript

The structure below is recommended for all theses and seminar papers.

(1) Cover Page

(2) Table of Contents

(3) Introduction

(4) Body — Subdivided text is the main component of the thesis

(5) Conclusion

(6) Bibliography/References

(7) Declaration of Academic Integrity

5.2 Title Page

A template for the layout of the title page is included in the thesis/seminar paper **template,** which can be downloaded from both Marketing Chairs' website (see 8. Formatting further down in this manual).

5.3 Table of Contents/Outline

The **table of contents** is part of the finalized version of the thesis. In the table of contents, the entire overview of the thesis is presented. All sections must be assigned a numerical classification. Furthermore, each numerical classification must be paired up with a page number. The table of contents represents the **outline** of the thesis/seminar paper. The outline tends to be subject to change during the different phases of literature search and draft writing and serves as a basis for discussion with the supervisor. The outline provides an understanding of how the topic is understood and dealt with, thus a good outline allows the reader to grasp the content and main focus of the study. The length and depth of each section should reflect its importance.

5.4 Introduction

The **introduction** aims, in a concise form, to depict the background of the subject, the problem statement, the research questions, objectives and method of the thesis/seminar paper. Among other things, the following aspects should be clarified:

- What is the problem statement of the thesis or what is the aim of the study?
- Why is the topic important or relevant?
- How is the chain of argumentation constructed?

5.5 Body (Differences between Qualitative and Quantitative Work)

With regards to the content, the text must be cohesive and the topic fully addressed. Footnotes must be avoided. **Definitions** for key terms, variables, concepts and constructs**,** if deemed suitable and necessary, should only appear in the main part (neither in the introduction nor in the conclusion). Students must ensure that the use of concepts and constructs is consistent throughout the paper and in accordance with their once formulated definition and conceptualization.

Differences between qualitative and quantitative research (MA thesis only)
Differences in content and structure exist depending on whether the thesis is based on quantitative or qualitative empirical data. In general, while quantitative research aims to **measure and confirm** (i.e. a large empirical sample with limited participant engagement) the purpose of qualitative research is to **explore, describe and conceptualize** (i.e. a small empirical sample with intensive engagement). This difference has implications for developing the body of the thesis.

- For **quantitative** (positivist) **research**, the literature review will serve to **develop hypotheses** that are then statistically tested and dis/confirmed with the help of empirical (survey/experimental/panel) data, which will then be presented and discussed in the **results section**. The data is presented in numerical form (statistics and graphs thereof). The empirical sample must be large enough to allow for robust and reliable statistical testing. The **minimum sample sizes** are 100 respondents for a survey and 120 respondents for a 2 x 2 experiment (30 per condition). Students need to allocate enough time for data collection in their work schedule to achieve these numbers.
- **Qualitative** (interpretivist) research on the other hand, does **not develop hypothesis** but is inductive. The size of the **empirical sample is smaller** but offers considerably more depth. The objective here is to deeply mine and interpret the data in its context in order to excavate new knowledge and develop a broader understanding of the research phenomenon. The **findings section** therefore does not contain quantified information (i.e. statistical results, counts) but is **descriptive** in nature (e.g. presenting identified themes, processes, consumer profiles etc.). Contrary to quantitative research, the findings section is interspersed with data in textual or visual form (e.g. participant quotes/verbatims, interview observation notes, photographs etc.) to empirically underline the newly discovered themes and conceptualization.

5.6 Conclusions (Summary and Final Discussion)

The paper finishes with a clear and concise summary of the work. A conclusion should at minimum include a discussion and critical appraisal of the results and the research topic, managerial implications (if any), limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.7 Bibliography/References

The bibliography lists the authors of references used in the text in **alphabetical** order by first author (see Appendix for more information).

5.8 Declaration of Academic Integrity (Only for Degree Theses)

The thesis ends with a signed **declaration of academic integrity** on a **separate page**. The exact wording of this declaration is provided by the Exam's Office.

5.9 Digital Copies of the Finalized Thesis/Seminar Paper, Data and Digital Sources

All submissions are checked for plagiarism using a specialized software. Therefore, students must submit **the finalized thesis/seminar paper as a Word document**. For seminar thesis, the final file is handed in via moodle, whereas BA/MA theses are submitted to the Exam's Office. All **online sources** used (i.e. sources that are **only** available on the Internet - which exclude almost all journal articles that are usually available in print and online) must be documented and submitted in digital form.

In empirical **quantitative** studies, the raw data such as survey or experimental data are required in a valid format (e.g. SPSS, Excel) along with methodological details (e.g., questionnaire, experimental stimuli). For **qualitative** empirical studies, various types of data may exist (e.g. audio, text, video, picture files) and must also be electronically provided. Interview data needs to be supplied in its original format (i.e. audio files) as well as in transcribed form (in Word).

All the above files must be handed in to the Exam's Office as a single CD-ROM or USB-stick together with the bound copies of the thesis. If there is a large number of files, students should categorize them into folders (e.g. online sources, interview audio files, interview transcripts).

6 Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation of the degree thesis requires the independent preparation and operationalization of the topic, as insured by the declaration of academic integrity signed by the author. The entire thesis must be the sole work of the author.

The following criteria are considered during the evaluation of the thesis:

- Substantive Content, Theoretical Foundations, and Delineation of the Thesis
  - Understanding and use of concepts, theories, and methods
  - Thematic relevance and coverage of the topic
- Argumentation

- Train of thought and organization of the thesis (structure, classifications, emphases, proportions, logical consistency)
- Degree of selection and integration of arguments, soundness of conclusions
- Clarity of thoughts, intellectual rigor, quality of critical reflection and discussion

• Selection and Evaluation of Literature Sources
  - Consideration of the relevant literature
  - Quality of evaluation and integration of the literature
• Formal Aspects
  - Correctness of citation techniques and bibliography
  - Style, expression and clarity
  - Grammar, spelling and punctuation
  - General appearance and quality of visual aids
• Methodological Rigor (for MA/empirical studies only)
  - Appropriateness of the selected research design
  - Execution of data collection
  - Execution of data analysis
  - Interpretation of the data

7 Defense of Master‘s Thesis

According to the examination regulations for master’s theses, students have to defend their work during a colloquium. The candidate, the supervisor of the thesis, and an expert assessor take part in the colloquium. After evaluating the written thesis, the grade will be announced and the defense date scheduled, provided the thesis has been awarded a grade no worse than 4.0. Feedback about the evaluation of the thesis is only possible after the thesis defense.

For the verbal defense, students have to prepare a 15-minute Power Point presentation summarizing the thesis. In order to stick to the allocated time limit of 15 minutes, students are advised to give a broad overview and focus on presenting only the most important points of the thesis. Not adhering to the time limit may result in a deduction of points during the formal evaluation, and if necessary, the evaluators may ask you to end your presentation. The presentation will be followed by a short question & answer session during which students have the opportunity to defend their work against critical objections and demonstrate their expertise in the subject area. The total duration of the defense will not exceed 30 minutes. **The student is requested to bring two printed versions of the presentation** (if possible with 4 slides printed on one page) to be included in the defense proceedings, as well as an **electronic version on a USB stick** for the defense**.**

8 Formatting Requirements

8.1 Layout

A thesis **template** is available for download on the website of the Chair. It has been prepared according to the following instructions:

- The thesis should be written with a word processing program.
- As **font,** a proportional font (e.g. Times New Roman) with the font size 12 pt. must be chosen.
- For **line spacing,** a distance of one and a half (18 pt.) must be selected.
- The text must be formatted using hyphenation justification.
- There must be a distance of two-line spacing between two new paragraphs.
- The titles must be written with larger line spacing proportionate to their classification level in the table of contents.
- A non-serif font (e.g. Arial) must be used for the figures.
- All pages except the cover page must be Arabic-numbered continuously.
- Each page must include: a left margin of at least 3 cm, a right margin of at least 2.5 cm, a top margin of at least 2.5 cm, and a bottom margin of at least 2.5 cm. The top and bottom margins might also depend on the head notes or where the page numbers are.
- About 33 lines with 80 keystrokes are the benchmark for the length of a page.

8.2 Table of Contents

The **table of contents** must follow a numerical order. There must be at least two lower order classifications under a higher order classification. An example:

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical Background and Significance of Market Research
3. Methods of Marketing Research
   3.1. Research Process
   3.2. Research Design
   …

The numerical order will facilitate **cross referencing** within the thesis/seminar paper. It should not contain numerical classifications with more than three levels (e.g. 2.3.1.).

8.3 Tables and Figures

Tables and figures must be consecutively numbered and clearly labeled reflecting their **content**. Labels of tables are placed above, whereas labels of figures are placed below. In the text, figures or tables must be referred to (e.g. see 'Table 3') in the appropriate section and must be legible (i.e. choose a suitable font type and size).

8.4 Citation Technique

Correct (i.e., complete and comprehensible) citation serves as a proof of thorough scientific work. It reflects both the honesty of the author and the ability to build arguments with appropriate sources.

Students are welcome to use either **Harvard, APA** or **Chicago B** style formatting which are all common in the marketing and consumer research domains. However, it is essential that the chosen style format is **consistent across the entire document** (meaning in-text as well as in the bibliography) to avoid point deductions for not adhering to formal citation requirements. An overview and comparison of the different citation styles can be found online, e.g. https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/citation-style-overview/. In the Appendix, the **Harvard** referencing style is explained in more detail.

9 Advice for Successfully Writing a Seminar Paper/Thesis

As timing poses a challenge for some, students should prepare a **timetable** at the beginning of the project and start working immediately. A common mistake is to underestimate the time required for final formatting, proofreading, and printing/copying. Part of the final grading is whether formal requirements have been adhered to, thus it is advisable to allow some time to revise, proofread and double-check the referencing and formatting. Technology malfunction (e.g. computer crash, data loss, internet failure) are not accepted reasons for a deadline extension. It is the students' responsibility to back up their files on a regular basis and ensure on time submission.

Here are some instructions in terms of **language style**. Note that the scientific way of writing does not imply verbose, overly complex and incomprehensible language.

- The first-person singular pronoun "I" and the first-person plural pronoun "we" should be avoided. It is however acceptable for qualitative, interpretive research (relevant for MA thesis only).
- Using filler words, weak words, colloquial expressions, unnecessary verbiage and poetic words should be avoided. Instead, applying marketing terminology, short sentences, a compact style of expression using strong words, and a clear and exact language is advisable.
- Chapter titles should be formulated in a precise and meaningful way.
- Language is an important tool in social sciences. While being a non-native English speaker is taken into account when evaluating the thesis/paper, easy mistakes such as frequent grammar, spelling, sentence structure, wording, and punctuation mistakes are a distraction to the reader and will lead to a deduction of points. Therefore, proofreading is recommended and/or the application of computer programs to check spelling and grammar is advised.
- Footnotes or endnotes should not be used.

When the body of literature (e.g. theories, models, studies, methods) the thesis builds on **is vast**, it is oftentimes useful to categorize the literature into a summary table or develop a taxonomy. In this case, only the most relevant points or seminal articles need to be discussed in-text. In other words, summarizing information is a reader-friendly way to deliver a focused and coherent story without getting lost in details. When providing a summary table or taxonomy, students should select relevant classification criteria and reason their particular choice. An alternative option to discussing many articles is to select a few key articles to more deeply engage with in-text. If this path is chosen and only a selection of relevant theories, models, studies, or methods are presented, again, the exact reasons for selecting these must be explained.

Conjectures, empirical results, practitioner opinions and experiences, hypothetical information, media reports and commercial as well as professional market research are all **different types of knowledge** that can be leveraged to build and strengthen general arguments, but need to be employed with their particular nature and quality in mind. For example, a newspaper article can be conducive to underlining the relevance of the research topic or a particular finding of research but is not suitable to build a theoretical or conceptual argument, for which only high-quality academic journal sources should be used.

Self-drawn conclusions must always be substantiated and justified in a logical way; undifferentiated and unsubstantiated judgments lead to deduction of points during the evaluation.

APPENDIX

Example of Citation Technique: Harvard referencing style

Direct Quotations
In direct quotations, the reference is given with the quote inside quotation marks such as "......." (Assael 2001, p. 115). If some parts of direct quotations are excluded, these parts should be marked with three full stops ("... by which attitudes […] are affected…”). Here, as for all quotations, the original relationship and the meaning of the quotation must be maintained. Direct quotations should be used sparingly and are most likely used for important definitions and particularly striking or brilliant formulations. A series of direct quotations will be regarded as plagiarism, as well as the use of slightly modified, but almost literally the same quotations, by which the author seeks to avoid independent formulations and own argumentation.

Indirect Quotations
In an indirect quotation, e.g. if the source is referred to as a whole or some general idea of it, the reference is given without page numbers. In other words, page numbers will not be indicated when working with journal articles or articles from anthologized works from which references to concrete results (e.g., empirical results) or direct quotations are not made.

> However, it would be naive to believe that, similar to how Vance Packard (1966) tried to persuade in his book “The Hidden Persuaders”, marketing gives the society a silver bullet.

If concrete passages (e.g., empirical figures) are addressed, the source appears at the end of the sentence as evidence of the previously made statement, with page numbers. If a source is directly addressed (by mentioning the names of the authors), the reference can be given after the names of the authors.

> The authors identify an effect size of 0.2 … (Jacoby et al. 1974a, p. 15)

Or: Jacoby et al. (1974a, p. 15) identify an effect size of 0.2 …

If a source has three or more authors, only the first author should be mentioned in-text and followed by ‘et al.’ (which stand for ‘and others’), as is illustrated in the example above. Yet, **all** authors must be mentioned in the bibliography.

If **more than one reference** is used for a statement, they must be in alphabetical order (Gatignon / Robertson 1985; Green / Gold 1981). When several references to the same author, or to the same author team are made, a comma must separate the publication years of the sources (Moschis / Moore 1978, 1979). If several references from the same author or from the same author team have the same publication year, distinctions between these sources must be made by assigning lowercase letters in alphabetical order which must also be used as such in the bibliography (Moore 1980a, 1980b).

Secondary quotations (“cited in”) are not admissible.

Citing Illustrations

If illustrations (figures and tables) from other sources are copied, the in-text citation rules apply. The source of the illustration is then indicated in the figure's title (below the figure) or the table's title (above the table). The illustration must be referred to in the main body of the manuscript (e.g. 'Table 1 illustrates the revenues').

Table 1: Development of Sales (McTable 2021, p. 312)

	1. Quarter	2. Quarter	3. Quarter	4. Quarter
East	20.4	27.4	90.0	20.4
West	30.6	38.6	34.6	31.6
North	45.9	46.9	45.0	43.9

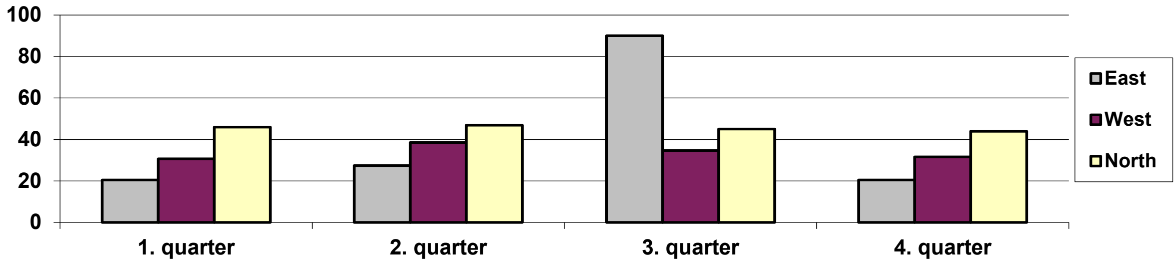

Figure 1: Sales per Quarter (McFigure 2021, p. 99)

List of References/Bibliography

In the list of references or bibliography, **all sources cited in the text** must be indicated in **alphabetical order by the surnames of the authors**. Sources that are not referred to in the text should not be included. Before submitting their thesis/paper, students need to **verify that the reference list/bibliography matches the references** used in the text. Incomplete or incorrect referencing will lead to a deduction in points.

In general, the following information is required for referencing in the bibliography:

- **Editor or author: last and first names** (must be mentioned and spelled out)
- **Publication year**
- **Title of the study or article**
  - For articles from journals the <u>title of the journal</u> is also indicated.
  - For articles from anthologies the <u>title of the anthology</u> is mentioned. Before the title of the anthology is mentioned, the name of the publisher followed by the note '(ed.)' for one editor or '(eds.)' for two or more editors must be written.
- **Volume, edition** (for monographs and edited volumes with multiple volumes or editions, the edition number must be mentioned starting from the second edition)
- **Place of publication** (for monographs, edited volumes, articles in edited volumes)
- **Publisher** (for monographs, edited volumes, articles in edited volumes)
- **Publication volume** (and **number** if several issues are published in a volume) **of the journal**
- **Page numbers** (for journal articles and articles in edited volumes)
- **Complete URL** and **date of retrieval** (for online sources)

The instructions mentioned above apply to all types of sources in the bibliography. In the following, examples that highlight how different types of sources are correctly indicated are provided. Some formal details, such as the use of punctuation or the use of underlining and italics, are not binding. In any case, **the formal details in the bibliography must be consistent** (e.g. the use of uppercase and lowercase letters in titles must be consistent and cannot change from title to title).

Books and Writings

Blackwell, Roger D. / Miniard, Paul W. / Engel, James F. (2001), *Consumer Behavior*, 9th edition, Forth Worth et al.: Harcourt College Publishers.

Articles in Edited Volumes

Jöreskog, Karl G. (1993), Testing Structural Equation Models, in Bollen, Kenneth A. / Long, J. Scott (eds.), *Testing Structural Equation Models*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 294-316.

Articles in Journals

Mittelstaedt, John D. (2002), A Framework for Understanding the Relationships Between Religions and Markets, *Journal of Macromarketing* 22(1), 6-18.

Digital Sources

The citations of digital sources have this structure:
Author (year), Title, [type of media], Available: Site / Path / File [Date of Retrieval].

Smith, Michael (1999), *Understanding Digital Markets: Review and Assessment*, [Online], Available: http://ecomerce.mit.edu/ERF140.pdf [April 28, 2009].

Falckenberg, Christian (1994), *Internet - Spielzeug oder Werkzeug?*, [Online], Available FTP: ftp://ftp.dfv.rwth-aachen.de/Internet/Studienarbeit [March 3, 2008].

If the author is not mentioned, the owner of the page (mentioned in the Legal Disclosure) should be indicated. If the publications are available in digital and in conventional form, the conventional source must be cited. Online sources should be used sparingly. Most online sources (e.g. Wikipedia) are not scientific sources!