MA THESIS GUIDE

Department of Communication and Media Science
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1. About the thesis guide

The purpose of this document is to describe the form and content requirements applying to theses submitted in Communication and Media Science programme at Corvinus University of Budapest. The administrative process of thesis submission is determined by Article 79 of the Study and Examination Regulations of the university, and students receive information about all the related tasks and deadlines in separate messages. Therefore, this document does not provide details about administrative tasks related to selection of the topic and the supervisor, the thesis proposal, the consultation process, or the submission of the thesis.

2. The objective of the thesis

In the thesis, the candidate must convincingly demonstrate that

- he/she is well-informed about the academic literature on the chosen topic,
- he/she is capable of collecting, comparing and contrasting relevant theoretical viewpoints and research findings, and presenting them in formal academic English in an integrated, logically structured, and coherent fashion,
- he/she takes a critical approach to the literature, assessing various sources and drawing independent and appropriately supported conclusions about the issues discussed,
- and – if the thesis reports on a piece of empirical research conducted by the candidate – he/she can design a study that meets the methodological requirements in social science research, collect and analyse data, and interpret the findings in the context of the academic literature.

3. Format and layout

The **length** of the thesis must be between 80,000 and 130,000 characters without spaces; with an average of 1,600 characters per page, this corresponds to approximately 50–80 pages. The length requirement applies to the body of the thesis, excluding the title page, the abstract, the table of contents, the references, and the appendices. (There is no upper limit on the length of the appendices.)

If the thesis does not reach the minimum required length, it will not be accepted for examination. If the length of the thesis exceeds the upper limit and the referee considers this to be unjustified by the purpose of the thesis, it may result in penalty points. Within the specified limits, the length of the thesis does not affect the assessment.

The thesis consists of the following **main parts** and it must contain them in the order given:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Table of contents
4. Chapters forming the main body of the thesis
5. References
6. Appendix/appendices (optional)

The general format of the **title page** is shown in Appendix A. Please check with your supervisor about the appropriate order for both your and their names (and any title/s, as needed).

The title page is followed by the **abstract**, which is a concise summary of the content of the thesis. The length of the abstract must be between 1500–2000 characters (without spaces). The purpose of the abstract is to enable people who are interested in the thesis (such as our future students) to quickly become familiar with the general content. Therefore, the abstract must summarise all the key points of the thesis and provide answers to the following questions: (1) what is the topic and objective of the thesis, (2) what sources does the thesis review (the most important authors, theories, and empirical studies), (3) if the thesis presents the candidate's own research: what methods did the candidate use and what were the key findings, (4) in the case of a theoretical thesis: what are the key elements of the theory/model advanced by the candidate, what phenomena does it account for, and how is it related to other theories and previous empirical findings, (5) what are the final conclusions of the thesis, and (6) what are some further (and potentially new) questions which the thesis leaves unanswered and what kind of further studies might be conducted in the future to clarify these open issues?

The **table of contents** must list all chapters and subchapters of the thesis with their corresponding page numbers. The default format of tables of contents generated by any major, widely used word processing software is generally acceptable. This document's Table of Contents is a viable example for your use.

Because different operating systems and office suites offer different selections of available **font**s, there is no restriction concerning the font used for the text of the thesis: the default font in any common word processor (e.g. Calibri, 11 points; Times New Roman, 12 points) is appropriate.

All **margins** must be set at 2.5 cm, which is the default value in most word processors.

The paragraphs of the main text must be formatted with 1.5 **line spacing**. Flush left and justified **alignment** styles are equally acceptable. We recommend that the first line of each paragraph should be indented by 1.25 cm:[1] this clearly separates the paragraphs and makes it unnecessary to include extra spacing between them (although the use of such inter-paragraph spacing is of course still permitted). In recent years, the use of a more modern-looking paragraph formatting style has been increasing, the so-called *block style*, which uses no indentation at the start of paragraphs. This more contemporary-looking formatting style may also be used; in this case, however, it is necessary to separate each paragraph from the next with extra **spacing** that is larger than the line spacing within the paragraphs (as in this document). If the block style is used without any inter-paragraph spacing, the paragraph boundaries may become unclear (especially when the text is left-aligned and the last line of a paragraph is long enough to approach the right margin).

Whichever formatting style the candidate opts to use, it is essential that paragraph formatting must be consistent throughout the thesis. The requirement of formatting consistency also applies to the **headings** of chapters and subchapters at different levels: all headings at the same level must be formatted in exactly the same way. If the candidate wishes to number the chapter headings, we recommend the use of tiered numbers, which unambiguously indicate each chapter's position in the hierarchy: 1., 1.1., 1.2., 1.2.1., 1.2.2., 1.2.3., 1.3., 2. etc. However, simple unnumbered chapter headings may also be used.

The pages of the thesis must be numbered beginning from the first page of the main text, and the **page numbers** must be positioned centred at the bottom of the page (as in this document).

All **tables** and **figures** in the main body of the thesis must have a number and a caption, which must be placed below the table/figure (e.g., "*Figure 1.* Age distribution of questionnaire respondents"). If necessary, further notes or a legend may be added below the title. The main text must contain at least one reference to each table/figure placed in the main body of the thesis: e.g. "The results of this analysis are shown in Table 2."

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[1] This is the default tabulator setting in most word processors.

The candidate must paraphrase the content of the cited sources: the key ideas must be presented in the author's own words, highlighting elements directly related to the topic or the thesis and continuously comparing and contrasting the content of various sources. In some cases, however, the literal quotation of a source may be justified, e.g. in the case of a precise definition for a concept or when the wittiness of the original wording would be difficult to convey in a paraphrase. Short **literal quotations** (below 40 words in length) must be enclosed in quotation marks, and after the quotation the author, the year of publication, and the exact page number must be given: e.g. `Berger notes that "the beginnings of personal relationships are fraught with uncertainties" (Berger, 1988, p. 244)`. (When the quote is taken from a nonpaginated source – such as a website – no page number can be provided, so this requirement does not apply.)

Quotations longer than 40 words must be displayed in a separate paragraph in which every line is indented 1.25 cm from the left margin. For instance:

> Burleson is perfectly aware of the striking gap between our knowledge and its practical applications in the field of communication science:
>
> > As a communication researcher and educator, I find this situation embarrassing and unacceptable. We researchers now know a lot about cognitive complexity and advanced social perception and communication skills, but thus far there have been few efforts to translate what we know into proven programs that effectively enhance these skills. (Burleson, 2006, p. 124)

This formatting clearly separates a long quotation from the rest of the text, and therefore quotation marks need not be used. If the quotation consists of multiple paragraphs, the first line of the second and subsequent paragraphs must be indented 2.5 cm.

The overall proportion of literal quotations must not exceed 5% of the main text.

The requirements concerning in-text **citations** and the list of **references** are described in a separate section (section 5).

Materials which are too lengthy to fit in the main body of the thesis or which are illustrative or supplementary in nature may be included in the **appendices**. Some examples for materials that are typically placed in an appendix are: (a) the original form of a questionnaire that the candidate used for data collection, (b) the guiding outline of topics used in semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions, (c) the verbatim transcription of an interview or discussion, (d) a sample of texts or visual material used in content analysis, or (e) tables/figures showing detailed results not specifically referred to in the main text.

If the thesis contains multiple appendices, each appendix must be identified by a capital letter and a unique title, e.g. "Appendix A – The online questionnaire". Each appendix must be specifically referred to in the main text, e.g. "The full questionnaire is given in Appendix A."

4. Language and style

The thesis must be written in formal academic English. The example to be followed is the stylistic conventions of academic literature found in social science journals, academic handbooks and university textbooks. The tone must remain objective throughout the thesis, and ideas must be conveyed in a precise, clear and concise manner: redundant self-repetitions and verbose discussions should be avoided. Each chapter and section must have a clearly stated purpose and its content must at no point steer away from the topic identified in the heading.

Colloquial words and expressions typical of casual, spoken English must be avoided (some examples of informal phrases and their formal equivalents are: "a lot of research" → "much/considerable research", "a lot of reasons" → "many/several reasons", "get" → "receive/obtain", "so far" → "to date", "just about" → "nearly", "not enough" → "insufficient", "problems like that do not happen very often" → "such problems rarely occur"). Bombastic expressions (e.g. "revolutionary discovery") and clichés reminiscent of the style of the popular media (e.g. "needless to say…", "time will tell if...", "at the end of the day...", "in a nutshell…", "the argument goes…") are also inappropriate and look out-of-place in academic writing. The candidate should also avoid the use of contracted forms (e.g. write "do not" instead of "don't"), avoid addressing the reader as "you" (e.g. "you can see the results in…" → "the results can be seen in…"), use formal transition signals ("therefore", "however", "nevertheless", "although", "whereas", "furthermore" etc.), place adverbs in middle position whenever possible (e.g. "actually, very little is known about…" → "very little is actually known about…"), and use formal single-word verbs instead of informal multi-word verbs (e.g. "came up with a new theory" → "developed a new theory", "to get rid of such problems" → "to eliminate such problems", "to figure out the reason" → "to determine the reason", "studies have looked at the effect" → "studies have examined the effect"). The books listed in Appendix C provide further guidance on the stylistic features of formal, academic English.

In a work of this size, it is natural and virtually inevitable that the thesis may contain a few typing errors or punctuation mistakes. If, however, the proportion of spelling and accuracy errors is disturbingly high and this impairs the legibility of the text, the candidate's carelessness may result in penalty points. Spell checkers found in word processing software can only filter certain types of error effectively, and therefore it is recommended that whenever in doubt, the candidate should rely on a respectable source, such as a manual of style and grammar.

5. Citations and references

Two of the most important features of academic writing are: 1) all work that references the original work of another author must be cited, and 2) all factual statements must be supported by a citation, unless it is evident that the statement follows from the author's own arguments or findings. The following sentences in this form, for example, would be unacceptable in any serious academic journal:

```
The success of persuasion depends on whether the receiver makes
a cognitive effort to elaborate on the content of the message.

Facial appearance has a profound impact on the social judgment
of an individual.
```

In neither of the above examples does the author make clear who has made these claims or on what basis. The proper way of presenting these statements is as follows:

> The success of persuasion depends on whether the receiver makes a cognitive effort to elaborate on the content of the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

> Facial appearance has a profound impact on the social judgment of an individual (Todorov, Mendle-Sieldecki & Dotsch, 2013).

In both examples, the citation in parentheses identifies a specific source: the information provided enables the reader to retrieve the bibliographical details of the source, and subsequently access the original content and verify for himself/herself whether the arguments and findings supporting the claim are sufficiently convincing.

While writing the thesis, the candidate should continuously envision a critical reader who responds to each factual statement by asking “What does the author base that claim on?”; this crucial question should never be left unanswered! Essentially there are two ways a statement can be supported: either (1) by making it clear that the statement follows from our own findings or our own theoretical reasoning, or (2) by citing a specific source, and hence indicating that the statement is based on other researchers’ findings or reflects another author’s viewpoint.

This, however, does not mean that – for example – in the literature review each and every sentence must contain a citation (although in some particularly concisely written parts of the thesis even this would not be unusual). It is often the case that the content of a specific source is presented in detail, spreading multiple paragraphs. In such cases it is sufficient to indicate the source at the point where it is first mentioned, and later use appropriate linking devices to clarify the fact that the discussion of the same source is being continued (e.g. “Another important finding of this study…”, “The authors also argue that…” etc.).

In the following sections, the formatting requirements concerning in-text citations (used in the main body of thesis) and references (used in the list of references) are discussed separately. In general, all in-text citations and all entries in the list of reference must follow the style of the *APA Publication Manual* (American Psychological Association, 2020), which has become an international standard for the social sciences in the past two decades. In special cases not covered in the present guide or whenever in doubt, the candidate should consult the APA manual (available at the Central Library of Corvinus University of Budapest) or a creditable online source on the APA format such as the APA style guide published by the *Purdue Online Writing Lab* (n. d.), accessible at the following URLaddress: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html.

In-text citations

The detailed bibliographical details of the cited sources need not be given in the main text since that information will be contained in the list of references. The function of an in-text citation is to unambiguously identify an element in the reference list. This may be accomplished in several different ways: in the social sciences the general convention – which is to be followed in the thesis as well – is providing the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication (copyright) in parentheses.[2]

The typical form of an in-text citation is therefore as follows:

> A similar pattern can be observed in the temporal dynamics of Twitter messages with political content (Jungherr, 2014).

When the sentence already contains the name of the authors, it is sufficient to provide the year:

> Jungherr (2014) examined Twitter messages related to the 2009 elections in Germany.

Occasionally the sentence may contain both the author's name and the year of publication. In such cases, the in-text citation would be completely redundant and is therefore omitted:

> In a more recent study published in 2014, Jungherr examined…

If a source has two authors, both authors must be listed each time the work is cited. In the text the two names are joined by the word "and", while in citations given in parentheses the ampersand ("&") symbol is used.

> Horányi and Szabó (2007) notes that…

> … the agent concept has undergone considerable change (Horányi & Szabó, 2007).

Note in the above example that the citation is in fact part of the sentence, and it is therefore placed before the full stop rather than between two sentences.

If a source has three or more authors, it is sufficient to name the first author and indicate the fact that the source has additional authors by the Latin abbreviation "et al."

> Neuman et al. (2014) compared the attention dynamics of traditional and social media.

In some cases, the name(s) of the author(s) of a document is/are not available. In such cases, it is the institution which published the source that is taken to be the author:

> According to a survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Centre (2013), the attitude of the general population towards…

When an institution with a long name is cited repeatedly, it is convenient to introduce an abbreviation when the institution is mentioned for the first time, and use this abbreviation in subsequent citations:

[2] The placement of references in footnotes is characteristic of arts and humanities and the essayist tradition. Such practice looks rather unusual in a social science context, and therefore the candidate should avoid the use of footnote citations in the thesis.

```
According to a survey conducted by the National Opinion
Research Centre (NORC, 2013), the attitude of the general
population towards… […] The results published by NORC (2013),
however, do not indicate whether…
```

Within a pair of parentheses multiple citations may be listed, separated by semicolons. If two or more sources have (an) identical author(s), the name(s) need not be repeated each time: if multiple years of publications are listed (separated by commas), each year is taken to refer to a separate source written by the same author(s). When listing multiple sources, they must be arranged in the alphabetical order of the authors' names.

```
… has been verified by several independent studies. (Greene &
Oliva, 2009; Oliva & Torralba, 2001, 2006; Schyns & Oliva,
1994).
```

After word-for-word quotations, the exact page number must also be given. In some cases, this practice may also be useful with paraphrased citation, particularly when the source is long (e.g. a monograph) and hence it would be difficult for the reader to locate the section where the cited claim is made. Page numbers are indicated by the abbreviation "p.":

```
A prime requirement for any coding scheme is that the
categories must be mutually exclusive (Neuendorf, 2002,
p. 119).
```

A section spreading multiple pages is indicated by the abbreviation "pp." and the page numbers are connected by an en-dash (rather than a hyphen):

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… which Neuendorf describes in detail (2002, pp. 114–117).
```

Occasionally, one may wish to cite a non-retrievable source such as a private conversation or an email. In such cases, the following format can be used:

```
… have encountered similar difficulties (Bakonyi Zs., personal
communication, 14 October 2013).
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The list of references

The list of references at the end of the thesis contains the detailed bibliographic data about the sources cited in the text, and is typically titled "References". When compiling the list of references, it is important to note the following two requirements:

- the list of references must contain every source cited at any point in the thesis, and
- the list of references must not contain any sources which are not actually cited in the main text of the thesis.

In the list of references the sources must be arranged in the alphabetic order of the authors' names. The sources should not be grouped according to their type (e.g. monographs, journal articles, electronic sources); since the in-text citations contain no information concerning the type of a source, such practice makes it more difficult for the reader to find a given reference (the reader is forced to look for the author's name in several separate lists rather than just one).

If multiple sources have the same first authors, it is the second author's name that determines the order. (If the first two authors are the same, the order is determined by the third author's name, and so on.) When ordering several works by the same first author, one-author sources must precede multiple-author sources:

```
Ekman, P. (1985). …

Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1969). …

Ekman, P., Friesen, W. V., & Ellsworth, P. (1972). …
```

If two sources have exactly the same author or authors, the entries must be ordered chronologically (according to the year or publication). In the rare case when two sources have the same author(s) (in the same order) and the year of publication is also identical, the sources must be distinguished by lowercase letters (a, b, c, etc.) added immediately after the year within the parentheses, and this letter must also be used in all matching in-text citations. In such a case, the sources must be arranged alphabetically by their titles:

```
Berger, C. R. (2010a). Making a differential difference. …

Berger, C. R. (2010b). Message production processes. …
```

As the above examples indicate, only the surname of each author is written out in full and this is followed by the initial of the author's first name, or the initials of the first and middle names. The surname is followed by a comma indicating that the parts of the name are not given in the usual (western) order. The comma must be included even if the author comes from a country where the eastern name order is used, i.e. the family name precedes given names (as in Japan, China, Korea or Hungary).

The names of multiple authors are separated by commas and an ampersand ("&") is added before the last author in the list. Note that the comma is always used before the ampersand, even if the source has only two authors.

```
Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). …

Rothman, A. J., Bartels, R. D., Wlaschin, J., & Salovey, P.
      (2006). …
```

The names of institutional authors must be written out in full and followed by a full stop:

```
National Opinion Research Centre. (2013). …
```

When citing an edited volume, we use the abbreviation "Ed." or the plural "Eds." to indicate that the names refer to the editors – rather than the authors – of the book.[3]

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Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (Eds.). (2011). …
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[3] This is a relatively rare case, because normally a specific chapter – rather than the whole volume – is cited and the entry begins with the chapter author(s) (see below).

As can be seen in the examples above, the year of publication is given in parentheses after the list of authors (or editors) and followed by a full stop. When citing a manuscript which has been received for publication but has not been published yet, this can be indicated as follows:

> Bokor, T. (in press). …

What follows below is some examples of references to the most commonly used types of sources.

Entries for **journal articles** have the following format:

> Carpenter, C. J. & Boster, F. J. (2013). The relationship between message recall and persuasion: More complex than it seems. *Journal of Communication, 63*(4), 661–681.

Note the following details in this example:

- The reference is a separate paragraph formatted with hanging indent, which means that each line of the paragraph except for the first is indented 1.25 cm. This formatting requirement generally applies to all entries in the list of references.
- The title (and subtitle) of the article begins with an uppercase initial, but all the other words in the title are lowercase (except, of course, proper nouns, nationality adjectives and the word "I", which must always be capitalised). The title ends with a full stop.
- The title of the journal is given in its original form (preserving capital initials) and formatted in italics.
- The journal title is followed by a comma and then the volume number, which is also italicised. The volume number is immediately followed the issue number, which is given in parentheses. Note that there is no space separating the volume from the issue and that – unlike the volume number – neither the issue number nor the surrounding parentheses are italicised.
- The "volume and issue" block is followed by a comma and two numbers indicating the first and last page of the article (including the list of references). These two page numbers are linked with an en-dash.
- The reference ends with a full stop.

References to standalone **books** have the following format:

> Griffin, E. (2012). *A first look at communication theory.* McGraw-Hill.

The title of the book is italicised and ends with a full stop. This is followed by the name of the publisher.

If the source is a chapter in an **edited book**, the entry begins with the author(s) of the chapter rather than the editor(s) of the book:

> Nabi, R. L., & Oliver, M. B. (2010). Mass media effects. In C. R. Berger, M. E. Roloff, & D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen (Eds.),

Handbook of communication science (2nd ed., pp. 255-272). Sage Publications.

The title of the chapter is terminated by a full stop. After the title, the word "In" indicates that the material is part of an edited volume, and this is followed by the editors' names (or editor's name). Note that unlike at the beginning of a reference, at this point the names are given in their normal western order with the surname coming last in each case. (Authors' names are reversed at the beginning of entries because this facilitates finding a reference as the list is ordered alphabetically by the authors' surnames. Within an entry, however, the reversal of names would serve no reasonable purpose.) The abbreviation "Ed." or "Eds." is given in parentheses and is followed by a comma and the title of the book in italics. If the source is not the first edition of the book, this must be specified in parentheses after the book title; if the book has only one edition, this information is omitted. The numbers of the first and last page of the chapter, however, must be provided in all cases in parentheses, following the abbreviation "pp.". As in the previous example, the reference ends with the location and the name of the publisher.

As for **electronic sources**, the following principles must be observed:

- If the name of the author is not given, the owner of the website is regarded as the institutional author of the content.
- If the date of publication (or last edit) is provided with the content, the reference must contain this information. If, however, the date is not available, the abbreviation "(n. d.)" (meaning "no date") must be given in parentheses after the author(s).
- The reference must end with the name of the website and the full URL-address. (If the institutional author and the name of the website are identical, the latter may be omitted.)

For instance:

Viewsonic. (29 July 2021). *5 ways to communicate better in meetings.* https://www.viewsonic.com/library/business/5-ways-tocommunicate-better-in-meetings/

Mitchell, J. (n. d.). *The upsides of gaming: 4 benefits and ways gaming promotes community.* Heartmanity's blog. https://blog.heartmanity.com/the-upsides-of-gaming-4-benefitsand-ways-gaming-promotes-community

When citing a **bachelor's** or **master's thesis**, a **doctoral dissertation**, or a **university lecture**, the same general requirements apply as in the examples above, except the nature of the source must be indicated after the title in parentheses, and the reference must end with the name and location of the institution (university or college) where the thesis/dissertation was submitted or the lecture was given. If the location is contained in the name of the institution, it may be omitted:

Holst, P. (1990). *Male and female communication patterns before and after personal narratives in a long-term support self help group* (Doctoral dissertation). Temple University, Philadelphia.

Kovács, G. (2015). *Processing and understanding texts* (Lecture). Corvinus University of Budapest.

6. Content requirements

The thesis may be

- a report on a piece of empirical research conducted by the candidate,
- a detailed review of the academic literature on a specific research topic, or
- a theoretical thesis.

The content requirements are somewhat different for each of these cases, and therefore the three types of thesis are discussed separately in the sections below.

Empirical theses

In the social sciences, empirical research reports follow a standard format which has developed over the last century, and therefore it is recommended that the overall structure of the thesis should follow this standard pattern. A research report traditionally consists of four main parts:

- introduction
- method(s)
- results
- discussion

This, however, does not mean that the chapters of the thesis should bear the above titles or that the thesis should consist of exactly four chapters. The introduction, for instance, may consist of several chapters, each of which reviews a separate topic, gradually focussing on the actual research question(s) targeted in the thesis. Similarly, the part describing the research methods may also consist of multiple chapters, especially if the candidate used a combination of different research methods.

The detailed content requirements regarding the four main parts are described below.

Introduction

The introductory chapter(s) must specify the topic of the thesis and explain why it is important to conduct research in that area: the candidate must demonstrate – in general terms – the theoretical significance and/or the practical applications of researching the chosen topic.

After this brief rationale, the candidate must present a selection of important studies that have been previously carried out in the area: this literature review must summarise the motivation for each study, the methods used in the research, and the key findings in a concise manner. The citations must be accurate and the key terms must be clearly defined. This literature review provides the context for the candidate's own research by outlining what is already known about the topic. It would obviously be impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of an area of research within the length limits of a master's thesis, and that is not a requirement: instead, the candidate must demonstrate his/her ability to select and focus on a relatively small range of previous studies which are most directly relevant to his/her own research.

There is no specific requirement about the minimum number of sources that the candidate must cite; nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine any research area whose current state could be described without relying on at least 10–12 independent sources. Since over the last few decades English has become the international language of science (including both natural and social sciences), it is natural that the majority of the sources cited in the thesis will be English language publications. Sources written in other languages, however, may also be cited, particularly when they contain information unavailable in English.

Another important requirement is that the vast majority of sources cited in the thesis must be academic or professional in nature. Academic literature consists, on the one hand, of (1) primary sources, which are peer reviewed academic journals publishing original papers, edited books published by university presses or other academic publishers, conference proceedings, and monographs written on academic subjects; and, on the other hand, of (2) secondary sources, which review a wide range of primary sources organised by topic; secondary sources include university textbooks and encyclopaedias, which typically present long-settled knowledge, and handbooks, which tend to summarise issues in contemporary research and our current state of knowledge (and therefore go out-of-date more quickly). The vast majority of content available freely on the internet does not stand up to academic standards, and therefore cannot be considered academic literature. (Exceptions include content published on university websites, manuscripts available from researchers' personal home pages, and books/journals made freely accessible by major academic publishers.) A wide range of academic literature is available through the services offered by the university library, such as the e-journals collection. These services are available locally in the library or remotely by VPN access. Candidates are highly recommended to make use of these resources.

In addition to creating the context for the research, the literature review also provides an opportunity for the candidate to draw attention to one or more questions which were not targeted in previous studies. This way, the candidate can demarcate the research gap which the thesis is intended to fill in and demonstrate that his/her own research is a logical continuation/extension of previous work summarised in the introduction.

The research objective and the research question(s) must be explicitly stated in the thesis, typically towards the end of the introduction. In addition, if the candidate employs quantitative methods in their thesis, hypotheses will be required alongside any appropriate research questions. If they use only qualitative methods, research questions will be sufficient.

Methods

The methods used in the research process must be described in such detail that would enable the reader to conduct an exact replication of the study. In communication science, the most commonly used research methods are (1) content analyses, (2) questionnaire surveys, and (3) qualitative interviews. In addition to these, the candidate may use any research method employed in the social sciences; for example, the candidate may (4) conduct an experiment, (5) hold focus group discussions, (6) do participant observation, or (7) prepare a case study. Also, a single research question may be targeted jointly by a combination of multiple methods.

If candidates decide to combine methods, they should not combine more than is necessary to competently and thoroughly answer their research questions (in discussion and agreement with their supervisor). More is not necessarily better, and candidates will not be marked down for choosing to focus in-depth on one method only. However—whatever method(s) the candidate opts to use—he/she must in all cases justify his/her selection and explain why the method is particularly suitable for studying the question at hand.

The chapter(s) describing the research method(s) must provide clear answers to the following questions:

- What is considered as the population of the study? (I.e. the range of people, objects, message units, or events to which the candidate wishes to generalise his/her findings.)
- What was the sample size? (For instance, in a content analysis: how many articles, new programmes, or television series episodes were collected and coded? How many respondents filled in the questionnaire? How many people were interviewed?)

  Please note: The Department has set the following minimum requirements for various methods:

  I. 80 respondents if using pen-and-paper and 150 if administering a questionnaire online.
  II. There must generally be at least two interviewees; however, if the candidate is interviewing a particular person (e.g. a film director or a company executive) because their thesis is based on that person, only their interview need be included.
  III. Focus groups should contain between 3 and 10 participants and there should be a minimum of three focus groups held.
- What was the composition of the sample? (For example, how were the respondents distributed according to their gender, age, and other relevant variables?)
- How was the sample selected? (Simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, convenience sampling etc.)
- What method(s) of data collection did the candidate use? What features of the study justify the selection of method(s)? (What made that/those method(s) particularly suitable for the candidate's purposes?)
- If the candidate used any kind of measuring instrument in the study (e.g. a questionnaire or a code book), how was the instrument designed? What steps did the candidate take to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument? If he/she conducted quantitative content analysis, was a co-coder involved in the process?
- How did data collection take place? (Depending on the research method: Where were the interviews conducted and how long did they last? Did the respondents complete an online or a pen-and-paper questionnaire? Where were the experiments conducted and what instructions did the participants receive? How often and under what circumstances did the candidate gather observational data?)
- Did the candidate use any technological apparatus for data collection? (e.g. a Dictaphone or a video camera.)
- What methods of data analysis did the candidate use? (Descriptive or inferential statistics; qualitative data analysis procedures, e.g. grounded theory.)

- Did the candidate use a computer for data analysis? If yes, what software did he/she use to obtain the results?
- Did the candidate conduct a pilot study? Did he/she test (and collect feedback on) the instrument(s) or procedure(s) before the main data collection phase?
- If artificial intelligence (A.I.) has been used as an analytical tool, the candidate should consult Appendix C of this Thesis Guide for appropriate declaration of its usage, and incorporate discussion of its usage within the Methods section.

Results

Like the methods section, the chapter describing the results has a narrow focus, concentrating solely on the candidate's own research. This part of the thesis must provide a concise and factual description of the key findings, but the reported results must not be interpreted or assessed at this point. If the study is quantitative in nature, the main results must be summarised in tables and/or charts. Each table or chart should be numbered and given a title. The table or chart should be referred to using the same numbering system e.g. "Table 1 highlights key correlations between x and y."

In addition to presenting the results in a numerical and/or graphical form, the candidate must also discuss in the text what the values given in the tables/figures actually mean. If the candidate has conducted inferential statistical tests (beyond mere descriptive statistics), the results of such analyses must also be reported in this section.

The results section may also include a discussion of unanticipated problems that occurred during the research process. For example, in a questionnaire study some respondents may fail to answer some of the questions: in such a case the candidate may describe at this point how missing data were handled in the analysis.

In qualitative research, there is often no sharp distinction between the factual results and their interpretation, and it is therefore more natural to treat the "results and discussion" as a single unit. If using interviewing techniques, include a copy of the questions in an Appendix to the thesis.

Discussion

In this section, the candidate must interpret and evaluate the results of his/her own research, comparing and contrasting them with the previous findings reviewed in the introduction. The discussion must deal with the following questions:

- What is the meaning of the research results? What could be a reasonable explanation for the results? Are other alternative accounts possible?
- If the candidate proposed a specific hypothesis (or a set of hypotheses), do the results yield evidence for it/them? If the results do not support the hypothesis/hypotheses, what could be the reason for this?
- How is the present study related to earlier studies? Are the present results in accord with any previous empirical findings or theoretical models, providing further support for a particular effect, relationship, or theoretical position? Do the present results contradict any previous findings or theories? If yes, what might be the explanation for such a mismatch?

- What is the theoretical and/or practical significance of the results? How may the present study contribute to the clarification of relevant theoretical issues and/or what are the potential practical applications of the findings?
- What are limitations and weaknesses of the study? Might the results have been distorted by some uncontrolled factor (internal validity)? To what extent can the findings be generalised (external validity)? How might such problems be eliminated in a future study?
- Considering the present findings, what further research should be conducted in the future? What are some further research questions that arose or remained open, and what would be the appropriate methods to deal with them?

Literature review theses

The structure of a literature review thesis is not as rigidly fixed as that of an empirical research report. Literature review theses typically cite and discuss a far wider range of sources than the introduction of an empirical thesis, because the objective of a literature review thesis is to provide a comprehensive and detailed overview of a particular research area.

The general content requirements for a literature review thesis are as follows. The candidate must

- discuss all the important (highly cited) authors and publications related to the chosen topic,
- demonstrate appropriate critical acumen,
- present the content of the sources in a clearly structured, logical, and systematic order, subdividing the topic of the thesis into a set (or hierarchy) of distinct (though related) issues and dealing with each issue in a separate chapter or section,
- draw attention to important relationships between the sources, pinpointing matches and contradictions between their content,
- note potential inconsistencies within and between sources and questions still left open by their authors, and
- make informed suggestions about potentially fruitful future directions of research in the area.

Literature review theses may be structured in various ways. If, for instance, the thesis provides a historical overview of the development of a research area, it is quite natural for the chapters to follow a chronological order, each corresponding to an era characterised by a distinctive paradigm. In other cases it is more logical to group the sources by the issues addressed or the research methods employed. In any case, it is important that the candidate must first make clear the organisation of the thesis, and then consistently adhere to that plan.

If the candidate has the necessary methodological skills, he/she may also use data from the sources to conduct a meta-analysis in which the results of previous studies are statistically combined and jointly interpreted.

Theoretical theses

Theoretical theses resemble literature reviews in that the structure of such theses need not follow a fixed, standard pattern. The purpose of a theoretical thesis is to present, compare and evaluate the available theoretical accounts of a specific range of phenomena, draw appropriate conclusions, and possibly propose a new theoretical framework or model which provides more accurate or more economical explanations for the known phenomena. For this reason, a theoretical thesis relies on empirical findings only inasmuch as they are relevant to theorising.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- At the beginning of the thesis, the candidate must justify why it is worthwhile to conduct theoretical research on the chosen topic. The rationale may be purely theoretical in nature; for instance, the candidate may point out contradictions between influential theories in the area, and argue that the clarification of such debates may contribute to the development of a more unified theoretical model. If the objective of the thesis is to analyse (and possibly solve) such theoretical debates, it is essential that the candidate should present an equally detailed, unbiased and objective description of both sides.
- Theoretical theses often take a historical approach: in order to avoid the trap of "reinventing the wheel", the candidate should not only be familiar with the current form of relevant theories, but also their past course of development, and describe the reasons for the modification or rejection of earlier approaches.
- A contrastive analysis of theories cannot consist in mere description. In the end, the candidate must draw novel and original conclusions, and these conclusions must be based on a critical examination of the internal consistency and external validity of competing theories and an analysis of their strengths and deficiencies. The candidate must either argue for and illustrate the superiority of a particular theory over alternative, concurrent models, or propose modifications to an existing approach or even an entirely new, more efficient theory to account for the range of phenomena under discussion.

7. Department position on the use of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)

What follows are the CommMedia Department's specifications for both instructors and students, in order to clarify how we interpret the more general best practices suggested by the university.

I. Support for the use of A.I. in assignments
II. Ethical violations in the use of AI to complete assignments
III. Verification of ethical violations in using A.I. to complete assignments
IV. Consequences of using A.I. in an academically unethical way

I. Support for the use of A.I. in assignments

The Department suggests that A.I. tools can be used responsibly by students in the following ways:

Initial ideation. Generation of very basic ideas on a topic (which must be then elaborated on and further researched by the student);

Identifying and understanding sources. Locating relevant research sources (which must then be verified and analyzed by the student), translating and explicating articles;

Analyzing and visualizing data. Initial visualization of datasets (which must be collected, curated, and interpreted by students);

Writing support. Improvement of syntax and phrasing of prose originally written by students.

All students who use A.I. in one of these supported ways should include a statement at the end of their assignment, explaining in some detail which tools were used and for what purpose. The template can be found in Appendix C.

II. Ethical violations in the use of AI to complete assignments

In general, the Department's policy is that **AI should never be used to produce any work that was not built on student-made foundations.**

The Department considers the following specific uses of A.I. an unethical breach of academic standards:

Uncritical generation of sources. A.I.-generated identification of sources (and/or quotes from sources) and then wholesale adoption of that material into the assignment with no further reading or synthesis of said sources;

Uncritical generation of prose**.** The use of A.I.-produced prose that is NOT based on original student prose, and then cut and pasted into an assignment with no further synthesis by student;

Uncritical data visualization. Analysis of data (even that produced by students) without any input, reflection, or synthesis by the student.

III. Verification of ethical violations in using A.I. to complete assignments

The Department **does not endorse the use of automatic A.I.-detection tools** to determine an ethical violation. There are too many false positives, and/or hybrid uses of A.I. which might show up as a positive. The A.I. detection tools are not yet reliable.

Rather, if an instructor feels that a student work demonstrates the use of A.I. in an academically unethical way, they could consider the following measures:

1) Invite the student to have an **informal conversation** on the subject matter, in order to verify the student's level of knowledge of the topic;
2) Ask the student to **produce handwritten prose** on the same subject in a supervised setting, in order to verify the student's level of knowledge on the topic (keeping in mind that the student might have used A.I. to improve the quality of their writing);
3) **Verify the sources** used by the students, ensuring that they a) exist, and b) were used appropriately.

IV. Consequences of using A.I. in an academically unethical way

If the student is found to have used A.I. in an academically unethical way once, they should be asked to **resubmit the assignment with clearly articulated references and sources**, proving the originality of their work. Resubmitted work can only be accepted for **partial credit** (the exact percentage can be determined by the instructor).

If the student is found to have **repeatedly used A.I. in an unethical way, their case can be referred to the Program Director,** with the possibility of further sanctions.

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Title page

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

Institute of Marketing and Communication Sciences
Department of Communication and Media Science

Title of the thesis

Student's name

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Master's Degree in Communication and Media Studies

Supervisor: Supervisor's name

2024.

Appendix B – List of recommended books and resources on academic writing

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association.

Bailey, S. (2015). *Academic writing: A handbook for international students* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Evans, D., Gruba, P., & Zobel, J. (2014) *How to write a better thesis* (3rd ed.). Springer International Publishing.

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). *APA style introduction.* Purdue Online Writing Lab. https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html

Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. (2012). *Academic writing for graduate students: Essential tasks and skills* (3rd ed.). University of Michigan Press.

Appendix C – Template for declaration of A.I. usage in assignments

If you have the opportunity, and desire, to use services based in generative artificial intelligence* (A.I.) in your assignment, its usage **must** be declared. Below is a suggestion for how this can be done.

*By generative A.I., we mean services that use artificial intelligence to generate text or multimedia material, such as Chat-GPT or Synthesia, for example. Simpler services like spell check are also based on artificial intelligence, but these usually do not need to be declared. Check with your supervisor.

Declaration template
Based on the current praxis at major scientific publishers and several leading universities, we provide this template for declaring generative A.I. usage. The declaration should be placed at the beginning of the assignment so that the reader/examiner knows that generative A.I. has been used. [Text in square brackets is a suggestion for prompts and needs to be adapted to individual needs].

If you have used A.I. in your assignment, use one or more of the suggested templates below:

Declaration of the use of generative artificial intelligence
In this scientific work, generative artificial intelligence (A.I.) has been used. All data and personal information have been processed in accordance with Corvinus University regulations, and I, as the author of the document, take full responsibility for its content, claims, and references. An overview of the use of generative A.I. is provided below.
(List bullet points with a description of usage, see examples below.)

Example: use for language editing

[Add specific A.I. tool here] has been used to improve the content of the report/assignment. A first version of the work was pasted in its entirety, and the model was given the prompt [rewrite this text to make the language more lively.] The text was then iterated a few times through the model where new prompts were used to get the correct structure of the text. The final result was cut out, fact-checked, and partly rewritten by the author(s).

Example: use for image generation

[Add specific A.I. tool here] has been used to produce the illustration in figure [X]. The specific prompt for producing the image was [*Create an image of a generic superhero clearly strapped to a rotating wheel. The scene is charged with energy, with dynamic lines to illustrate the spinning motion. The background is a blur, enhancing the feeling of speed and urgency.*] The prompt for producing the image was created through brainstorming with OpenAI's ChatGPT-4.

Example: use for brainstorming
The service ChatGPT-4, developed by OpenAI, has been used for brainstorming to find a suitable working hypothesis.

Example: use as an analytical tool
[Add specific A.I. tool here] has been used as an analytical tool to look for trends and patterns in anonymized data. The result was compared with other analytical tools, and the usage is described under the methods section.