

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**Faculty of Social Sciences**  
**Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism**

**MA THESIS REVIEW**

**NOTE: Only the grey fields should be filled out!**

**Review type** (choose one):

Review by thesis supervisor  Review by opponent

**Thesis author:**

Surname and given name: Amanda Orlando Magnani

**Thesis title:** Branding strategies on Instagram among female freelance photojournalists

**Reviewer:**

Surname and given name: Sandra Lábová

Affiliation: IKSŽ

**1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS** (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**COMMENTARY** (description of the relationship between the research proposal and the thesis. If there are problems, please be specific): The thesis presents original research results regarding the online branding of female freelance photojournalists. In particular, the study examines the construction of their presence on the social network Instagram. The candidate claims the study to be groundbreaking as none of the academic literature has dealt with the group under study's investigation. The study aims to overcome this gap by building on semi-structured interviews with relevant news media professionals.

No significant changes to the thesis proposal have been found.

**2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT**

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	D
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	C
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	B
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	B
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	A
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	C

**COMMENTARY** (description of thesis content and the main problems):

The chapter Introduction overviews the research issue within the broader context. The candidate briefly states the main study's objective. The Introduction would deserve to be more elaborated. Especially when describing the aims of the study it fails to provide enough details about the study's goals.

The following chapter, the Literature review, is reasonably structured. It focuses mainly on the process of journalists' personal branding on social media. In this sense, the candidate examines primary scholarly publications and demonstrates a familiarity with the relevant literature. On the contrary, some parts of the theoretical framework do not provide a sufficient literature review. This is predominantly a case of scholarly writing concerning photojournalism. The candidate claims that "photojournalists are an understudied group among creative content producers" (p. 2). The thesis provides a brief reflection of only a handful of recent

publications when some other would also deserve candidate's attention. To name a few – Santana and Russial (2013) - photojournalists' position in US newspapers, Illan (2018) - photojournalists working patterns and the role of wire agencies in distributing news images, Caple (2010 and 2019) - the value of photojournalist and news image sourcing, Thomson, T. J. (2018) - Freelance photojournalists and photo editors., Gürsel, (2016) - the daily routine of the photo department at news agencies, Stallabrass, J. (ed). (2013) - wire agency and stingers, special issue of *Nordicom Review* (Gynnild and Nilsson, 2017) that brought an in-depth look at the current state of photojournalism in Europe; last but not least, all research supported by the World Press Photo association and conducted by Hadland and Barnett in 2015, 2016, and 2018 (one of them mentioned in the presented thesis). The lack of proper literature review results in a questionable selection of respondents, which subsequently affects the quality of the empirical part of the research (will be further discussed).

Additionally, the candidate often uses the term precarious work without providing its proper definition. In the background of precarious work, the candidate provides general remarks about women's position in the labour market applied to journalistic context and photojournalism. Nonetheless, this topic would deserve broader attention, as the primary research objectives appear to be built around it. The author should explain and provide specific examples based on academic literature of this concept in wider journalistic practice, and also in photojournalism.

The Chapter Literature review contains subchapter "1.6 This Study". It formulates the main and sub-research questions. Although academic papers may state the research objectives and questions within a theoretical framework and thus create a direct connection to literature reviews, the presented thesis does not use this approach. For this reason, it would be more appropriate to include the research questions into the chapter Methodology.

The chapter Methodology aims to describe methods employed for acquiring and analyzing data. The candidate uses a grounded theory concept to analyze data collected in semi-structured interviews. Overall the Methodology chapter provides a solid ground for the research and demonstrates the candidate's knowledge of the data collection process through semi-structured interviews and subsequent analysis. The candidate provides a detailed description of sampling, data collection process and steps of the interpretation procedure.

At this point, I would like to come to the observation concerning the responders' selection, as already mentioned above. The choice of the researched subjects seems tricky for two reasons. Firstly, it combines two popular issues that often resonate in academic discussion and within the profession. That be freelance journalism and women in journalism. We might question how relevant it is to follow such a narrowly defined group in an already narrowly defined space of photojournalism. The selection of this sample does not have much support in the academic literature, which in no way identifies this group as significant contributor to photojournalistic practice. This observation does not aim to undervalue female freelance photojournalists' contributions or the importance of their work. Nonetheless, any researcher who would make such a selective sampling would face a lack of research in the field. From this point of view, the presented research is truly groundbreaking because it selects a very narrow group of media professionals. However, its validity and usefulness might be questioned.

Secondly, the factors that affected the sample construction should be discussed. The candidate does not clearly define who qualifies as a freelance photojournalist. This is reflected in the findings – at least one responder stated to have a problem identifying as a journalist (p. 32). Furthermore, in candidate's aim "was to select as diverse a sample as possible in terms of nationality, age, race and religion, within the pool of female freelance photojournalists." (p. 22) Such an approach is undoubtedly helpful for broad quantitative studies and cross-category comparisons. However, in the case of semi-structured interviews with a limited number of respondents, it can appear counterproductive - considering that the analysis that applies grounded theory may break the attention into a broad spectrum of topics and subtopics and thus make the interpretation challenging.

Two chapters present the study's findings. The chapter Findings provide rather technical descriptions in connection to some interesting citations. The chapter Discussion connects those findings to the thesis's theoretical framework and discusses the results with relevant scholarly publications. This division seems confusing as it forces the reader to go back and forth in the thesis. Additionally, it forces the candidate to repeat the findings that have already been reflected.

However, when depicted overall findings provide some notable remarks, such as:

- The appreciation of editorial independents that allows the photojournalists to publish content that would otherwise have a low probability of being picked up by news media.
- Self-branding, visibility and reputation construction are perceived as natural, although at the cost of being demanding and viewed as unpaid labour.

- The importance of Instagram when demonstrating affiliation to the profession.
- Application of three distinctive strategies when building the personal brand, namely 1) journalistic distance, 2) activism, and 3) transparency.

One of the finding deals with the sexism and harassment. However, this serious and multilevel issue is not reflected in the literature review.

Chapter Conclusions answer the research questions in the light of research findings. The candidate also connects the findings to relevant literature and theoretical framework and outlines the limits of the present study.

### 3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	C
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	B
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	B
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	C
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	A
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	A
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	A

(\*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY (description of thesis form and the main problems):

The length and scope of this thesis is sufficient. It could be better structured, e.g. it is difficult to read findings that are interperet withing two chapters. Some of the terms, such as precarious, harassment are not properly explained. The thesis is technically correct. Quotations are treated correctly.

### 4. OVERAL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

**The thesis presents a novel topic that is especially important to media professionals. It reveals the purpose of Instagram in the hands of photojournalists, focusing on female freelance photojournalists. It explains how Instagram represents a forceful tool to shape a professional identity and connect with colleagues in practice. At the same time, Instagram serves as a professional business card allowing photojournalists to publish their portfolios effectively and distribute it to the high number of potential customers. Furthermore, the social network allows them to perform a considerable degree of editorial freedom by publishing content of their interest and thus connect to the desirable audience. On the other hand, the thesis suffers from several weaknesses described above. In the light of those I suggest overall grade C.**

### 5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	What are the main challenges of photojournalism today?
5.2	Why are there not many women in photojournalism?
5.3	Which factors affect job insecurity in the field of photojournalism? Please, provide a general description and subsequently apply it to the situation of women photojournalists.
5.4	

### 6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis 'antiplagiarism system score.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	The overall similarity is 20%, most of which are included in theoretical part of the thesis. All sources and citations are correctly cited.
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**7. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE** (choose one or two)

- A**  excellent
- B**  very good (above average but with some weaknesses)
- C**  good (average with some important weaknesses)
- D**  satisfactory (below average with significant weaknesses)
- E**  marginal pass (meeting minimal requirements)
- F**  not recommended for defence

**If the mark is an “F”, please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:**

Date: August 18, 2022

Signature: .....

*A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer’s behalf.*

*Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.*