

**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: Wagemaker Puck Anne

**Thesis title:** The response of Dutch political journalists to the counter-narrative from right-wing populist parties PVV and FvD to the securitization of COVID-19

**Reviewer:**

Surname and given name: Dimitrov Michal

Affiliation: Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, external lecturer

**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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 changes to the approved research proposal are explained in detail and are appropriate. On the one hand, the author resigned on analysis of speech acts by the leader of Forum voor Democratie Thierry Baudet and thus gave up a two-sided methodological approach, but she broadened the research design by including a second populist party (PVV) to her analysis on the other hand. The adaptation of the research design enabled her to keep with the main research question, collect more data conducting the method of semi-structured interviews with a sample of Dutch political journalists and come up with an interesting interpretation of gate-keeping role of political journalists when reporting (or not reporting) on politics and policies of the both populist parties in the Netherlands in a different way.

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

COMMENTARY (description of thesis content and the main problems): Wagemaker presents an overall outstanding diploma thesis regarding theoretical framework, showing a profound ability to discuss relevant theoretical and empirical literature and giving a solid theoretical basis to her empirical research while being able to discuss various limitations of reliability and validity of her research design and results of her analysis. The author presents a very well founded case study with a small, but sufficient sample (n=7) of political journalists who reported on FvD and PVV politics and policies (counter-narrative) on "securitization" (Copenhagen School) of COVID-19 pandemic by the Dutch government. Wagemaker conducted 7 interviews (and attached their full transcription as the appendix to the thesis) and analysed them in order to answer the research question: "How do Dutch political journalists enact when reporting the counter-reaction of right-

wing populist parties to the securitization of COVID-19 in the Netherlands?" (p. 6), or in other words: "How much and in what way the resistance from populist parties to the securitization of COVID-19 is given a platform in the media"? (p. 19) Wagemaker analysed the roles of journalists regarding the topic by combining typologies developed by Donsbach (2012) and Wettstein et al. (2018), focusing on the extent of the counter-narrative in the media (gates closed-gates open and exceptions) and proposing the counter-narrative in the media (commercial-educational; advocacy-neutral; participant-observational). The author showed ability to transfer and apply theoretical knowledge to the empirical research and presents her results based on solid argumentation that offers insight in how political journalists in the Netherlands dealt with counter-narratives of the populist parties, how they perceive(d) their role reporting on policies/politics by FvD and PVV and why they (partly) closed the gate for the FvD (which at some point started to strictly deny the existence of the virus) while they left it open for the less radical and more constructive PVV.

In her conclusion, Wagemaker argues, that "the journalists were unable and moreover unwilling to fully close the gates for FvD" and "there were certain exceptions that opened the gates for the party". (pp 51-52)

According to the author, "this made a third variant visible in the gatekeeper role next to solely opening and closing the gates, something that the literature did not elaborate on so far." (p. 52) This conclusion - that "in the third stage the gates opened for FvD regardless of the gates originally being closed." (p. 52) seems not to take into account the contingency of politics/policies and reporting on them by journalists/editors, in other words that opening and closing the gates is a neverending process and - with respect to media logic - the gate that is closed today can be open tomorrow for a variety of reasons. Without claiming that the conclusion of Wagemaker may not be right, this conclusion should be better and more persuasive argued as it has the potential to be the biggest contribution of the author and her thesis.

### 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	A
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	A
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	A
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	A
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 author presents an outstanding thesis regarding all the points in section 3 of this review listed above. The diploma thesis proves the potential of the author to pursue an academic career (in a PhD programme)

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

**Wagemaker presents an outstanding and original thesis that has no doubt a potential to be published (after necessary adjustments including removing repetitive passages and information) and/or presented at a relevant forum (such as the annual Prague Populism Conference). The author shows ability to anchor her research theoretically, create a solid research design and embed it in a broad context (in this case of securitization policies, populism, Dutch politics, media logic and news values, previous research etc.) She shows ability to communicate with the past research and has ambition to formulate new research questions. However, her conclusion about "a third variant" to "gate-closed" and "gate-open" should be better explained. This point could be addressed by the author when defending the thesis (see question 5.1).**

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

5.1	Wagemaker identifies a "third variant visible in the gatekeeper role next to solely opening and closing the gates, something that the literature did not elaborate on so far." (p. 52) Could she explain it in a more detail? Why does she define a new category beyond "gate-open" and "gate-closed"?
5.2	The author investigated and analysed the (ex-post) perceptions and considerations of the selected political journalists on their role when reporting on counter-narratives of the populist parties, however she did not investigate/analyse the texts they produced. Could the combination of two methods (semi-structured interviews and e.g. qualitative/quantitative content analysis as the author suggest in the conclusion, p. 52) possibly change the conclusion of the research - and if yes how?

5.3	The author admits that "the sample size of seven journalists is relatively limited to generalize the results to all Dutch political journalists" and "the research is a small-N case study, the findings are representative and applicable only to this specific case and situation". (p. 29) How would/could a bigger sample possibly change the result/conclusion of the thesis? What should be done to make a generalization of the results possible?
5.4	The author suggests expanding the research to a wider region. (p. 52) How would she adjust/change the research design in order to enable an international comparative perspective? Which other countries than Belgium would she suggest to include in the research?

**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	-
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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:**

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Date: 1. 9. 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.*

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