Master's Thesis Evaluation Form

Student's name: Marija Brnović

Thesis title: Nation and Manipulation: Post-war Media Scene in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia

Name of the supervisor: Mgr. Jan Miessler

Name of the opponent: Mgr. Andrea Průchová Hrůzová Ph.D.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis? Please give your reasons for the suggested grade in detail below.

1.   Does the author show understanding of one or more theories, and use theory to generate a hypothesis or to make the problem area more understandable.

The author **works intensively with a wide range of international literature** published in the fields of social sciences (the issue of nationalism) and journalism/media studies (research studies on the Balkan media landscape, framing theory etc.). The great interest and the investment of the author in the research theme is obvious and gives the text a strong drive. The author is able to present clearly main concepts/ideas/notions developed by other authors.

However, **the structure of the theoretical part is not clear**. The author firstly offers the literature overview discussing the various concepts related to the key notion of nationalism. Here, it is not clear how the chosen authors (as well as the student herself) understand the role that is played by the **collective memory** in the rise of nationalistic tendencies and rhetoric. Especially, when the literature and her research so frequently debate the events of the WW-II. Therefore, I am missing a mention of the collective and/or cultural memory, their variations in terms of different regional, ethnic, and religious groups. Later, this would help employ some other concepts like "ethnopopulism" or "ethnic racism", that could be also considered as part of the theoretical framework. On contrary, I appreciate that the concepts of "triadic news" or the work of Dizdarevic on "negative nationalism" are presented.

It is not clear to me, why a theoretical discussion on media does not represent an individual subchapter of the theoretical part. Here, also, for the first time, the great pain of the text comes up as there is no definition of "war propaganda" offered. Throughout the text, **the author conflates two terms "war rhetoric" and "war propaganda"** while not telling us what the differences are, and namely, how she understands the latter concept. There exist, e.g., the subfield of propaganda studies, and there are specific connotations that this term is bearing.

Surprisingly, there are two theoretical sections implemented in the empirical part of the text, where only data analysis and discussion of findings should be presented. The author describes there the specificities of commercial and state media in the chosen countries. Yet this information should have come at the end of the theoretical section.

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*2.	Is the research question articulated clearly and properly? Is the research question sufficiently answered in the conclusion?*

The research project articulates two research questions which are clear and relevant. Yet, they are not followed by **any question that would examine a relationship between the commercial and the state media.** It is surprising to me that such a question is not asked as the author demonstrates her good knowledge of specificities and differences between these two media sectors. Also, there is **no question asked that would help us understand better dynamics among individual countries, if there are any symptomatic elements in their rhetoric, or specific communication practices**. From the collected data, these two suggested questions could have been answered. Two questions articulated by the author are answered in the conclusion.

*3.	Is the thesis based on relevant research and literature and does it accurately summarize and integrate the information?*

In this section, I will continue to discuss the problem of the general structure of the text as suggested in the point no. 1. The author surprisingly inserts **the section about the purpose of the research in the middle of the theoretical part**. The important introductory information should have been present in the introduction section. In the text, **we are lacking the information based on which criteria the author has chosen three examined countries**. Only at the end of the text we can guess that due to her personal experience of growing up in Montenegro. **The methodological section should subsume research questions and ethical limitations**, which are presented as individual chapters. Again, this makes the interesting reading a bit unclear.

*4.	What is the quality of the data or the other sources? Are the sample method, data collection and data analysis appropriate?*

The author works with the relevant number of sources, however there are some confusions regarding several aspects of her methodological work. **Firstly, the authors states that she has analysed 75 articles (p. 42). Later in the text, she presents the research that contains 60 articles (p. 45 and further on).** There is no explanation provided for such a change in the data set.

It is also **unclear to what extent this research really employs any quantitative technique**. The author mentions that uses both, the quantitative and the qualitative approach, but she only presents the qualitative findings. We do not know how many articles were found in individual countries in total. We are not introduced to any specific statistics regarding the proportion of individual frames within individual media outlets or media sectors. The only information we get is the one about the number of articles (in total) that employed examined frame. To me, this is not sufficient use of the quantitative approach.

In terms of collecting data, I would like to see **more proper explanation of how individual key words**, which were driving the search, **correlate with the statements detected in the academic literature**. The analysis itself sometimes does and sometimes does not provide the

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specific examples. I am not sure if the frame "Representation" should not be renamed e.g., as "Reporting Style" as the term "representation" is imbued with various theoretical meanings in the field of media studies. It is not clear to me **how the frame "Generalization" is linked with the figure of stereotypization**. It seems to me that it is, yet there is no theoretical or methodological explanation for that. In terms of the chosen method, I would like to learn **why the historical discourse analyses was not chosen** as it would enable the deep reading of the textual content in relation to the past and would not require such an extensive transformation of the original concept of framing theory.

5.   Are the findings relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions of the thesis based on strong arguments?

The findings are relevant to the research questions, yet – as stated above – **much more could be reached from the collected data**. The interpretation has gotten stuck on the surface of the problem as it does not employ any comparative point of view. And it is obvious from the data, that the public and the commercial sector work with frames differently e.g., in terms of their intensity, but there is also a specific relationship among individual countries, especially in terms of the representation of the other country. E.g., there can be found much more vivid interaction between Croatian and Serbian media – why is it so? Why there is a specific position of BHRT´s articles? **I believe that the author has done an extensive work with aiming the best, but there is much greater potential within her data that cannot be used due to the very limited set of research questions**.

The other problem represents the way how the author conflates the term "war propaganda" (with no specific definition provided throughout the text) with the term "war rhetoric". At the beginning of the methodological section, the **term "war rhetoric" is positioned as the central one and explained, but later, the unclear and biased term "war propaganda" takes over**. Such mixing of terms with different historical and theoretical connotations works against the clear understanding of presented findings.

6.   Are the author's thoughts distinguished unambiguously from the borrowed ideas?

Yes, they are.

7.   Is the thesis containing original/innovative research (in terms of topic, approach, and/or findings)?

The research presents an important topic that follows the stream of an existing academic literature and further develops it by its transnational focus and its emphasis put on online media.

8.   What is the quality of style and other formal requirements?

The text contains typos, and I would recommend it to be proofread. When referring to academic literature, the author does not use the format of (Ibid). In the empirical part of the text, the author refers to specific pages in case of addressing specific statements, yet she does state only the general (year) reference in the theoretical section. The referencing in relation to

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direct quotes is fine. **I would like to see some charts throughout the methodological and analytical part of the text that would help us better navigate in the examined frames, media, results. In general, I would recommend more punctual formatting of the text**.

9.   Are there any other strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, which are not included in the previous questions? Please list them if any.

As stated above, I very much appreciate **a very good work of the author with the academic literature. I also appreciate the depth of knowledge and the level of excitement** about the topic that is palpable throughout the text.

10.   What topic do you suggest for the discussion in the thesis defence?

Could you clarify why there is a difference between the number of articles included into your data at the beginning of the methodological section and later? (70 vs 60 articles).

Could you explain why no comparative interpretation was used? Why there was no interest expressed in specifics of different media spheres (commercial vs state) and individual countries and their mutual dynamics?

How do you understand terms "war rhetoric" and "war propaganda"? Is there any difference, and if so, please, elaborate on it.

11.   Declaration that the supervisor has read the result of the originality check in the system: [   ]   Theses   [   ]   Turnitin   [x   ]   Original   (Urkund)

Supervisor's comment on the originality check result:

Overall assessment of the thesis:

I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest grading it D-C. Despite the very good work with the literature, there is an unclear structure of the text that would deserve proofreading and better formatting. As stated above, there are some methodological problems (quantitative aspect, key words, research questions) and the final argumentation suffers by the lack of comparative perspective and the unclear terminology.

Proposed grade: D (if there is a strong defence presentation C)

(A- B: excellent, C-D: very good, E: good, F: fail)

Date: 15. 9. 2023   Signature:

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