

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: Shirsha Chakraborty

Thesis title: Behind the Lens of a Conflict Zone: Male and Female Photojournalists in the Russia and Ukraine War

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):

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	C
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	C
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	C
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	B

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

Theoretical framework:

Shirsha Chakraborty discusses the main ideas and concepts of Social Role Theory in journalism and gender representation in the news. This part is well-written and builds a solid foundation for the main objectives of the research. In contrast, the chapter "1.2. Women in War Photojournalism" seems a bit out of place and might be better suited for the literature review (as there is a chapter with a very similar heading in the literature review, as discussed below). Furthermore, chapter 1.2 discusses a different approach to war according to gender, among other concepts, by discussing so-called tropes. However, this concept is poorly (if ever) explained, and the author tends to conclude based on one study (Zarzycka and Kleppe (2016)). My concern here is that one study is not enough to justify that gendered tropes are presented in news coverage.

Literature review

Shirsha Chakraborty presents a well-developed literature review on gender in journalism and the main issues connected to the different working conditions of men and women. However, the author overlooks a scholarly

examination of photojournalism as a field. Some critical studies that have researched the numbers, positions, and working practices of women in photojournalism are only briefly mentioned. Furthermore, some remarks seem more like the author's general observations rather than being sourced from relevant scholarly references.

Select methods

Chakraborty attempts to use semi-structured interviews to assert the study's main objectives. While the rationale for using this method and its purpose is explained, it would be beneficial to discuss its limitations, such as subjectivity, further, as the respondents' answers highlight this limitation. Furthermore, Chakraborty provides only a superficial explanation of the structure and scenario of her semi-structured interviews. The author should offer an overview of the questions and how they relate to the study's aims, objectives, and theoretical framework. Consequently, the interviews presented in the appendices resemble open-ended interviews rather than semi-structured ones, as it is challenging to identify a clear structure.

Empirical research

Chakraborty uses thematic analysis to decode and identify common topics in the responses. This approach seems appropriate given the study's objectives. However, it would be beneficial to explain further and interpret the main emerging themes (codes)—Gendered and Other Factors—rather than predominantly offering comments on a series of respondents' quotations and breaking the main codes into subcodes without adequately explaining how they relate to each other and the main codes. For example, it is unclear why the subcode "negation in identity" is within "Other Factors," as it might fit better under "Gendered" based on the given explanation. Additionally, thematic analysis can be effectively summarized in a graphic layout, which helps readers comprehend the structure of the main and subthemes. Unfortunately, Chakraborty does not reference Appendix 2 in the findings, as it provides these overviews. However, without such a reference, it can easily be missed by readers.

Discussion and conclusions

Chakraborty provides a brief discussion of the main findings. The assertion that Social Role Theory might not be strongly demonstrated in war photojournalism is interesting. Unfortunately, this part of the thesis suffers from clumsy structuring, making it difficult to identify where the discussion ends and the conclusions begin, as further discussed below. Some sources in the discussion are outdated for evaluating the current context; for example, on page 82, studies that are 20 years old are used to reference the number of journalists in the industry, which may not apply to the current context. Conversely, more recent studies, such as the Worlds of Journalism Study or Hadland and Barnett (2018), discuss the numbers of female (photo) journalists and should be considered.

Lastly, I am not sure about the purpose of the subchapter in the discussion titled "There is a Bigger Purpose in Conflict Reporting." Is this a presentation of findings again? It seems to discuss concepts such as agenda-setting and objectivity, which are not examined within the theoretical framework or literature review.

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	A
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	B
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	D
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):

Structure:

The thesis structure is chaotic at times, and some chapters are relatively brief and could be merged into one. E.g., chapters 1.2. Women in War Photojournalism and 2.2 Women and War Photojournalism might refer to similar arguments.

Section "These concerns have been reflected in various studies about foreigners reporting [...]" (p. 75) belongs to the discussion rather than the findings.

Similarly challenging is the structure of the chapter “5. Discussion,” which somewhat merges into conclusions and includes 1) limitations and future research recommendations, and 2) findings (to my perspective) - subchapter 5.2 “There a Bigger Purpose in Conflict Reporting.”

Argumentation:

The conclusive evaluation and the answers to the research questions seem clumsy and, at times, difficult to decode. Additionally, the quality of the discussion could be improved by better connecting the main findings to the theoretical framework and literature review.

Citations and quotations standards:

In a few instances, the source is missing, or it is sourced elsewhere in the text, e.g.:

p. 28, "This idea of gendered power can be situated in journalism whether it is the selection of topics, types of news (hard or soft), assignment of duties and responsibilities [...]"

p. 46, "History mentions uncountable instances where women photojournalists like Jenny Mathews [...]. They are eminent female photojournalists from around the world whose contributions were considered remarkable.

p. 46, "And the numbers have increased ever since."

Chapter 2.2 Women and War Photojournalist - opening paragraph missing source

Chapter 2.2.1 Women Photographers in the War Zone - again, the opening paragraph - missing sources for several claims.

At least in one instance, the source in the text does not correspond with the reference. In the thesis, the author uses Campbell and Critcher (2018) several times; the correct referencing is Westcott Campbell and Critcher (2018).

4. OVERALL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis’s strengths and weaknesses):

Shirsha Chakraborty’s thesis presents a well-developed literature review. However, besides the limited selection, it overlooks scholarly discussion on photojournalism. The author employs appropriate methods to investigate gender dynamics in journalism, particularly war photojournalism. The empirical research utilizes thematic analysis effectively, but the explanation and interpretation of themes need improvement. The theoretical framework is solid in parts but lacks depth and cohesiveness in others. Structural issues and outdated sources weaken the discussion and conclusions, which are not delineated. Citation practices are inconsistent, with some missing or incorrect references. Despite these shortcomings, the thesis offers valuable insights and contributes to the academic understanding of gender in photojournalism. Given these strengths and weaknesses, I suggest a grade of C.

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

5.1	Your thesis discusses the application of Social Role Theory to gender representation in journalism. How did you integrate this theoretical framework with the empirical findings from your study? Can you elaborate on any unexpected findings that challenged or supported this theoretical perspective?
5.2	There is a Bigger Purpose in Conflict Reporting," you touch upon concepts like agenda-setting and objectivity. Could you clarify how these insights contribute to understanding gender dynamics in war photojournalism?
5.3	How did you ensure the reliability and validity of your thematic analysis in interpreting the data from semi-structured interviews? Can you provide examples of how you addressed potential biases or subjectivities in your analysis?
5.4	

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis’ score in plagiarism analysis in SIS.

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

6.1	Turnitin shows 25% similarity. However, quotations are handled correctly.
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7. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE (choose one or two)

- A
- B
- C

D
E
F

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

Date: June 14, 2024

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.