

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: Melikyan Aren

Thesis title: Televised Imperialism: Normalisation of Russian irredentism in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus through state-controlled Channel One's news journalism, following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine

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 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): Research objectives and thesis structure are in line with the approved research proposal with only slight adjustments for the benefit of the aim to provide understanding of various frames and techniques employed by the prime-time news coverage by the Russian Channel One to normalise Russian irredentism in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. These adjustments are relevant and well argued in the introduction.

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

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

The thesis by Aren Melikyan covers a significant and relevant contemporary topic and aims to present a contribution to understanding how Russian state-controlled television Channel One seeks to normalise the country's irredentist policies in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus following the Russian full scale invasion to Ukraine. The thesis on "Televised imperialism" is driven by the hypothesis that "the Russian state-controlled television employs specific journalistic techniques and framing strategies (...) aiming to foster public support for its actions there both domestically and internationally (p. 3). Based on the previous theoretical and empirical research (e.g. Foucault, Krzyzanowski, Entman or Gavriely-Nury), the author constructs a solid theoretical framework for his empirical study and proves in-depth understanding of the subject, even though some terms like "propaganda" would deserve more attention. Unfortunately, there are some weaknesses regarding data sampling/narrowing and application of selected methods that limit the soundness of the findings and conclusion. Despite these limits and weaknesses (that will be further elaborated

in the following section) the thesis by Melikyan proves to be an interesting contribution to academic knowledge production, be it the focus on irredentism in various countries of "Russkiy mir" (beyond Ukraine as the hotspot of contemporary research for obvious reasons) or some interesting findings, e.g. regarding the direct journalistic involvement in the banal nationalist construction of "we" and "the other" to strengthen the normalisation of Russian irredentism or constructing a "new reality" regarding Russian claims on former territories that acquired independence in the context of dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

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)	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)	C
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	C

(*) 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 thesis structure and quality of argumentation struggle a bit in the empirical part which is divided in two sections: frames and normalisation techniques. After presenting and discussing three key frames ("We" and "Our"; The "Other"; Either Empire - or nothing" in the first section, the author comes up with another frames in the following section (e.g. "right deed" as prevalent frame, p. 39) when discussing four identified normalisation techniques ("A new, normal and shared reality"; "Absolute truths"; "Denial of sovereignty"; "Happy Ending"), including some demonstrative images/screenshots from the broadcast. Thus, the whole structure and argumentation appears to be incomprehensible at times which results in lower soundness of the research and findings. This may be the consequence of preceding decisions and explanations (not) made regarding method and collection of data. According to the author, the research adheres to Braun and Clarks's method of six-phase thematic analysis (p. 19-20) without being clear how (and if) the method was applied in the following analysis of data. Melikyan narrows the data from four selected periods down to four issues of the prime-time news programme "Vremya" (one issue for each period) to exemplify the collected data (see Appendix); however, much of the argumentation regarding frames and techniques is based on examples from number of another issues from the four periods (not included in the Appendix). The whole research design suffers from it to some extent and the argumentation seems to lose validity and transparency. The conclusion could be more consequent in summing up the identified frames and techniques rather than focusing on discussion of the (self-estimated) contribution of the thesis. Despite the fact that the author proves ability to use academic writing style, there is a number of typos (sometimes accumulated on one page, e. g. "Russia is doing wight" or "Ulyanovs" instead of Ulyanovsk, p. 39, or Vasily Nebenza instead of Vasily Nebenzya, p. 41) and missing words in some cases which has a negative impact on clarity of the argumentation.

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

Aren Melikyan submitted a very good thesis on one of the key topics regarding the biggest conflict in Europe since the Second World War. The study helps to understand how Russian state-controlled media (Channel One, Vremya) works to normalise (and reinforce) irredentism in post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus in the context of Russian postcolonial imperialism. The author proves expertise in the topic and ability to work with suitable and relevant concepts, identify key normalisation frames and techniques and discuss the findings on the background of relevant secondary literature. He comes to interesting, to some degree original findings (e.g. regarding direct involvement of journalists in state propaganda or construction of new reality as one of the key normalisation techniques). However, the contribution to the academic knowledge could be bigger, if the soundness of the empirical research and argumentation did not suffer from some limits regarding data sampling and the unclarity about the way how the selected research method was applied. These limits of validity and transparency of the research should be addressed at the defence (see 5.1).

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

5.1	Could the author address the points mentioned above regarding data sample (working extensively with data from another issues of "Vremya" than the core four issues) and applied method and explain the steps taken in the analytical procedure?
5.2	The vast majority of analysed data (and identified frames and techniques) were linked to the news coverage of the conflict in Ukraine (and Russian irredentist claims). The author comes to the conclusion that especially the representation of Belarus and Azerbaijan in news coverage with respect to Russian irredentism was minimal. Could he provide political context to explain why? And did the focus beyond Ukraine prove to be useful/viable for the conducted research?
5.3	
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	The score of 18 % overall similarity by Turnitin does not indicate any problems after a detailed check. The thesis is original, conforming to quotation standards. The antiplagiarism tool of theses.cz identifies 2 % of overall similarity.
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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:

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Date: 8. 9. 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.