Thesis evaluation Nicolas Schuierer

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Thesis details:

Title: Securitisation of the 5G rollout in Germany

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

The Turnitin report raises many concerns about plagiarism. Several parts are indicated as having been copy-pasted or not properly cited. It is not overwhelming, but might raise some concerns.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by A. Escribà-Folch: it can be made public throught the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

Overall, the thesis is well-written and the topic selected is timely and relevant, as the author emphasizes in section 1.4 and other sections. The topic at stake seems well suited for a detailed exploration in terms of the security implications and, in particular, for approaching it from a discursive point of view and methodology. The author offers a great deal of detail throughout all stages of the research and has been careful on discussing the steps taken, the concepts involved and the design used; so he shows capacity to conduct original research autonomously. The thesis has though several shortcomings that are worth noting. First, the treatment and presentation of the theory sections on securitization and what it means for the understanding of 5G rollout. The two remain too disconnected and no actual expectations based on the characteristics of the case are developed. Considering securitization as an IV and then rollout as a DV is incorrected and confusing, and it is never properly explained of developed in terms of expectations and implications. Second, importantly, the structure of the thesis and the logic it conveys is quite problematic in terms of the development and presentation of the necessary research steps.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

This thesis explores the rollout of 5G in Germany, its security implications and, so, uses securitization theory and discourse analysis to see the extent to which the adoption of this new technology was securitized. The research question, thus, in examining a profound transformation in communication technologies already undergoing and with many potential implications, is relevant and timely. It is presented as an examination of the extent to which the issue has been securitized. Putting it that way might be challenging, since a clear quantification seems problematic, especially considering the approach and design adopted and the fact that only one case is analyzed. I'm not sure this is an appropriate treatment or use of securitization theory. This limits the exploration of conditional effects that could add further nuances to the securitization process based on contextual and institutional elements. Actually, the initial discussion in section 1.3 points precisely at that cross-national variation.

The implications, whether political, economic, and social, of the 5G technology as well as its main characteristics could be better spelled out at the beginning of the thesis, so that the relevance of the topic and the potential implications could be better established from the beginning. That would strengthen the justification of the topic and of the research question. Further, the implications of what securitization entails for a given policy in terms of policy and practical consequences should also be stressed from the very beginning, despite the concept is discussed later in the paper in good detail.

A super-short subsection just for presenting the research question does not seem necessary, as it could be integrated in the introduction to the thesis with a discussion of the relevance of the topic (which comes later as a separate section). Section 1.4.1 is a bit too short and fails to some extent to justify and present a full relevance of %G and the political and social implications it might have. There is no citation of related literature there that further supports the author's points.

Assessment: good   **Weighing:** n/a

Application knowledge and insight

The research design and methods employed are coherent with the underlying question being research.

The case selection seems thoroughly justified. Although it might be organized this way according to some other standards, let me just point out that I consider the case selection justification to be a discussion that should follow the theoretical framework and hypothesis developed by the author. It is the theoretical proposal that guides the case selection, so that such selection is properly theory-grounded and allows for answering a general research question. This is not the case as the two main motives the author uses to justify the selection have little to do with theoretical elements or factors that have a crucial explanatory value or have a relation to theoretical models (however abstract).

The treatment of securitization theory is presented in a bit confusing way, as something to be "deployed" (p. 9), rather than a framework from which observable implications can be derived to understand policy designs and applications. Otherwise the research question is already partially answered by assuming the theory applies in this case ex ante. In fact, it is literally said, page 12, that the theory is treated as an independent variable, while the 5G rollout is the dependent one. This is highly problematic in terms of research design considering how the research question is framed and the implications it has. This assumes that there is variability in the DV to be explained (or the adoption of the policy itself) by a securitization process that has also variability that causes or is correlated with the former; yet this is not what the author is poised to explore and it cannot be done when only one case is analyzed and the methodology adopted.

Section 2 has way too many subsections and stands as being overtly descriptive, disconnected, and agnostic; with no view on the specific policy to be analyzed and lacks expectations and original arguments that apply to the specific policy at stake. This is only done in subsection 2.2, but that discussion is too short and lacks profundity and the exploration of specific implications of 5G and securitization in the context of Germany (given that the case is pre-selected). It is only said how cyber-security may fit onto the framework (p.23), but what one wants to see is specifically what it means for 5G rollout and what can be expected to be observed, discourse-wise, in the context under study (which should provide for explanatory nuances to be incorporated into the theoretical framework).

Section 2.3 seems to be totally misplaced, in my opinion. A literature review should not follow the description and discussion of the theoretical framework, as the latter should rely on and build on existing theory in order to develop expectations for the context or specific policy under study and address existing gaps. A review does not require an introduction and several subsections. Also, it looks to me as being to author-centered, instead of theory or finding oriented. The author shows a good command of the existing literature, but should do more in critically discussing it to justify his own research and integrate it into his own theory propositions. Again, the review should be placed before the theory section.

Then, section 3 should start with the discussion of the case selection, which is now found in section 1.3. More detail on the case is provided in section 4 (and the many subsections it includes, including an unnecessary and short conclusion). The structure is a bit odd, as it is unclear what information belongs to each section as regards to relevance for the upcoming analysis.

Section 3.1.2 on sampling is quite unclear, as the unit of analysis that requires sampling remains quite unspecified as well as the conditions and characteristics that make such sampling necessary.

Given the framework used, discourse analysis looks definitively like the right methodological choice and one that can produce relevant insights. It is also commendable that the author is aware and discusses the limitations of the method (pages 31-32). The section could be a bit longer in my view and offer a deeper discussion.

Section 5.1.2 on data exploitation needs a more detailed explanation of the coding utilized as it is crucial for the empirical insights that can be derived from it. A table summarizing the relevant data and sources and actors generating them would be very useful in the previous section.

More explanation of the logic for this selection and the relevance of each of the documents, acts of speech seems necessary. An appendix thus would have been useful and necessary providing the details of sources, coding, etc. Otherwise, there is a lack of transparency in the analysis sections that is worrisome.

The actual analysis looks a bit shallow, and represents a relatively small share of the total length of the dissertation. The material, pieces and quotations from which conclusions are derived should be more clearly be presented, and refer to each specific document or source when discussing and interpreting their implications, otherwise it is hard for the reader if conclusions being reached by the author are granted or not.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory   **Weighing:** n/a

Reaching conclusions

Given some of the limitations pointed above, the reach of the conclusions has also its own limits in terms of overall contribution to a wider literature, the relevance of the findings as well as the policy implications they carry. The conclusion is too short as compared to the length of the whole thesis and fails to some extent to highlight the main insights and implications.

Assessment: (more than) satisfactory   **Weighing:** n/a

Communication

Format aspects relating to language and citation style seem correct and appropriate. There are still a few typos though and the language and sentence construction in several parts needs some streamlining.

In terms of structure, the thesis could be substantially improved by changing its structure and organization to make more coherent and by reducing the massive number of subsections.

Assessment: unsatisfactory   **Weighing:** n/a

Formal requirements

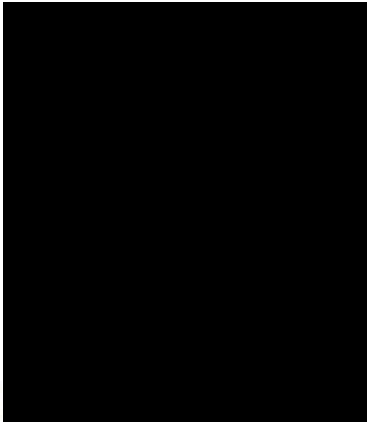An appendix should have been very useful and seems necessary given the nature of the analysis.

As said above, the structure is confusing and not logical in some parts and makes the reading more difficult.

Citation style seems consistent and correct.

Final assessment

This thesis is graded with a 6.8

Signatures

A. Escribà-Folch