

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: Tunková Anna

Thesis title: Echoes of History: Reflection of the socialist past regarding the 2023 presidential election in selected Czech media

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): The thesis conforms to the approved research proposal in terms of research objective, applied methodology and thesis structure. The quality of the thesis is discussed below.

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

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

The thesis is driven by a rather descriptive, but relevant questions, "how did Czech media portray the socialist past, and how prominent was that topic in their coverage of the 2023 presidential election?" (p. 2-3) and "what are the key themes and narratives that emerge from this portrayal?" (p. 3) In a rather simple hypothesis, the author expects that "the socialist past will be a prominent topic in the media coverage on the presidential election" and that "the media will adopt different approaches to covering the socialist past of various candidates based on their editorial lines, as well as how the candidates have addressed their past and conducted their lives since 1989" (p. 3).

For the theoretical foundation, Anna Tunková employs basic principles from agenda-setting theory and briefly introduces concepts like collective memory and theory of totalitarianism by Hannah Arendt. Regarding definitions of key terms, the author argues relatively well, why the terms "socialism" and "communism" are used interchangeably for the purpose of the thesis, even though both terms would deserve a deeper definition and explanation. The quality of literature review of sources directly linked to the topic of reflexion of socialist/communist past is rather poor, leaving out studies (cp. various analyses to TV coverage in debates for

the The Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting) and theses defended at the Institute of communication studies and journalism at the Charles University (cp Pásler, February 2024 Preissová, June 2024) on media coverage of the presidential elections that have been already published/defended. Despite their focus on TV broadcasting and different aspects of the topic, the critical evaluation could have helped the author to establish a more solid foundation for her research. The same applies to literature covering political and historical context of post-1989 Czech society and media; the author relies almost completely on sources written in English and the assessment of contribution of the literature to own research is more or less missing.

The research design is set to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis (Ørmen & Gregersen, 2019). The empirical part of the thesis is original. The author chose to analyze media coverage by six representative on-line Czech media. The process of data collection based on key words and data sampling is on a good level and - based on basic principles of the methods - the author can present some interesting findings regarding themes and identify 6 dominant narratives regarding the socialist past, however, especially the last one ("The portrayal of NATO in the context of historical communist values and propaganda") would deserve a deeper explanation.

Based on the quantitative segment of her work, the author concludes that "left-leaning outlets like Alarm and Deník N emphasised these narratives [regarding socialist past] more. This likely reflects their editorial priorities and desire to examine the candidates' historical ties to communism critically" (p. 45). At the same time, "the qualitative analysis reveals that even outlets with lower percentages of communism-related articles, such as Echo24, produced some of the most critical coverage of the candidate's past (p. 46). Unfortunately, the author does not provide a detailed and contextualized persuasive interpretation of these findings in terms of motivation, direction and intensity of the "criticism".

The author does not provide a more specific information on how does the thesis contribute to academic knowledge and further research, e.g. regarding research of narratives in political news coverage. There are couple of errors as well, e.g. "For instance, the Communist Party played a significant role in the election of Václav Havel as president in 2003" (instead of Václav Klaus, p. 7).

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	D
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	E
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	D
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	E
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	E
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	D
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	B

(*) 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 quality of structure and argumentation is satisfactory. In basic terms, the author is able to use academic terminology appropriately, but the interconnection of knowledge from literature is rather unconvincing. Inter alia, this can be manifested by the fact that the author mixes different methodological approaches (quantitative content analysis, thematic analysis, qualitative content analysis, narrative analysis) when introducing her research design. The quality and appropriateness of the citations is overall good, but the way how the author applied secondary literature in a short subchapter 2.2.4 (see further points 5.3 and 6.1 in this review) should be addressed at the defence as it could be classified as improper referencing. Obviously, the author should have spent more time to enhance the quality of her academic writing style in English. In the empirical part, the author included graphs, tables and appendices to present her findings.

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

Anna Tunková covered one of the key themes for post-1989 Czech society. The empirical research on narratives in news coverage by 6 mainstream Czech media of the aspect of "socialist past" in Czech presidential elections 2023 is original. The author identified various narratives and was able to provide answers on her rather descriptive research questions. Overall, she presented an acceptable/satisfactory

work with a number of notable weaknesses regarding the quality of theoretical framework, critical evaluation and application of the secondary literature, quality of argumentation and soundness of the empirical research including conclusion, conformity to quotation standards and quality of language. Many of these weaknesses could have been avoided, if the communication with supervisor were more intense and timely. The weaknesses are described in more detail above and in the following questions to be discussed during the thesis defense.

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

5.1	The author claims to use various methods for her empirical research: quantitative content analysis, thematic analysis, qualitative content analysis, narrative analysis. Could she explain in more detail, how did she apply these methods in her research? Could she be specific about difference/relationship between "narrative" and "theme"?
5.2	The key method is narrative analysis. The author identifies a few different narratives. Could she explain the identified "narrative "The portrayal of NATO in the context of historical communist values and propaganda" in a more detail (as the findings regarding this narrative were summarized just on one standard page, see p. 43-44)?
5.3	Could the author comment on the way how she conformed to quotation standards in subchapter 2.2.4 and refute the possibility of improper referencing?
5.4	What is the contribution of the thesis to further research beyond the statement in the last sentence of the conclusion, that the study "enhances our understanding of the ongoing influence of the socialist past on current media practices and public discourse in the Czech Republic"? (p. 55). Could the author be more specific?

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 24 % overall similarity by Turnitin indicates a relatively strong dependence on formulations from the secondary literature, especially in sections providing information on political and historical context of the topic. In the vast majority of cases, credit is given to the author when paraphrasing or summarizing their thoughts. Even though Turnitin did not indicate any problems with the subchapter 2.2.4 (Transformation of Post-socialist media), the vast majority of this short section (less than 2 pages) is almost word-for-word excerpt from Waschková Císařová et. al, 2024, including references on publications of another scholars. This could be conceivably viewed as improper referencing and should be addressed at the defence (see Question 5.3 above). The antiplagiarism tool of theses.cz identified 4 % 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:

-

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.

