

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
Fakulta sociálních věd
Institut mezinárodních studií

PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE
(Posudek vedoucího)

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): Tomáš Linhart

Název práce: Portrayal of Journalists in Netflix Series "House of Cards"

Vedoucí práce (u externích vedoucích uveďte též adresu a funkci v rámci instituce):

Jana Sehnálková

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

Tomáš Linhart has dedicated his master's thesis to the study of the portrayal of journalists in the Netflix's Series House of Cards. As he states on p. 12, the major goal of the thesis is to "evaluate whether the House of Cards series portrays the journalistic reality credibly, or whether it is fiction instead". The second question that Tomáš poses is whether portrayal of journalists (or any other aspects of the series) have an impact on public trust in the media: "Could series such as House of Cards cause any harm to real journalists and media by their portrayal?" (p. 12)

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, argumentace, logická struktura, teoretické a metodologické ukotvení, práce s prameny a literaturou, vhodnost příloh apod.):

Tomáš Linhart has selected an original topic for his analysis - and he has also selected an interesting approach. The key component of his work is based on interviews with prominent Czech (and American) journalists who offer their opinion on the series' portrayal of journalists, which provides an interesting insight into the perception of House of Cards among journalists, but also an interesting insight into the world of journalism and its everyday operation. In addition, as an extra, the reader also gets an interesting behind-the-scenes information about the life of Czech journalists. By contrasting responses from Czech and American journalists, Tomáš's research also shows a number of interesting cultural differences in journalistic work.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Following the introduction, the second chapter is entirely dedicated to methodology. Here, the author describes how he selected and subsequently approached Czech journalists to interview them about their perception of the portrayal of journalists in the House of Cards. As a kind of a control group, Tomáš also interviewed three American journalists who reside in Prague. The author is aware that the sample is relatively small, at the same time, he was limited by the fact that the respondents would have had seen the series and would, at least to some extent, understand the U.S. media environment. American experience that many of his respondents had was important.

In the third chapter, Tomáš introduces the theoretical underpinnings of his research. He examines the trend of declining trust in media and the theory of influence of popular culture on mass society, where he relies particularly on Umberto Eco who believes that "the content that the audience receives... might have an impact on social behavior." (p. 30) Tomáš then builds his argument for internalization of media representation of reality by audience by

using cultivation theory and agenda setting. In the last part of this chapter, Tomáš establishes basic rules of journalistic ethics.

In the fourth chapter, the author provides basic background to the series *House of Cards* and introduces the key characters. The third and fourth chapters altogether provide all the necessary background to the fifth chapter, which is based on the interviews with journalists. During the guided interviews, the interviewees were presented with a set of scenarios that depict *House of Cards* journalists in specific situations. Tomáš is trying to identify whether the scenarios and the journalist's behavior is realistically portrayed or, to the contrary, blown out of proportion to add more drama to the series. Ethics issues come to the forefront in almost every interview.

The theoretical part is based on a variety of secondary sources both in Czech and in English. The second part of the thesis is mostly based on interviews. In the appendix, the author provides the list of model situations he discussed with the interviewees as well as the questions that he posed to each of them.

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):

As far as formal and language requirements are concerned, Tomáš has done a very good job. His text is well written, only occasionally, there are few grammar mistakes and typos. Footnotes as well as bibliography are prepared meticulously. Notably, I would like to praise the author's enormous effort that he put into translating all the interviews conducted in Czech into English.

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z bakalářské práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):

With the selection of the topic, Tomáš has embarked on an interesting journey, which at the very beginning did not have a clear end point. However, the more he delved into the topic, the direction became clear. The topic and his approach is quite original and creative and it required a lot of work. The theoretical part is well researched and I very much appreciate Tomáš's effort to find linkages between media and popular culture as well as evidence of popular culture's impact on individual's framing of reality. Albeit Tomáš points out that there is currently little empirical evidence whether there is some correlation between the portrayal of media in popular culture and public trust in the media, he argues - with evidence - that popular culture helps recipients (audience) to create a framework through which they tend to perceive journalists (p. 24). As the author points out on p. 31, citing Gerbner, "television confirms worries and prejudices of how people perceive the real world... the impact of television could lead even up to the extension of societal norms in terms of ethics and behavior." Most of the journalists that Tomáš interviewed seem to confirm such an assertion. When discussing agenda setting, the author then continues to argue that "uncertainty and ignorance related to concerned topics tend to make the audience more likely to accept the agenda" (p. 34). I agree that this makes certain audiences susceptible to artistic shortcuts that filmmakers use to add more flavor, suspense, and drama to their work.

In the fifth chapter, the interviews provide a very interesting glimpse into the journalistic profession. The conversation largely revolves around the issues of journalistic ethics - here, it

is interesting to see some differences in the perspective on some of the presented scenarios between female and male journalists. Personally, this part is too long and too “chatty”, relying a bit too much on direct citations from the individual interviews. While I understand that the author may have wanted to give enough space to all of the interviewees, as each of their responses offered a slightly different take on the model situations, which definitely was interesting, I was missing a bit more in-depth analysis. Also, by inserting references to Czech media stories without providing much context, it seems that the author is diverging from his focal point - the series House of Cards.

In the conclusion, the author evaluates the responses and based on those, he classifies the model scenarios as credible or exaggerated. While most of the situations were described by the majority of the interviewees as exaggerated, in many cases, there was a general agreement that such situations are - to more or less extent - possible. This was a bit surprising to me, as most of the model situations clearly represent a breach (or at least bending) of journalistic ethics. However, it also proves that journalists are human beings after all - and journalistic ethics is subject to interpretation of each individual. Overall, it seems that most of the interviewees rated the series as exaggerated and distorting reality.

The research was inconclusive with respect to the impact of the media portrayal of the series on public trust in the media: half of the interviewees expressed belief that the series itself might have had an impact on the public trust on the media, the other half claimed that audiences do understand that film uses hyperbole and exaggeration to make the plot more dramatic. To prove persuasively the assertion that the series actually does undermine the audience's trust in the media would require a slightly different approach - for example, surveying the audiences after watching the series.

5. SPOLUPRÁCE S VEDOUCÍM PRÁCE (komunikace s vedoucím práce, schopnost reflektovat připomínky, posun od původního záměru apod.)

Tomáš has consulted his work on a regular basis in several in-person and virtual meetings and reflected upon recommendations. At the end of the writing process, he was pressed for time, however, was able to pull all of his energy together and at the very final stretch, he rewrote the analytical part of the thesis.

6. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):

- In the area of journalistic ethics, where did you identify the biggest differences between Czechs and Americans?
- Based on your research, what would you consider more influential in terms of public view of the media – popular culture or the attitudes of elected officials?

7. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA

Tomáš Linhart's thesis fulfils all of the requirements of the master's thesis and is therefore recommended for defense. I propose grade B.

Datum: 11. června 2020

Podpis: Jana Sehnalkova

Pozn.: Hodnocení píše k jednotlivým bodům, pokud nepíšete v textovém editoru, použijte při nedostatku místa zadní stranu nebo příložený list. V hodnocení práce se pokuste oddělit ty její nedostatky, které jsou, podle vašeho mínění, obhajobou neodstranitelné (např. chybí kritické zhodnocení pramenů a literatury), od těch věcí, které student může dobrou obhajobou napravit; poměr těchto dvou položek berte prosím v úvahu při stanovení konečné známky.