

FIRST READER THESIS REVIEW FORM

Name of the Student	Gijs Verhoeff
Date of Submission	16.06.2023
Title of the Thesis	European(ised) Media Dutch journalists reporting on Europe in a European public sphere
Reviewer Name / Affiliation	Vera Sceanovic/Leiden University

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

The thesis is free of plagiarism. The Turnitin report identified no problematic matches; the thesis is based on original research.

KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review)

The thesis addresses an issue that is both topical well embedded in the existing literature on Europeanization in the areas of media, public opinion, and identity. It makes an excellent case for revisiting the concept of the European public sphere and does so from a relatively fresh angle, by examining the perspectives, perceptions, and practices of journalists, i.e. people who are professionally involved in shaping the public sphere. The thesis shows excellent knowledge of the theoretical discussions surrounding the likelihood of a 'European' public sphere and the existing research on some of its aspects, and makes a strong case for adding to this research. The connection between the two – the highly theoretical discussion in the first part of the literature review, and the various operationalizations used in the empirical studies the thesis addresses – could have been stronger, and would have helped the author articulate a clearer theoretical contribution to the field (for example by qualifying the type or degree of 'Europeanness' depending on the strength of different dimensions). While some of the concepts used are clearly articulated, others (e.g. 'pan-European media') should have been better defined.

ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources)

On the whole, the research design is very solid and appropriate to the question. The case selection could have been better defended. The choice of the Netherlands is justified largely by the lack of literature on the country, and more half-heartedly by reference to the political mood in the country, but neither amounts to a very clear theoretical explanation. The selection of outlets/interviewees is justified at length, and is generally convincing, but while the author makes much of the transformation of the media in the contextual sections (media concentration, emergence of specialized 'pan-European' outlets vs. national correspondents, changes in patterns of media consumption etc.) none of this seems to play a role either in the selection of respondents or in the analysis of their answers, except in the margins. Instead, they are simply conceptualized as 'Dutch journalists'. This is unfortunate, as the differences between those who see themselves as 'Brussels correspondents' for the Dutch media and those (European correspondent, EU Observer, FTM) who see themselves as being on a mission to transform reporting on Europe are quite patterned and should have been more clearly part of the analysis, as this would have also helped the conclusions go beyond merely documenting diversity. The method described (thematic analysis) is generally appropriate and convincingly described, but it is not really well integrated in the analysis – it is not very clear what purpose these codes had served or how they helped to formulate the results. Finally, it could have been better explained how the 5 dimensions that formed the backbone of the semi-structured interview related to the different forms of 'Europeanization' of the public sphere.

CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives)

The conclusions effectively summarize the findings, and offer wealth of interesting insights, for example with regard to the conflict between increased interest in 'Europe' and decline in the number of European correspondents, or with regard to the joint dislike of 'pan-European' (in reality Brussels-focused) media etc. Nevertheless, the research question is answered mostly with a nod towards diversity in conceptualizations of and interest in a 'European public sphere' by different journalists. This is not in itself surprising and while it makes for an interesting read a theoretically stronger answer would have required revisiting the arguments for the case selection and reintegrating the empirical findings with those of the previous literature.

FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout)

The thesis is for the most part well and clearly written, professionally referenced, and generally clearly and logically structured. There are, however, many small typos, mismatched numbers and tenses and other small mistakes that detract from the reading experience. An extra round of language editing would have made for a much more polished final product.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak points of the thesis, other issues)


This is overall an informative and insightful thesis. It gives a good overview of the way 'European' Dutch journalists work, their perception of their own role, their audience, and their colleagues and the way they imagine participating in something like a 'European public sphere'. I also found suggestions of different ways in which 'Europeanization' may be taking place to be very insightful.

At the same time, the connection between empirical findings and the theoretical apparatus remained quite loose, giving the thesis a somewhat tentative and exploratory character. This is a pity, as I think the material would have allowed for more focused explorations and more conclusive arguments about the possible avenues for 'Europeanization' of the Dutch (and potentially other national) media.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

(for example, word count)

All formal requirements are met.

Grade (1 – 10)	7,8
Date	Reviewer Signature 
05.07.2023	

2 – 3 SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THESIS DEFENCE

1.	The operative definition you use for the 'European public sphere' is a good introduction to the scholarly discussion on it, but not exactly appropriate to your research subjects. They are, after all, journalists: it is difficult to see what from their perspective a 'network that gives all citizens an equal opportunity to take part in an encompassing process of political communication' would even mean and I wasn't surprised that they told you as much. If you were to do this research again, knowing what you know now, would you try to conceptualize the notion of a 'European public sphere' or 'Europeanization of the public sphere' differently?
2.	In your contextual chapters, you explain quite compellingly the challenges facing traditional media today, but these don't seem to play a big role in your interviews, except for the occasional reference to the importance of 'clicks'. Why do you think this is the case? Do you nevertheless think these changes are relevant, and if so, would a different research design have captured them better?
3.	In the thesis you defend the choice of the Netherlands somewhat casually, saying there has simply been little research on it so far. Do you think that there is simply little difference across countries, and that your findings on the perceptions and positions of journalists would easily apply to other European states? Or is anything about your findings particular to NL?

AGREED FINAL GRADE

(To be completed *after* both readers have read and marked the thesis independently)

Grade (1 – 10 and A-F)	7,9 (B)
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Date	Reviewer 1 Signature	Reviewer 2 Signature
08.07.2023	