

Master's Thesis Evaluation Form

Student's name: Rebecca Susanne Vaughan

Thesis title: Conversations With Our Apps: Exploring The Social Context of Communicating with Technology

Name of the supervisor: Filip Vostal

Name of the opponent:

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis? Please give your reasons for the suggested grade in detail below.

1. *Does the author show understanding of one or more theories, and use theory to generate a hypothesis or to make the problem area more understandable.*

Comments: This is an exceptional thesis with no major weaknesses.

2. *Is the research question articulated clearly and properly? Is the research question sufficiently answered in the conclusion?*

Comments: The research question is well and rigorously articulated and tackled in the conclusion.

3. *Is the thesis based on relevant research and literature and does it accurately summarize and integrate the information?*

Comments: Yes.

4. *What is the quality of the data or the other sources? Are the sample method, data collection and data analysis appropriate?*

Comments: The entire labour with data – its gathering, its robustness, its analysis and interpretation – is the critical strength of the thesis. In other words: the thesis' empirical dimension, featuring heavy-weight qualitative social analysis, is unique.

5. *Are the findings relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions of the thesis based on strong arguments?*

Comments: Yes.

6. *Are the author's thoughts distinguished unambiguously from the borrowed ideas?*

Comments: Yes, they are.

7. *Is the thesis containing original/innovative research (in terms of topic, approach, and/or findings)?*

Comments: The thesis presents very original and social scientifically relevant intellectual cluster when framing the research problem, angle as well as interpreting findings.

8. *What is the quality of style and other formal requirements?*

Comments: The thesis is well written when it comes to style and formalities. Some in-text citations cannot be found in references, and it is not clear why the thesis begins (and ends) with references. This is an editorial micro-misstep rather than a formal issue.

9. *Are there any other strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, which are not included in the previous questions? Please list them if any.*

Comments: NA

10. *What topic do you suggest for the discussion in the thesis defence?*

Comments: What is sociological relevance of studying UX? Why is your thesis important for communication studies? Why did you draw on STS (namely The Social Construction of Technological Systems) tradition in you work? You've conducted superb qualitatively-oriented empirical inquiry during C-19 pandemic – how challenging was it?

11. *Declaration that the supervisor has read the result of the originality check in the system: [] Theses [] Turnitin [X] Original (Urkund)*

Supervisor's comment on the originality check result: NA

Overall assessment of the thesis:

At the outset, as Rebecca's advisor and teacher, I need to emphasize that her thesis is truly outstanding (and I am not saying this customarily). Let me elaborate in detail why I think it is the case.

This explorative and empirically very strong thesis confidently posits *its own* post-disciplinary intellectual territory situated at the intersection of sociologically-oriented communication/language studies (Searle, Austin, Grice, Cole et al, but also Lupton), Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Bijker, Hughes, Pinch), and highly up-to-date investigations of the User Experience (UX) from informatics (e.g. Foster, Nass, Mara & Mara). Against the background of a fascinating *entrée* and literature synthesis, Rebecca has advanced extremely robust qualitative study¹ which conceives a fundamental pillar of the overall methodology. The empirical inquiry into the nexus of UX and social agency is highly innovative in both its conduct, interpretation, and results. Rebecca has perfectly contextualized the notion of UX with relevant literature from aforementioned social scientific streams. It is obvious that she well understands that the topic of how humans relate to (their) technologies (and how technologies redraw the map of “the social”) and why such investigation is critical for understanding late modernity.

The main argument of the thesis is couched in terms of how conversation, language style, rhetorical notion connects to ever-changing demands of humans as socio-cultural actors. Rebecca fantastically and systematically argues that not only the experience of human

¹ I must emphasize that Rebecca has conducted masterful qualitative social research and analysis during C-19 pandemic when social contact was extremely uneasy and/or digitized.

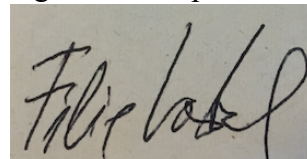
beings matters when they communicate with technologies, but also that technologies – in their own particular and quasi-autonomous manner – communicate *with* human beings. Her analytics can be read as an exploration of how communication patters, styles, and notions re-embed relational links between social formations and technological structures in an era of “acceleration.”

Overall, this is an excellent thesis, with a potential to be published (in a shortened version) as article in a third- perhaps second-tier journal (in such case, its various parts still need to be modified and revised). The thesis is convincing in its argumentative tone, theoretically strong and exemplary in empirics; it is well structured, clear in presentation and focus, authoritative in its analysis and exposition, and importantly, *interesting*. Rebecca has identified a niche (how human beings communicate with apps and vice-versa) at the aforementioned post-disciplinary junction. Not only is the entire analytical apparatus developed in step-wise and very intelligent manner and well situated into literature, but it is also written in an gaging language – the reader literally enjoys reading the text as the author’s English is perfect and the phraseology is superb. The author’s ability to treat a difficult theme in very qualified fashion, relying on a range of sources, is admirable and rare for master’s thesis. In my best opinion, the thesis could be a VERY good base for PhD proposal.

Proposed grade: A

Date: 7 September 2021

Signature: Filip Vostal

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and appears to read "Filip Vostal".