

Graduate School of International
Culture and Communication Studies
Examination Report on the Doctoral Dissertation

Applicant	
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Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (English)	(Re)creating the Local in the Digital: An Exploration of Gender Representation in the Arab Gulf Context on YouTube
Dissertation Title · Subtitle : (Japanese)	デジタルにおいてローカルを(再)創造すること: YouTube におけるアラブ湾岸諸国の文脈でのジェンダー表現の探索

*Even if the dissertation is written in English, a Japanese language translation of the title and subtitle must also be submitted.

5. Summary of the Dissertation

As per attached sheet

6. Table of Contents

As per attached sheet

7. The results of the dissertation examination and the oral defense

(About 3,000 characters in Japanese or 1,000 words in English)

(1) Evaluation and summary of the dissertation examination

(Including Summary of the Dissertation)

Under the title “(Re)creating the Local in the Digital: An Exploration of Gender Representation in the Arab Gulf Context on YouTube” the candidate has created decidedly original contributions alike to the fields of gender studies and media studies in the particular context of socio-cultural developments in the Arab Gulf region over the last decade or so. These contributions include not only empirical advances in the form of richly detailed case studies of two popular YouTube channels of professionally generated content (PGC) produced locally in the Arab Gulf and distributed globally on YouTube (*Telfaz11*, mainly featuring sketch comedy, and the talk show Bilmokhba’s *Swar Shuaib*), but also refinements to established theoretical frameworks and methodological models. Between them, the two case studies investigate in all 126 video sequences issued between May 2012 and June 2018, totalling over 36 hours in clips varying in length from around 3 to 40 minutes, and reaching an online audience of up to 26 million people or so. In the realm of theory, of particular note is the incorporation not only of a specifically Gulf regional perspectives on developments of genre in media, but also of feminist voices within recent Islamic thought. Regarding methodology, the main innovation is in the specific combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches utilized, which permits the clear delineation of both dominant trends and dissenting voices. The evidence that Ms Alkhaja puts forward amply supports her argument that YouTube PGC has “challenged the limitations of traditional media gatekeepers and established alternate ways of meaning-making” and thus come to represent “a transformative vehicle for change in regard to gender (re)presentations” in the Arab Gulf.

In addition to an Introduction briefly outlining the topic, methodology and theoretical framework, and a Conclusion providing a synthesis of the argument, and discussing the opportunities it offers for further research in the field, the dissertation is divided into six main chapters, falling into two groups. The first group (Chapters 2-4) offers first a comprehensive literature review covering sources relevant to the Arab Gulf region from the fields of gender studies and media studies in particular, and then a detailed explication of the quantitative and qualitative methods employed in the thesis and the reasons why they were chosen. The second group presents a detailed examination of the selected YouTube contents: Chapters 5 and 6 cover the quantitative content analysis of gender representations on the two channels in turn with a particular focus on the concepts of recognition and respect, while Chapter 7 offers a qualitative (semiotic) examination of material on both channels tending to exhibit implicit or explicit signs of resistance to and subversion of the conservative gender narratives still dominant in the region. The thesis is rounded off with four useful appendices concerning the two YouTube channels investigated, specifying both the individual videos viewed and the coding systems used to analyze their characteristics.

The evaluators all agree that the candidate’s written work amply satisfies the criteria for a doctoral dissertation in the field of international culture and communication. These requirements principally include empirical and

theoretical originality as well as its recognition of previous research in the area, effective deployment of terminology and concepts as well as effective verbal and visual illustration, logical development and conformity to academic citation and style, and quality as English composition. Prior to filing this report, with the assistance of the "Turnitin" database and analytical tools, the chief examiner has again confirmed that the revised thesis does not contain any inappropriate use of source materials. Moreover, he has checked carefully that the revisions requested at the conclusion of the oral defense (mainly minor issues of phrasing and formatting, though also including a few brief additions for clarification or to add nuance) have been carefully implemented as intended.

(2) Summary of the oral defense (including Comments and Questions)

Ms Alkhaja's Oral Defense Examination was conducted on campus in 11-809 on Friday, December 16th, from 10.40am to 12.10pm. Prof. Dvorak was prevented from coming to campus due to sudden indisposition and university health regulations but participated in the oral defense online via Zoom link without any problems. As well as by the three appointed evaluators, the examination was attended by around nine others including quite a few of the candidate's fellow postgraduate students at GSICCS. There, following a brief introduction by the chief examiner, Ms Alkhaja delivered a Powerpoint presentation of over 40 slides lasting around 30 minutes on her doctoral research project under the main title of his thesis, ""(Re)creating the Local in the Digital." This was organized very clearly, full of detail, and well articulated in excellent English. It covered concisely the theme, purpose, organization, and conclusions of the thesis, and included an explanation of its main research questions, research concepts, research methods, and research materials both primary and secondary. In addition to these general matters covered, specific slides offered: overviews of the social and media background to the thesis, as well as the main theoretical pillars upholding the argument (notably the approaches of Social Cognitive and Cultivation theory); information providing context for the discussion of the female driving ban debate in Saudi Arabia and on conventional modes of dress in the Arab Gulf, including illustrative visual material; and a variety of charts and tables summarizing the numerical data generated regarding *Telfaz11* and *Swar Shuaib*.

The questions and comments from the official evaluators principally concerned the following issues:

- * the role of social and political elites in the Arab Gulf region in policing media expression and its relevance to the thesis presented;
- * the traditional role of women in Islamic society as, e.g., guardians of family honour and its implications for the current project;
- * the traditional visual and plastic arts (as opposed to contemporary media) as a potential alternative site of resistance to gender norms and conventions in the Gulf;
- * evidence among the extensive YouTube material analyzed by the candidate of concern in the various Gulf states with non-binary formations of gender and sexuality;
- * potential future research in related areas, including explorations of other genres of PGC content such as film and drama, or of other aspects of the current PGC material such as audience response.

In each case the candidate answered effectively and confidently, taking time to confirm that the questions had been correctly understood and appropriately answered, and revealing a deep understanding of the field and mastery of the topic. Only a brief period was available towards the end of the defense for comments and questions from those attending other than the examiners, though these suggested that the topic of the thesis was indeed one of general interest. Immediately following the public proceedings the evaluators privately conferred together, concluding unanimously that, as with the dissertation itself, the candidate had amply fulfilled the requirements of the oral defense. There were also a number of constructive suggestions for further development of the project and strong encouragement that the thesis should in due course be made available in volume form to a wider audience.

5. Summary of the Dissertation

Abstract

Professionally generated content (PGC) on YouTube in the Arab Gulf has been a transformative vehicle for change in regard to gender (re)presentations in the Peninsula. It has challenged the limitations of traditional media gatekeepers and established alternate ways of meaning-making in virtual spaces that have added to the region's reservoir of cultural productions. The examination of gender roles in this content is of salience. Decades of research in non-Middle Eastern media contexts has demonstrated recurring stereotypes of gender roles and existing research within the Middle Eastern context has also demonstrated similar results. In the Arab region, a proliferation of stereotypical depictions of gender roles in traditional media exists across multiple genres, such as music videos, Arabic drama, and talk shows. Additionally, research on gender roles in the Arab-social media nexus is scarce but nevertheless important as the media is a powerful force of socialization and it engages in processes of representing the world. Professionally generated content in the Gulf is an amalgamation of locally drawn narratives that not only visually and textually consider the socio-religious, cultural, and political context of the region, but also interrogate and examine significant cultural attitudes towards gender roles, among other issues the youth are facing in this globalizing world. The wide reach and influence of this content due to its employment of humor, particularly satire, in the Arab Gulf make it a critical focus of study. This dissertation advances the argument that creative production in the form of professionally generated content in the Arab Gulf is contributing to social change in terms of gender representations in the region. To answer the research questions, this research applies quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to analyze the gender representations present in the content. The motivation for utilizing this methodological orientation is that quantitative and qualitative approaches may complement each other in studying the social phenomenon in question and, side by side, allow for a deeper exploration of the research questions. Quantitative content analysis provides empirical data on the frequency of what lies in the visual and is applied to analyze gender role depictions utilizing Signorielli and Bacue's (1999) concepts of recognition and respect. Semiotic textual analysis, on the other hand, gives a deeper view of the site of the image and the meaning that is encoded in it. It is applied in this research to analyze the modes of resistance that transgress and subvert dominant normative gender dynamics in the PGC. The results conclude that the professionally generated content examined in this dissertation perpetuates stereotypical depictions of gender roles while also playing a pivotal role in advancing gender-role-related discourses and issues in society. The quantitative analytical results indicate that male characters/participants are overrepresented in the content and that female characters/participants are underrepresented in almost all categories of analysis, appearing in stereotypical roles, and perpetuating stereotypical gender-role portrayals in the PGC. The qualitative semiotic textual analysis concludes that in some of the content, humorous and transgressive forms of resistances are applied to expose the gender double standards that exist in society and the asymmetries of power that work within a framework of oppositional powers to contribute to women's equality. They also interrogate the attitudes and positions that impact women and their progress. Moreover, modes of dress in the content became a lens through which gender roles and behaviors were examined. Modes of dress in the Arab Gulf are connected to larger ideas of modesty, propriety, decency, morality, femininity, and masculinity which are all informed by religious, cultural, and sociohistorical prescriptions. The transgressions employed both active and passive strategies of resistance: the active modes naturalize forms of transgression by connecting them to existent practices in society that are subject to various degrees of visibility based on context and medium; in contrast, the passive modes include being transgressive by not conforming to established practices and asserting individual choice over societal expectations, albeit without challenging dominant hegemonic narratives. The general results confirm that while stereotypical depictions of gender roles do exist in the content, PGC pushes forward conversations and messages that question the asymmetries of power in gender roles and creates the space to engage in meaningful ways of seeing. Despite the limitations of the study, such as the small sample sizes, the findings provide evidence supporting past research in the literature of gender roles. The findings also provide insight into future research avenues for this topic in the digital and gender nexus in the Arab Gulf context.

6. Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ii

List of Tables vi

List of Figures vii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Gender Representation and the Media	4
1.2 YouTube as a Field of Inquiry	6
1.3 Defining Professionally Generated Content	9
1.4 Professionally Generated Content in the Arab Gulf	11
1.5 Research Objectives	15
1.6 Research Questions	16
1.7 Gender, Resistance, Transgression, and Satire: A Conceptual Framework	16
1.7.1 Gender, Social Cognition Theory, and Cultivation Theory	16
1.7.2 Resistance	22
1.7.3 Transgression	24
1.7.4 Satire	27
1.8 Methodological Approach	30
1.9 Organization of the Thesis	31

Chapter 2: Gender in the Modern Arab Gulf 34

2.1 Introduction	34
2.2 Gender in the Modern Arab Gulf	36
2.2.1 The Gulf States and the State of Gender: Twentieth-Century Influences	36
2.2.2 The Gulf States and the State of Gender: Twenty-First Century Influences	44
2.3 Gender in the Arab Media	49
2.3.1 Traditional Media and Gender	49
2.3.2 Social Media and Gender	56

Chapter 3: Theory of Gender Representations in the Media 62

3.1 Gender and the Media	62
3.2 Cultural, Theoretical, and Methodological Transformations	64
3.2.1 Theoretical and Methodological Shifts	66
3.2.2 Feminism(s) After the Second Wave	69
3.2.3 Masculinities and Media Studies	74
3.3 Gender Representation in the Media: Advertising and Television programming	75
3.4 Talk Shows and Gender	84
3.4.1 The Talk Show Genre	84
3.4.2 Late-Night Talk Shows	92
3.5 Sketch Comedy and Gender	98

Chapter 4: Methodology 102

4.1 Quantitative Content Analysis	102
4.2 Hypotheses and Significance	104
4.3 Sample	105
4.3.1 Telfaz11 Sample	105
4.3.2 Bilmokhba (Swar Shuaib) Sample	106
4.4 Coding Categories	108
4.4.1 Telfaz11 Coding Categories	108
4.4.2 Bilmokhba's Swar Shuaib Coding Categories	116
4.5 Data Collection and Analysis	126
4.5.1 Validity and Reliability	127
4.5.2 Methodological Limitations	127
4.6 Semiotic Textual Analysis	129

Chapter 5: Gender (Re)presentation on Telfaz11	136
5.1 Hypotheses and Rationale	138
5.2 Results for Recognition	140
5.3 Results for Respect	147
5.3.1 Role	147
5.3.2 Occupation, Occupation Status and Setting	148
5.3.3 Age	155
5.3.4 Results for Dressing Style and Warmth and Competence	157
5.4 Analysis and Discussion	164
5.4.1 Analysis and Discussion of Recognition	164
5.4.2 Analysis and Discussion of Respect	169
5.4.3 Analysis and Discussion of Dressing Style, Warmth, and Competence	172
5.4.4 Analysis and Discussion: General Comments	174
Chapter 6: Gender (Re)presentation on Swar Shuaib Talk Show	177
6.1 Hypotheses and Rationale	179
6.2 Results for Recognition	181
6.3 Results for Respect	184
6.4 Results for Remaining Categories	201
6.5 Analysis and Discussion	205
6.5.1 Analysis and Discussion of Recognition	205
6.5.2 Analysis and Discussion of Respect	208
6.5.3 Analysis and Discussion of Remaining Categories	212
6.5.4 Analysis and Discussion: General Comments	215
Chapter 7: Currents of Change: Professionally Generated Content, Creative Transgressive Resistance and Subversive Gender Narratives in the Arab Gulf	217
7.1 Art and Social Change: Resistance and the Driving Ban Debate in the Saudi Context	220
7.2 Art, Social Change, and Professionally Generated Content Resisting the Driving Ban	227
7.2.1 Analysis of No Woman, No Drive	227
7.2.2 Analysis of Hole in my Pocket and Filter Watan	230
7.2.3 Analysis of A Conversation on the Pedal	234
7.2.4 Discussion and General Analysis	238
7.3 Body: Modes of Dress and PGC Resistance	240
7.3.1 Body and Modes of Dress in the Arab Gulf	241
7.3.2 Analysis of Season 1 Episode 9: Fouz Alfahad, Zori Ashkanani, and Dana Altuwairesh	245
7.3.3 Analysis of Season 2 Episode 5: Halima Boland	247
7.3.4 Analysis of Season 3 Episode 9: Jessica Michelle Kahawaty	249
7.3.5 Analysis of Season 4 Episode 2: Tahani	250
7.3.6 Analysis of Season 3 Episode 3 Hala Abdullah	253
7.3.7 Analysis of Season 2 Episode 9: Mohammed Diego	254
7.3.8 Analysis of Season 2 Episode 10: Amy Roko	256
7.3.9 Discussion and General Analysis	259
Chapter 8: Conclusion	264
8.1 General Conclusion and Comments	264
8.2 Limitations and Future Research	269
<i>References</i>	272
<i>Appendix 1: Full List of Videos Examined for Telfaz11</i>	344
<i>Appendix 2: Full List of Videos Examined for Bilmokhba's Swar Shuaib</i>	348
<i>Appendix 3: Telfaz11 Codebook</i>	353
<i>Appendix 4: Swar Shuaib Codebook</i>	358