Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague
Department of Photography

Assessment of the Master's Thesis

Author of thesis: Longyu You
Title of thesis: Plant Porn: Analysis of the social media fascination with indoor plants photography

Assessment of the primary advisor ✓   Assessment of the opponent ✗

Author of the assessment (first name, last name, workplace): Michal Šimůnek, KF

Evaluation of the content and final form of the thesis (A/excellent – B/very good – C/good – D/good with objections – E/satisfactory – F/unsatisfactory – not recommended for defence)

Suitability of the selected objective and work approach.. B
Relative completeness of the literature used for the selected topic.............................B
Ability to critically evaluate and use scholarly literature.. A
Logicality of the thesis structure, connection of its chapters......................................B
Language and stylistic level of the thesis...A
Compliance with citation norms (should the text repeatedly contain adopted passages without citing the source, the work cannot be recommended for defence)...................A
Sufficient extent of image attachments, justifiability and suitability of attachments, graphic layout..A
Originality of the thesis, contribution to the development of the field of study...........B

Overall evaluation of the thesis..B

Verbal evaluation of the thesis including questions that the candidate must address in his/her thesis defence:

The research focused on contemporary social media usually traces and explores a variety of tendencies, rhythms, fads and fashions regarding the style, purpose and theme of shared content (usually images). Social media are also recognised as an essential platform for self-expression, self-promotion, construction and maintenance of communities and subcultures. The Master thesis of Longyu You is of this kind of research as it deals with contemporary social media fascination with indoor plants photography. The objective of the thesis is to address the origin of the popularity of indoor plants growing and particularly to explore plant porn subculture that blossoms on the ground of social media, mainly Instagram.

The thesis is well and logically structured, the argumentation is supported by sufficient amount of literature and other sources. The first part describes the history of both outdoor and indoor gardening from ancient times until recent trends closely connected to social media. This part is well written, and it is a necessary exposition for the empirical part of the thesis. However, instead of briefly outlining the ancient

ways of gardening, this part could be more focused on recent history and those social, cultural and technological tendencies that have influenced contemporary popularity of indoor plant growing and establishment of social media-based communities of plant enthusiasts.

The second part of the thesis is based on the original Longyu You's empirical research. Longyu You describes his research design as nethongraphy and mixed research. However, his research is instead a set of separate data collection and data analysis techniques (netnography and mixed research designs are both based on parallel or successive collection of data that should be as much as possible complementary). However, despite this misunderstanding of the specificity of given research designs, I consider You's empirical research as of satisfactory quality. It is impressive that You managed to collect data using three different techniques: online survey, interviews and object detection image analysis. Although the results are because of the limitations of these techniques (online questionnaires are usually significantly biased because of impossibility to control the sampling procedures, object detection analysis – as mention by You himself – would require much larger datasets trained to "see" Instagram images) rather illustrative and provisional, I find the analysis and interpretation of data as interesting and convincing. Furthermore, interviews seem not to be in-depth interviews but rather a sort of journalistic interviews and You is not analysing them following necessary qualitative coding strategy but instead giving only a summary of answers for each respondent. This form of analysis and interpretation is again a sort of eclectic journalistic style which prevents him from generalising across all interviews. Simply put, when using sociological methods, it is necessary to consult methodological literature (except Kozinet's *Netnography* there is no other reference to the methodological sources in the thesis) or at least consult with the thesis supervisor.

Despite these objections, I find Longyu You's thesis as highly ambitious in its goals and scope, and I appreciate the enormous effort that You invested in his research and writing. I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest B as the final grade.

Questions for the defence:
Social platforms like Instagram and YouTube are flooded by influencers whose purpose of sharing content is driven by the necessity to build and maintain a particular community of consumption and monetise on attention (likes, clicks) of community members/followers. Content shared by influencers usually differ from "ordinary" users of a given platform: they post content regularly and frequently, they have more than an average number of followers, their images are usually more "glossy" and professional-like, their hashtag strategy is usually supported by constant analysis, they are making money by sharing content. Is such kind of differences between influencers and "ordinary users" also observable in the "plantporn" communities? Could you describe in more detail how do plantfluencers co-create the plant community of consumption? What is their role in the subculture? Are these influencers exclusively oriented on plant and gardening market or are they rather general celebrity-like influencers promoting a variety of other commodities not related to gardening and "plant industry"?

Date: 01/09/2020   Signature: ………………………