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Course: Getting Started

Assignment: Pre-Assignment for session 2 on the 26th October 2023



Source: <https://www.hanken.fi/sv/calendar/disputation-anna-maaranen>

A short essay about writing a dissertation based on the interviews of a graduate Dr. Anna Maaranen and her supervisor professor Janne Tienari.

Newly graduated Doctor: Anna Maaranen

Main subject: Management and Organisation

Title of the work: Socio-technological encounters and new discursive dynamics in social media spaces

Opponent: Sine Nørholm Just, PhD, Professor, Roskilde University

Supervisors: Janne Tienari and Emma Nordbäck

# Phases of writing the dissertation

## Preliminary mental process and planning the thesis

Anna Maaranen decided to continue her doctoral studies straight after doing her master studies at Aalto University under the supervision of Professor Eero Vaara. The process of applying for the doctoral program and the research idea had been developing the past year in her mind as she felt that the master studies didn't fulfill her information desire in depth and width. While working as a research assistant she started to have her own ideas of what she would like to look at: social media. When she was ready to progress with her plans, she contacted Janne Tienari and explained her ideas, and he then encouraged to submit her application as the call was on-going. She was accepted and so she officially became a doctoral student in January 2019.

## Searching, reading and Essay 1

In the first spring of her doctoral journey Anna spent simply reading and sketching her thesis and ideas, immersing herself in extensive reading and scouring academic articles and readings. With each passing day, she began to grasp the trends and central topics of the ongoing scholarly conversation, gaining a deeper understanding of the pertinent topics and the discourse that had evolved in recent years. Drawing from her prior experiences at Aalto University, she quickly adapted to the discursive approach, which was already very familiar to her.

During the spring, no courses were available, and it was during this time that she, along with Janne Tienari, began drafting the initial version of an article. Social media data processing proved to be a relatively swift process, particularly when access to open Reddit data was readily available. The subsequent steps involved collecting the data, drafting the article, submitting it, and successfully publishing it in a reputable magazine the following year. The process was not without its challenges, as suitable confiscations were initially hard to come by. This led to one major revision and one minor revision of the article, which was centered around gender organization and the role of social media.

## Studies

The doctoral studies really started in autumn 2019 and she managed to complete most of the courses within a year. She utilized the course contents immediately in her articles or in her plans. She had some struggles with a compulsory quantitative course, her method is qualitative.

## Essays 2-4

Anna experienced minimal direct guidance from her supervisors, which granted her a significant degree of autonomy in choosing her research topics. However, she found valuable support and sparring from her instructors. Notably, the field of gender literature was relatively new within the realm of social media research at that time. Simultaneously, there were significant developments within the social media landscape. During the creation of her

first paper, Anna began to develop a rather clear idea of the direction she wanted to take with her research. Interestingly, the second paper underwent the most extensive modifications and revisions throughout the research process, signifying the dynamic nature of her academic journey.

Following this, there came the seemingly eternal article, essay number two, known as "going to never happen", in which she was designated as the lead author. This project took shape towards the end of 2020 and underwent a rigorous process of review and revision, spanning three rounds, before finally taking its place as a full-fledged feature article. In her doctoral journey, one solo paper was compulsory, and it held a position as the third essay within her thesis. Interestingly, she found herself working on this particular paper simultaneously with her second paper, which, unfortunately, was facing significant challenges during the review process. The fourth paper in her thesis took the form of a book chapter, and it presented a relatively easier undertaking compared to the other research pieces she had navigated.

As her research progressed, a distinct theoretical focus gradually emerged, introducing new dynamics to her academic pursuits. The shift in focus was marked by an emphasis on the critical discursive aspects, which presented a fresh perspective on her research aims. Amid this process, data collection took precedence, forming the cornerstone of her work on a critical constructionist approach. She gathered data, utilizing it as the building blocks for the development of a robust theoretical framework. It was important to note that, in one instance, she engaged in crafting a concept paper, a unique deviation from her usual methodology.

Throughout this formative period, reading remained an essential part of her daily routine. She delved into a wealth of papers, particularly those exploring overlapping themes, such as identity theory, recognizing the valuable insights these materials offered for the advancement of her research projects. The first spring of her doctoral journey was characterized by the foundational work of constructing her research framework and the continued exploration of literature, setting the stage for the substantial academic contributions she would make in the years to come.

Supervisor Janne Tienari says there is only good to say about his former student, current colleague. Anna's exceptional efficiency and talent have made her a true asset to their research team. Anna not only completed her work within the designated timeframe but also exhibited a remarkable aptitude for time management. Throughout our collaborative journey, Anna's commitment and dedication were unwavering, which significantly contributed to the success of her project.

## Adapting to Covid 2019

The doctoral thesis writing process during the COVID-19 pandemic was marked by challenges and required adaptability, resourcefulness, and resilience. Anna, like many other PhD candidates, had to confront a rapidly changing academic and global landscape. She faced unprecedented delays, adapted to virtual collaboration and defense formats to experience from other students' defenses, and relied heavily on online resources. Furthermore, she had to prioritize mental health and maintain productivity despite the challenges. All the in-person tutorials, events or travels. On the other hand this made the working very effective, on the other hand she felt she was missing a lot.

In the challenging landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic Anna, together with fellow researcher Inkeri Tanhua, founded in late 2020 a gender-research group. This group convened virtually once a month on Microsoft Teams, bringing together participants from Hanken and other esteemed universities. Despite its relatively small size, the gender-research group quickly became a hub for engaging and thought-provoking conversations. The virtual environment did not diminish the quality of discourse; it thrived with diverse perspectives and enriched exchanges. Within this nurturing academic community, Anna seized the opportunity to present her research several times. Each presentation was met with enthusiasm and generated significant interest among fellow participants. The feedback she received was constructive and contributed to her study.- The group is still alive and active, new members are welcome.

## Main research question and task, and how did that come out in the dissertation

The thesis emphasizes the need for qualitative and discursive methods in social media research and highlights its implications in the field of organization studies and beyond. It underscores the evolving dynamics of online spaces and the role of social media in shaping contemporary work and organizations. In the introductory essay, the foundations of the research, key contributions, and research questions are outlined. The theoretical framework guiding the research is discussed, focusing on social media in and outside of work contexts, the socio-technological nature of social media spaces, and multimodal discursivity in social media. Methodological approaches and the research design for each individual paper are detailed.

The initial aim was straightforward: to explore how social media is utilized in contemporary work and organizational contexts, as well as its impact. However, early on, the nagging question of "so what?" began to surface. It became apparent for Anna Maaranen, the author, that in a digitally-infused world where a significant portion of the population is online, the widespread use of social media in work and organizational settings was hardly groundbreaking. To navigate this challenge, an abductive process involving a back-and-forth exploration of empirical insights and theoretical focus was undertaken. This process revealed that the unique aspects of social media and its relevance to work and organizations were the key focus areas that would contribute to the evolving understanding of online spaces within the field.

Two central research questions emerged from this understanding:

1. What kinds of discursive dynamics manifest in social media spaces?
  - How are discourses produced and shared on social media?
  - Who participates in discursive interactions on social media?
2. Why do these discursive dynamics in social media matter for organizations and warrant research attention?

This thesis presents two interconnected claims. First, it asserts that novel discursive dynamics arise within socio-technological social media spaces. These dynamics are characterized by the transformation of the 'where,' 'how,' and 'by whom' aspects of interaction on social media. Interaction increasingly takes place across various online

platforms, involving both humans and technologies, and utilizing diverse digitally-mediated and multimodal means.

Second, it argues that social media spaces blur the traditional boundaries of organizations and work. This means that the new discursive dynamics spill over and expand the discursive territories of organizations, organization, and work, transcending conventional distinctions between "intra-organizational" and "extra-organizational" domains. This impact makes social media a particularly intriguing and relevant subject of study in contemporary organization studies.

The thesis comprises four individual papers, each exploring distinct aspects of social media's influence on work and organizations. These papers delve into contexts such as finance, city mergers, politics, and social media algorithms, demonstrating the multifaceted impact of social media across various settings.

## Does the doctoral thesis in my view address this task or question?

I agree that the thesis effectively addresses the task or question at hand. It's important to note that the topic is relatively new, which does come with its own set of challenges. The author has taken a thorough approach in examining how social media affects contemporary work and organizations. Exploring novel discursive dynamics within socio-technological social media spaces is a crucial aspect, even considering the challenges that arise from the topic's novelty.

The research questions posed in the thesis are well-structured and purposeful, going boldly to less-researched fields. It shows how discourses are produced and shared on social media and who participates in these interactions, providing a comprehensive understanding of the digital landscape. In my opinion the thesis contributes to contemporary organization studies by exploring how social media blurs traditional organizational boundaries and widens the discursive territories of work and organizations, which is especially relevant in today's digital age. Overall, I think that the thesis effectively highlights the significance of its research questions while recognizing the challenges posed by the newness of the topic. It's a valuable addition to the academic discourse on this subject, made more impressive by its willingness to address the inherent challenges of not so traditional research areas.