



OPINION

from ...Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Petkova.....
(*scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution*)

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: "Digital communication and political influence - the moral meaning of communication technologies",

presented by Boris Rosenov Stoyanov....., full-time doctoral student in the Department of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nikolai Mihailov.....

I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

The dissertation, presented by Boris Rosenov Stoyanov, is dedicated to an actual problem, which in the recent years has gained more importance and scope due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 and the emphasis on the digital communication. Globalization and the continuous improvement of communication technologies contribute to the emergence of digital platforms, such as Instagram, Tik Tok, etc., where the public communication is individualized. It is through this personalization of the digital communication that new strategies for persuasion and influence are emerging. This raises many questions about the moral meaning of modern communication technologies. By bringing to the fore the moral dilemmas of communication, the dissertation offers new perspectives on the old, but at the same time new, question of ethics in public communication. The dissertation is very well structured in three main chapters and demonstrates knowledge of the scientific literature on the problem, both in Bulgaria and abroad.

Chapter one offers a theoretical framework of the study and focuses on political influence in digital communication. Special attention is paid to digital platforms such as Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, that are preferred by a number of politicians and members of the public and that become a real scene of their public appearance, especially in times of a pandemic. A special emphasis is placed on the political campaign of Donald Trump and his election as the President of the United States. It is a well-known fact that both during his presidential campaign and during his presidency, the American president has actively used Twitter to share his views with the public on issues important to the United States. Boris Stoyanov also examines the extremely important problem of subsidizing the presidential candidate campaigns and the resulting moral cases. In Bulgaria the most popular and preferred by politicians is still Facebook. This is also true for the former prime minister from the "Gerb" party, Boyko Borisov, who often demonstratively avoids official press conferences, but regularly publishes his addresses to his followers on Facebook. And here I would like to address a specific question to Boris Stoyanov. What is the reason for the preference to digital platforms on the part of Bulgarian politicians like Borisov, who



often also show a disregard to traditional press conferences and journalistic interviews? What effect does this choice have on building the image of the Bulgarian politician?

In the second chapter, the focus of attention turns to the communication influence through mediums. The analysis focuses on the political speech in a digital environment, as well as on the rhetoric and persuasive techniques. The emphasis is placed on the moral problem of truthfulness, as well as on the related questions of political freedoms and responsibilities. Not less important are the visual perceptions and influence in digital platforms and social networks. Based on his analysis, the author also reaches an important conclusion about the peculiarities of visual communication, namely that the way in which a message is delivered often has a greater impact on the audience than the message itself, regardless of its truth or significance.

These observations become even more specific in the next, third chapter, devoted to the analysis of specific examples of communication. Based on the analysis, Boris Stoyanov concludes that the Bulgarian politicians are not sufficiently prepared to communicate correctly in the digital space. Although at first glance such a conclusion may seem extreme, a number of details confirm such generalizations, namely: the lack of political culture, the black PR, or the vilification of the opponent, as a frequently used trick in Bulgaria, and the ambiguities in relation to the very concept of 'political freedom'. The case studies proposed in the third chapter are indicative in this respect. Based on the analyzes of publications of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, Boyko Borisov, Toshko Yordanov, Ivan Geshev and others, Boris Stoyanov comes to the conclusion that political subjects often show incompetence related to communication on the Internet. This statement is also emphasized in the conclusion, where the main dangers of online filtering are outlined. Also, interesting to me is the observation that political communication is becoming increasingly informal, which, according to the dissertation, could lead to irreparable damage to the audience's perceptions.

Once again, I will emphasize that the text is very well organized and presented, and the chosen method - case analysis - enables the problem of political communication in the digital space to be explored in depth and to draw important conclusions. The broad awareness of Boris Stoyanov is clearly visible. In terms of language and style, the text is good, and the abstract is in accordance with the text of the dissertation.



II. Contributions of the dissertation research

One of the essential contributions of the dissertation is the positioning of the old problem of ethics in political communication in a fundamentally new context, predetermined by the development of digital technologies in the modern world. The digitalization of public communication creates new opportunities for targeting the audience, but at the same time it gives rise to new, different prerequisites for political and reputational crises. Thus, the dissertation is dedicated to a problem that has not been sufficiently investigated in Bulgaria until now and enriches existing theories with its analysis. The case studies, used as the main method in the dissertation, adds to the text the necessary concrete applicability of the main theses.

III. Notes and recommendations

Finally, I would make a recommendation rather than a remark. In the publication of the present work, I would recommend to emphasize more clearly on the specific application of the communication models in the case studies, especially since these models are indicated in the abstract as an essential contribution of the dissertation.

IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Participation in seven scientific and professional forums related to public and digital communication is presented. Boris Stoyanov has the necessary number of publications on the topic of the dissertation. This fulfills the requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5 and the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and art. 69, para. 3.

V. Conclusion

Due to everything stated above, I state a clear and unambiguous opinion that Boris Stoyanov should be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Petkova

Date: 29.10.2022