

ATTITUDE OF REVIEWER

from

Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Andreas Stavru,
Department of Ethical Studies, IPS-BAS

on

„DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE – THE MORAL MEANING OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES “

by **Boris Rosenov Stoyanov**

thesis submitted for the degree of „**Doctor**“

in scientific specialty 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”

professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

1. Information about the procedure

I present this opinion in my capacity as an external member of a scientific jury for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" based on: ZRASRB, PPZRASRB; Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria; Decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication dated September 8, 2022 (Protocol No. 1); Order RD-38-548/23.09.2022 of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approval of a scientific jury and Decision of the Scientific Jury from its first meeting on 11.10.2022.

The opinion is based on the thesis provided by the author (174 pages), an the summary of the thesis with a list of publications on the subject of the thesis (29 pages) and a scientific biography.

2. Short biography of the candidate

Boris Rosenov Stoyanov was born in 1994. He graduated from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", with a bachelor's degree in "Public Relations", defending a diploma thesis on the topic: "The image of the enemy in contemporary cinema" (2017). At the same university, he acquired a second bachelor's degree in Russian Philology. In 2018, he graduated with a master's degree in "Diplomacy and Foreign Policy" at Lancaster University, Great Britain, with a thesis topic “FYROM (Greed and Grievance). Europe's Forbidden Fruit”. Since 2020, he has

been working in the field of public relations, communications, and marketing, successively holding the positions of "PR manager" and "managing director".

The professional responsibilities indicated in the CV fall entirely within the scope of the research carried out in the dissertation work. This is also one of the important factors for a strong practical orientation and applicability of the doctoral student's conclusions, which is undoubtedly one of the advantages and one of the contributions of the dissertation.

3. Compliance with the Minimal National Standards for the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences

According to the minimum national requirements by groups indicative of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences, the candidate must have submitted a thesis for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (Group of Indicators "A"), as well as author of scientific publications (Group of Indicators "D"), whose minimum value to exceed 30 points. On pages 25-36 of the presented Abstract, 3 publications are listed. The total number of points of the publications thus presented is 30 and covers the minimum required.

With the documents presented, it should be concluded that Boris Rosenov Stoyanov meets the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

4. Evaluation of the academic achievements of the candidate

The thesis is 174 pages long, and according to the list of references, it contains references to 58 bibliographic sources and 102 other (Internet) sources in Bulgarian and English. The structure of the thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion.

In the introduction of the dissertation, the main premise from which the author starts is the extremely rapid parallel development of technology and political online communication, which is becoming one of the main sources of information for the mass consumer and an important field for formation and expression of opinion, as well as for carrying out various forms of political activity. In this new context, the applicability of conventional ethical principles and norms is problematized, posing the question of what is right and permissible online and whether there are moral limits to the different forms of political influence in digital communication platforms.

The first chapter of the thesis "The theoretical framework of the study" focuses on presenting the specifics of the most popular and most frequently used digital communication

platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok). This chapter presents and analyses some basic terms related, on the one hand, to relatively "classic" constructs, such as digital communication, political influence, moral meaning, political discourse and disinformation, as well as, on the other hand, some completely new ones (and in most cases without translation into Bulgarian) terms such as influencer, meme, digital communication channel, viral, traditional media, instant rebuttal. Clarifying the content of these basic concepts is a key prerequisite for the success of the subsequent research focus on different forms of online presence and political influence.

The second chapter of the thesis "Tendencies in communication - influence through mediums. Retrospective reading of technological development" takes a step back to the historical tracing of certain features in people's behaviour in the implementation of political interaction and communication. Through various examples, the inclinations of the individual towards training and his need to obtain approval from a certain communication group are explained. The used approach of theoretical and literary-philosophical reading of various events and incidents facilitates the presentation of the author's theses and their integration in the dissertation.

The third chapter of the thesis "Analysis of examples and communication models (Case Studies)" contains the most specific and clearly stated points of the author. They are related to demonstrating the inability of many Bulgarian politics to build and maintain an adequate political presence in the online platforms, despite the existence of sufficient party funds that can and are invested in such types of activities. The preferences of different political formations in their choice of digital platforms in which to carry out Internet-based communication and political influence have been tracked. It has been demonstrated how the various political subjects, both in Bulgaria and globally, meet the challenges of decentralized communication with their voters. 3 authors' communication models of political communication online are substantiated: "Latent online presence. Partial participation in a digital dialogue on topics" (Model B1); "Adapting content. Partial and selective entry into dialogue" (Model B2) and "Author content and combined content. Deploying a presence in more than one platform" (Model B3). These models are also laid out visually, which allows them to be more easily perceive. The numerous examples help to demonstrate the effectiveness of the models.

The Conclusion summarizes the author's thesis regarding the importance of innovations in communication technologies for new forms of political influence, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of political subjects. Considering the purpose of political communication with the mass audience, the author brings out the consensus (Habermas) as a possible tool for the

implementation of ethically correct online communication. This is also the place where emphasis is placed on the moral meaning of online communication.

An advantage of the research is its interdisciplinary approach and the inclusion of numerous concrete examples from the Bulgarian and global reality, which demonstrate both the communication challenges facing the new forms of political online influence, and the specific ethical questions that these forms of influence pose. Diverse scientific methods were used, including analysis of scientific articles, communication models, photographic and video material.

I confirm the scientific contributions formulated by the thesis (p. 23-24 of the Abstract). The author's chosen model of analysis of the presented examples (format-channel-person-case-case-cause-goal-result) should be supported. Particularly valuable is the categorization of the behaviour of specific Bulgarian political subjects, which allows the subsequent analysis of the forms of political online influence and the effect of this influence on voters, including on their political and electoral activity.

5. Critical commentary on the submitted thesis

The topic of the thesis is more than current. Not only the analysis of specific examples of political influence in the online space, but also the provided tools for carrying out such an analysis, are valuable achievements of the dissertation. Considering the scientific field to which I belong: ethical studies and legal regulations and taking into account the specific emphasis that is made in the title of the dissertation: the "moral meaning" of communication technologies, I feel that the ethical dimensions of the questions posed by the thesis could be deployed to a greater extent. Authors like Zygmunt Bauman, Jeremy Rifkin, Scott Lash could be useful here. In the Bulgarian context, the author would be interested in books such as "Internet Crowds" by Doncho Gradev and Alexander Marinov, as well as "Happy Crowds. Massovization of Non-Criticism" by Doncho Gradev, both published in 2021 by University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski".

6. Personal impressions about the candidate

I do not know Boris Rosenov Stoyanov. I have no publications in common with Boris Rosenov Stoyanov.

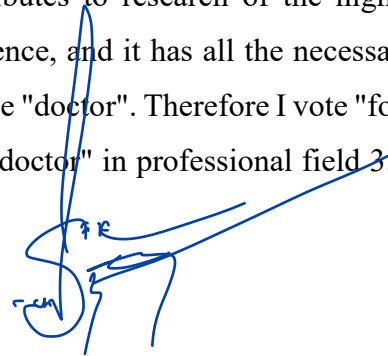
7. Conclusion

The thesis and the summary submitted by Boris Rosenov Stoyanov fulfill the requirements of ADASRB and the Regulations for the Application of ADASRB. The available documents invite the conclusion that the candidate meets the minimal national standards for the educational and scientific degree "doctor". The thesis contributes to research of the highly relevant issues related to the exercise of political online influence, and it has all the necessary characteristics for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor". Therefore I vote "for" Boris Rosenov Stoyanov to be awarded the scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences.

24.10.2022

Sofia

Signature:



Assoc. Prof. Stoyan Stavru