

OPINION

For the dissertation work by Boris Stoyanov, "Digital communication and political influence - the moral meaning of communication technologies."

for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree doctor professional
direction 3.5. public communications and information sciences

Academic supervisor: Prof. Nikolay Mihailov

Member of Scientific Jury

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As stated in his biographical information, Boris Stoyanov is a Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski" graduate. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Public Relations and Russian Philology in 2017. In 2018 he became a Master of Arts, Diplomacy and Foreign Policy FYROM (Greed and Grievances) at Lancaster University. From 2022 he will be a doctoral student in the Department of Public Relations (Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski").

The dissertation contains 174 pages, including a table of contents, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. His bibliography includes 160 sources and two appendices.

The theme of the work reflects the interrelationship between communication technologies and the metamorphosis of political discourses, predominantly positioned in the online space, borrowing, as the author rightly notes, "commercial marketing approaches, compared to traditionally accepted formal concepts."

The subject of the dissertation is the specifics, trends, and ways of conducting political/state communication activities via the Internet and of political discourse, framing, and distinguishing between good and bad practices. Technological development, changes in archetypes, norms of communication, and the natures of individuals are also the subject of research by the author.

The dissertation research covers the period 2010-2022. The leitmotif, according to the author, is the unprecedented epidemic in history in the face of COVID-19 in 2020, which caused the need for a total change in the way of exerting political influence worldwide scale, mainly due to the impossibility of personal contact, mass events and the increasing need for online presence.

The approach used in the text to reach a satisfactory conclusion is mixed.

In addition to an extensive study of specialized literature, the author uses the method of document analysis, based on official state structures or political parties, and the case study method - of public statements of specific practices, etc.; It uses a comparative method – it compares political behavior in a formal live setting and online.

The objective of the dissertation research. Boris Stoyanov aims to systematize and show what influence technological development and the transformation of communication from life to mediated have on the behavior of users on the Internet, their relativity to political life, and, of course, their ethical and moral boundaries (if there are any).

The tasks he has set are 1. He was examining and identifying rules for digitally based communication in the context of political discourse; 2. Touching and analyzing the idea of "expected action" in the audience by the political entity (whether it covers it or not if it acts mainly online); 3. Is there "right" and "wrong" in online communication in political discourse; 4. Clarifications about trends related to online communication in general and, in particular, political discourse; 5. It proves the need for technological and specific communication competence to deploy political messages in online communication effectively; 6. It set the current framework and those that can be expected in the near future regarding online politically oriented communication. In addition, it also pays attention to the deciphering of successful approaches for politically oriented communication online - what are the techniques used, how political entities or organizations manage to adapt to the digital environment, and accordingly, judgments will be drawn from these examples, which will eloquently shape the perspective that is referred to future political communication online.

The thesis that the dissertation insists on is that "Bulgarian and political subjects largely do not have the necessary knowledge to implement adequate political communication online." Despite the organizations that appeared in the period 2019-2021 that managed to handle well the opportunities offered by digital communication channels, there remain those that are visibly lagging behind new technologies; The new type of political discourse will raise more and more questions related to moral foundations, a classical understanding of ethical norms in communication, of truth and reality, as well as of the true meaning of political communication."

Within this thesis, the author defends the idea that "political discourse will increasingly resemble business practices and use techniques already established by the online entertainment industry, that influence will change its shape and become more personalized, that we will be targeted with messages that are entirely and specifically tailored to us, our sensibilities and our particular moral values. The author proves that the moral values of the communicators change in relation to imposed cultural changes, which are already valid for the Internet space. And last but not least, the author emphasizes

that the distinction between who is an effective and a good communicator will happen through. With the help of digital communication channels, they and the activity of their users will become the measure of success.

Scientific contributions are associated with several moments.

- concepts relevant to digital communication are defined, in direct dependence on technological development;
- three communication models were created, outlining in detail the dynamics of online communication in the political context.
- based on analyzed examples, judgments and hypotheses have been proven in three directions (1) a way of influencing through the optimization of the toolkit provided by Internet platforms, (2) the need for specific knowledge and competencies for an adequate presence of political subjects in the digital space and (3)) the lack of frameworks for the conduct of political discourse online can lead to the deterioration of communication processes and dynamics.
- claims of communication addictions when conducting political discourse online are classified
- a categorization of the behavior of specific Bulgarian political subjects is presented concerning the author's communication models.
- through the analysis of empirical data, it is proven that the Bulgarian user of politically relevant digital content is more inclined to believe in individuals than in formations and, accordingly, follow ideologies
- the unregulated behavior of political entities and formations directly affects the ethical conduct of communication and creates prerequisites for corrupting the moral meaning of technological development and the use of technologies for communication
- I add one final contribution from me that the overall author's conceptualization can be seen as an extension of Neil Postman's concept of the spiritual meaning of the give and take of technology by humans in cultural progress.

The dissertation text is written in excellent academic language with knowledge of and reference to the literature at home and abroad. Acquired dissertation skills for secondary analysis, relevant interpretation of other authors, and works on the subject are revealed.

The abstract corresponds to the dissertation work.

Boris Stoyanov has presented the required number of presentations at international forums and has the necessary scientific publications.

I have no notes or recommendations for Boris Stoyanov except to continue his work on the subject and expand his scope.

In conclusion, I want to confirm that we have completed dissertation work of a contributing nature and to declare that I will vote Yes for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Boris Rosenov Stoyanov in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences.

21.10.2022

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