

O P I N I U M

by **Prof. Minka Gencheva Zlateva, PhD**, retired

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 3.5. PCIS - Media and Communications - Manipulations in Communication with a dissertation on

"Manipulation techniques in the language of photography (Photographic signs and their visual impact in non-verbal communication)",

presented by **Ivan Aleksandrovich Zahariev**, a full-time PhD student at the Department of Printing and Book Publishing of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Ventseslav Bondikov.

I.Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation

Analyzing and commenting on manipulation through the language of photography in the digital age, in the age of fake news and social media, poses great challenges for any researcher. First of all, because in all three fields: communication, photography and manipulation, a huge body of literature has accumulated in numerous languages, tracing their history, possibilities and experiments. Secondly, because the interdisciplinary nature of the subject requires diverse knowledge and expertise in a number of fields such as communication, photography, film, psychology, social psychology, philosophy, linguistics, semiotics, sociology, etc. Last but not least, because these topics have been the subject of research interest of a number of authoritative international scholars and Bulgarian authors.

I am pleased to note that the PhD student Ivan Zahariev had the courage and ambition, as well as the practical experience to take on the development of this highly topical and complex topic. He presents a dissertation of 330 pages, structured in an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, including his own empirical research on the topic and a bibliography of 206 sources, of which 183 in Cyrillic by Bulgarian and Russian authors and 23 in English. He has illustrated his dissertation with 38 photographs, 12 graphs and 5 tables.

In **chapter one**, devoted to "Communication - concepts, models, theories", the PhD student shows a very good knowledge of the main authors who have analysed this multifaceted phenomenon. In accordance with the chosen topic he has put emphasis on visual and non-verbal communication. He has included the issues related to the development of photography as well as its multifaceted application since its inception. In the digital age of universal Internet connectivity, the author believes, the camera is expanding its use as a means of communication and is becoming a medium, a means of conveying messages. And, according to Susan Sontag, it is also becoming a "fantasy device" thanks to the "captured experiences" of millions of people around the world. The PhD student stresses that freed from the need to print photographs, people can now instantly share visual messages using the sensors and displays built into smartphones. In the conclusion of chapter one, he comments on the changes that

have occurred as a result The introduction outlines the main elements of the study and formulates four hypotheses which the author is to verify in the process of his analysis. In defining the research period, only the period of the empirical study is specifically mentioned, from January to December 2019.

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In the **second chapter**, Ivan Zahariev goes into the heart of the chosen topic, namely how photography is used for the purpose of manipulation in mass communication. He conscientiously clarifies the views of a number of researchers such as Barth, Benjamin, Virilio, Eco, etc. on the concept of "manipulation" in mass communication, on the elements of its impact in photography. The PhD student has paid attention to the role of the subject - photoreporter, his objects that can also represent themselves, and also the products of his activity, used in PR and advertising, to exert a manipulative influence in this process. Ivan Zahariev offers an author's table of the four aspects of the visual message in disinformation, propaganda, PR and advertising.

In the **third chapter** the PhD student answers the questions what and how the photojournalist takes pictures in order to manipulatively influence the audience of mass media. Thanks to his rich personal experience, Ivan Zahariev figuratively speaking swims in his own waters by analyzing photographic techniques for psychological influence in visual communication to achieve manipulative effects. The doctoral student comments professionally on the problems of photographic language, focus, background, point of view, types of lenses, light, colors, sections, as well as framing as a basic mechanism for building manipulation in visual impact.

The **fourth chapter** includes the author's empirical study of the hug gesture in photographs of 12 European leaders. Starting from their national psychological traditions and based on Tolya Stoitsova's opinion, the doctoral student divides the leaders into two groups. In the "South" group he includes the prime ministers

of Portugal, Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania and Spain as representatives of "warmer European cultures and inhabitants of more temperamental countries". Out of the 10307 situations studied, the chosen unit - the embrace - appears 1174 times or in 11.39% of the photographs. The results for the two groups of leaders are presented in tables.

The **conclusion** of the dissertation summarizes the results of the accomplishment of the set tasks through the conducted research and draws relevant conclusions confirming the author's four hypotheses.

The language and style of Ivan Zahariev are professionally sound. The citation is done according to the established requirements for scientific work.

II. Contributions of the dissertation research

The topic of Ivan Zahariev's dissertation is a novelty in the Bulgarian media studies because for the first time the manipulation techniques in the language of photography are analyzed. There is an enrichment of the critical analysis in the existing Bulgarian studies of photographic theory and practice. The contributions and contributions are formulated in accordance with the results of the research. The three publications of the doctoral candidate are related to the topic of his dissertation.

III. Notes and recommendations

The dissertant has complied with the critical remarks in my review for the internal defense of his thesis. In order to further improve and refine the text of the dissertation and its eventual publication as a book, I also have the following specific critical comments and recommendations:

1. The separation of the empirical study as a separate fourth chapter is inappropriate because it is only 12 pages long and disrupts the balance between the chapters.
2. I would suggest the author to pay particular attention in chapter one to the newest stage in the development of the communication revolution through digital media such as mobile phones, smartphones, tablets and other innovations in terms of the specificity of photographic images in them .
3. We are witnessing an increasingly active merging of PR and advertising (especially product and fashion advertising) with marketing. The author could therefore include this important new aspect of the application of photographic images for manipulative purposes in the second chapter of his thesis.
4. Since Ivan Zahariev carries out his empirical research on the basis of photographs posted on Facebook, this requires that he devote space to the specificity of visual communication on social media, where the boundary between public and private space is now reduced to a click away. And this leads to a steady increase in the importance of photography in political PR, political marketing and political advertising.

IV. Publication and participation in scientific forums

The PhD student has participated in an international scientific conference (2020), in scientific and educational seminars "Media and Communications" of

the Faculty of Journalism and has 3 publications in indexed scientific journals on the topic of the dissertation.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, taking into account the serious and thorough work of the PhD student Ivan Zahariev on the topic "Manipulation techniques in the language of photography (Photographic signs and their visual impact in non-verbal communication)" and the positive results achieved, I propose the scientific jury to award him the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.

Sofia, 22 December 2022

Member of the scientific jury:
Prof. Minka Zlatevaq PhD