

REVIEW

from PROF. DR. VESSELINA VALKANOVA
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

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

with a dissertation on the topic: "ACTIVISM AND SLACTIVISM.
EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL CAUSES (CIVIL SOCIETY
IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2013 – 2022)"

presented by ZARINA BOYKOVA VASILEVA, full -time doctoral student
in the Department "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" of the
Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication
with supervisor: PROF. DR. GRETA DERMENDZHIEVA

PRESENTATION OF THE DOCTORAL STUDENT ON THE BASIS OF THE SUBMITTED DOCUMENTATION

Zarina Boykova Vasileva was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in the scientific specialty "Online Journalism" in the Department of "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" on January 10, 2019 with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Greta Dermendzhieva. The doctoral student successfully approved her dissertation work on January 9, 2023 in front of the extended staff of the Department of "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" and on the basis of two written reviews by qualified professors.

DISSERTATION AND AUTHOR ABSTRACT INFORMATION

The dissertation "Activism and slacktivism. Effectiveness of the implementation of social causes (Civil Society in Bulgaria in the period 2013 - 2022)" has a total volume of 350 pages (including bibliography and appendices), structured in an introduction, four chapters, conclusions, bibliography of 145 sources in Bulgarian, English and Russian language, separately suggested sources in periodicals and online media; appendices, including 54 figures and 10 images. On the topic of the dissertation, Zarina Vasileva has 8 publications in anthologies and continuing editions with scientific review, two of which in foreign editions, as well as 7 participations in national and international scientific and educational forums.

As an reviewer in the Department of Press Journalism and Book Publishing, where the preliminary discussion took place, I must note that the dissertation work was further revised and edited, with the doctoral student conscientiously taking into account the opinions and recommendations of the reviewers and colleagues who participated in the discussion.

The abstract attached to the documentation has a volume of 44 pages and presents the dissertation work through a description and analysis of: the relevance of the problem, object, subject, hypothesis, goals, tasks, methodology, research scope and limitations. The abstract is adequate to the dissertation, reflects essentially the structure, approach and main summaries and meets the requirements for self-referencing a dissertation work.

ASSESSMENT OF THE ACTUALITY OF THE PROBLEM

Communication in a radically changed cultural, social, technological context reflects the profile and new rhythm of the world - with new realities, new media, self-organization, radical openness, debunking of authorities, everyone's tribune, changing the roles of journalists and citizens, new educations, news , non-news, propaganda and manipulation, new models, ideas, attitudes towards the media and the social construct in general.

This dissertation is dedicated to a current and important topic related to activism in the digital environment and social networks, which we usually associate with disinformation, fake news, propaganda outbursts, populism and demagoguery. Social causes and their organization and implementation in social networks, effective social communication during crises or important events - these are essential issues of public communication, of online media and social networks, of the social environment as a whole.

How the public accepts and reacts to social causes in the online space, what transformations goes through the commitment of societies to important social topics and in a situation of transition to online activism - these seem self-evident are the focus of Zarina Vasileva's attention and raise complex thoughts related to the dynamics of social life in a digital context, with citizens' reactivity and sensitivity to causes, with the role of traditional and online media, of social networks in activism and slacktivism, and ultimately in social change.

ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITIES OF THE DISSERTATION TEXT

The dissertation outlines specific tasks and goals related to the study of the scientific problem, among which the main one is related to the definition of the concept of "slacktivism" and to the derivation of the conceptual framework and the parameters of the environment in which the researched phenomenon falls. Studies on social causes and their development and effectiveness in a real and virtual environment in order to emphasize the role of technology in the analysis of the essence of slacktivism and to establish the social function of the media for the formation of active civic behavior are undoubtedly the general challenges of the development.

To fulfill the goals and tasks, the doctoral student relies on a methodology that includes a theoretical overview, analysis of examples from practice and empirical research, content analysis on the topic, polls on the attitudes of the audience, surveys among non-governmental organizations, activists and experts through in-depth interviews. Synchronous and diachronic analyzes have been made, and the scope of the actual study is significant - from 2013 to 2022.

In the first chapter of doctoral thesis "THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF SLACKTIVISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE DIGITAL ERA" the doctoral student defines the essence of slacktivism, accepting the thesis that "slacktivism is a social phenomenon conditioned by digital technologies. Action stimulated and facilitated by the specifics of the online environment, representing a new form of activity. Slacktivism is not the absence of an act of will, but on the contrary – it is a conscious behavior and as such brings concrete consequences" (p. 25), analyzes human activity and passivity, the transformations of civic activism in a digital environment, explores the

essence of slacktivism as social behavior as a political tool, as well as the concepts of civil society.

The second chapter "PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR - DIMENSIONS, EVOLUTION, ASPECTS" focuses on the study of the important aspects of social behavior and action, focuses on motivation as a complex psychological process, on emotions influencing human behavior and decisions. The leading campaigns in recent years, the factors that increase the effectiveness of the contents, the tools for increasing the rhetorical effectiveness of the campaigns are analyzed. An author's model for the formation of prosocial behavior is proposed, based on reliable information, directing the audience, provoking interest and effective communication of the contents, based on the generalizations on the positive and negative connotations of slacktivism, the factors for what the doctoral student called "positive" and "negative" slacktivism.

One of the general problems on the subject - the forms of proactive social behavior - is studied in the third chapter "FORMS OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION - PROTESTS AND CHARITY". In order to validate her theses and establish the levels of activity and vitality of the Bulgarian society and the abilities for reactivity and impact on the social environment, the doctoral student undertakes an analysis of the effectiveness factors of social causes realized in the online space, among which are the legitimacy of the campaign , building a successful communication strategy, creating impactful content, using the opportunities and advantages of online communication, deployment by using the functionalities of social networks to create pages, groups, events, posts, etc.

The results of the research presented in the fourth chapter of the dissertation "THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT AND THE MEDIA THROUGH THE PRISM OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE AUDIENCE - EMPIRICAL RESEARCH" are decisive for proving theses.

The PhD student undertook: a survey among 11 organizations from the non-governmental sector to establish the mechanisms of influence on civil society through media and social networks on socially significant topics and causes; a survey of audience attitudes towards social causes that examines how users use social networks and how they perceive the development and effectiveness of social events and causes on social networks. The conclusions and analyzes in the fourth chapter of the dissertation are expanded through in-depth interviews with experts, confirming the main theses of the author.

QUALITIES OF THE DISSERTATION PAPER

The dissertation text clearly demonstrates the doctoral student's professional reflection and her lasting interest in the research field to which she has devoted herself.

The dissertation represents a contribution to the researched field. Key findings are directly derived from and relate to practice. The style is clear and concise, does not fall into overquotation. The parts are logically and meaningfully connected.

The research and theses are original and original, the doctoral student has demonstrated a high level of critical thinking towards the researched problem. Empirical scientific research, with a clearly stated applied effect, has a certain preponderance in the dissertation.

QUESTION:

- At a time of significant economic pressure, including for major tech platforms, and first-generation social networks such as Facebook and Twitter struggling to retain users of all age groups, especially young people migrating to new networks, is there light in the tunnel - that the time is coming for apps, networks and models that emphasize connections and content that are useful to society, including in support of positive activism and social causes?

CONCLUSION:

- With its typologies of the forms of civil activity and social causes;
- With the multi-aspect and multi-disciplinary analysis of slacktivism as a social behavior and through the prism of theories about the activity and passivity of the individual and society;
- With the proposed systematizations and author's model for the formation of prosocial behavior in the context of slacktivism and bringing out the essential role of the media and quality journalism

the current dissertation work has a certain contribution to research in public communications and information sciences, in media studies, online journalism, content management.

The above contributing points of the research give me reasons to
SUPPORT THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN 3.5.
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SCIENCES - ONLINE JOURNALISM OF
ZARINA BOYKOVA VASILEVA FOR THE DISSERTATION PAPER "ACTIVISM AND

SLACTIVISM. EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL CAUSES (CIVIL SOCIETY IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2013 – 2022)".

Prof. Dr. Veselina Valkanova



18.3.2023