REVIEW

from Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Stancheva Peicheva

of the Ph.D. thesis 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, a full-time Ph.D. student in the department of "Press Journalism and Book Publishing" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at SU "Kl. Ohridski"

with supervisor: Prof. Dr. Greta Dermendzhieva

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Online Journalism)

I. Presentation of the doctoral candidate based on the submitted documentation

This review is following the ORDER RD-38-53 of 27.01.2023 of the Rector of SU "Cl. Ohridski," based on Art. 4 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated SG No. 38 of 21.05.2010, amended by SG No. 81 of 15.10.2010, amended by SG No. 10l of 28.12. 2010 г.; amended No. 68 of 08/02/2013, in force from 08/02/2013; amended and supplemented, No. 30 of 04/03/2018, in detail from 05/05/2018), the decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication dated 19.01.2023 - protocol No. 05.

Zarina Vasileva is a full-time Ph.D. student at the FJMK from 2019-2022 in the Department of Press Journalism and Book Publishing. He had 2 completed a master's degree - in law at the New Bulgarian University in 1999 and Journalism and Media at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Sofia University in 2015.

Vasileva successfully passed all doctoral exams.

The work presented has a volume with a total volume of 350 pages (including a bibliography and appendices). The bibliography includes 145 titles in Bulgarian, English, and Russian. In addition to scientific publications, over a hundred publications in media and social networks are used.

The following were published on the subject of the Ph.D. thesis: 1 chapter of a monograph, 8 scientific articles, and 7 participations with reports in national and international conferences.

Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The paper consists of an introduction, four main chapters, conclusions, a bibliography, and appendices and contains 54 figures and ten images. The relevance of the dissertation is unquestionable, especially in the context of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that unfolded at the time the text was written. As the Ph.D. student herself claims, "the debate about the digital activity as "slacktivism" became particularly relevant in this period.

In addition to being up-to-date, the dissertation development is also original. The innovative approach and angle from which social causes have been seen and analyzed have flourished in the Ph.D. thesis. They have opened the possibility of a new look at the relationship between traditional and new media. The Ph.D. student is right, who says that "regardless of the scale, the immense possibilities, the continuous upgrading and improvement of social networks, personal or public causes cannot be fully effective and achieve the necessary result without the help of the media, be it in its digital form . (page 9)

The goal that Zarina Vasileva has set for herself in her Ph.D. thesis emphasizes this originality - "to investigate to what extent slacktivism leads to real social changes and a successful outcome of the causes, by defining the concept of "slacktivism" in its positive and negative connotations and through the interaction between online media and social networks.

To achieve her goal, the dissertation student set herself relevant tasks:

- To define the term "slacktivism" in positive and negative connotations

2. To investigate how communication technologies directly influence the democratic process and the audience by tracking different forms of protest and their effectiveness.

3. To reveal the new role of digital technologies as tools for democracy, proving that they do not limit civil society to activity only in an online environment.

4. To research, describe, and analyze various personal and public causes, trace their development in virtual and natural environments, and reveal the role of technology and the true nature of slacktivism.

5. To evaluate the online environment as a catalyst for the effectiveness of causes.

6. To establish the role of the media in the effectiveness of social causes.

7. To investigate the importance of the media in their social function for the formation of prosocial behavior.

Methodology

In order to fulfill the set goals and tasks of the present Ph.D. thesis, in addition to research, systematization, and critical analysis of the scientific literature, online media content related to social causes has been researched and analyzed; study and analysis of social causes in social networks have been carried out; an associative experiment was carried out, as well as an analysis of audience attitudes. A survey among non-governmental organizations on the social function of the online environment and the media was prepared and implemented, as well as a survey on the audience's attitudes toward social causes. Based on an organized and conducted in-depth interview, an initial analysis of the opinion of activists and experts.

The scientific thesis that the doctoral student defends in her work reads:

"Slacktivism is a new form of activism that brings about social change and leads to the successful realization of personal causes. Slacktivism is a social phenomenon and action conditioned by digital technologies, 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. On the contrary - it is a conscious behavior and, as such, leads to concrete consequences... But regardless of the scale, the immense possibilities, and the continuous upgrading and improvement of social networks, however, personal or public causes cannot be fully effective and achieve the required result without the help of the media, be it in its digital form."

The text contains all the mandatory attributes for a Ph.D. thesis. Both the goal and the tasks are content-wise and positionally well-developed and set. The text is structured in theoretical chapters relevant to the topic; a particular chapter with an empirical research focus is also included; it is approached with innovative intentions to use the statistical possibilities for one-dimensional, two-dimensional, three-dimensional or cross-calculations on data from quantitative research through the specialized software product SPSS.

The online space, the focus of research interest in many scientific pursuits, is explored here with its possibilities and effectiveness for concentrating solidarity, volunteering, realizing causes, etc. Simultaneously, more global problems are sought, regarding the role of civic participation in the new media digital environment, virtuality itself and the variations of virtual altruism and life, the effects of frequent exchanges of the roles of receivers and communicators, the blurring of truth, etc., considering the different forms of digital activism, in this case of dissertation work as "slacktivism."

Slacktivism itself in its various dimensions is subjected to analysis, its boundaries are outlined and it is studied to what extent activity or passivity is behind this activity and to what extent they are factors for the effectiveness of the implementation of social causes.

Slacktivism is examined in the context of charitable causes and social protests in its positive and negative connotations, proving that even in its passive form, it is a type of activism.

The role of the media as an essential factor in the implementation and effectiveness of social causes is highlighted. It has been argued that social networks alone are not a sufficient condition for success.

An author's model for forming prosocial behavior in the context of slacktivism is developed, and the essential role of the media is emphasized.

A set of recommendations for communicating charitable causes is proposed, which help their effectiveness in compliance with ethical norms and standards.

A systematization of practical recommendations for the success of protests by provoking positive slacktivism and stimulating activity is proposed.

In the first theoretical-methodological chapter, the definitions of activism and slacktivism are examined very well; the problems of digital pessimists and optimists in the context of slacktivism, the concept of civil society, Internet society in Bulgaria, slacktivism as a political tool, the dark side of the digital organism, etc.

The second chapter, entitled "Prosocial behavior - dimensions, evolution, forms," specifies and theorizes prosocial behavior - manifestations of altruism, blogging, philanthropy, volunteerism, and specific causes.

In the second chapter, the author's proposed model of prosocial behavior formation in slacktivism is to be welcomed.

The third chapter is an academic explication of the essential forms of civic participation – protests and charity. Civic participation has been studied, presented, and analyzed with relative impartiality, scientific responsibility, and good faith. A relatively comprehensive picture is presented - the protests before the Internet, the Ruse protests, the Jebel, Yablanovo, Eco-voice in 1989, the first democratic protests, and the BNT protest. Protests born online, for Mogilino before Mogilino, the "Sedenka" of the teachers, the Bulgarian Jan Palah, the protest movement "The system is killing us," etc., have been analyzed.

The object of analysis is also the success rate of protests in the context of slacktivism, charity instead of the state from the Renaissance to today - personal causes and individuals with causes, social causes, and non-governmental sector. This an extremely informative and valuable chapter.

The fourth chapter is devoted to analyzing the author's empirical sociological surveys, which seek answers to questions about the role of the online environment in the success of social causes, how social networks provoke activism through slacktivism, and the changes in people's activity in an online environment. The research was conducted during the period 10-13 December 2021, within 11 non-governmental organizations, with different subjects of activity, whose activities are presented in the project "Civic Hubs in Universities: Activating Civic Energy in Support of Civil Organizations" (ACF/ 61), implemented by the Bulgarian Center for Non-Profit Law with the partnership of the "OFF Media" Foundation and financed by the Active Citizens Bulgaria Fund under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area 2014-2021.

The second sociological survey studies the audience's motivation to participate in social causes. The online survey, to which 351 respondents responded, was conducted on a first-responder basis from December 2021 - February 2022 and May 2022. The two surveys prove the thesis of the dissertation, namely that slacktivism is not a lack of activity but a new form of activism that causes social change and leads to the successful realization of personal causes and that "regardless of the scale, the immense possibilities, the continuous upgrading and improvement of social networks, however, personal or public causes cannot be fully effective and achieve the necessary result, without the help of traditional media, be it in their digital form" p. 270.

The third survey, carried out using the in-depth interview method, was carried out with Krasimira Obretenova - organizer of the protests of mothers of children with disabilities; Slaveya Kostadinova - parent of a child with an illness requiring treatment abroad, chairman and co-founder of the "Spina bifida and hydrocephalus-Bulgaria" association; and with an expert from the State Child Protection Agency. All three persons are typical representatives of interested stakeholders and closely related to the purpose and tasks of the Ph.D. thesis.

My assessment of the authorship and conduct of the three surveys is high. It was approached with innovative intentions to use the statistical possibilities for calculations through the specialized software product SPSS.

Contributions

I accept the self-assessment of the contributions by the dissertation student as listed:

1. Slacktivism is formulated as social behavior through the prism of sciences such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology, etc., in the context of theories about the activity and passivity of the individual and society.

2. Slacktivism is examined in the context of charitable causes and social protests in its two connotations – positive and negative, and it is scientifically proven that even in its passive form, it is a type of activity.

3. Contributing point is overturning the accepted views that digital technologies make civil society lazy and reactive in the online environment without contributing to real social changes.

4. The contribution of the dissertation work is bringing out the role of the media as a decisive factor for the implementation and effectiveness of social causes - social networks are not a sufficient condition for success.

5. An author's model for forming prosocial behavior in the context of slacktivism is proposed, in which the essential role of the media and quality journalism is brought out.

6. A set of recommendations for communicating charitable causes is proposed, which helps their effectiveness in compliance with ethical norms and standards.

7. A systematization of practical recommendations for the success rate of protests by provoking positive slacktivism and stimulating activity is proposed.

The Ph.D. student has an enviable number of scientific publications on the dissertation topic - 7 articles and 1 chapter of a collective monograph.

Notes and recommendations

My recommendation for Zorniza Vasileva is to publish your work , and to change some citations and references.

My final assessment of the work is high.

Before us is an up-to-date development dedicated to a significant problem related to an innovative consideration of citizen activity as slacktivism and its enhanced role in pandemic and post-pandemic conditions in a digital environment.

The dissertation reveals a clearly expressed author's thoroughness and comprehensiveness in the approaches to the overall study - including regarding the theoretical sources and their

interpretation. With the help of relevant sources and with the use of relevant empirical research tools, the selected aspects of the methods used by the dissertation are operationalized, but an adequate methodology is released, guaranteeing correctness in the collection, processing and analysis of the received empirical data. It contributed to the explanation and proof of previously unexplored essential aspects of existing theories and hypotheses, namely the consideration of citizen activity as slacktivism.

Vsileva's bibliographic awareness and skills for extracting, interrelating and proving new ideas are evident.

My assessment of the linguistic and stylistic qualities of the presentation and the applied grammar and spelling norms is also high.

My assessment regarding the correspondence of the text of the abstract with the text of the Ph.D. thesis is also high.

All this gives me a reason to convince the esteemed Scientific Jury at the FJMK to award Doctor's educational and scientific degree to Zarina Boykova Vsileva in professional direction 3.5. Public communications and information sciences (media and communications - online journalism).

REVIEWER:

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