



## REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Ivanova Serafimova, Sofia University, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Department of "Communication, Public Relations and Advertising" for obtaining of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in scientific field 3.5. "Public Communications and Information Sciences" with a dissertation on the topic: „Business reputation management in crises with pandemic character (2020-2023)", presented by Bogomila Vasileva Koleva, full-time doctoral student in Department "Communication and audiovisual production" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov.

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

Bogomila Koleva is a full-time doctoral student in Department "Communication and audiovisual production" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov. The doctoral student successfully approved her dissertation work in front of the extended staff of the department.

### II. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

The dissertation of Bogomila Koleva that I have proposed for review has a total volume of 231 pages, of which 205 pages are the main text of the dissertation, followed by a bibliography and two appendices. Each chapter is further divided by internal headings, which contributes to the clarity of presentation and the separation of individual aspects of the subject under consideration. The bibliography consists of 61 scientific publications in Bulgarian and English and 63 online sources, including media publications.

**The actuality of the topic** is indisputable. We can define the period of the study as a "situation of global crisis", where we are witnessing a "ubiquitous crisis communication", which we can call "communication from all to all", and at all levels - at the level of international organizations, at the level governments, non-governmental organizations, business associations, consumer organizations, professional and trade union organizations, activist groups, etc. On the other hand, all those affected by the decisions and positions of the institutions also communicate their positions and "truths" in social networks. We can define the "global communication situation" created as a result of COVID-19 as the phenomenon of the imposition of a single topic in media and public communication worldwide and its dominance over a long period coinciding with research by the Ph.D.

The author argues for the choice of the topic with " the significantly increasing number of real crises in various business sectors, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic" ( p. 9 ) .



**Research approach, research thesis, goals and objectives, subject and object, scientific methods are correctly formulated.** The purpose of the dissertation was fulfilled "to investigate and prove that if companies do not adhere to following certain communication rules and anti-crisis strategies, they will not have the necessary knowledge and will act ineffectively. This could be extremely risky and result in significant material and financial losses and even cause bankruptcy, due to misinterpreted signals and poorly coordinated actions" ( p.12 ).

Bogomila Koleva **sets** limitations of the study, which are justified in view of the wide scientific field and the possibilities for empirical research.

The text is distinguished by a logical structure - an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion.

The first chapter clarifies concepts such as "crisis", "reputation management", "crisis management", "communication management" and "media influence", reviews the scientific literature and approaches regarding crisis management, and the author formulates practical guidelines for improvement of this process. The classifications of the different types of crises are considered. Subchapter 1.2 distinguishes reputation from image and corporate brand and the author then explores the categories of reputational risks for the purpose of prevention. The first chapter also examines the principles of anti-crisis communication and specific communication activities - preparing a communication crisis plan, choosing a spokesperson for the organization, as well as preparing an anti-crisis action plan, forming a crisis headquarters, resolving the crisis, persuading and influencing the media, building a relationship with the media, interaction of speakers with journalists.

The second chapter is entitled "The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on the New Social Reality". In it, Bogomila Koleva examines the effects of the pandemic, defending the thesis that "the crisis leads to a change in the social order in society in relation to all spheres and this causes a change in the way organizations function". She seeks an answer to the question whether these serious consequences are the result of the development of the global crisis facing humanity or are due to the admission of many mistakes in the anti-crisis approaches to deal with it.

In the second chapter, the author examines the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifics of the applied anti-crisis strategies by organizations, examples of successful business management models developed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis are given. The chapter includes the results of comparative studies regarding business models in Bulgaria and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as measuring the crisis in some sectors such as hotels, restaurants, tourism. As a good research approach, I can single out the analysis of protests in these branches as a typical communication situation for Bulgaria, often observed during crises. The protest as a form of communication with the government and local authorities in Bulgaria definitely deserves a comprehensive study, and the text proposed for review deals with this aspect of anti-crisis communication in the studied period.

The third chapter is entitled "Business Management in Crisis (Empirical Study)". It presents the results of the conducted survey and summarizes its conclusions. A useful point is that the author conducts his own survey with a total of 50 executive directors and managers of leading companies in Bulgaria from various sectors. As a proper research approach, we can highlight the fact that



companies are divided into the following three categories: small (10-49 employees), medium (50-249 employees) and large (over 250 employees), as this has a direct bearing on the adequacy of received results. As a conclusion of the survey, the author came to the conclusion that small and medium-sized companies, unlike large ones, do not have a pre-made anti-crisis action plan and claim that "external events are unpredictable and therefore their strategy is to take decisions and post-crisis actions".

In the third chapter, a comparative analysis of the results obtained from the own study with other representative studies - of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, the European Investment Bank, Colliers International, Economist magazine "is made, which is a good scientific approach .

Bogomila Koleva formulated three hypotheses of scientific research, which she investigated and proved in her dissertation with precisely and adequately selected scientific methods. The first hypothesis is that the crisis leads to a change in the social order in society in relation to all spheres and this causes a change in the way organizations function. The second hypothesis is that the results of the studies show that only the largest companies in Bulgaria conduct an expert level of communication and a high level of anti-crisis preparation. The third hypothesis is that the crisis will lead organizations that show high levels of adaptability, flexibility and innovation to new transformations related to process optimization and digitization.

The theoretical sources have been studied in depth, and the bibliography corresponds to the requirements for current scientific research on the subject. Authors' interpretations of anti-crisis communications in the context of the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are offered. The research methods are appropriately chosen and applied and correspond to the set goals and three hypotheses of the dissertation formulated by the author. They are logically proven with reliable material, which gives reason to accept the contributions of the study as valid. The abstract corresponds to the text of the dissertation and presents it correctly.

### **III. Dissertation Research Contributions**

I agree with the formulated contributions of the dissertation work. They are applicable in the practice and I can confirm that the contributions are the own survey and the analysis of its results, which aims to establish the level of anti-crisis culture of the organizations in Bulgaria, as well as the argumentation of the need for the anti-crisis strategies of the organizations and more specifically, those of state institutions to be adapted to the changing external reality, given the constantly emerging real crises, leading to institutional crises of confidence and destruction of reputation.

A contribution of Bogomila Koleva's dissertation work is the analysis of over 460 media publications, which examines the crisis in one of the business sectors most affected by COVID-19, that of services.

Another contribution is the defining of effective anti-crisis strategies and provement of the function of media as a key intermediary in the flow of communication.

Contributions are also related to exploring the response to the crisis caused by COVID-19 by various industries and the use of protest actions as a means of communication with the government, health authorities and local authorities.



#### IV. Notes and recommendations

Bogomila Koleva complied with the notes and recommendations made during the internal defense and they are reflected in the text submitted for review. As a recommendation for the future scientific development of the doctoral student, I would point out the refinement of the concepts and the disallowance of expressions closer to the conversational style, in which the relevant scientific statement can be found. I would recommend that the results of Bogomila Koleva's studies be published, as they would be of value to the industries she studies in a situation of crisis caused by a pandemic.

#### V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Bogomila Koleva applies the following scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation work, as well as reports from participation in scientific forums:

1. Koleva, Bogomila. Methods for dealing with the risks of crises in business. Article for the online publication of research, analysis and criticism - Newmedia21. Available from: <https://www.newmedia21.eu/izsledvaniq/metodi-za-spravvyane-s-riskovete-ot-vaznikvaneto-na-krizi-v-biznesa/>
2. Koleva, Bogomila. Strategies for managing the business organization in crisis conditions. In: Media and Communications - volume 2/2022. Scientific collection of doctoral students from FJMK, Sofia: University of St. Kliment Ohridski, 2022, p. 89.
3. Koleva, Bogomila. Methods for businesses to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. In: Volume 3 "Pathways to Sustainable Development: Social Science Approaches and Contributions" Proceedings of the National School for Doctoral and Young Researchers in the Social Sciences. ( in press , forthcoming article )
4. Participation with a report on the topic: "Methods for dealing with the crisis of COVID-19 in business" in a volume of 14 pages at the Jubilee International Scientific Conference "Communication and the Media of the XXI Century: Educational and Professional Challenges", organized by the Faculty of journalism and mass communication of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" October 27-28, 2022
5. Participation with a report in the Scientific and Educational Doctoral Seminar "Media and Communications" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, held on November 26, 2021 within the framework of the Clement Days 2021 of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
6. Participation with a report of the XIII National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in the Social Sciences at the BAS. "Pathways to Sustainable Development: Social Science Approaches and Contributions". Place: Institute for Population and Human Research. BAS, on 27.05.22, with a report on the topic: "Methods for business to deal with the COVID-19 crisis"
7. Participation with a report in the Scientific-Educational Doctoral Seminar of FJMK "Media and Communications", which was held on December 12 and 13, 2022.



## **VI. Conclusion**

Due to all of the above, I firmly state my opinion that Bogomila Koleva should be awarded the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in scientific field 3.5 "Public Communications and Information Sciences", for which I will vote positively.

Date: 06/02/2023 Reviewer:  
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