



OPINION¹

of the thesis (works) submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position PROFESSOR as per professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media Ecosystem), announced by Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' in the State Gazette, issue No. 35 as of 18 April 2023

Reviewer: Prof. PhD Totka Monova

Candidate: Simeon Ignatov Vasilev, Associate Professor, PhD in the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the scientific and educational production presented for participation in the competition

The set of materials presented by Associate Professor Simeon Vasilev, PhD, fully complies with the 'Rules on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Science Degrees and Holding Academic Positions in Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski' and it complies with the legal framework of the relevant normative acts.

Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev presents to date his scientific and practical activity in 262 titles totally, as of them 9 are monographs, 32 are studies and articles, and 19 are scientific conference reports. **16 texts totally** have been selected for the current competition for 'professor': **2 monographs** - 'Media Ecosystem. Challenges of transformation', Sofia, 2023 (presented as the **main habilitation thesis**) and 'In the spiral of sharing: Media content and social networks', Sofia 2022; **group of authors monograph chapter, 2 studies and 11 articles.**

According to the enclosed reference, the candidate **exceeds the minimum national requirements** pursuant to Art. 26 of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria as out of the total **783 points**, for citations in monographs and authors group volumes with scientific review the points are 180, and for citations and reviews in non-refereed journals with scientific review – 55.

Assoc. Prof. Vasilev began his academic career as a part-time assistant in 2011, qualified as an associate professor in 2020 in the Department of 'Communication and Audiovisual Production', he is a full-time lecturer in: Subject 'Communication Management' (in the disciplines 'Media Ecosystem', 'Cultural and historical interrelationships and media content', 'Leadership in Europe', 'Functions of the institutional spokesperson', 'Target audience and media content'); subject 'Public Relations' - 'Communication Skills'; subject 'Book publishing' - 'World media of the 20th and 21st centuries'; reads lectures in the Master's programme 'Production and Creative Industry' on 'Media Convergence'. He is an established lecturer with long practical experience - the author of 6 documentary films and more than 200 articles in periodicals, he has many years of experience as a television journalist, manager and administrator, as well as he is an established international correspondent and reporter. An important part of the current lecture work of Assoc. Prof. Vasilev is the point that his scientific production essentially provides the lectures delivered as scientific and educational literature and guarantees a thorough modern analysis, grounded on long practical experience for many years in situ, of the dynamically developing changes in the media environment today.

¹ Note: Recommended volume of the opinion – 2-3 standard pages.



By virtue of the **general characteristics of the works presented, it is concluded** that the candidature of Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev categorically satisfies all the legal requirements concerning occupation of the academic position of 'professor'. The texts submitted for review exactly correspond to the direction of the competition, and now I would like to point out categorically the **main contribution** (in summary) of the candidate, namely: **the texts unconditionally participate in the identification and subsequent development of the media ecosystem sphere** insufficiently developed in our country yet (but extremely relevant in the modern global world of new communication technologies) **as a complex and multifunctional environment**, which, on the one hand, contains complex intra-systemic cultural, economic, social and professional aspects, and on the other hand - all these subsystems are continuously transformed under pressure of the technological changes and the digitization of this environment. These problems are the object, subject and purpose of the research of both presented monographs, they are at the centre of the scientific interests of Assoc. Prof. Vasilev. In the book 'In the spiral of sharing. Media content and social networks' the conceptual framework is outlined and a methodology for the description and analysis of scientific concepts such as the 'network Fourth Estate' (or fourth power) is approved, the modifications in the specifics of a new media audience are presented, the 'spiral of sharing' is introduced as a subject of research, the algorithms of this 'spiral of sharing' are presented in synchronicity and critical analysis with Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's 'spiral of silence'. Namely, a new categorical scientific apparatus is presented with a good proportion of description and analysis, thus allowing the author to build on these observations in his habilitation thesis 'Media Ecosystem' and to move to theoretical generalizations on an already macro level, to summarize the 'formula of the digital transformation' and to present to us the problems that the techno revolution and the new 'media consciousness' are facing today's modern societies.

As **I accept with conviction the scientific novelties and contributions formulated and presented by the candidate**, in my standpoint I would like to go into more detail on the presented main habilitation thesis '**Media Ecosystem. Challenges of transformation**'. I stand on it because I am currently operating with genre diversifications and the change in the genre code of media texts, a direct result of the transformations in media content that social networks forcefully impose. I found it extremely interesting (and useful) to see how identical empirical material, described, researched and analysed with different methodological apparatus, from different perspectives and placed within different kind of contexts, in practice leads us to the same disturbing results, conclusions and predictions. I agree with Assoc. Prof. Vasilev we are facing the development of a new conceptual scientific apparatus, that we should adapt the methods we have been working to the specifics of the new type of media content and media consciousness, because we are already witnessing every day how, aggressively entering the fields of politics, science, religion and literature (according to Pierre Bourdieu), 'communicatively created power can be transformed into administratively applicable power' (J. Habermas). We observe the unlimited (up to now) capabilities of social networks to self-institutionalize and generate political and administrative power both within institutions and among different layers of society. Thus, media researchers and theoreticians face qualitatively new tasks, it also implies a critical reassessment of key moments of the theory of mass communication that we have known up to now. Within this meaning, Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev offers us **significant and extremely relevant works**. In the best-selling research essay 'Thumbelina', French philosopher and anthropologist Michel Serres is emphatic in his assertion: 'Cognitive science shows that using the Internet, reading, and writing messages with the lightning touch of the thumbs... do not stimulate the same neurons neither the same cortical areas as working with a book, a blackboard, or a notebook'. According to M. Serres, today's children 'no longer have the same head', 'they do not inhabit the same space', 'no longer speak the same language', and 'since they no longer have head of his parents, he or she understands differently'. (M. Serres, 'Thumbelina', Sofia: Sonm, 2021, p.15-17) In this



context, Assoc. Prof. Vasilev's assessments of the connections between the 'network audience' and traditional media are interesting and significant. In my opinion, the author's thesis deserves special attention that in the media ecosystem, under pressure of digitalization and the dynamics of technological changes, all its internal system aspects - cultural, economic, social and professional, are undergoing complex and irreversible transformations. The exact and precise outline of this new scientific framework enables research in this direction to be built upon using other methodological tools such as social anthropology, classical and political linguistics, etc.

Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev is **an undisputed expert** in the field of new media and social networks, as his research and theoretical developments are oriented towards the global transformations that they provoke in the field of traditional media and classical journalism. 'This fundamental restructuring of journalism is of the utmost importance for political and democratic life' ('Media Ecosystem...' p. 9) on the one hand, and 'the new notion of media is one of the greatest challenges for media science', on the other hand (ibid., p. 76). In summary, in all the texts presented for the competition (to the point, these are developments from the last three years), Assoc. Prof. Vasilev, with different approaches and from different points of view, precisely analyses the following **extremely topical scientific problem**, which he defines as follows: 'The new digitized media and the new type of communication imposed by the network are the main reasons for the changed values and knowledge of the world'. ('Media Ecosystem...' p. 63)

In my opinion, **this is the first comprehensive study by a Bulgarian author**, focused on undoubtedly the most radical and dynamic diversification of traditional classical journalism in the history of the media with its inherent messages, contents, genres and their reception by their audiences. I fully accept the thesis that digitalization and social networks have not only provoked a new kind of communicative situation, but also have irreversibly restructured the classical media audience, real in its essence, into multiple audience specified in the network, some of which, under certain conditions, show the characteristics of axial communication. This restructuring of audience objectively leads to the change and relocation of power centres both within the media ecosystem and within the social and political macro-system. The problem is that the networks allow contamination of facts, plots, characters, ideas, emotions, between which there is no need for 'content convergence' (M. Bakhtin). I give full support to the opinion that pushing the ontological fact to the periphery of media content is an alarming trend, which is also one of the reasons for the formation of a new type of specific media consciousness - and the step from here to fake news, hybrid wars, post-truth, etc. phenomena and modern communication problems, is very short.

I would add that the presented habilitation thesis has the qualities to be an academic reference point in updating and renewing the educational content of academic disciplines in all subjects of Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. As a practical-applied contribution of the monograph 'Media Ecosystem', I would indicate the fact that the text is dialogue friendly and open to additional developments and discussions in the field of mass communication theory, as each researcher could specify, in accordance with his own scientific pursuits, the proposed scientific definitions, categories, methodological frameworks.

Conclusion

The habilitation work 'Media Ecosystem. Challenges of transformation' (Sofia: University publishing, 'St. Kliment Ohridski, 2023, p. 174, ISBN 978-954-07-5749-0) **and the overall presented scientific and research output** of Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev contain indisputable scientific and scientific-applied results, which represent an **original contribution** to the modern theory of mass



communication.

All submitted texts fully comply with the requirements of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication in the profile of the announced competition.

Based on the analysis of the overall research and teaching activity of Assoc. Prof. Simeon Ignatov Vasilev, I strongly suggest to the respected colleagues of the scientific selection committee to be elected as a 'professor' in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media Ecosystem), for which I vote positively, and also to be proposed to the Scientific Council at Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication the election of Assoc. Prof. Simeon Vasilev to be confirmed.

Date: 15 August 2023

Member of the selection committee:
/ Prof. PhD Totka Monova/