REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Ivanova Serafimova, Sofia University, FJMC, Department of "Communication, Public Relations and Advertising" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 3.5. "Public Communications and Information Sciences" with a dissertation on the topic: "Building a Political Image in Bulgaria: perceptions and influence in public communication", presented by Plamena Dinkova Papazova, doctoral student, full-time study in the Department of "Communication, Public Relations and Advertising" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Petkova.

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

Plamena Papazova was a full-time doctoral student in the Department of "Communication, Public Relations and Advertising" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with scientific supervisor Assoc. Dr. Diana Petkova. She has successfully completed her individual study plan and has been awarded with the right to defend her dissertation, which is submitted for review.

II. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

Plamena Papazova's dissertation, which I have received for review, has a total volume of 246 pages, of which 233 pages are the main text, followed by a bibliography. The dissertation is distinguished by a logical structure of the text, which is developed in three chapters, and they are further divided by internal subheadings, which contributes to the clarity of the presentation and the differentiation of individual aspects of the subject under consideration. The bibliography consists of 165 scientific publications in Bulgarian and English and 40 online sources.

The relevance of the topic even increases after the period of research, which was defined by the PhD student. The research is focused on what happened in 2021, but in 2023 we can say that the problems in building a political image in Bulgaria are escalating, which proves the foresight of the doctoral student in choosing the field of research, which is perspective and provides an opportunity for future research. The period of study brings the seeds of phenomena that are currently developing. In this sense, Plamena Papazova predicts the importance of the topics she researches in the coming years, which is one of the main functions of scientific research.

The thesis of the dissertation presented for review is that in modern society, politicians should strive for a policy of honesty and transparency, thus building a positive public image. According to the doctoral student, "The modern digital environment, where every action and speech is recorded, makes attempts to conceal information almost impossible. When the truth comes out,

attempts to cover it up can have disastrous consequences for a politician's image." In 2023, this thesis acquired a particularly topical sound.

It is important to note that PhD student Papazova outlines the specifics of the Bulgarian political environment and communication - in Bulgaria the level of trust in politicians is very low and can be easily destroyed.

The second thesis of the dissertation is that the active use of social networks can be of great benefit to the image of a politician.

The aim of the dissertation is to examine the role of social media in the construction of political image. Moreover, in the studied period, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process of transformation of political communication into mostly online communication. The dissertation provides information and analysis of communication in the context of the political situation in Bulgaria in the period 2020-2023.

The content of the dissertation is structured in three chapters.

The first chapter explores the basic concepts related to political image and communication, looking at the communication process, public communication and public relations, the role of the public and perception, the construction of political image and influence.

The second chapter examines the role of social media in the construction of political image, the relationship between the Internet and politics, social media and politics, memes and politics.

The author successfully defends the thesis that social media requires a policy of transparency from politicians. The chapter includes research on the topic of the relationship between the Internet, social media and politics. Also presented are the results of the author's empirical research with a detailed analysis of the Facebook profiles of three influential politicians in Bulgaria in 2021 - Boyko Borisov, Slavi Trifonov and Kiril Petkov. The study uses as a method observation and analysis of the profiles of the leaders of the winning parties in each of the three rounds of parliamentary elections in 2021 - GERB-SDS (Boiko Borisov), PP "There is such a people" (Slavi Trifonov) and "Continuing the Change" (Kyril Petkov).

The third chapter of the dissertation includes three other author's studies that present the results of research on various aspects of the political image and the public's perception of it in the context of the elections in Bulgaria in 2021. These three studies use as a method questionnaire surveys and analysis of the results of them.

As an indisputable quality of the dissertation work, I can emphasize the author's empirical research carried out, which has a contributing character. Plamena Papazova presents the results of four conducted studies, which have their own hypotheses that support her theses.

The first study analyzed the profiles of Boyko Borisov, Slavi Trifonov and Kiril Petkov on Facebook for the year 2021.

The second study carried out examines psycho-social attitudes towards Bulgarian politicians in 2021. The main tasks of the study are to check the impact of physical characteristics, such as age, gender and appearance, as well as socio-cultural characteristics, such as education, religion and sexual orientation, on the image of a politician. The hypothesis of the study is that people's trust in

politicians is shaken, and most likely they will not care as much about the physical characteristics of the individual as about the socio-cultural ones.

The third study, entitled "Perception of political image in the context of the 2021 Bulgarian parliamentary elections, explores the ways in which people are informed about politics, including the importance of social media, election campaigns and the credibility of information.

The fourth study examines trust in the political image in 2021 in Bulgaria.

III. Dissertation Research Contributions

The contributions of the dissertation submitted for review are precisely categorized as scientific and scientific-applied.

The systematization of scientific theories, research and concepts related to the construction of the political image, approaches and methods for its research are the scientific contribution of the dissertation. No less important are the scientific and applied contributions related to the study of the perceptions and attitudes of the audience in Bulgaria and their role in political communication and image construction, as well as the outlined psycho-social and cultural prerequisites specific to the Bulgarian political reality.

A contribution as a result of the conducted empirical research is also the study of the resulting consequences and effects of digitalization in the construction of a political image.

IV. Notes and recommendations

Plamena Papazova complied with the notes and recommendations made during the internal discussion of her dissertation work, and the text was refined. I would recommend that she use the results of the already conducted empirical studies as a basis and comparative analysis of the development of political communication in Bulgaria in her future scientific publications. The present dissertation work is a good foundation for further research, dedicated to the construction of political image in Bulgaria, which is obviously a significant topic of public importance.

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Plamena Papazova submitted the following scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation, as well as reports from participation in scientific forums that are on the topic of the dissertation:

1. PAPAZOVA, Plamena. The image of the ideal Bulgarian politician in 2021. In: Media and communications: scientific collection of doctoral students from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, volume 2. Sofia: University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022, 254-275.
2. PAPAZOVA, Plamena. Perception of political image in the context of the elections in Bulgaria in 2021. In: "Roads to sustainable development: approaches and contributions of social sciences",

volume 3, National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in Social Sciences, 2023, ISSN (online) : 2683-0868.

3. PAPAZOVA, Plamena. Trust and politics: survey of public opinion in Bulgaria in 2021 (in press, forthcoming article). In: scientific collection of doctoral students from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, volume 3. Sofia: University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2023.

4. PAPAZOVA, Plamena. The role of social media in the formation of political image: analysis of the profiles of Boyko Borisov, Slavi Trifonov and Kiril Petkov on Facebook in 2021 (forthcoming article). Sp. "Media and Language", 2023, ISSN (online): 2535-0587.

These publications correspond to the topic of the dissertation and demonstrate the doctoral student's ability to actively participate in scholarly forums by publishing valuable own research on current issues in the field of political communication and political imageg.

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: 09/05/2023   Reviewer:
                                                                        Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova