



## OPINION<sup>1</sup>

from Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Svetlana Stankova, Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

*(scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution)*

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Psychology of communication)

with a dissertation on the topic: “Building a political image in Bulgaria: perceptions and influence in public communication”,

presented by Plamena Dinkova Papazova, full-time doctoral student in the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Diana Petkova

### I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation:

The problem of building a transmedial political image and possibilities of social networks as one of the effective channels for political communication and mobilization of supporters, is relevant and significant. Digitalization creates new forms of political marketing, which acquire an increasingly important part of it. Many researchers even see the future of political communication entirely through them - politicians constantly “post” on social networks, create video portals, create podcasts. In this way, Plamena Papazova shows that it is no longer about left or right, but about old and new, about traditional and digital in the field of political communication, which aims above all at one thing - to convince the audience to vote in a specific way.

Plamena Papazova presents in her research 206 theoretical sources in Bulgarian and English, 41 of which are online sources in both languages. This is an indicator of a clear aspiration for depth and comprehensiveness of the research related to the topic of the dissertation. It should be noted that they include both contemporary scholarly works dedicated to media impact, political communication, and election campaigns in the Internet age, as well as foundational works on media theory and the process of political marketing. The review of concepts is done introducing contemporary developments and uses of all concepts used.

The Ph.D. student examines political image in two ways – both as a perception by the audience and as an opportunity to influence their attitudes to gain an advantage in election results. The political image is analyzed from several aspects – as part of the communication process, as part of the cultural-historical context and as an instrument of political communication in the context of the election campaign. She has found a different and interesting angle in researching the interconnections between media and politics. In her scientific research, Plamena Papazova examines contemporary political practices and

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The text in italics offers reference points for evaluating the research results. Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages



makes a theoretical overview of the existing concepts of political communication, and in particular of the political image, and of the possibilities of attracting broad electoral participation, of political marketing techniques and their use in election campaigns and the role of audience perceptions in them. At the same time, she proves that regardless of the different communication situations of the three premature parliamentary elections held in 2021, social networks are becoming an increasingly influential part of political communication between the government and society, becoming an effective tool for political competition. It offers a new interpretation of the possibilities of traditional and new media, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of using the media mix in complex social situations;

The dissertation uses a multidisciplinary approach, applying methods from different scientific fields – media studies, communication theory, persuasive communication; visual communication; psychology; social psychology; historiography; sociology; management; public relations. Empirical methods are observation, comparison, measurement, experiment; survey, analysis and processing of empirical data. In general, the chosen scientific methodology is integral, relevant to the complexity of the chosen topic.

The scientific research done by Plamena Papazova outlines the use of traditional and new audiovisual media in public communication and their impact between citizens/voters and politicians. The special focus of the study is on the role of social networks in forming perceptions of political image during the three premature parliamentary elections in 2021. From that media practices the empirical objects are drawn and examined in a conceptually productive symmetry.

Scientific research is based on empirical material that respects its volume and complexity, processed with conscious scientific responsibility. It could be evaluated from both a sociological and political point of view as professional, achieving reliable data, which is of great importance for their comparability. The contributions of this doctoral dissertation are based on an impressive amount of empirical material. Plamena Papazova independently conducted four empirical studies - on the profiles of Boyko Borisov, Slavi Trifonov and Kiril Petkov on Facebook in 2021, on psycho-social attitudes towards the Bulgarian.

## II. Contributions of the dissertation research

The dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the media-politicians-audience triad. I agree with the presented contributions, which clearly formulate the essence of the research.

I would point out as a significant practical-applied scientific contribution the author's studies of the psycho-social attitudes towards the Bulgarian politician, which represent a reliable tool for building strategies in the public communications of political subjects and communication managers.

The three independently conducted studies of audience attitudes and perceptions towards the Bulgarian politician in 2021, the ways in which people are informed about politics and trust in the political image in Bulgaria in 2021 offer valuable factual material and sociological data. These results can be used in future political campaigns, both by political actors and future researchers of digital political dialogue.

## III. Notes and recommendations

As for directions for further work on the presented dissertation text, I could recommend to be explored other factors that may influence voters' intention to vote for a politician or political party, such as the cultural, social and demographic status of the respondents. Comparisons could be made for different periods of time (before the elections, during, after the elections) or between two different election periods, thus seeing the role of the media during these periods and how information and communication



technologies are used for political goals. The dissertation work could be improved if the concepts of “social networks” and “social media” are not mixed, which erodes the scientific apparatus of the work to some extent.

I would ask the doctoral student what, in her opinion, is the place of political branding in the researched topic?

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

The requirements of the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5 and are fulfilled, and the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para.1, item 4 and art. 69, para.3 are covered: four publications in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and edited collective volumes are presented, as well as a collective monograph chapter.

#### V. Conclusion

Taking into account the correctly justified and conducted research, the precise analysis and good scientific style of the dissertation work on the topic “Building a political image in Bulgaria: perceptions and influence in public communication” of the full-time doctoral student in the department “Communication, Public Relations and Advertisement”, FJMC of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Psychology of communication), Plamena Dinkova Papazova, I express to the respected members of the scientific jury my positive opinion that she should be awarded the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PH.D).

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Stankova, Ph.D.

Date: September 8, 2023