

## OPINION

From Assoc. Prof. Stella Angova, UNWE, Media and Public Communication Department

For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field  
2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric)

With a dissertation on the topic: „NONVERBAL CODE CHANGES IN PUBLIC  
COMMUNICATION IN THE GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGE - COVID – 19“

Presented by Kremena Dachova

with supervisor: Prof. Velichko Rumenev, DSc

The dissertation topic is undeniably important and contributes significantly to new knowledge in the context of nonverbal public communication in crisis (risk). This aspect of communication proved essential at a time when people were discouraged from having close physical contact (some even called for social distance). The communication environment was hampered by masks, protective clothing, and this affected the expression of non-verbal support. I would argue the relevance and importance of the topic is also due to the long-term implications, which the PhD student talks about in the introduction of his thesis. Fear, isolation, the quality of information, and its framing, in verbal and non-verbal terms - these elements of the pandemic are having their impact now. The doctoral student is correct in his statement, "Risk communication has become a topic - not only for communication scholars, but also for researchers in many other scientific fields" (p. 4). I'll back it up with an example: the Royal College of Nursing in the UK has a section on its website dedicated to the importance of body language (according to CNN)<sup>1</sup>. Researchers are rallying around the idea that Covid has changed the way we communicate, and more importantly, we are not authentic in the way we used to be, but rather artificial<sup>2</sup>.

I find original the aim of the study to "analyze the multimodalities of contemporary public rhetoric in order to ascertain the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic and related societal changes (found in the time frame studied (2020-2022 )

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<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus has stolen our most meaningful ways to connect by Bianca Nobilo, CNN.  
<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/06/world/coronavirus-body-language-wellness/>

<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has made communication more important than ever.  
<https://news.temple.edu/news/2020-09-16/coronavirus-pandemic-has-made-communication-more-important-ever>

have affected people's nonverbal behavior" (pp. 8-9). The study focuses on two groups of public speakers and their nonverbal behaviors - significant national figures and global ones. The nonverbal behaviour of political figures (five with influence in the world and Europe and two in Bulgaria) is analysed. Their selection is logical because, although the crisis was basically health-related, it was communicated regularly through political rhetoric. The non-verbal messages of Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Boris Johnson, Rumen and Boyko Borissov are examined. I approve of their choice as research subjects, as their important role is that of opinion leader. From the standpoint of time, it is important, both for science and for society as a whole, to analyse their messages, especially their non-verbal context, in order to be able to identify the effect and therefore the responsibility.

I admire the interdisciplinary approach and the social commitment of the author to the research problem. I agree with the mentioned contribution to the 'to SURVIVE' model, the author's concept for deciphering non-verbal communication after the pandemic-induced transformations, especially in the field of rhetoric. Here we see scholarly courage and research commitment to the analysis of the research problem and to building on existing theory. The PhD student has contributed a paper and a scholarly publication on this topic and I would recommend that, if desired, a publication in English could also be undertaken to have greater dissemination of this substantial research contribution.

Of course, I accept as correctly defined the other two contributions - the enriched and critically reflected theoretical knowledge and the application of the research in the direction of distance as a real proxemic category.

The dissertation is written according to the rules of the scientific genre. All mandatory methodological attributes are included. The text is written in scientific language and is oriented to a wide audience. It has its relevance for theory, practice and society. The research carried out is done with scientific care. For all these reasons, I will give my positive vote for the awarding of the PhD degree to Kremena Stefanova Dachova for her dissertation on „Changes in Nonverbal Codes in Public Communication under the Global Health Challenge - COVID - 19“

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Stella Angova

Date: 06.10.2023