



OPINION¹

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” (Ph.D.) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Image in Strategic Communications)

with a dissertation on the topic: “Media Images’ s Strategic Aspects of the Bulgarian Prosecutors General (2006-2020)”,

presented by Borislav Radoslavov Georgiev, full-time doctoral student in the Department of Communication and Audiovisual Production, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Dsc. Milko Petrov

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

The problem developed in the dissertation, related to the media images of the Bulgarian prosecutors general in the specified period and the role of strategic communications for the audience's perceptions, is relevant and significant. The judicial system and the rule of law is a basic principle of democracy. In this sense, attempts to influence public opinion through media manipulation undermine the foundations of the rule of law. With specific examples from socio-political life, Borislav Georgiev points out trends in the formation and development of media manipulation and attempts to influence through certain image strategic communications.

Borislav Georgiev presents in his research 95 theoretical sources in Bulgarian, 17 in English, Russian and French, 10 articles in scientific journals and 84 Internet sources. 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 and manipulative aspects of image, as well as foundational works on social psychology, media law and reputation management. The review of concepts is done introducing modern developments and uses of all concepts used.

Ph.D. student Georgiev examines image both as a public perception by the audience and as well an opportunity to influence/manipulate their attitudes to gain an advantage. The media images of the three prosecutors general – Boris Velchev, Sotir Tsatsarov and Ivan Geshev are analyzed from several aspects – as a part of the communication process, as a part of the cultural and historical context of Bulgaria and as a tool for media manipulation. Borislav Georgiev has found an interesting perspective in researching the media – judiciary – politics interrelations.

In his scientific research, Borislav Georgiev examines contemporary media practices (2006-2020) and reviews the existing manipulative and propaganda tools forming the media images of the prosecutor's office and prosecutors general with the relevant specifics and characteristics. At the same time, he proves

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



that, regardless of the different communication situations in which the media images of the three prosecutors are formed, different media covering is observed corresponding to the existing political-economic lobby. On that basis he analyzes the attempt of public opinion manipulation and the construction of a specific media image of the figure of the Prosecutor General. He offers a new interpretation of the instruments of media and PR manipulation, through which the image of the prosecutor general is transformed into an image of person-institution.

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

The scientific study, made by Borislav Georgiev, outlines the attempts for political orchestration of the judicial system, which predetermines characteristic media projections. The special focus of the study is on the function of the so-called an artificial or “floating” (p. 230) image of the three prosecutors general, from whose media practices the empirical objects are drawn and examined in a conceptually productive symmetry.

The research is based on respectable volume and complexity of empirical data, processed with extreme precision and conscious scientific responsibility. It could be assessed both from a sociological and a media point of view as professional and correct.

The contributions of the current doctoral dissertation are based on an impressive volume of empirical material. Borislav Georgiev independently conducted two empirical studies - a quantitative study of a representative sample of public opinion on the media images of the prosecutors general (2006-2020) through a questionnaire filled out by 603 respondents, and a qualitative study of expert opinions on the media images of Boris Velchev, Sotir Tsatsarov and Ivan Geshev through in-depth interviews with 15 specialists, divided into three groups. The studies were conducted correctly and are empirically verifiable.

Examining the strategic aspects of the media images of the Bulgarian prosecutors general in the period 2006-2020, Borislav Georgiev proves that their building through an opposed media model represents in its essence a conceptual projection of political-economic structures and confrontations.

Communication between politicians and citizens/voters is most important in a democratic state. Analyzing the media images of senior magistrates, Borislav Georgiev comes to significant conclusions about the effects of manipulation and propaganda in the context of public communication. In the course of his research, the doctoral student came to the interpretation that the systematic politicization of the media images of the Bulgarian prosecutors general could be defined as disinformation, manipulation, corruption, media opposition and division (p. 225).

The presented 123 bibliographic sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English show that Borislav Georgiev has the competence to interpret and analytically present a wide corpus of scientific bibliography. The cited sources are representative of the scientific field he researched, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the analysis and its contemporary pursuits.

The dissertation text is composed in three chapters, includes an introduction presenting the research design, a conclusion, scientific and scientific-applied contributions, a list of publications related to the topic of the present research, a bibliography and two appendices. Included are 3 tables and 16 figures



outlining the research objective of the doctoral thesis. The structure is balanced. The first chapter presents basic views on the nature and characteristics of image manipulation, media regulation and self-censorship. With the type of exposition chosen by the author in this theoretical chapter, the journalistic approach could be distinguished, with concrete cases and communication situations, due to which the conclusions are blurred and the reviewer is in the situation of trying himself in the implementation of summaries. The second chapter examines key cases for the prosecutor's office and prosecutors general in the period 2006-2020. The overview is methodologically based, taking into account the monitoring of the media images of Velchev, Tsatsarov and Geshev in the specified period. Chapter three presents the actual quantitative and qualitative study of the media portrayals of the three prosecutors general and the perceptions of the audience. It analyzes the obtained results, indicates conclusions and generalizations, summarized in the conclusion of the dissertation text. The structure fully meets the compositional requirements for such type of scientific text.

The text of the dissertation is distinguished by good language and style and does not deviate from the literary norms of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

The presented abstract, attached to the documentation, has a volume of 47 pages and contains the necessary scientific details, namely: object and subject of the scientific research, scientific goals and scientific tasks, obtained scientific results. The abstract meets the technical and regulatory requirements and correctly presents the essence of the dissertation thesis, both from the point of view of the content and in terms of the contributions made.

II. Contributions of the dissertation research

The main contribution of the dissertation work, in my opinion, is the creation of a new conceptual typological framework, including the opposed media projections regarding the prosecution and prosecutors general in the studied period. I also consider as a contribution the author's distinguished juxtaposition between media practices before and after 1989, in the years of transition related to political dependencies and self-censorship. The author's research on public perceptions and expert opinions on media images of Boris Velchev, Sotir Tsatsarov and Ivan Geshev present a reliable tool for building strategies in the public communication.

The two independently conducted studies – an online survey with 603 respondents and in-depth interviews with 15 experts – offer valuable factual material and sociological data. These results can be used in future research both in the field of politics, journalism and PR.

III. Notes and recommendations

Publishing this research after some revision would be beneficial to a wide range of readers, because the work is interesting, useful and valuable. I would note that the development is involved in a certain maximalism, as regards the specifics of the selfish human gene, clouded reason, the code of life, Bulgarian folk psychology and the genetic predisposition to manipulation of Bulgarians (p.85, p.229), which should to be subject to another type of study. Also, in my opinion, it is not relevant to prove an



author's hypothesis based on the research of other Bulgarian and foreign scientists, and not by the author himself, based on his own research.

I would ask the doctoral student if the criteria used to divide the media into critical and manipulative ones (p.10, p.227) would also be relevant to a study of other topics of socio-political life of Bulgaria?

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: eight publications in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and edited collective volumes are presented.

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 and Audiovisual Production", FJMC of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Image in Strategic Communication), Borislav Radoslavov Georgiev, I express to the respected members of the scientific jury my positive opinion that he should be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" (Ph.D.)

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

Date: February 15, 2024