

ACADEMIC REVIEW

by Prof. **Chavdar Hristov**, PhD, FJMC, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski " about the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the occupation of the academic position "Associate Professor" at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski " by professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Theory and History of Public Relations), promulgated Darzhaven Vestnik state gazette DV 93 / 26.11.2019

Ground for submission of the review: participation in the jury for the competition for associate professor in 3.5. Public communications and information sciences (Theory and history of public relations) according to Order No. RD 38-16 of 13.01.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski".

EDUCATION OF THE CANDIDATES

Assoc. Prof. Mila Serafimova holds a Master's Degree (1995) and a Doctorate in Journalism (2001) with a dissertation on Media Management - an Ethical Aspect. Associate Professor is with a decision of the Higher Administrative Commission of 2010 in the scientific specialty 05.02.24 "Organization and management outside the sphere of material production (Public communications in security and defense). She has worked as a journalist and editor in several Bulgarian media. She was Chief Expert (1998-2009) at the Ministry of Defense's Public Relations Directorate and later Director (2010-2012). She has specialized in public relations and security at the US Department of Defense and the George Marshall Center (2003-2004). She is fluent in English and Russian.

Assoc. Prof. Boyan Kutevski has a Master's Degree in Public Relations (2002) and a PhD in Political Science (2007) with a dissertation on "Functions of Persuasive Impact in Propaganda and Public Relations". He has been an associate

professor at the College of Management, Trade and Marketing - Sofia (2012-2013). He has worked as a reporter and editor in the Bulgarian media (1996-1998), holding express and management positions at several private companies in the field of public relations, advertising and marketing (2008-2013). From 2014 until now he is a Project Manager at two consulting agencies. He speaks English, German and Russian.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHING PRACTICE.

In the period 2001-2003, **Assoc. Prof. Mila Serafimova** is a part-time lecturer at the FJMC. From 2009 to 2010, she is the Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Leadership of the Faculty of National Security and Defense, the Military Academy "GS. Rakovsky". Since 2010 she is an Associate Professor in the same department. She is the head of the Master's program in Public Communication. She teaches Public Relations, Crisis PR, Political and Institutional PR, Media Science and Media Management, Media Training for Heads of Public Administration, Media and Corporate Security, Media and Anti-Terrorism, Strategic Communications." She is also a part-time lecturer at the Ministry of Interior Academy and the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy. She also lectures at the NATO Crisis and Excellence Center. She is the coordinator of the Media and Communication Program of the Sofia Security Forum and participates in projects of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

In the period 2011-2013 **Assoc. Prof. Boyan Kutevski** is a lecturer at the College of Management, Trade and Marketing - Sofia. He has taught the subjects of PR and Reputation Management, Political Marketing and Brand Management. In the period 2012-2017 he is the Chief Assistant at the New Bulgarian University, Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show business. He has taught at the

Bachelor's Degree in the fields of Copywriting, Organizational Reputation Management, Branding, Briefing Techniques and Brand Management. In the master's faculty he taught "Relationship Management Advertising Agency - Client" and "Internal and External Communications". Both candidates cover the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Bulgarian Law in this respect.

RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY.

Assoc. Prof. Mila Serafimova is a researcher in problematic areas of public communication, communication ethics, political communication and security and defense communication. She is the author of the following scholarly publications that largely reflect her research interest:

- Monographs, textbooks and teaching aids:

"PR in the Digital Era", Sofia: ed. Enthusiast, 2020, 184 pp., ISBN 978-619-164-318-9

"PR - Theoretical Foundations and Historical Development", Sofia: ed. Vanyo Nedkov, 2020, 211 pages, ISBN 978-619-194-060-8

„Fundamentals of Public Communication - Media Management“, monograph, 247 pp., Vanyo Nedkov Publishing House, Sofia, 2010 ISBN 978-954-9462-52-4

“Phenomena of Political Communication in the Bulgarian Media. Georgy Ganchev's PR Strategy“, 119 pp., Vanyo Nedkov Publishing House, Sofia, 2010.

"Technology of public communication. Model of Public Communication in Security and Defense", textbook, 164 pp., Vanyo Nedkov Publishing House, Sofia, 2010.

"A Practical Guide to Public Communication. Examples of security and defense. The Bulgarian Experience", Practical Guide (textbook), 173 pp., Vanyo Nedkov Publishing House, Sofia, 2010.

- Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or in peer-reviewed collective volumes:

Twenty articles were published in the period 1991-2019. From her participation in numerous national and international conferences, 23 papers were published respectively, 12 of them were published abroad. There are 18 citations to 8 publications.

She is the author and editor of a series of brochures for the Bulgarian Army, as well as a book collection in communication problems.

Assoc. Prof. Boyan Kutevski is a researcher in the field of advocacy, public relations, reputation management, advertising and integrated marketing communications. He is the author of the following scholarly publications that reflect his research interest:

- Monographs, textbooks and teaching aids:

„PR - From Propaganda to Reputation Management“, Sofia: Jay Point Plus, 2020, ISBN 978-619-91464-0-8

„Integrated Marketing Communications - An Overhaul“, Sofia: Jay Point Plus, 2019. ISBN 978-619-91464-1-5

„PR and Reputation Management“, Sofia: College of Management, Trade and Marketing, 2012, ISBN 978-954-2971-04-7

- Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or in peer-reviewed collective volumes:

There are 3 studies and 14 articles published in the period (2004-2019). He has participated with a report at an international conference. There are 7 citations in 6 publications.

HABILITATION WORKS

Assoc. Prof. Mila Serafimova participates in the competition with three monographs and eight articles, published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes. The monograph "PR in the digital era" traces the current process of transformation of traditional PR under the influence of the changed information environment, which in turn leads to changes in the theoretical thinking and practice of the social technology in question. It argues that the opposition to "traditional" with "digital" PR is artificial and outlines trends in their alignment. Several factors of change have been identified related to the influence in the online environment of astroturfing and misinformation, of civic journalism on social networks and of the cross-media accumulated impact that brings to the fore the anti-crisis management. An understanding of the strategic focus of public relations such as perception management is outlined, with emphasis on narrative and storytelling. The problem with the reputational crises of the Bulgarian institutions and the corresponding problems in the so-called institutional PR in the country are analyzed. Contemporary crisis PR is linked to the threats of online communication, formulating the claim that it is rather a source of crises than a means of dealing with them. An indisputable contribution of the monograph is the analysis of the transformation of public relations in the conditions of the new communication technologies, as well as the identification of problematic fields in this direction.

I will allow myself some comments and questions related to the monograph work. For example, the strategic orientation of PR in a context of transformation is defined as the management of perceptions. This is a term that is euphemistically defined as "soft propaganda" in the scientific literature. Does this mean that public

relations accepts propaganda as part of their communication activities? I cannot completely agree with the statement that online communication is a source of crises rather than a means of dealing with them. The online environment provides ample reciprocal crisis management capabilities. In this direction there are current scientific publications by Bulgarian authors that should be taken into account in the analysis of contemporary crisis PR.

The monograph "PR - Theoretical Foundations and Historical Development" follows in a logical sequence important milestones in the development of public relations and their theoretical understanding, spanning a considerable period. The professional perspective includes well-established practices related to communication with different audiences and organizations, basic routine activities related to planning and working with the media, a good knowledge of the journalistic profession, principles of crisis activity and the importance of media pools in this direction. The main contribution of the monograph is the updating of the theoretical and applied foundations of public relations, which builds on the existing Bulgarian scientific publications on this topic.

The monograph "Fundamentals of Public Communication - Media Management" analyzes the media environment in the last decade of the last century. The main focus is on exploring the contradictions between journalistic ethics and media management, between the social responsibility of journalists and the lack of purpose of their organizations. The explicit conflict between ethical and business values, as well as the proposals made to reconcile social responsibilities and market interests, are still relevant today.

The three monographs largely cover the subject of the competition. The articles cover analysis of problems and recommendations related to crisis and routine communication in risk situations (military conflicts), various misinformation and propaganda activities (hybrid wars), problems of institutional communication, with online threats, with the majority focused on ethical issues.

communicator commitments. The articles further elaborate on some of the issues analyzed in the monographs.

Assoc. Prof. Boyan Kutevski participates in the competition with two monographs, three studios and six articles and reports published in non-refereed scientific peer-reviewed journals or in published collective volumes. The monograph "PR - From Propaganda to Reputation Management" analyzes the evolution and interpenetration between propaganda, public relations and reputation management. Propaganda and public relations are defined as public forms of persuasive influence, with PR connecting to democratic public systems. In this connection, the similarities and differences between the two social technologies are explored. The thesis is that in our mediated society, PR is transformed into reputation management, which in its turn is separated as an independent communication channel in the evolutionary chain of propaganda - PR - reputation management.

Propaganda has been analyzed in many ways, and the differences in its use in totalitarian and democratic societies are justified. Its negative impact on the plane of persuasion - suggestion is revealed. A correct definition of manipulation is given, in this connection specifically interpreting the principles of social behavior as taught by Robert Cialdini, as well as certain media practices. The historical roots of propaganda are limited in the work of the church's Christian institution. The internet environment, related digital propaganda and its mechanisms of influence on the mass consumer are analyzed in detail. PR has been analyzed in development, followed by its gradual emancipation from propaganda and its transformation into a social technology with ethical dominants. At the same time, it has been noted as being used as a "cover" for manipulative actions by professionals who ultimately form negative public opinion about the profession. PR's relationship with journalism is presented as a competitive field, but also as

an opportunity for collaboration. The location of the PR in the marketing mix and its relationship with the ad are outlined.

In turn, the management of reputation, in the direction of corporate relations and its relationship with the stakeholders, is analyzed. The advantages of organizational reputation as an opportunity for quantification are highlighted. Examples of some of the approaches (excuses) used to manage reputational crises are justified. The undisputed contribution of the monograph is the raised discussion questions to the academic community about the interconnections, similarities and differences, as well as evolutionary changes, in accordance with the transformations in the social and technological environment that occur in communication technologies - propaganda, PR and reputation management. The author's view of the unbundling of reputation management as a separate line is noteworthy, as contemporary social and communication processes impose a similar trend.

At the same time, I cannot agree that advertising is a "contemporary and publicly accepted form of propaganda" (p. 14). Since its attribution to propaganda is only one criterion - repeatability. Repeatability is part of the persuasive impact and is inherent in different communication technologies, which does not make them the same.

Nor can I agree that Robert Cialdini "is one of the most thorough investigators of manipulation" (41 p.). He is known to be one of the leading contemporary social psychologists, and the principles / mechanisms of mass behavior he derived are aimed at the public. They are formed as a result of social evolution and are dominated by heuristics and emotions, which allows for the possible exercise of uncontrolled influence on a peripheral path (Petty and Cacioppo, Chaiken), i.e. manipulation. It should be noted that influence is not always negative for the public / group interest.

The monograph *Integrated Marketing Communications - An Overhaul* "analyzes the Integrated Marketing Communications as a major market-oriented communication management approach. The place of advertising as a long-term dominant in the Integrated Marketing Communications is critically considered. It is defined as propaganda par excellence with its impact methods that use emotional engagement and repetition of messages. At the same time, its application to political marketing and lobbying practices, its association with conflicting public values, and the exhaustion of its communication capabilities are analyzed.

The need for a conceptual change of the IMC is justified by the modern dominance of Internet communication, its market opportunities and the role of social networks in this direction. The nature, the positives and the perspectives of corporate reputation management as a possible core / center of the IMC with strategic focus are examined in detail.

Another possible alternative center of Integrated Marketing Communications - brand management is outlined. The author analyzes the brand as a kind of market-oriented construct, shaping consumer preferences, introducing a broader understanding of its perception as a communication tool. The contribution of the monograph is the outlining of possible dominants in the IMC - reputation management or brand management, dictated by the changed technological and information environment. The two monographs partially cover the subject of the competition. The studios are focused on the Integrated Marketing Communications and their potential for change in the direction of reputation or brand management, as part of the analysis is included in the eponymous monograph. Articles and reports cover problematic communication fields such as media content and stakeholder mapping capabilities, micro branding, the role of text in market-oriented online communication, the role of

social media in film branding, branding Bulgaria as a tourist destination, the use of gameplay principles sports goods, services and events.

CONCLUSION.

Accordingly, it can be reasonably argued that the two candidates are precision researchers and well-established lecturers. But given that the reviewed scientific papers presented **by Assoc. Prof. Mila Ivanova Serafimova** cover the subject matter of the competition, as well as her solid teaching experience compared with the other candidate, **I suggest her selection** in the competition academic position “Associate Professor” 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Theory and History of Public Relations), promulgated in the State Gazette, DV 93 of 11/26/2019.

Member of Scientific Jury, Prof. Chavdar Hristov, PhD

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