

OPINION

of Prof. Nikolai Kirilov Mihailov, PhD, FJMC, Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising, Member of the Scientific Jury in the procedure for taking the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Persuasion and Social Influence) for the needs of FJMC (SG, no. 103 of 10.12.2021)

Candidates:

1. Mr. Kalin Tsvetanov Kalinov
2. Mr. Plamen Atanasov Atanasov

I. Evaluation of the scientific and practical results and contributions of the scientific and educational production submitted for participation in the competition

For candidate 1.

Kalin Tsvetanov Kalinov, PhD defended his dissertation on "Applications of public diplomacy in terrorist crises after 9/11" in 2018. In the announced competition as evidence of his research he presented a monograph, a book based on defense dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "PhD", seven articles (one co-authored), published in unrefereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes, as well as nine chapters (two co-authored) from a collective monograph. A total of 18 scientific publications were presented for the competition, and the sum of the points on scientometric indicators that they carry exceeds the required according to the minimum national requirements. All publications in one way or another include the problems and topics of persuasive communication, influence, communication impact, motivation, research in the field of communication management, etc. The habilitation thesis of the candidate "*Persuasive Communication and Communication Management*", 2021, presents, systematizes and analyzes key concepts in the field of persuasive communication and its effective implementation. Mr. Kalinov has also proved twelve citations of his own works, three of which in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes. Mr. Kalinov has participated in six research projects, three of which he is a leader. The projects in which the candidate has participated are directly related to the subject

of the competition in which he is participates. Active participation in conferences and scientific forums - thirteen in number - in Bulgarian and foreign languages, which describes the candidate as an active participant in academic communication research, results, classifications and trends in the field of media, persuasive influence, communication management and reputation, social platforms, digital change of communication processes, etc. Regarding the teaching activity, Mr. Kalinov has provided solid evidence of his establishment as a lecturer, actively participating in the classroom and extracurricular activities of students. From 25.06. In 2018 he was an assistant, and from 02.01.2020 he has been holding the academic position of chief assistant at the FJMC. He teaches the disciplines "Persuasion and Social Influence", "Management of Mass Perceptions", "Persuasive Communication" and "Communication Management" or I can say that the topics of the courses he leads are entirely in the field of the competition. Mr. Kalinov also works actively with undergraduate graduates, noting seventeen research guides, in which I see evidence of the interest his lectures and academic pursuits in students and describe him as an erudite and even preferred lecturer.

Regarding the scientific content and scientific contributions of the works submitted for the competition by Mr. Kalinov, I can summarize the following. The total scientific output presented by the applicant for review and evaluation, in my opinion, fully confirms the contribution points of the self-evaluation, which is contained in the proposed Reference for original scientific contributions. Mr. Kalinov works in several very well-defined areas in the scientific topics of the announced competition. In the presented monograph "Persuasive Communication and Communication Management" his research attention is focused on the implementation of persuasive communication and impact in the context of modern concepts of communication management in Bulgaria. On the basis of comparison and historical tracing of concepts, an argumentative typology of the concept is reached by examining a number of definitions and presenting a basic approach to distinguishing between "persuasive communication" and "social influence". Mr. Kalinov builds a solid and well-argued scientific apparatus to achieve reliable results. The original approach of the candidate consists in the successful attempt to build a model of persuasive influence in the context of the undertaken effective experience for communication influence. It is based on the extensive theoretical research and case studies, a specificity of the research handwriting of Mr. Kalinov. It also reflects a current trend in communication knowledge, namely the practical validity and direction of scientific results. In addition to receiving facts confirming already known theories and interpretations, the candidate does not hesitate to present their concepts and models, to offer

an author's definition of "persuasive communication": "Persuasive communication is a process of deliberate and nonviolent formation, strengthening or changing the attitudes and / or intentions of another person or group of people."(p. 39). Another important area of research with which the candidate fits into the scientific field of the announced competition is the identification of trends and the creation of a model of strategic persuasive influence in modern communication management. Mr. Kalinov shows skills not only in describing and understanding the stated problem, but also comes to an explanation and, accordingly, to proposing models, a fundamental way of scientific understanding, and not just as "cabinet" (p. 226) description of a phenomenon. "Often persuasion is the goal of a communication campaign" (p. 227), the candidate writes. Not only campaigns, I would add, but human communication in general is inconceivable without persuasive dialogue, that *eristike techne* (heuristic dialogue or art of argument), which the ancient sophists talk about and which is aimed at convincing the interlocutor in the communicator's own point of view – Dispute or argumentation is a basic skill for success. The applicant Kalinov builds on the existing ones and proposes a model based on a marketing concept for market volume, the aim being to solve a communication problem for the respective brand. I would summarize that the conceptually proposed results of Mr. Kalinov in his main field of scientific interest are consistent, reasoned and realize a social effect - scientific, scientific-applied and educational. The emphasis on the detailed study of the practical dimensions of communication situations, skilful and their impact, skilful handling of empirical research methods and data handling is a characteristic research style of the candidate. Again, in the spirit of the ancient sophists, the problem of the relativization of knowledge at all arises here, if it is not supported by proper evidence from practice. In the case of persuasiveness and the social impact it has, this is a key situation. The candidate has taken this into account and created communication models that target the social networks and websites of various organizations as a form of social influence based on trust - "the mass audience relies on structures that are already trusted" (Public diplomacy and..., pp. 248). I can point out two important things here, namely - persuasion today reaches the broadest social limits and second - persuasion as communication is institutionalized, ie. more and more social organizations are working on its implementation. Social media is changing the very topography of persuasion - it is now done through tweets, posts, hashtags or even recent emojis, rather than the main face to face, as in the classic cases known to us from the time of Aristotle or Carl Hovland. All this is based on the research approach of the candidate Mr. Kalinov, describing him as a consistent and penetrating author. but also a lecturer in this scientific field.

The candidate's activities as a lecturer in the specialty "Communication Management" have led him to a theoretical attempt to clarify this concept. According to him, communication management as a concept contains the idea that this is a management function and should be considered as such, and this "is undoubtedly a step in the right direction." On the other hand, I would find it difficult to agree that one of the dominant communication disciplines today is marketing ("The most dominant of communication disciplines over the last few decades have been public relations and marketing", Conceptual framework for communication management). Marketing communications may be, but anyway, communication is only an aid to reaching goods and producers and traders in general to the consumer market. Philip Kotler in the latest, 15th edition of his famous textbook Marketing Management gives an example of Coca Cola brand marketing, which in its various marketing tools includes a digital communication model with customers through "axial" topics such as "happiness" or "optimism". but this is only part of the general economic policy to increase consumer interest in the content of the product offered. But what marketing lacks as a business tool are competencies that can certainly be complemented by communication tools such as direct connectivity with customers and consumers. Therefore, I support the contribution expressed by the candidate to the conceptualization of the strategic goals of a communication campaign through the prism of the desired persuasive impact on consumers. This interest is indeed of both scientific and applied nature, as it can be applied by professionals in the field, for example by theoretical and empirical framing of the role of communication manager in modern organizations, which presented the candidate in some chapters. , whose (co) author he is in the collective monograph.

In conclusion, the presented scientific production of the candidate covers several thematic fields relevant to the announced competition: persuasive communication and social influence, communication management, dimensions and transformations of digital public diplomacy. Analyzing the main paradigms in the field of persuasive communication, Mr. Kalinov argues that his original contribution is the modernization or elimination of some of the established concepts in the adopted model of explanation. Persuasion does not mean coercion to something you do not want to do, it has ethical foundations, and the role of the communicator is to provide arguments for a change in behavior or attitude, he shows the logic behind ideas. The evidence presented by the candidate confirms my belief in a specialist with high skills for teaching disciplines related to the subject of the competition, who has gained serious experience and a positive routine despite his young age.

For candidate 2.

Plamen Atanasov Atanasov, PhD has defended his dissertation on "The role of computer-mediated communication in causing and managing reputational and managerial crises. Survey of the content of blogs, corporate and information sites, discussion and thematic forums and social networks related to reputational and managerial crises "in 2017 located as a topic in the field of reputation management and crisis communication. To participate in this competition, the candidate presented as an argument for his research work a habilitation thesis (Reputational Crises Online, 2018), an article (co-authored) in a referenced publication in global databases, nineteen articles published in non-refereed journals with scientific reviewing or published in edited collective volumes, as well as three chapters published in a collective monograph, a total of 24 scientific publications in Bulgarian and English. The candidate also presented a reference to citations, one of which in a scientific publication, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases, and five more in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review. Thus, the total number of points that the candidate collects and can prove significantly exceeds the required minimum national criteria, which speaks of a serious researcher with established and defended scientific positions. Regarding the scientific content and scientific contributions of Mr. Atanasov. The candidate's habilitation thesis examines reputation and its management (ie control) - "Reputation is a functional manifestation of image" (p.21). This statement is not entirely true. Trust and reputation are important in any exchange, be it social, personal or commercial, but regardless of the image of a country, even when it sometimes suffers, the reputation of its production or goods is always high. A similar example can be given with the German car industry - despite the disastrous image of Germany after World War II, the reputation of German carmakers managed to strengthen the country economically, mainly through exports to the former adversary - the United States. I highly appreciate the candidate's precise research on the problems of reputation and the way in which it affects the presence of corporations in any of the social fields - economic, political, military, educational, to develop a classification and conduct independent research to establish the relationship between crisis, risk and reputation. But it seems to me that the idea of the monograph will be realized more successfully in the field of communication crisis management. Academic researchers of communication such as Mr. Atanasov study methods and procedures, and in this case theoretically substantiate what is or is not effective in crisis response, how reputation is threatened, etc. These are important issues for communication science and obviously the candidate has significant achievements in this field, because as he noted in the report on

scientific contributions, "the proposed developments are focused on reputational crises and reputational threats after the expansion of social relationships caused by the Internet." Reference to original scientific contributions). The topic of the competition is related to persuasion, ie. with convincing content of communication messages and the potential of their influence and comprehensive penetration into society, even in everyday life. The emphasis on reputational crises shifts the vector of the author's efforts (full and consistent otherwise) to another perspective of the phenomenon of communication - reaction to a negative event ["caused by the crisis - NM] and is accompanied by strong public negativity towards the bearer of reputation " (, P.39) with a potentially threatening outcome or result for an organization or company. For example, advertising no longer relies solely on outright messages to buy (so-called hard sell), but also on more convincing and emotional methods of persuasion and influence, affecting the maximum number of people. It should be noted that in habilitation work there is a significant place for persuasive communication (Chapter 4, pp. 137 - 151). Despite the interesting and in-depth observations in it, Mr. Atanasov spoke there about "persuasion [as for - NM] - rather a psychological process, presented in the perspective of communication", and at least I did not find the distinction between persuasion and suggestion. Persuasive communication, in my opinion, is a complex process, the psychological process often involves direct contact of the persuader with persuasion, and in today's globalized social situation influencers rely not so much on direct contact but on their followers sharing a common cultural and social environment. The psyche always signifies the subjective perception of an objective environment, persuasive communication seeks sharing, multidirectional impact, diversity of media and channels of influence. Digital technologies, on the other hand, change the very nature of persuasion by blurring the boundaries between information, entertainment and influence, which can also carry a social message. Mr. Atanasov is well acquainted with the content of "web communication", but the lack of a sufficiently dense research context on the topic of the competition in places in habilitation work has in the part dedicated to persuading topics about computer "viruses" that are malware and they strive not for persuasion, but for covert and forcible receipt of information, which must be hidden, personal and controlled. I would rather focus on the opportunity provided by digital technology to change the content of persuasive messages by giving them meaning that they did not initially have. In general, I am left with the impression that the habilitation work of Mr. Atanasov, although obviously the result of in-depth research, with clear classifications and accurate summaries, was realized as an effort in the field of crisis communication, which the author knows very well. And perhaps it was prepared at an earlier stage and for various academic and scientific purposes. The other academic production

of Mr. Atanasov is also fruitful and diverse, which describes him as a profound and erudite researcher, extremely well acquainted with the subject and object of his scientific research. In it, he focuses on important and current issues of modern communication knowledge - organizational reputation, "trolls" and hackers as a threat to a reputational crisis, issues of trust in the communication process, artificial intelligence in the context of online communication and even Covid 19 problems or everyday life, this notion of phenomenological sociology. Some of the publications are provoked by current events, while others are a continuation of the candidate's stated scientific interest in the problems of crisis communication, reputation management and the dynamics of online media, fake news as a way of social influence. As a contributor, the candidate pointed out "author's summary that the choice of communication channel depends on the need for information in both parts: timeliness and reliability", and for this purpose conducted its own sociological study. It is primarily related to the interest of young people in various facts and events and problematizes the reliability of the information they receive, especially in the context of online interaction. In the foreground in the otherwise interesting and focused research of the candidate are topics that would have a realization in a different optics of research. Persuasion is unthinkable without the free choice of the communicator, people must be free to choose and change their behaviour as a result of the persuasive effect of communication. In this sense, persuasive influence as a symbolic process of incitement to free choice is different from coercion, manipulation and propaganda. Although extremely broad in subject matter, the proposed works of the candidate contain a relatively small number of pages dedicated to the announced in the competition trajectory of the communication process - persuasion as a communication mechanism for more delicate or explicit or impact on beliefs, beliefs, emotions and actions of individuals, and are devoted mainly to establishing various social facts in this field. Of course, an extremely complex and important scientific task, but it seems to be too wide in scope and sometimes causes difficulties for correct statements and summaries by the candidate. For example, Frederick II Hohenstaufen, who lived in the 13th century, was proclaimed emperor of the "Roman Empire" (p. 24 of the habilitation work, in fact emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, a completely different political union), the classical notions of ethics without which It is impossible that even the millennial religious-cultural tradition has been defined without serious arguments as invalid ("it is no longer exhaustive to use criteria such as virtues, duty and values, but probably a complex combination of them in a dynamic conglomerate", truth... ", good moral deeds do not have objective truth, it is determined by the virtue of the one who performs them), computer-mediated communication according to the candidate is" communication process realized using

networked computers "(Place and role on the Internet in building social perception ", it is not clear whether this is human communication or just machine). I am writing this not in order to reduce the obvious serious academic achievements of Mr. Atanasov, not in the least. His extensive knowledge and erudition, scientific curiosity, and seemingly inexhaustible research energy cannot be denied. My idea is that sometimes too wide a front of scientific interest leaves important problems as if only hinted at, and serious and significant claims sometimes remain insufficiently explained and well grounded.

In connection with the teaching activity, Mr. Atanasov presented documents which show that during his doctoral studies he conducted 30 hours of exercises in the discipline "Persuasive Communication" and that he was the teacher of an optional course "Institutional Transmedia Image" and have 15 classroom hours during the school year 2017/2018, which I am convinced have been implemented at a high level by him. As well as certainly this can be said for the reviews he has prepared for bachelor's and master's theses. A note was also presented proving the professional experience of the candidate as PR expert for two years. However, at least I did not find in the evidence presented by my colleague data proving significant experience and sustainable habits of working with students or graduates, especially compared to his competitor. I also did not find data on significant participation in research projects, sufficiently proving the practical skills of the candidate for research and applied activities. However, the activity of Mr. Atanasov as a participant in various academic forums at home and abroad is impressive - conferences, seminars, events, with reports and presentations.

In conclusion, the presented scientific and research products of the candidate Mr. Atanasov is an obvious result of serious and deep interest by showing the author's skills to focus on new and current topics in the field of communication knowledge, to use the methods of empirical sociological research. Also to build on what has been achieved by seeking new, unexplored aspects of the subject under study. For the most part, however, this significant production differs from the theme of the competition - persuasion and social influence - sometimes affecting it only indirectly, rather than directly examining the dynamics of persuasive influence. The main contributions of the candidate are in the field of crisis communication, reputation and care for public and perception, i.e. taking action in the communication aspect during a crisis situation or the emergence of a threat in the conditions and of the digital communication impact.

II. Conclusion. The announced competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" involves two candidates who I personally know well as active researchers, serious young scientists with significant scientific achievements, which makes it difficult for me to choose

one of them as a proposal for the position. However, the objective reading of the evidence presented by the two colleagues leads me to an impartial assessment. Persuasion is a symbolic communication process, a conscious experience of the communicator, a successful intentional effort to change people's attitudes to a part of social reality in the conditions of free choice. It always includes some kind of influence, the awareness that the believer has the ability to change his attitude as a result of the messages or actions of the other / others (social influence). In this regard, the presented evidence for scientific and research activities of **Mr. Kalin Kalinov**, the topics of his habilitation work and a large part of his other publications, his scientific visibility by citing his works, as well as his profile as an experienced lecturer who actively works with students, participant and leader in research projects in the field of persuasive communication impact, **make me recommend to the esteemed members of the FC of FJMC that he can be elected to the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Persuasion and Social Influence)**. Without in any way underestimating the knowledge, experience and scientific qualities of **Mr. Plamen Atanasov**, I rank the candidate **in second place**.

Date: 30.03.2022

Member of the jury: Prof. Nikolai Mihailov, PhD