

REVIEW

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For obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field

1.2 Pedagogy (Media Pedagogy)

With a dissertation on the topic: "The role of public relations (PR) in football for media literacy"

Presented by Dimitar Penev

with supervisor: Prof. Bozhidar Angelov, DSc.

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

Structure, volume. The dissertation has a total volume of 158 pages in pdf format, of which the main text is 129 pages. It is organized into an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and five appendices. The references used are 105 - scientific literature in Cyrillic and Latin, as well as online sources.

The subject and object of the dissertation are defined correctly and clearly. A terminological justification is given for concepts important for the quality of the dissertation: football, media and communications, image, publicity and public space, football club, image and public space, media literacy. Six research tasks are listed, which I report as completed. The visual presentation of the research parameters makes a good impression.

The research methodology includes analysis of literature sources, questionnaires with different target groups - (1) PR specialists of professional football clubs, (2) sports journalists, (3) owners, sponsors, members of management and supervisory boards, sport-technical and executive directors of professional football clubs, (4) players of professional football clubs and (5) fans. I find this approach - to consult all stakeholders in football sports communication - to be the right one, as it gives a more complete picture of the problem under study. The study was conducted between May 2019 and February 2023 and involved a total of 278 randomly selected respondents.

Topic Relevance. The topic is dissertationally defined and offers an original perspective on the responsibility of public sport communication for media literacy education. I have not seen media literacy considered through the lens of sports (football) PR before, therefore there is a scholarly and practical-applied contribution. I agree with the author's assertion that football should be seen as a social phenomenon that is at the centre of unceasing public and media interest. The dissertator draws attention to the different interests (mainly financial) in football and how these practices "trigger different discussions about the direction in which this most popular sport is evolving and about the

change in its essential characteristics" (p. 4). The relevance of the topic can also be seen in the conversation that has finally begun in Bulgaria about the responsibility of public figures in public speaking and actions, and the responsibility of content creators who lack the professional knowledge and education for ethical behaviour, as well as the awareness that celebrity brings consequences for reckless behaviour. The author logically emphasizes the role of information flows and the creation of a global information space (p. 5) and the problems arising from overinformation in the context of media literacy.

For D. Penev important are ethical communication practices, through which trust would be formed towards the organization and its members. Quite reasonably, he emphasizes that building trust requires not only a meaningful two-way communication process, but also a sufficiently prolonged and productive accumulation of positive experiences of communicating with the organization or structure to be perceived as a credible source and reliable communicator. And one more point of relevance - for me, the PhD starts a serious conversation on the topic of media literacy and media responsibility in public communications, which can (and should) go beyond sports PR and apply to all other public relations practitioners.

The first chapter is entitled "Program orientation of the research" and in it the author clarifies the attributes of the work - relevance, subject, object, hypothesis, type of research. The main concepts in the text are precisely defined and the expectations from the surveys with the different target groups are substantiated. This chapter has a total length of 8 pages.

Chapter two offers a "Theoretical analysis of the problem area". The focus is on the relationship football - public communications - media literacy. Here the author identifies trends and processes that influence the development and maintenance of a positive image and reputation. Especially the business success of an organization depends on communication strategies for a positive reputation. An interesting parallel is drawn between behavioral deviations and distortions and how they reflect on the intra-group dynamics and on the equilibrium of its members. The author's observation is that in such situations the PR specialist acts as a mediator between the players and the public. Consequently, "he is an important factor in stabilizing interpersonal interdependencies, mainly encompassing the functioning of the team in the training process and official competitions, in accordance with the pursued goals, i.e. the effectiveness of team activity depends to a determining degree on the organizational and media comfort of the players and the club's service teams" p. 48). Such actions presuppose a media literate PR expert.

The third chapter is entitled "Methodological and organizational parameters of the study". Like chapter one, it is 8 pages long. It argues the reason for conducting the surveys with different target groups. Indicators of importance in the design of the questions are indicated for each questionnaire.

Chapter four presents an analysis of the results of the study ("Analysis of the Study Results"). The data are presented through tables and charts. The study and the

subsequent analysis prove the hypothesis that: 'We suggest that there is an interdependence between the professional-sporting, social and financial-economic positions of football structures, presented as club policies, and the way their image is reflected in the public space, which provokes positives/negatives in the education of media literacy. In this perspective, the public image of football entities is directly dependent on the degree of development of their media literacy" (pp. 13-14). The results are important in terms of how PR professionals perceive their role as mediator in the relationship between clubs, media and the public sphere.

3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied results

I accept as correct the proposed scientific contributions in terms of the theoretical interpretation of the problem area, terminological justification of the problematic and research projections. Without neglecting the work carried out in theoretical terms, I would like to point out as a significant contribution the developed and approbated author's methodology for the study of the orientations of different groups of respondents. Another indisputable contribution is the compilation of the 'Handbook of Football PR'.

4. Critical comments, recommendations and questions

My comments are on the structure, not the quality of the text. I believe that the place of meteorological attributes is in the introduction of a scientific text. This implies that the author should state his/her research intention and how he/she intends to achieve it at the very beginning of the text. Chapter one, for example, as well as chapter four, could become part of the introduction in an eventual publication of the text as a book.

My question is: 'What concrete measures can football PR experts take to develop media literacy among their target audiences?'

5. Conclusion

Finally, I reaffirm the relevance of the topic. The dissertation is written literately, in good scientific language. The critical analysis and the empirical study have been carried out in good faith and important results have been achieved that would be of use not only to communication professionals but also to all target groups addressed in the text. The six publications presented exceed the minimum national requirements and are on the topic of the PhD. The abstract succinctly presents the developed topic. For these reasons, I will vote positively for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to Dimitar Radoslavov Penev for his thesis on 'The role of public relations (PR) in football for media literacy education'.

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