



## REVIEW AND OPINION

**With relation to:** competition for holding the academic position of 'Associate professor', in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, scientific specialty 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric);

**Reviewer:** assoc. prof. Gerasim PETRINSKI, PhD, Head of the Department of Rhetoric, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski,' appointed member of the commission under the Rector's Directive № РД-38-489/22.8.2022

### GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE COMPETITION

The competition has been announced in the State Gazette, issue 61 from 02.08.2022, for the Department of Rhetoric, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'.

All procedures provided by the Law and the statutes of the Sofia University have been duly completed.

### CANDIDATES

For participation in the competition for associate professor in the field 2.3. Philosophy (rhetoric) documents were submitted by one candidate – Ch. Assistant Professor Yana Krasimirova Sabeva, PhD, full time lecturer at the Department of Rhetoric at the Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". For the competition the candidate has submitted the following documents:

1. Curriculum vitae;
2. Diplomas for educational degrees "Master" (2);
3. Diploma for successfully defended educational and scientific degree "PhD";
4. Employment contract for a full-time position "Chief assistant professor" at the Department of Rhetoric, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski";
5. Certificate from the Human Resources Department of Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', according to which she obtains at present the academic position 'chief assistant professor';
6. Copy from the candidate's labor booklet;
7. Official notes from the following organizations for the candidate's participation in projects:
  - Direct Media Kres Agency, for participation in two projects aimed at organizing of a communication campaign;
  - Non-profitable organization "National network for the children", for participation in a project to develop a communication strategy and operational plan and a project to prepare a strategy for the development of the public image and identity of the National Network for Children;



- „Speedy Ltd.“ for managing of projects to develop various PR strategies for the company;
- Municipality of Varna for participation as a "Communication and Information" expert under the project "Functioning of the Regional Information Center - Varna";
- “Remark Consulting Ltd” for participation in the project training module for strategic communications” of the European patients’ forum;
- Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for participation in a project under the “Scientific Research Fund”.

8. List of all scientific publications;

9. List of publications submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position ‘Associate Professor’;

10. List of scientific contributions generated by the ‘Authors’ system;

11. Information on the fulfillment of the minimum scientific requirements for holding the academic position "Associate Professor" according to Art. 2b of the Academic Staff Development Act (ASDA);

12. List of observed citations;

13. Information on the scientific contributions of the candidate;

14. Information on the educational activity of the candidate;

15. Information for membership in various professional and scientific organizations;

16. Publications for the competition;

17. Abstracts of publications in Bulgarian and English;

18. Issue of the State Gazette of December 10, 2021 with the announcement of the competition;

19. Application for admission to the competition.

From the attached documents, it is clear that the candidate ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Yana Sabeva completed her master's degree in "Economics (Marketing and Management)" at the University of National and World Economy in 2000 and her master's degree in 2.3. Philosophy/Rhetoric – in 2014. In 2018 she defended her doctoral dissertation in 2.3. Philosophy/Rhetoric. From 2018 until now, she has been an assistant professor in 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric) in the Department of Rhetoric.

### III. TEACHING AND PROJECT ACTIVITY. PARTICIPATION IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

Yana Sabeva has profound teaching experience. The disciplines she teaches are in the field of general rhetoric ("Rhetoric," "Rhetoric and communication skills," "Non-verbal communication") and specifically in the field of business rhetoric and public relations. Dr. Sabeva teaches numerous undergraduate majors in various faculties of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Pedagogy, Faculty of Geology and Geography, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications, Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, etc.), as well as in the master's program "Rhetoric." Her academic workload



significantly exceeds the required norm. She has supervised five successfully defended master's students in the master's program "Rhetoric." Her participation in the activities of the academic community is also noticeable – she actively participates in thesis defense committees. She is the editor of a collective volume with materials from scientific conferences. She has been a member of the Rhetoric Online magazine editorial board (<https://rhetoric-bg.com/>), published by the Department of Rhetoric from the start. She is a member of several non-governmental and professional organizations and their projects.

The above teaching activity meets the formal requirements for participation in the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" and significantly exceeds them. The positive feedback from students about her work should also be noted.

Active work on projects is added to the scientific activity of Dr. Sabeva (total of 210 points in the group of indicators E) /app. 12/, editing scientific collections and belonging to scientific communities. She is a member of the "Bulgarian Society for Public Relations" and its Management Board, as well as "Society.bg". Actively participates as a consultant and expert in scientific projects (for "National Network for Children," "Direct Media Kress," Municipality of Varna, etc.). All the listed activities are duly supported with the necessary documentary evidence.

#### IV. RESEARCH

##### 1. Overview

The scientific research activity of the candidate receives a total of 720 points on all indicators for compliance with the minimum national requirements (Article 16 of the ASDA).

Dr. Sabeva presented for participation in the competition /appendix. 10C/ the following studies:

##### **1. 2 scientific reviewed monographs:**

- **Rhetorical aspects of integrated marketing communications in the context of a pandemic. Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022, ISBN:978-954-07-5427-7 (main study presented for the competition).**
- **Rhetoric and crisis communications. Analysis of the 2020 and 2021 crises. Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022, ISBN:978-954-07-5475-8**

##### **2. 1 monograph based on the candidate's PhD thesis:**

**Non-verbal aspects in business communication, Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2020, ISBN:987-954-07-5016-3 (the book is based on a dissertation)**



3. **1 article published in a reviewed and indexed journal (WoS);**
4. **5 articles published in non-indexed journals peer reviewed journal or in collective volumes.**

All articles are written in Bulgarian and have been published in peer-reviewed and/or indexed journals, or in reviewed collective volumes. Her scientific activity meets the minimum scientometric requirements (a total of 255 points in group D, see Annex 12). The points obtained from citations of her scientific works also meet the minimum scientometric requirements (a total of 105 points in group E, see Annex 12). The research presented for participation in the competition is entirely in its subject field, in particular in the field of general theory of communication, non-verbal communication, and, of course, business rhetoric.

**It must be noted that the candidate is not entitled to apply for a higher academic position with a work that repeats to a significant extent the topic and content of her doctoral dissertation. For this reason, I will not take into account the monograph №2 for the overall assessment.**

In addition to the attached research papers in the subject area of the competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor", Dr. Sabeva has presented an expanded list of publications, which includes 7 additional scientific articles/appendix. 10A/.

The candidate's research activity also includes participation in 11 conferences (according to the "Authors" system) in the period 2018-2022. Most of them are in the subject field of rhetoric and communication (non-verbal communication, crisis communication, business rhetoric).

## 2. Contributions

### 2.1. *Habilitation monography*

The monograph presented as a habilitation thesis focuses on the rhetorical aspects of integrated marketing communications in the context of a pandemic. This is the first such study in Bulgarian that effectively applies the theoretical apparatus of rhetoric in marketing. Its reviewers are Prof. Dr. Margarita Pesheva and Assoc. Dr. Gerasim Petrinski and the scientific editor is Prof. Dr. Tsvetan Davidkov. The book contains 174 pages and is organized into three chapters with their respective sub-chapters.

Virtual rhetoric, which occupies the bulk of integrated marketing communications, is a field of research that has been around for a while. However, the author grasped quickly and adequately the impact of the global pandemic - a dynamic chain of events that continues even today - on communication and rhetoric. We should note the extreme topicality of the researched topic. We will likely experience the effects of the global pandemic and the forced fragmentation of society and extreme individualization for decades. I think that Sabeva's analysis shows an



excellent knowledge of the scientific apparatus, and her conclusions are well-founded and extremely useful for studying the modern "triumph of indirect communication."

In my opinion, one of the most significant contributions of the book is its modern interdisciplinary approach. The object of the study is the so-called "integrated marketing communications" (IMC) and the changes they underwent during the most acute stage of the global Covid-19 pandemic from late 2019 to mid-2021. However, Sabeva allows herself to do more than analyze the specific period she studies. She successfully makes suggestions about the future impact of the changes in communication between the business and its customers/audience due to the pandemic (p. 151-158). The author has successfully combined rhetoric (ancient and modern) with marketing and public relations theory. This method makes the study valuable not only from a theoretical but also from a practical point of view. Sabeva effectively demonstrates that advertising is not just the "illegitimate daughter of rhetoric" (according to Prof. V. Rumenchev) but a specific type of oratory that combines elements of deliberative, judicial, and epideictic eloquence in the context of the classical rhetorical "canon" (*inventio - dispositio - elocutio - memoria - actio - pronuntiatio* - cf. table 5, p. 143). Conceptual and theoretical apparatus specifically related to "crisis communication" is formulated (esp. pp. 82-85), which can be applied in other thematic branches of rhetoric in the future.

Structurally, the monograph is clear, precise, and elucidative. The first chapter (p. 11-38) focuses on clarifying the concept of "integrated marketing communications," understood as a complex of different communication channels to convey a particular business message (p. 14), and the specific changes that they undergo as a result of the global pandemic. Sabeva researches and presents the factors determining the changed communicative situation (economic instability, changes in the life stereotype and needs). She also provides a useful detailed chronology of the pandemic in light of her subject (pp. 25-35). The author draws attention to a critical phenomenon in modern communications, namely the hyper-personalization of messages, currently achieved chiefly (but not only) through computer algorithms. This process did not begin with the global pandemic. Still, COVID-19 undoubtedly acted as a catalyst for it, and business communication is only one of the spheres of rhetoric in which we find its manifestation. As the author calls it, a kind of "pandemic rhetoric" can also be seen in political language. The formation of micro-audiences as a consequence of globalization and technological progress is a scientific question that rhetoricians should pay serious attention to, and not only in the context of business communication. Perhaps the decline of classical political ideologies we are witnessing in the Western world, as well as the focus on minorities, is a reflection of this fragmentation – this time politically.

The **second chapter** (pp. 38-116) occupies the largest part of the study. It focuses on the application of digital communication channels in integrated marketing strategies. While I do not find the analogy between radio and social media during the Great Depression particularly successful (p. 38), the theoretical overview of the use of the digital medium to deliver a targeted business message is practical and, I would argue, innovative. The features of the virtual space as



a mediator between the "speaker" and his audience are successfully formulated. These are speed, feedback, and predictability of the effect through various algorithms (pp. 40-41). Special attention is paid to a new type of speaker, namely vloggers, and some recommendations for a successful vlog, including emotional appeals and ethos. Typical mixes of the advertising message with educational themes, social causes, achieving a family idyll, use of celebrities, etc., are also traced. Dr. Joseph Goebbels recommended similar approaches concerning political propaganda.

On pp. 54-59, an interesting overview of the main tasks and functions of advertising in the conditions of a pandemic, especially on the Internet, is made. Both traditional and innovative rhetorical devices for achieving the goal of making a purchase are examined. The author has drawn attention to the different uses of emotion (rhetorical pathos), for example, creating an emotional connection between consumers of a particular brand, the idea of loyalty to it (the "loyal customer"), and giving emotional value to online shopping. Both there and on pp. 92-98 (and table 2), valuable strategies for increasing and promoting sales are presented - for example, preserving impulsive sales through pop-up advertising, influence marketing, and marketing linked to a particular social cause. Sabeva also pays attention to printed media and print advertising, which finds a new path of development in the conditions of almost complete dominance of digital communication. The author makes well-grounded assumptions about the prospects for this "luxury" way of promoting products. Quite rightly, she emphasizes the higher veracity of both printed means of communication and traditional media in general - radio and television.

As I said above, this chapter defines the concept of "crisis communication" in terms of business rhetoric. The factors that condition this specific type of communication and its manipulative strategies (e.g., "social responsibility" and the demonstration of concern and support regarding the pandemic) are analyzed.

In the same chapter, attention is paid to the general ethical problems related to PR strategies (pp. 85-87). Notably, the existing professional codes and regulations in this field are primarily associated with practical, even technical issues, e.g., content credibility, the possibility of manipulation, fake news, and overexposure to specific topics (p. 85). I will return to the ethical issues that have historically formed the backbone of charges against rhetoric in general in the questions I will put to the candidate at the end of this review.

At the end of the chapter, the author focuses on the relatively modern phenomenon of employer branding. According to Sabeva, the communication issues faced by corporations in their endeavor to attract quality personnel and retain the already available ones are formulated and numbered.

The second chapter contains three interviews with leading specialists in business communication and management (Dobromir Djurov, pp. 71-77, Asen Asenov, pp. 88-91, and Katya Dimitrova, pp. 111-115). Both materials serve as empirical research and are extremely



useful. However, the reader expects the author to draw more explicitly defined conclusions after each of them.

The third chapter (pp. 116-169) is devoted to the relationship between rhetoric and integrated marketing communications. This part of the monograph is also the most interesting from a rhetorical point of view. Already at the beginning of the chapter, Sabeva poses the research questions:

"Is there reason to look for common ground between [rhetoric] and [ICT]"?

"Are the ancient rhetorical devices applicable to today's situation?"

The answer to the first question, both in my opinion and the author's opinion, is positive. The second question, I think, is not asked correctly. Rhetoric is not an "ancient" science nor an "ancient" art, except in the sense of its long historical tradition. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It is as old as human society and will probably accompany that society until the very sunset of humanity. We cannot stop persuading, just as we cannot stop communicating. In this sense, it would be more productive to answer the question, "What tools of persuasion, rhetorical in nature, are used in the specific sphere of IMT?". The other would limit rhetoric itself to the means of persuasion invented by Aristotle and Cicero for their own epoch. As Dr. Sabeva herself quite rightly emphasizes (p. 123), "with the development of information technologies over the years, the definitions of the concept of "rhetoric" quite naturally expand in scope." From a methodological point of view, it is more productive to look not only for how the traditional means of rhetoric are transformed but also for the emergence of entirely new means of persuasion, understood as creating, changing, or strengthening an opinion, an emotion, or a decision to act.

Despite the above-mentioned methodological flaw, this part of the study is original and well-founded in content. Some classic definitions of rhetoric are effectively presented and applied to the specific topic researched by the candidate, thereby justifying their applicability to IMT. A parallel is drawn with the classic components of argument (logos, pathos, and ethos) refracted through the traditional marketing mix of product, price, promotion, and distribution (pp. 117-118 and Table 3). I would have suggested a different approach, but the author's methodology is generally acceptable.

After brief but informative and well-balanced introductory remarks on visual and digital rhetoric, the author moves on to an analysis of the Internet audience (pp. 127-135). On p. 135, in tab. 4, she reasonably formulates the specifics of communication with this particular audience - some of these specifics are new to the art of oratory. Prominent among these are the many identities that both the speaker and each audience member can assume and the outcome's predictability that allows for unprecedented political and business manipulation.



Dr. Sabeva emphasizes the role of non-logical means (pathos and ethos in the Aristotelian paradigm) for the construction of argumentativeness among influencers ("the new speakers") and in corporate communication. Historically, the logical connection between "expertise," understood differently by different societies, and authority has been a priori established. When the promoter was not an in-depth specialist in the field he was commenting on, he was still usually part of a larger structure, and his job was simply to make foreign messages more attractive to a broader audience. The emancipation of the charismatic amateur is rare in European history from Antiquity to the present day – for the ancient Near East, it is even more typical. The dilettantism and profaning of science with severe political consequences seem to have stood out most clearly in the post-World War I era with the rise of belligerent, half-educated, aggressive personalities like Hitler and his ideological guru Alfred Rosenberg. Nowadays, the ultra-liberal digital space enables amateurs in particular fields or simply ambitious individuals through charisma and persistence to attract huge audiences and shape public opinion in areas that are, and should, in principle, be subject to unbiased expertise. On pp. 136-139, Dr. Sabeva highlights the means that would guarantee the success of this "shortcut to rhetoric" (after Raffaella Cribbiore). As a manipulative strategy, the "full disclosure" to the audience and the "obliteration of the boundary between private and public space" (p. 138) are of great interest here. It is as if we are witnessing the same phenomenon in the public space with the construction of pseudo-left "lifestyle" ideologies.

On pp. 141-145, the author effectively applies some specific rhetoric tools and typologies in the advertising field. On p. 143, tab. 5, she places the classic six phases in the creation of oratory in the context of the creative process in advertising.

At the end of her research, Dr. Sabeva makes proper and well-grounded predictions related to the future development of marketing strategies for brand and product communication. In my opinion, the most important of her conclusions concerns the blurring of boundaries between traditional forms such as PR and advertising. According to her, the boundaries between these forms of business communication will continue to be erased (p. 157).

In my opinion, the monograph presented for the competition is persuasive and very well-founded. It also has serious practical application in rhetorical research.

*2.2. Rhetoric and crisis communications. Analysis of the 2020 and 2021 crises. Sofia: University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022*

The monograph is intended to be a continuation of the previous book of the candidate /see general overview in appendix 17/. It contains 179 pages and is divided into an introduction, an unnumbered introductory part, three chapters, and a conclusion.





The research topic is precisely and relatively narrowly formulated and corresponds to the scope of the research. As in the habilitation work, the author focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on business communication. Here, however, the author pays particular attention to the modifications that the PR sphere is undergoing and the formation of "crisis rhetoric" and "pandemic PR" in this area. Dr. Sabeva examines the issue in the light of rhetoric and the application of rhetorical practices in a modern business context.

The first chapter (pp. 24-50) mainly examines one of the components of the argument in the classical Aristotelian trichotomy "logos - pathos - ethos." The author examines not so much the classical "ethos" as the collective image of an entire organization, which appears as a "collective speaker" (cf. and p. 88) in a comprehensive set of strategies for persuasion over a long period and in numerous communicative acts. Different definitions of the concept of "reputation" are applied, emphasizing the role of the Internet as a specific mediator in its construction. Dr. Sabeva, somewhat surprisingly, separates "ethos" from reputation (pp. 46-48), which she says is a combination of all three components of argument (logos, pathos, and ethos).

In the second chapter, the author pays attention to definitions and provides typologies of crises and the stages in their development. General classifications are also presented on p. 52, tab. 6, and p. 58, fig. 2. Again, a heavy focus is placed on reputational crises (pp. 65-75).

The most interesting from a rhetorical point of view is the third chapter (pp. 83-163), dedicated to how the rhetorical instrument is applied in modern PR, especially in times of crisis. The features of the rhetorical situation (according to Bitzer), as well as the characteristics of the audience, are examined. Dr. Sabeva highlights the peculiarities of the communicative situation in corporate communication, above all in reputation building. She again emphasizes "the kind of symbiosis between a business leader and a company" (p. 89). In general, the candidate pays due attention to all components of rhetorical communication and demonstrates an ability to apply a rhetorical approach to the subject dealt with. About 3 (p. 97-99) pages of the work are explicitly devoted to rhetorical argumentation, and here, Dr. Sabeva could have approached with greater attention and in more detail. Only one definition of the term "argumentation" was taken from an encyclopedia, with thousands of pages on the subject in the 20th century alone. Nor am I aware of any text by Aristotle that speaks of "logical, dialectical, and rhetorical" argumentation (no reference on p. 97), although such distinctions are implicit in Stagyrite's treatises. However, the author's approach of considering argumentation through the prism of the three main components of argument (logos, pathos, and ethos) is appropriate.

### *2.3. Articles and studies*

Dr. Sabeva's contributions in the papers submitted for the competition examine various aspects of digital rhetoric and resolving crises and conflicts through discursive means. An excellent impression makes the fact that the candidate has chosen mostly such studies that are



different from the topics covered in her two monographs for the competition. Only the article "Cultural Specificities and Business Rhetoric: Developments and Prospects for Future Research" is related to business rhetoric.

Dr. Sabeva shows interest in the field of (digital) pedagogical rhetoric, in the following studies:

- Rhetoric and Management of Communication Crises in Education in the Period 2020 – 2021. – In: *Strategies for policy in science and education*, 30 (4), 2022, 369-383;
- Effective Communication and Adolescent Conflict Resolution Techniques in an Online Environment. – In: *"Adolescence as a transition between childhood and adulthood - challenges and humanistic perspectives" [Proceedings of a scientific conference "Adolescence as a transition between childhood and adulthood - challenges and humanistic perspectives"]*, Sofia: Avangard - Prima, 2020 259-267.

In my opinion, these studies contribute to Bulgarian science and treat a subject that is not highly developed in our country. In addition, the topic of digital education is hugely relevant.

The article "Rhetoric and Alienation in the Virtual Environment is related to digital rhetoric and the communicative features of the virtual environment." Here, the author again emphasizes the non-logical means of persuasion (pathos and ethos) and, above all, the ethos of the new type of virtual speaker. She raised the seemingly paradoxical but well-founded thesis that the possibilities provided by the digital space for the speaker and his audience to control the content create isolation.

In the article "Rhetorical aspects and communication specifics of the protests in the year 2020," Dr. Sabeva also expresses interest in political rhetoric, above all in times of crisis. She analyzes "political marketing," which increasingly blurs the line between commercial and political "product" (in this case, protests). The main characteristics of the rhetoric of the protests are also formulated. The article "Rhetoric and Ecology: Connections and Interactions" can be placed in the same context. – In: *"Ecology and Civil Society," [Collection of materials from the scientific conference "Ecology and Civil Society"]*, Sofia: Avangard - Prima, 2018, which examines how rhetorical means are applied to popularize a social cause, such as ecology.

#### IV. QUESTIONS

The scientific activity of the candidate is undoubtedly extensive. However, I would like to ask her a few questions about the subject she deals with:

1. Presenting and analyzing the works of B. Fogg, on p. 43 of the habilitation work, you touch on the issue of the ethical aspect of persuasive communication in the context of business rhetoric and briefly supplement this topic on p. 85-87. Most of the accusations against rhetoric have historically been ethical, and it is worth paying more attention to this question concerning the most extreme and aggressive form of persuasive communication in our modernity, advertising. How would you comment on the reaction against advertising culture's unethical and even corrupting effect in the context of



increasingly severe pressures that the middle class in the Western world is subjected to? I would quote, for example, Frederik Begbeder's sophisticated semi-autobiographical work "6.66 Euros". Should specific regulations be imposed on the advertising business in this particular direction, along with the general codes of ethics for PR that you mention?

2. What is your attitude towards the so-called "corporate responsibility," which includes the delegation by the state to business organizations with an economic purpose of activities atypical for them, such as collecting funds for charity (McDonald's, KFC, etc.) and various other social activities and causes (p. 49)? Are these activities included in the companies' business model, or are we witnessing an amazing phenomenon where the businessman realizes his duty to society, turns his back on profit, and begins to work for the benefit of the community of his own free will?
3. How do the so-called "influencers," often not established experts in the fields they promote, make the audience trust their opinions? Why do such "orators" acquire a disproportionately large weight in society and politics?

## V. CONCLUSION

Considering the materials and contributions mentioned above, I am convinced that the presented academic activities and the research of the candidate Yana Sabeva fully meets the requirements for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" of 2.3. Philosophy (Rhetoric) at the Department of Rhetoric, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." She has a doctoral degree of 2.3. Philosophy/Rhetoric, she has sufficient teaching experience, actively participates in projects and scientific conferences, has high competence in rhetoric, skills to analyze and create scientific texts, and high efficiency, productivity, and precision in their work. She meets the minimum requirements set by ASDA and significantly exceeds them. I would strongly recommend that the esteemed jury grant her the academic position of "Associate Professor" in 2.3. Philosophy/Rhetoric, and I will undoubtedly vote in favor of her candidacy.

Sofia,

9.12.2022

/assoc. prof. Gerasim Petrinski, PhD/

