



## REVIEW

of the submitted works for participation in a competition for the academic position of ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in SJ, issue 24/17.03.2023 r.

**Reviewer:** Prof. PhD Iliana Pavlova Koleva

**Candidate:** PhD Alexander Traikov Hristov

### **I. Summary of applicant (research, teaching and academic activity)**

Alexander Hristov has a master's degree in international economic relations; he holds the scientific and educational degree "PhD", with a diploma from VAK № 33158/11.05.2009, scientific specialty 05.04.10 Journalism (advertising), with a dissertation on the topic "Noise in the communication process: features of the negative effects of advertising".

The academic development of Alexander Hristov is in the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Department of "International Economic Relations and Business", where he was elected chief assistant in 2011; since 2018 he has been "associate professor" in the scientific specialty "World economy and International Economic Relations (international marketing)", certificate № 79/2018.

Over the years, he has taught various courses in bachelor's and master's degree at UNWE: "Marketing", "Corporate Websites and Blogs", "Social Network Marketing and Search Engine Optimization", "Social Media in International Business", "Digital Marketing", "International Marketing", "Influencer Marketing", "Social Network Marketing and Online Store Management", "Marketing Management".

Observations on the lecture courses developed and presented at the competition testify to high professionalism in the teaching work, a desire to stimulate the creative potential of students, and innovation.

Alexander Hristov is an established expert in the field of integrated marketing communications and PR. He has rich practical experience; holds leadership positions in the



Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies (BAPRA) and the Bulgarian Society for Public Relations (BDVO); he is a project manager; he participated in over 20 international conferences on marketing, media and PR issues in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Poland, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia. He is a lecturer at specialized seminars and trainings on marketing, public relations, business communications.

## **II. Characteristics of the scientific and scientific-applied production of the candidate**

Alexander Hristov is an author of 4 independent monograph studies, he has 3 participations in collective monograph studies, author of 65 articles and reports published in specialized scientific journals. His research topics are related to marketing, integrated marketing communications, media, PR, regulation and self-regulation. The citations attest to the authority of his scientific activity.

For participation in the current competition, the following are submitted: 1 monograph study, 2 chapters in collective monograph studies (published by Routledge, London - authorship of individual chapters, each in volume equal to an article), 20 articles and reports, 3 of which were published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information. All scientific works presented in the competition meet the requirements and can be accepted for evaluation.

The scientometric data for the occupation of the academic position "associate professor" fully corresponds to the requirements.

The main habilitation thesis in the competition is the monograph study "Integrated Marketing Communications and Digitalization" (2023).

The monograph study presents a calm and balanced view of integrated marketing communications. Expertly and with a clear understanding, the author analyzes and highlights the transformations in the field, outlining the parameters of change in the conditions of digitalization, bringing out the trends and indicating working mechanisms and paths for future development. At the very beginning, the author makes the stipulation that the text is devoid of specific examples of (advertising, PR or integrated) campaigns. The use of such an approach has its grounds and its choice is defensible with the arguments of the author's practical-applied and scientific-theoretical knowledge. Relying confidently on his rich practical experience in the field of marketing communications, but also on his extremely good theoretical and scientific preparation, Alexander Hristov brings the monographic work to the



level of systematized experience and conceptualization. The chosen research optics are also supported by the desire for maximum objectivity and stepping away from the discourse of the concrete ups and downs of brands and industries. The aim is to highlight the conclusions, ideas, problem areas outlined in the accelerated digitization process, to indicate possible solutions and working practices. In a multidisciplinary plan and with tools from different fields (public communications, marketing, philosophy, ethics, regulations, etc.), the monographic study presents the different dimensions and the multi-layered nature of integrated marketing communications in the conditions of digitalization.

The monograph study consists of 3 chapters, each of which reveals a different perspective to the research object: "Integrated marketing communications and self-regulation", "Digitalization in marketing communications", "Results and efficiency. Ethics and Professionalism". A connecting point is digitization, which, as the research proves, provides a natural integrating mechanism for communications and gives new opportunities for marketing development.

One of the leading imperatives in modern communications, to which the author pays attention, is the authenticity of the content - reinforced by the voices of users on the Internet, authenticity rearranges communication paradigms and rearranges managerial positions in marketing communications. Al. Hristov rightly noted that authenticity in terms of communicated content becomes one of the most important prerequisites for building trust and creating distinctive advantages (p. 67). The issue of creating a digital environment favoring long-term relationships with the brand, supporting user loyalty, and ensuring the transparency of these relationships also stands out as a priority - the very presence of the organization in the online environment is already a request for its readiness to maintain open and transparent relationships. Addressing the specific person and understanding their position is a distinctive feature of the transformation: "The user wants to feel informed and understood, and this is achieved through an up-to-date digital strategy," the author points out (p. 74). Digital marketing and communications provide the opportunity to create personalized experiences that can lead to increased consumer engagement.

An important topic in the monograph is self-regulation, as well as the relationship ethics - professionalism in integrated marketing communications. Ethics and professionalism complement each other, as "one can even talk about a synergistic effect - notes Al. Hristov, - ethical and professionally executed marketing activities are a prerequisite for more loyalty on



the part of consumers, that is, for long-term success (p. 107). The topic is the main one for a large group of articles and reports presented in the competition: *"Modern political communications: ethics and professionalism"* (In: "21st Century Media and Communications", 2017), *"Self-regulation in marketing communications: strategic interactions between ethical commissions and state institutions"* (In: "Strategic visions: effective management of economic, organizational and social transformations (innovations - institutions - business)", 2016), *"Digital marketing: ethical principles and training development"* (In: "Modern distance learning: trends, policies and good practices", 2016), *"The preventive role of self-regulation in advertising and PR and opportunities for market leadership"* (In: "Leadership - it's time for changes", 2015), *"Issues in the application of normative regulations and ethical principles to advertising"* (In: "Media and Public Communications", 2008), etc.

Al. Hristov expands the field of research on the relationship between ethics and professionalism, placing it in relation to the effectiveness of integrated marketing communications. The digital environment allows extremely good opportunities for measuring communication effects, "it is important to move from the measurement of outputs (realization) to the measurement of outcomes (effects)", he rightly says (p. 128-129). Performance measurement is also the main topic of a number of other scientific articles and reports: *"Measuring brand awareness, campaign evaluation and web analytics"* (In: "Digital and Social Media Marketing: A Results-Driven Approach", London, Routledge, 2020); *"Effectiveness of marketing communications: overview and distinctions"* (In: "Economic and social alternatives", 2020), *"Innovative approaches in evaluating the effectiveness of advertising and PR"* (In: "Innovative strategies for competitive business" , 2015).

A valuable point in the scientific works of Alexander Hristov is that they capture the latest trends in communications, incl. the increased interest in ChatGPT and other opportunities for the application of modern technologies. The problem is examined from the perspective of ethics in the third chapter of the monographic study. A group of articles also draw attention to the serious problem of misinformation, fake news and other negative phenomena and their impact on society and, in particular, on companies.

Without a doubt, the scientific production of Alexander Hristov contributes to the enrichment of the scientific field of integrated marketing communications and PR,



demonstrates an extremely high scientific and theoretical preparation, good research culture and rich practical experience.

### **III. Major contributions in science, applied science and teaching minute activity of the applicant**

As a significant contribution, I highlight the study of marketing communications in the conditions of digitalization. Seriously developed in A. Hristov's monograph study "Integrated Marketing Communications and Digitalization", but also visible in the other scientific texts presented in the competition, the topic is of extreme importance. The main directions of change in integrated marketing communications in the context of digitalization are convincingly argued in the research and the importance of the specific steps that companies need to take in their development quest are highlighted also. The clearly defined mechanisms for successful communication practices undoubtedly determine the serious practical-applied contribution of scientific research.

The new communication environment - globalized as a result of digitalization, but still connected to the specifics of local contexts and dependencies, provides new opportunities, but also poses new challenges to marketing. A. Hristov thoroughly analyzes the peculiarities of the media and digital environment, which may have an impact on the development of marketing communications, bringing out propositions that would facilitate practical application and favor the development of companies. The main groups of management changes are indicated as imperative: 1) globalization of messages and restructuring of budgets; and 2) localization of marketing activities.

As a contribution, I would also highlight the outlined relationship between ethical behavior and professionalism in marketing communications, as well as the role of self-regulation as a mechanism for achieving compliance.

A contributing element is the further developed and enriched understanding of effectiveness in marketing communications, as well as the presented opportunities for the development of new metrics and approaches to effectiveness. The derived position, emphasizing the results for business and society, with measurement that is accompanied by an objective evaluation, corresponds to the main directions in the development of digital marketing and is a contributing point in the scientific research of the author.



#### IV. Conclusion

On the basis of the comprehensive analysis of the research and teaching activities of Alexander Hristov, the candidate in the competition for the academic position of "associate professor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", I am convinced that he meets all the requirements under the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in Bulgaria for holding the position.

Alexander Hristov has made significant contributions in the scientific field of integrated marketing communications and PR, he has teaching experience, as well as serious practical experience.

All this gives me reasons to confidently recommend to the respected scientific jury to support the election of **Dr. Alexander Hristov as "associate professor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications).**

17.07.2023

Prof. PhD Iliana Pavlova