



## OPINION

on 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), promulgated by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in State Gazette, issue 24/17.03.2023 with the only candidate

**Reviewer: Prof. Nikolai Mihailov, PhD**

**Candidate: Associate Professor Alexander Traikov Hristov**

### **I. General characteristics of the candidates and the requirements for the competition.**

Only one candidate participates in the announced competition - Associate Professor Alexander Traikov Hristov, PhD. The documentation submitted by him for the competition includes all the necessary materials, which have been completed and extremely correctly systematized in accordance with the Bulgarian law in the field and the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". I can note that the submitted documents are systematized and described precisely and in accordance with the requirements, which makes the general documentation, on the basis of which the candidate was admitted to the competition unblamable. The information about the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "Associate Professor" in professional direction 3.5. in professional field 3.5 Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications), presented by the colleague impresses and convinces. According to the necessary groups of indicators (dissertation work; habilitation work - monograph; published chapter of a collective monograph; other publications; citations, etc.), the candidate not only meets, but also exceeds the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law, which makes him a fully legitimate participant in the competition.

In total, for participation in the announced competition, Assoc. Prof. Hristov presented a serious scientific production, including: 1 monograph, 2 participations in collective monographs (in English), 14 articles and reports published in scientific periodicals, in scientific collections and continuing editions with scientific peer review with significant scientific results that do not repeat those used to acquire the educational and scientific degree "PhD" on his part. The listed publications are proof of Assoc. Prof. Hristov's deep interest in topics from the field of public communication and integrated marketing communications, which are completely relevant to the subject of the announced competition and fall entirely within his professional and academic field. I can conclude that in the documents attached according to the requirements, Assoc. Prof. Hristov proves his profile as an established researcher in the field of integrated marketing communications and various aspects thereof, as an erudite and preferred teacher (according to the provided reference for teaching employment at "bachelor" and "master" degree") in the field of marketing in social networks,



influencer marketing, international marketing communications in Bulgarian and English languages, as well as an active author of academic production and participant in national and international scientific forums (the candidate has indicated participation in over 20 international conferences on marketing, media and PR issues in Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Poland, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia). I unequivocally accept that, from this point of view, the candidate Associate Professor Alexander Hristov not only fulfills, but also significantly exceeds the necessary requirements for occupying the academic position of "Associate Professor" according to the Regulations of SU "St. Kl. Ohridski" in the desired professional direction.

**II. Analysis of the candidate's scientific publications.** I will begin with some general impressions from the detailed review I made of the publications provided by the applicant. First of all, they all testify to Assoc. Prof. Hristov's constant academic interest in the scientific topic of digital marketing, the study of its effectiveness, consumer behavior, the role and effectiveness of PR in sales, the importance of advertising as a communication tool or everything, which can be united under the name of marketing communications. In the works presented for the competition, the candidate realized and implemented this interest, which led him to clear theoretical formulations and to the successful construction of curricula in related disciplines in a pedagogic-teaching plan. Second, I can also conclude that the academic output provided by the candidate testifies to a scholar and researcher of enviable erudition, with a persistent attitude to the research of new trends in the field of marketing communications, fluent in the scientific discourse in the relevant field of study. Thirdly, Assoc. Prof. Hristov sufficiently convincingly uses different approaches to the main object of his scientific interest - as public communication, as PR or even as a way of persuasion through the media, as a marketing process aimed at effectively stimulating users with different communication methods tools, including digital ones, as a social process with the corresponding ethical and even political significance and the need for the corresponding regulation. Written with an original approach, in a style characteristic of Assoc. Prof. Hristov, aimed at recognizing and explaining what is new in the phenomenon of marketing communications, especially in connection with digitalization and the resulting complex changes in it, with a successful synthesis of knowledge from various fields, the scientific works of the applicant are useful both for colleagues - researchers and for students attracted by this current and significant topic.

The main habilitation thesis with which the candidate participates in the competition is entitled *Integrated Marketing Communications and Digitalization, Sofia, 2023*. It begins with the true observation that the idea of marketing communications is not new (I would add that much more has passed since the time of Albert Davis Lasker of 100 years), "but the modern information environment is such that the integration of communications is inevitable and completely unavoidable". The candidate has chosen a research approach that I find entirely appropriate for the purpose of his work. It is initially related to the clarification of some theoretical statements about integrated marketing communications, as the original explanation by Assoc. Prof. Hristov sounds like this: "However, the essence of integrated marketing communications is synergy" (p. 21). Synergy is a polysemantic term, it is used in theology, philosophy, social psychology, in the natural sciences. Assoc. Prof. Hristov chooses it aptly to oppose the simplistic notion that integrated marketing communications are a "simple assembly" (recently current expression) of a passive set of various techniques and instruments



for sale or some kind of commercial exchange. The habilitation work of the candidate successfully and specifically solves several tasks. First of all, it offers an approach that clearly describes the impact of the digital environment on the dynamics of integrated marketing communications development - specifically, in a positive way and in terms of the integration of the communication process. Secondly, it shows the relationship between ethics and professionalism and outlines the moral distinctions in the implementation of different forms of integrated marketing communications. Philosophically speaking, communication is one of the foundations of human existence and social interactions. It plays a significant role with the influence it has in society through the reasons for choice it offers people, especially through the power of digital platforms. That professional communicators consciously choose the means by which to make an impact definitely raises the question of the distinction between right and wrong, between good and evil. "The relationship between ethics and professionalism can be extended with a relationship between ethics and effectiveness, that is, the achievement of certain results, and even more so-with effectiveness in integrated marketing communications" (p.113) This academic statement has two significant projections. First, it convincingly presents a defensible concept, a new framework of scholarly endeavours that accept the moral climate, the moral regulation in marketing communications as extremely important in their study. Secondly, it is written not only from the positions of an academic researcher but also from the point of view of a proven professional in the field, with detailed observations on the practical dimensions of choice through concepts such as truth, professional honour and dignity, professional virtue. The truth in a commercial advertising message is very quickly revealed as soon as the customer or consumer receives or buys the relevant product.

The volume of an opinion is reasonably limited, but I will allow myself to dwell on one more of the candidate's publications presented for the competition. The article *Marketing Communications Effectiveness: An Overview and Distinctions (publication 4)* argues that distinguishing between economic and non-economic effectiveness in marketing communications is an appropriate basis for better understanding immediate and potential effects and for selecting and refining metrics. According to Associate Professor Hristov, this is again related to the modern development of digital communication channels and the possibility of measurements, which in turn require communication practices to be improved. In this way, the self-assessment is confirmed, in which Assoc. Prof. Hristov notes as a contribution the justification of the position that marketing communications should emphasize the results for business and society more, and the measurement should be accompanied by an objective assessment.

The general conclusion from the review of the candidate's scientific publications, both those provided for the competition and his overall publication activity, convince me that the academic works of Alexander Hristov are entirely in the field of the announced competition and, as research, concern all those questions that are key for an erudite and extremely knowledgeable scientist in the field of integrated marketing communications. They are written in a language through which the author clearly and comprehensibly explains theories, methods, trends and in which the logical connection of the exposition, starting positions and arguments can be easily traced. That is why they are and will be of benefit to the students involved in the courses offered and led by Assoc. Prof. Hristov as a lecturer.



**III. Scientific contributions. Teaching experience and personal impressions.** The self-assessment of the scientific and publication activity carried out by the candidate is detailed and reasoned, and I confirm the points of contribution that he indicated in the reference (*document 14 Contributions*) as well as their conceptual integrity. In my capacity as a participant in the Scientific Jury, I could arrange them in several important areas for communication knowledge. First of all, these are contributing reflections regarding the role of digitalization in the improvement of marketing communications and their integration. Assoc. Prof. Hristov here analyses in depth the global field of the digital environment, its ubiquity and, in this sense, the influence on international marketing as well. Secondly, I would point to the analysis of issues of regulation and especially self-regulation, the relationship between ethical behaviour and professionalism in marketing communications, an important topic on which relatively little has been written, especially by a professional colleague. In my opinion, this is a successful attempt to expand the research field in the field of integrated market communications, which until now remained in the background, not to say underestimated. This approach of Associate Professor Hristov also marks a new culture of research and practical implementation of marketing communications, which, in addition to direct financial benefit, also complies with socially acceptable norms and values and demonstrates respect for the dignity of its customers and the entire society. And in the third place, I will place the examination of features in the media and digital environment that may accelerate or slow down the development of marketing communications, and for each of them, scenarios and models are presented to facilitate practical application. The practical emphasis in the candidate's works is something that undoubtedly makes a very strong impression, marking together with theoretical and convincing practical contributions, which benefit not only researchers and theorists, but also students and all those who are trained in promising and current specialties, related to integrated market communications. Of course, a careful reading of the works of Associate Professor Hristov will reveal more important points of contribution, but I think that these alone are convincing in favour of his choice for desired academic position.

Regarding the teaching and lecturing activities, I know Associate Professor Hristov as a respected and erudite teacher in the field of marketing communications, marketing, professional ethics, etc. The serious practical experience of the candidate in the relevant academic and professional field is a very big, in my opinion, decisive advantage both for his selection for the desired academic position, but also for his ability to formulate, organize and teach lecture courses, seminars, workshops, which enjoy a high interest among students. The data that the candidate has provided in this regard unequivocally prove the accumulated experience and erudition of an experienced lecturer, sought-after scientific mentor and supervisor. Associate Professor Hristov also has an active project activity as the head of project teams in the field of the role of marketing communications in consumption, as well as European practices in this activity. Recognition of the high evaluation he receives from his colleagues in both academic and professional circles is the fact that he was elected (and is currently in this position) as the chairman of the Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies (BAPRA), as well as holding a number of managerial positions and public positions in various professional and professional ethics commissions and bodies of the PR, advertising, marketing industries.



My personal impressions of the candidate as a colleague with whom I have worked in various scientific teams are of a person dedicated to his work both as a teacher and as a practitioner, open to new ideas and initiatives and fully coping with complex tasks both in teaching and in his professional activity. He is also a lecturer whose classes are of high value to the students, managing to present his knowledge in an impactful way to them.

**IV. Conclusion.** The review and analysis of the publications, research and teaching activities of Assoc. Prof. Alexander Hristov, the only candidate in the competition, which I carried out within the framework of this Opinion, allows me to conclude that he is a candidate with indisputable contributions and possessing the necessary qualities to occupy the desired academic position. I believe that the presented evidence of the full implementation of the criteria for habilitation of the Law and the Rules for its application to the Sofia University by the candidate are indisputable both formally and in terms of content. I unequivocally accept that **the candidature of Associate Professor Alexander Traikov Hristov fully meets the requirements for the academic position "Associate Professor" in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications) I vote positive and suggest the esteemed scientific jury to select him for it.**

Jury member: Prof. Nikolai Mihailov, PhD

Date: 27.07.2023