



OPINION¹

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), announced by Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in SJ, issue 24, 17.03.2023

Reviewer: Prof. Dsc Petranka Fileva

Candidate: Dr Alexander Christov

Dr. Alexander Christov is the only candidate in the current competition for associate professor. The colleague has many years of experience as a teacher, expert and practitioner in the field of marketing and public communications. He has moved through the stages of academic positions from assistant to associate professor at the University of National and World Economy. He has participated in over 20 international conferences on marketing, media and PR issues in Bulgaria and other European countries. He has been invited as a speaker at specialized seminars and trainings on marketing, public relations, and business communications. His engagement in public relations associations is impressive, in particular as chairman of the Bulgarian Association of PR Agencies.

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

The candidate participates in the competition with a monograph "Integrated Marketing Communications and Digitalization"; with two articles in a collective monographic work on digital marketing applied in the new digital environment; with three articles and reports published in scientific publications, indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information; with over 20 articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes.

The main scientific field is integrated marketing communications, enriched by research in three main directions: the role of digital transformation, measurement of effectiveness from the point of view of quantitative and qualitative indicators, self-regulation as a leading tool in handling the common interest. Each of these three thematic circles is developed sufficiently densely in the habilitation work and in the published articles and reports. The theoretical overview is successfully combined with clearly and reasonably presented own theses with a contribution to practice. The author's interest in the economic effects of public communication extends to current topics such as disinformation. From the perspective of theories of media business models and effects on marketing communications, this is a new scientific problem that deserves further attention. The entry of media content into PR technologies is another topic touched upon by the author. Although classic from the point of view of the scholarly discussion of the relationship between PR and journalism, it also adds novelty to the analysis of the relationship between integrated marketing communications and digitalization.

The first leading theme in the presented works is the evolution in integrated marketing communication. I am strongly attached to the thesis about the synergistic effects of the skillful integration of separate elements of marketing communication. What is new in Christov's monograph is that he clearly links the search for synergy with the potential of digital technologies, focusing on coordinated brand promotion. In the digital age, the channels are more, the participants are connected more horizontally, and the search for synergy should be more comprehensive and even better ordered and synchronized. The digital environment provides real and largely effective opportunities for communications integration, and companies should take advantage of this, the author writes.

¹ Note: Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages.



Contributing to practice is the generalization about the main directions in the development of integrated marketing communications in the conditions of digitalization: the first direction is internal coordination and flexibility; the second direction is the homogeneity of messages; the third direction is content improvement; the fourth direction is related to the integration of creativity; the fifth direction is the global perspective.

I will mention one more thing that seems to me new and important from the point of view of classifying media channels: because of the presence of authentic content in digital media, instead of the usual division of traditional and digital media and channels, Alexander Christov proposes a more functional division according to him of earned, owned and paid media. Earned media provides an opportunity for word-of-mouth marketing and becomes an unpaid and effective communication channel. The combination of the three types of media and channels contributes to building successful digital marketing strategies and optimizing the results of communication campaigns.

The second recurring theme is the effectiveness of integrated marketing communications. I will recall that the main thesis in the habilitation thesis is that digitalization allows for a more successful integration of the elements of marketing communication. More recent in Hristov's research is the strong emphasis on looking for relationships with efficiency, both in terms of costs input and output, and rather in the long term. The framework in the specific analysis is the Barcelona principles, which, in addition to everything else known in the search for efficiency, also include an integrated approach in the measurement of all off-line and on-line channels. In addition to this, the author accepts to distinguish between the economic and non-economic effectiveness of marketing communications, since it is recognized that marketing communications have increasingly pronounced social effects.

Very important and relatively little known is the emphasis on evaluation rather than solely on performance measurement. Measurement is related to the collection of data on posts, number of users and others, accompanied by analysis and summarization of this data. The evaluation is an interpretation of the obtained data and an assessment of the value of each of the results. And when it comes to integration and achieving synergy, it is important to evaluate the individual elements of integrated marketing communication, for example, measurement of communication metrics separate from measurement of organizational (optimizing time and cost) results.

The third theme, closely related to the professional life of the author, is self-regulation as a combination of ethics and professionalism. The achievements in this topic are first, the theoretical justification of similarity and complementarity between regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation; secondly, the complete list of responsible institutions and organizations and finally, the rich overview of scientific literature in Bulgarian on this occasion. I want to draw attention to the consistent and logical presentation of the idea of integration and synergy in every stage of implementation of communication activities, including when it comes to self-regulation. Accepting that self-regulation is the communication industry's voluntary application of a code of ethical rules, the author recommends that every participant in integrated marketing communications adopt the rules - both companies, agencies and media, and in a well-planned manner. The thesis is about the need for collective action with three main objectives: (1) realization of economies of scale; (2) internalization of benefits and (3) change in the balance of power between the participants in the process.

Assessment of Contributions:

1. A summary about the role of digital technologies in the evolution of integrated marketing communications
2. Presentation of new approaches to measure the effectiveness of integrated marketing communications in a digital environment, specifically the emphasis on the assessment of short-term and long-term results.
3. The analysis of self-regulation in the complex of regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation is contributed, in particular the preventive function of self-regulation brought to the fore.



II. Notes and recommendations

I positively evaluate the author's publications aimed at the application of ethical principles in digital marketing teaching process, which is closely related to the development of professionalism. I would recommend further research on the boundaries in the digital environment between PR content and advertising content, as well as the interweaving of PR posts in media editorial content.

III. Conclusion

The publications presented by Alexander Christov indisputably prove his research qualities and his consistency in scientific research. Judging by the numerous recommendations to practitioners offered in the monographic work and in individual articles and reports, I can assume excellent results from his teaching activity. The contributions evaluated above give me reason to confidently vote positively for his election to the academic position of ASSISTANT PROFESSOR in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Integrated Marketing Communications).

Jury member: Prof. Dsc Petranka Fileva

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