

## STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Alexander Traikov Hristov, PhD  
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about a doctoral thesis for the award of the educational and qualification degree of PhD in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

With a title: **Models of persuasive communication for the promotion of culinary brands**

Presented by Antonia Ivanova, doctoral student in professional field 3.5. “Public Communications and Information Sciences; Media and Communications – Persuasive Communication” at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, with research supervisor Assoc. Prof. Mila Serafimova, PhD

### **I. Description of the PhD based on the documents submitted**

The content of the thesis, the other documents, and also the achievements of Antonia Ivanova show that she is a researcher with significant experience in the field of communications. Her publications and her career path, contribute both to her development and to the improvement of the communication sphere. All this creates prerequisites the research to be of serious value.

### **II. Evaluation of the qualities of the thesis**

Antonia Ivanova's doctoral thesis is focused at first sight to a narrow, but at the same time extremely important topic. The building and management of personal and culinary brands is symptomatic of the realization of successful campaigns in general, not only because what is happening in this sphere is legendary, but also because it concerns and attracts the attention of many people.

In this sense, the study of this area definitely brings benefits not only for her, but also for corporate communications and communication of celebrities.

Moreover, the dynamic in the culinary field is significant, and any good attempt at an outside view provides a useful 'snapshot', important for researchers and practitioners. In today's world of an information that is disseminating dynamically and concepts being constantly improved, this lays important foundations and contributes to the depth of knowledge.

Considering this, the actuality of the dissertation research topic shall be outlined, and more probably it will increase in the future.

The work has all the necessary formal characteristics of a serious PhD thesis, it is characterized as interdisciplinary research, combining knowledge and methodology from different fields, mostly from two main ones – communication and culinary. The positions,

especially those regarding the development of culinary brands, are presented extremely clearly and reasoned and they are arranged in a good sequence. The text suffers neither from excessive pathos nor from excessive criticism, which makes it balanced, meaningful and useful. The content of the abstract shows a good correspondence with the text of the thesis. All this contributes to the high degree of applicability of the results in practice.

Regarding the methodology – the chosen combination of research with quantitative and qualitative methods, more specifically survey and in-depth interviews, creates prerequisites for objectivity and relevance, and is very responsible as a research approach. Empirical data have been processed with the necessary responsibility and objectivity.

In both of the constituent topics of the dissertation research – communications and culinary – the literature is extremely rich and completely relevantly applied in the text. The variety of source types, in particular influential monographs, periodicals and online resources, allows for as many perspectives as possible to be covered, which is great. However, in the first part, which covers the topic of persuasion and influence, the views of Robert Cialdini and Chavdar Hristov have a serious and interesting advantage, and they, although authoritative researchers, tip the scales of the text in one direction, yet without being able to speak of any one-sidedness. The topic of persuasion and influence – or persuasive communication as the term in the dissertation topic – is complex and multifaceted, and it would be great if other perspectives from communication and marketing researchers were included. Especially the second sphere suggests that influencing brands does not happen so easily.

### **III. Benefits of the PhD thesis**

In terms of content, several extremely important advantages of the PhD thesis by Antonia Ivanova can be highlighted.

First – and this is perhaps the most important contribution, noted as third in the reference – the text has achieved a sufficiently ambitious goal related to the study of the development of the public image / personal brand of culinary celebrities. Obviously, it is characterized by unique features, which are excellently and sufficiently thoroughly presented in the text. As part of this achievement is the introduction of the concept of “visual rhetoric”, which is a key element of the presentation of the culinary achievements noted in the text. This model can become the basis for conceptualizing higher-level theoretical judgments to be used in a wide range of human knowledge.

Second, the aspects of branding are presented with the necessary accuracy and precision, especially in the part with the brand's relationship with consumers. On this basis, the part with the development of cooking and – I would call it – its public part, or as the author defines it, the “culinary show” related to the role of celebrity chefs, is integrated very well.

Third, the research is an asset, showing both engagement and access to key opinion leaders in this important field. The interpretation of the data collected during the research is excellent.

Fourth, the thesis is pragmatic, consistent and makes extremely precise references to the communication reality. The texts clearly show the excellent knowledge of the

communication environment, the knowledge in both spheres is indisputable, and the positions are presented with the necessary precision. Special attention is paid to the social goals of cooking, which is important considering the need for more attention to this topic.

Fifth, the main conclusions of the exposition are well reflected in the conclusion, which provides sufficient completeness in terms of structure and content. This gives a serious reason to confirm that the PhD thesis is characterized by comprehensiveness and completeness.

#### **IV. Notes, recommendations, guidelines for further research**

Considering all this, two notes and recommendations can be highlighted that can be addressed further.

First, the thesis focuses on the development of the personal brand (especially on pages 59, 65 and 66), however, it would be great, if in the theoretical part there was more attention to the personal image as well, for which there are studies by reputable Bulgarian and foreign authors. An understanding of personal image and its management would be a valuable addition, precisely because famous chefs are celebrities, for whom society has high requirements in terms of publicity, as seen in the reaction to the accident made by Andre Tokev. Incorporating the principles of personal image management would enrich the theoretical part and contribute to a better interpretation of the research results.

Second, the main hypothesis of the study is stretched. Bigger precision could be achieved if it could be reduced to the causal relationship of the techniques used and the achieved image results for chefs, which are created and developed as public figures.

The directions for further research are clear – constant attention and updating of productions regarding the development of culinary communications and the ways in which celebrities are constructed and their image managed.

These notes definitely do not reduce the extremely positive assessment of the thesis and the significance of the mentioned scientific achievements. The text presents the author as a researcher with very good knowledge and skills in this field.

#### **V. Publications and participation in scientific forums**

From the documents submitted, it is clear that the requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” for approving and publicizing the results of the research, as well as the minimum national requirements for awarding the PhD degree.

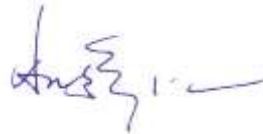
#### **VI. Conclusion**

Taking into account the benefits of the work, the topicality and specificity of the problems studied, their practicability, the excellent theoretical level of the problems studied and analysed and everything else, my overall assessment of the PhD thesis is positive. In this

regard, I would like to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the PhD degree in the professional field 3.5. “Public Communications and Information Sciences; Media and Communications – Persuasive Communication”

12.08.2024 г.

Author of the statement:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Hristov', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Assoc. Prof. Alexander Hristov, PhD