



REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Ivanova Serafimova, Sofia University, FJMC, Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising

for the obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Public Relations) with a dissertation on the topic: "Global Changes in the PR Business. Effective Management of Social Media", presented by Maxim Moncho Behar, PhD student at the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with scientific supervisor Prof. DCs Lyubomir Stoykov.

I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student on the basis of the submitted documentation

Maxim Behar is a PhD student at the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with scientific supervisor Prof. DCs Lyubomir Stoykov. He is a specialist in PR and communication, well known not only in Bulgaria but also among the world professional community, with popular among the experts and the general public publications on the subject.

II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

Maxim Behar's dissertation, submitted to me for review, meets the requirements for a scientific text and even exceeds in many aspects the criteria for obtaining a PhD.

The greatest advantage of this dissertation is that the scientific issues are refracted through the author's personal and professional experience and expert position. The text wins the interest of readers - not only members of the scientific community, but also anyone interested in effective communication. A major contribution of the study is that it attracts the interest of the general public, leaders and managers, as well as experts to the topic of global changes in the PR business and effective social media management, which will contribute to the understanding of these changes and to PR practice.

It is a great pleasure to read Maxim Behar's eyewitness observations as a participant in the exciting PR experience and to look through his eyes as a professional, especially as he shares his impressions from his meetings with leading PR industry figures from around the world.



Maxim Behar's dissertation, submitted for review, consists of a preface, four chapters, and a conclusion. It has a total length of 249 pages, of which 168 pages are the main text of the dissertation, followed by a 10-page bibliography and 8 appendices in 68 pages. The bibliography consists of 185 actual scientific publications, of which 23 in Bulgarian and 162 in English.

Topic Relevance. The topic of the global transformation of PR in the age of digital media is of undeniable relevance and importance.

Both the theory and practice of public relations have been influenced in recent years by this process of significant change, which has also led to new curriculum content in universities teaching communication studies.

A doctoral dissertation in this area, presenting the perspective of the communications business, is a significant contribution to the scholarly study of effective social media management as a key to change in PR as an industry, theory and practice.

The author argues the choice of the topic with the fact that "the penetration of social media in communication industries and mainly in PR business is taking place at such a rapid pace that the practice remains insufficiently studied and prepared for the revolutionary changes" (p. 5).

The leading research thesis is that "at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, planetary-scale changes, crises, pandemics, breakthroughs in information technology and artificial intelligence, and especially the rehabilitation of the figure of the leader, have led to a global revolution in the PR business and in the entire communications industry" (p. 7).

The research approach, thesis, aims and objectives, subject and object, scientific methods are precisely formulated. The aim of the research is "to prove that digital transformation, the transfer of resources to social media and the cultivation of leaders as a strategy of PR businesses are leading to a global revolution, where the factor of "leadership" is not taken as an end in itself, but as a central feature of successful communication industries". There are three important themes here for the scholarly debate - can and how to cultivate leaders in the future, what should be the strategies, secondly - are we talking about a global revolution or an evolution of PR, and what type of leadership are we talking about - human centric or another type.

The research thesis is that "at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, global changes, crises, pandemics, discoveries in information technology and Artificial Intelligence, and the rehabilitation of the leadership figure have revolutionized the PR business and communications industry" (p.6).

The thesis of the revolution in PR as a result of the emergence of the Internet and social media has appeared in the scientific literature since the beginning of the new



millennium, and some researchers also defend the thesis that these changes are not a revolution, but an evolution in PR.

Maxim Behar formulated four initial hypotheses, the last one being related to his predicted change of the profession's name: "As a result of its merger with the other auxiliary market industries - advertising and marketing, the Public Relations sector will change its name in the direction of generalization and conceptualization, for example, into Social Relations, Social Affairs, Global Relations, Media Relations, Real-Time Relations or others." This is an interesting hypothesis, considering that Media Relations and Social Affairs have always been an essential part of PR, to which many new areas and professional roles are being added in the present.

Maxim Behar places constraints on research in the broad scientific field and this positively affects the validity of empirical research, making the research even more valuable. It is formulated as global, which is an achievement for Bulgarian communication science - to be global rather than local. The author deliberately makes a choice about the focus of his research: "And more - in this dissertation I have deliberately not analysed the "heroes" of the Bulgarian political scene such as Boyko Borisov, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Ahmed Dogan or anyone else. It has always seemed to me that the Bulgarian experience is a very small and insignificant part of the global changes in this business and if I were to write about it, this dissertation would have a completely different look. I am not saying that these processes in Bulgaria are not interesting, on the contrary - for our local experience they are even almost revolutionary, but they really go beyond the focus of this research." This choice of the author requires a global study of the topic, which he does with empirical research and surveys with international and Bulgarian communication experts and up-to-date data from studies of the communication business worldwide.

The first chapter, titled "PR: Conceptual Approaches and Reassessment of the Traditional Communication Toolkit", analyses the development of the PR industry, focusing on the impact of social media on communication and PR practices. The author argues that social media has fundamentally changed the way PR is conducted, offering new opportunities for rapid dissemination of information and interaction with audiences. Maxim Behar formulates a definition of PR as "expressing the truth in a way that people can understand," emphasizing the importance of ethics in this field. The chapter examines the competitive relationship between PR and advertising, the evolution of political PR and the impact of social media on political campaigns, and the future prospects for the PR industry. The section on the technological transformation of the press release and press conference in the digital age is devoted to the author's view of the demise of the traditional press release and press conference. The author argues against over-regulation of social media, stressing that government attempts to limit its influence can hinder innovation and reduce free speech.

The second chapter, "Global Media Transformations in the PR Business," analyses the role of PR in the context of social media, which is changing the PR industry by making every



action public and transparent. The author proves his thesis that social media provides freedom of expression and the ability to reach a wide audience, which has made it an essential communication tool. He concludes that social media has significantly changed the dynamics of public communication and has a strong impact on society. Logically, the topics of reorganization of positions in PR offices, leading-edge techniques and tools of modern PR follow, and then the AMEC interactive tool for measuring and evaluating communication and the Barcelona Principles 2.0 for effective public communication are presented (pp. 116-126), with sources correctly cited.

Chapter three publishes the results of in-depth interviews with 100 foreign leaders in the PR business conducted in 2019, plus a series of interviews conducted in 2024 among PR professionals and practitioners in Bulgaria. Based on the spontaneously shared expert opinions and statements, the author of this paper tests and proves his hypotheses. For example, he makes conclusions, confirmed by the current communication practice, that visual content will dominate, as well the storytelling has growing importance - trends that are undisputed in contemporary PR practice.

Based on his professional experience Maxim Behar offers an algorithm of a successful PR business.

The fourth chapter "Artificial Intelligence: how it will change the PR business, what we expect - predictions, prerequisites, first results" is dedicated to the role of Artificial Intelligence in the communication business. The author presents the pros and risks of its use, as well as the regulation in the European Union - the Digital Services Act.

The dissertation is cross-disciplinary and is distinguished by a logically sound structure and a well-defended thesis. The separate parts of the dissertation comply with the compositional requirements for a dissertation text. The author correctly collects, processes and analyses empirical data, ensuring the reliability of the material on which the contributions are built. The bibliographical awareness is unquestionable, however, a little more thoroughness in citing the scientific literature can be recommended. This feature of the text can also be taken as its advantage, since the author's observations and sharing of professional experience predominate. The author describes himself as primarily a practitioner. But from a historical perspective, much of PR theory was created by practitioners. This makes the text very readable and appealing to the general public, not just PR experts, and this educational function of the dissertation definitely has a contributory moment. The linguistic and stylistic qualities of the presentation are of a high level, and the literary norms of grammar, spelling and punctuation have been flawlessly applied. The author has a command of the language and this holds the reader's attention and interest. The scientific methods applied are adequate to the aims and successfully prove the thesis of the dissertation. The abstract correctly presents the text of the dissertation.



III. Contributions of the dissertation research

At the beginning of the review I mentioned some of the main contributions of the dissertation, which make it significant and in some aspects exceeding the requirements for the PhD - addressing the topic globally rather than locally, refracting important for the future of PR issues through the author's personal and extremely rich professional experience, reading style, which makes the doctoral research on effective communication and transformations in the era of social media popular and significant among the general public and the expert community. Among the scholarly contributions, the following stand out:

1. A large-scale study of the PR industry on a global level

The dissertation summarizes the results of empirical research on the PR industry conducted by professional organizations and the scientific community, and conducts its own research using the in-depth expert interview method, which lays the foundation for future theoretical developments and practical application. This scholarly approach is essential to broaden the understanding of the dynamics of PR in the context of digitalisation and audience interaction.

2. Comparison of key concepts

The study compares the concepts of "PR" and "advertising", as well as "manager" and "leader" - traditional issues of communication theory, leadership and management, with the author presenting his own observations and formulations based on his practice. The proposed model of leadership PR has pragmatic applications and provides a foundation for future research related to concepts such as "open science," "open market," and "open business."

3. Leadership and Social Media

The study proves the hypothesis that "Anyone can be a leader", especially in the context of working with social media. The ability to communicate in real time suggests that every member of the PR team needs to develop leadership skills to be able to meet the rapidly changing demands of the industry.

4. Relationship between PR and management

The scientific work highlights the logical and practical link between PR activity and communication management at a high managerial level and the author argues that PR is not only complementary but also a natural extension of managerial functions. This interpretation presents PR as a key element in strategic management, which is imperative for the successful functioning of any organisation.

The dissertation's scholarly contributions extend theoretical research in the field of PR, but more importantly, they summarize current practical guidelines for industry professionals. The dissertation has scientific and applied contributions. The author himself defines the contribution of the dissertation as "Many of the theses presented in this dissertation have already been recognized as global innovations, introduced by the author in various projects as



well as presented at global PR forums in the last year." In an accessible language and in an engaging and readable style he summarizes and popularizes among the Bulgarian audience the professional debates he has attended and participated and on their basis he has drawn the main conclusions and recommendations for the PR business. This picture of changes in the PR business has application in the training of managers, business administration, practitioners and the general public.

IV. Notes and recommendations

I would recommend the dissertation to be published - it is a really fascinating read, which is a good example of the possibility of a scientific text to present facts, data, trends that are of interest beyond a narrow professional community. The dissertation summarizes global trends in the PR business that are known to professionals and the scholarly community, but in this case are presented in a way that will educate a wide range of Bulgarian society and this effort would contribute to improving the communication environment. Effective social media management is also a topic that excites not only communication experts, but leaders and managers in all fields.

As a recommendation, I would elaborate on Maxim Behar's rightly noted specificity of the PR business: "In other words, whatever I write about this business, the next day it may be already out-dated. And this has always been the charm of the PR business for me, I have been in it for exactly 30 years and to this day I observe its very rapid development, its dynamics, changes and new techniques." My recommendation to Maxim Behar is to continue to observe these transformations of the profession, participating as a practitioner in them, analysing in the next book not only the global, but also the Bulgarian PR practice and its changes, for which he also has a personal contribution.

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Maxim Behar has published the following scientific articles on the topic of his dissertation:

1. Behar, Maxim. Visual communication and information society. In. Publisher. ISSN 1313-9908.
2. Behar, Maxim. Public relations and the risks of "full transparency". Media and Communications: Scientific Proceedings of Doctoral Students of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. 3 Sofia. St. Petersburg. 208-216 pp.
3. Behar, Maxim. The new normal of social media. Media and Communications: Scientific Proceedings of Doctoral Students of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. St. 210-228 pp.

The books cited by the PhD student are related to the topic of the dissertation. Although for the most part they do not comply with the generally accepted definitions and



criteria for a scientific text, this does not diminish their value and their practical-applied contributions to the PR business. Among these titles, we can mention the following Maxim Behar's books: "Five Minutes to Tomorrow: COVID-19 Woke Leaders to a New World: Here's How We'll Live in It", Faber, 2020, "The Global PR Revolution", Enthusiast, 2019, "Generation F", Enthusiast, 2013, "111 Rules on Facebook", ed. Siela Norma, 2011.

VI. Conclusion

Due to all the above, I believe that PhD student Maxim Behar can be awarded the degree of Doctor of Education and Science in the professional field 3.5. "Public Communications and Information Sciences" (Media and Communications - Public Relations), for which I will vote positively.

Date: 09.11.2024

Reviewer:
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova