



OPINION

from **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariya Nikolova, University of National and World Economy** for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Business Communication) with a dissertation on the topic: **“Dynamics and Tendencies in Sectoral PR for Nonconventional Energy Sector”**, presented by Maria Teodorova Krasteva, full-time doctoral student at the Department History and Theory of Journalism of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor: **Prof. D.Sc. Lubomir Stoykov**.

I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation

Maria Krasteva's dissertation explores a highly relevant and significant issue—how public relations (PR) is integrated into the unconventional energy sector. Given the global drive toward renewable energy—along with public scepticism, organised pressure groups, and political and institutional regulatory shortcomings—this dissertation is not only timely but also necessary. As Bulgaria, along with other European countries, increasingly incorporates renewables into its energy mix, the need for robust PR strategies to foster public acceptance of renewable policies and projects among various stakeholders becomes even more critical.

The dissertation presents a thorough review of key theoretical sources and works by authors from both Bulgaria and abroad. It draws on classical and contemporary communication theories, including fundamental communication models that position PR within corporate and public discourse. The analysis features an extensive review of research in sectoral PR, integrating interdisciplinary perspectives on energy policy at both the European and global levels, as well as methods for researching public opinion and developing communication strategies aimed at shifting attitudes. This provides a strong theoretical foundation for the empirical research conducted.

As the first study of its kind in Bulgaria, Maria Krasteva's research critically analyses established PR communication techniques and examines their applicability to the unconventional energy sector. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the dissertation provides empirical evidence supporting the need for tailored PR strategies within the industry. This work makes a valuable contribution by introducing new conceptual frameworks for PR in the unconventional energy sector. The author's proposed definitions and classifications of communication challenges are well-argued and supported by findings from her empirical research in Bulgaria. Furthermore, the identification of key narratives and their influence on public perception adds originality to the study.

The research methods used are well-chosen and functionally viable. The dissertation employs a mixed-methods research approach, including case studies of PR strategies for unconventional energy projects, in-depth interviews with public relations professionals in the energy sector, and quantitative studies assessing the role of PR practitioners in organisations working in the renewable energy sector. This multifaceted approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the communication challenges facing this crucial industry in modern societies.

The dissertation successfully systematises the major PR challenges in the unconventional energy sector and offers a structured approach to addressing them. Maria Krasteva introduces a new model for audience segmentation and strategic messaging, which could serve as a practical tool for PR professionals engaged in strategic planning. Additionally, the study proposes the adoption of innovative PR techniques, such as interactive digital engagement and crisis communication strategies, tailored to the unique characteristics of the energy sector.



The dissertation demonstrates a high level of accuracy in data collection, processing, and analysis. All sources are correctly cited, and the theoretical generalisations of definitions and concepts are well-argued. The empirical data from industry surveys, as well as the author's own research, are accurately described, leading to valuable conclusions and recommendations.

Maria Krasteva's dissertation introduces new insights into public relations in the unconventional energy sector, particularly in Bulgaria. It identifies previously unexplored challenges, such as the lack of dedicated PR campaigns for renewable energy projects, the insufficient involvement of local communities in energy transition initiatives, and the spread of misinformation on social media regarding renewable energy projects and climate change. These findings contribute significantly to the broader academic discourse on energy communication.

While introducing qualitatively new data, the dissertation also reinforces existing theories in public relations, demonstrates the applicability of crisis communication strategies, and validates stakeholder theory along with other media concepts. Maria Krasteva exhibits a high level of bibliographic awareness, drawing on a wide range of sources, including academic articles, industry reports, and policy documents. The inclusion of international research further enhances the credibility of the study and situates it within the global discourse on PR and the communication of renewable energy projects.

The dissertation follows a well-structured format and adheres to academic standards. It includes a clear introduction, literature review, methodology section, empirical research findings, and conclusion. The logical sequence of arguments and structured presentation contribute to its coherence. The text is written in an accessible academic style, utilising precise terminology. The language is professional and appropriate for a doctoral dissertation.

II. Contributions of the dissertation research

I fully acknowledge Maria Krasteva's contributions as formulated in the dissertation. The research introduces new theoretical frameworks and hypotheses regarding PR communications in the unconventional energy sector. It also develops an original model for audience segmentation and message framing, enhancing strategic communication in the renewable energy sector. Additionally, the dissertation identifies key PR challenges and analyses shortcomings in current PR strategies employed by renewable energy organisations.

A major strength of the research is its practical applicability. By identifying the main barriers to effective communication in the unconventional energy sector, the dissertation's findings can help organisations build public trust, enhance transparency, and refine their strategies through high-quality information and education targeted at both stakeholders and the general public.

III. Notes and recommendations

I have no substantive criticisms of the text. However, I encourage Maria Krasteva to continue exploring the topic of communications in the energy sector, particularly in the area of crisis PR. I also recommend that the dissertation be published to ensure its well-deserved dissemination among the professional community.

IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Maria Krasteva meets the requirements of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University *St. Kliment Ohridski* for the approbation and dissemination of research results, in accordance with Article 5, item 5. The dissertation also fulfils the minimum national requirements under Article 63, paragraph 1(4), and Article 69, paragraph 3, as it includes four publications on the topic—two in electronic scientific journals, one in the *Yearbook of St. Kliment Ohridski*, and one in the *Proceedings of the Scientific Conference Media and Communications* of the FJMC.



V. Conclusion

Maria Teodorova Krasteva's dissertation is a well-researched, original, and methodologically sound study of sectoral PR in the field of unconventional energy. It makes a significant theoretical and practical contribution by proposing new models for PR strategies in the renewable energy sector. The research is thorough, and its conclusions are convincingly argued. Given the quality of the study and the practical applicability of its findings, the dissertation serves as a valuable resource for both academics and practitioners in the field of PR within the energy sector.

For these reasons, I fully support the awarding of the PhD degree in the professional field **3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences** (*Media and Communications – Business Communication*) to Maria Krasteva for her dissertation, *"Dynamics and Problems of Sector PR in the Unconventional Energy Sector."*

Jury member:

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