



## OPINION

from Assoc. Prof. Katia Mihailova, PhD

*(scientific position, academic degree, name, surname, educational / scientific institution)*

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences.

with a dissertation on the topic: "Multimodal stimuli and the construction of meanings and visual messages. Analysis of the communicative tools of traditional and online media through framing theory",

presented by Yotka Valentinova Pancheva, full-time doctoral student in the Department "Press and Book Publishing" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Veselina Vakanova, PhD

### **I. Evaluation of the qualities of the text of dissertation**

The dissertation research focuses on a problem of undeniable scientific and social relevance. It deals with the impact of the visual media image on audiences or how visuality participates in the "*discursive construction of meaning, in the construction, narration and legitimization of the "image" of the world*" (Abstract, p. 8, Dissertation, p. 8). It is difficult to find an argument against the relevance of the problem, even though we live in a "civilization of the spectacle" according to Mario Vargas Llosa.

The presented dissertation examines the problem from a precisely defined and methodologically justified point of view. The author is interested in the "frames of thinking" in visual journalism, derived through framing theory, which are perceived by the audience in the process of mass communication through online and traditional media. The object of study is online and traditional media. The empirical research is focused on selected media publications with text and visual components. The criteria for recruiting the units of research are clearly presented. Three qualitative empirical surveys are presented, which approve the methodology proposed by the author and serve as a starting point for new research hypotheses.

A precisely constructed scientific apparatus is visible, showing good bibliographic awareness of the author. It is precisely the bibliographic awareness that is the pedestal of the theoretical analysis presented in the first and second chapters of the dissertation research. Here, the author's attempt to combine different theoretical concepts is remarkable – framing theory and media agenda theory on the one hand, and on the other – their collective combination with visual rhetoric and other concepts in visual communication.

The theoretical combination is synchronous with the main concept in the title of the dissertation - "multimodality". It turns out that the author is not looking for dimensions of multimodality only in the media message or only in the construction of frames, but also on



theoretical level by combining theoretical concepts from different disciplines and paradigms. This is the basis of interdisciplinarity.

If the first and second chapters present the theoretical basis of the dissertation research, then in the third chapter the author presents the methodological basis of his research – operationalization of the theoretical to achieve methodologically substantiated tools for empirical research. Consequently, in the fourth chapter three qualitative empirical studies are presented.

What has been said so far gives grounds for the following conclusions:

1. The research is an indisputably current scientific and social problem;
2. From a disciplinary point of view, the research is interdisciplinary with a center in the sociology of media and communications;
3. The methodological solutions of the research are reasoned and correctly followed by the author;
4. In terms of structure, the dissertation is developed in a classical structure with the first – theoretical, the second – methodological and the third – empirical part;
5. A high degree of scientific awareness of the chosen problem, but also of scientific integrity and ethics, has been demonstrated. The latter is also evident in the completely correct reflection of the dissertation in the abstract.

## **II. Contributions of the dissertation research**

The presented dissertation research has its scientific contributions. At the theoretical level, the attempt to combine framing theory, media theories as well as theories in the field of visual rhetoric and communication, which is made in the dissertation, is a basis for contributions. At the methodological level, the dissertation also opens up a wide field of contribution, insofar as an original methodological toolkit for the substantive analysis of multimodal stimuli and the construction of meaning in visual publications is first developed.

Usually, the author formulates the contributions of his research in a separate part of the abstract. In the abstract under consideration, the contributions are embedded in the concluding part of the abstract, which in terms of content is identical to the “Conclusion” of the dissertation itself. The question arises of how to separate the concluding part of the research from the contributing part. In the conclusion of the dissertation, the author usually presents the results of testing the research hypotheses. And in the contributions, as part of the abstract, the author specifically formulates what is new for science – at a theoretical and methodological level, new concepts, new definitions, new methods and research methodologies.

## **III. Notes and recommendations**

There are three main recommendations for further work on the dissertation.

The first is of a stylistic nature and refers specifically to the fourth chapter of the dissertation. It presents three qualitative empirical studies. Each of them is also presented in separate publications by the author, which indicates the dissemination of scientific results among the community. In the dissertation, these three studies stand more as independent publications, rather than as part of the entire dissertation research.

The second is editorial – semantic and stylistic editing of the text is necessary in order to increase the scientific accuracy of the conceptual apparatus. For example, what does “empirical



program” mean on page 27? Maybe “empirical research program”? Editing is also necessary to avoid repetition of individual sentences and paragraphs. For example, on pages 88 and 146, paragraphs that begin with “Advanced modern technologies make photographic manipulation...”; on page 25, see the first and second paragraphs, the repetition blurs the meaning.

The third recommendation is to include a contribution section in which the author presents his own assessment of the contributions of the dissertation research. My request is that the doctoral student, within the framework of the public defense, specify the contributions of the research.

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

The materials submitted for the preparation of this opinion – dissertation, abstract, reference for the fulfillment of the national minimum requirements, autobiography, show fulfillment of the requirements of the Regulations on the terms and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for testing and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5, as well as covering the minimum national requirements under Art. 63, para. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, para. 3.

The doctoral candidate presents 5 independent publications and 1 in co-authorship. Four are developed from reports from scientific conferences, the remaining 3 are published in the most authoritative Bulgarian scientific publications in the scientific field. All publications submitted are within the thematic outline of the dissertation.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The presented dissertation demonstrates scientific awareness, theoretical and methodological approach, skills in conducting empirical research, high scientific integrity and ethics. All this gives me reason to confidently recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in scientific specialty 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Visual Communication) to Yotka Valentinova Pancheva.

Jury member: Assoc. Prof. Katia Mihailova, PhD

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025