

## **SCIENTIFIC REVIEW**

by Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov, Sofia University, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor/PhD" in the professional field

3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Visual Communication)

with a dissertation on the topic: "Multimodal Stimuli and Construction of Meanings and Visual Messages Analysis of the Communicative Tools of Traditional and Online Media through the Theory of Framing", presented by Yotka Valentinova Pancheva, a full-time PhD student in the Department of Press Journalism and Book Publishing of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

**Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova**

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

The topic of the presented completed dissertation text is an attempt to comprehensively study the messages and communicative tools for their implementation in traditional and online media through the method of visual framing. The work is structured in an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, bibliography. The latter contains 140 bibliographical sources, of which 34 are in Cyrillic and 106 in Latin. The dissertation work has a total volume of 157 pages. The four chapters of the dissertation include the necessary elements of a serious research analysis on each topic considered by the PhD student: the communication theory of framing, the evolution of visual design and the social significance of media, multimodal framing tools for constructing meanings and visual messages, as well as the dynamics of traditional and online media. The analysis is specific, with references to concepts, with rich bibliographical awareness, with depth and comprehensiveness of the study of theoretical sources and, in my opinion, with a realized social effect, especially in the part where, based on my own research (three in number), important and necessary generalizations are offered about the role of communication in today's digital and technologically advanced social world.

As a systematized subfield of communication research, the study of visual communication is a relatively new scientific discipline. Even today, in this academic field, there is a need to explore and discover more complex ways to study visual meanings and study the reactions of viewers and audiences to the impact of images. Therefore, with the imposition of visual culture in communication, a broad study of theoretical approaches to the study of images and the different social contexts in which they play a role, as well as the practical study of different methods of visualization, is important and necessary. According to some aesthetic theories, theater also

attracts as a form of experience through images, and this emphasizes the importance of visuality and the need for its study and research.

In this sense, the research of PhD student Pancheva is a serious, current and original vision of new trends in the field of communication tools, refracted through an influential theory. As the PhD student noted, “with the continued development of technologies and the discovery of new ways of communication, it is inevitable that journalism will continue to transform, adapt and take advantage of them in order to fully fulfil its social function” (p. 9). The good structure of the dissertation leaves a very strong impression, which brings additional clarity to the thesis and arguments of the PhD student in the complex subject of his research.

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

PhD student Pancheva aptly begins her research part of the presentation with the mention of photography and its role in media messages. Today, visuality has not lost the power of its impact - in consumer culture, in popular culture and in the emerging global digital culture, in science, art, journalism and commercial communication. In general, the visual, if I may summarize in a broader sense, is turned towards the future, especially in the process of communication and the transmission of content. As Nicholas Mirzoeff, a theorist of visual culture and one of the main researchers in this field, writes in one of his forewords – “nowadays, seeing is far more important than believing... the queues of people in front of the Empire State Building skyscraper in New York are longer for the virtual reality “New York Ride” than for the elevators to access the building itself”. I am writing all this to emphasize the relevance and dissertationability of the thesis and the overall research optics of PhD student Pancheva. She also connects her main thesis with the social significance of journalism in society, which emphasizes the relevance of the chosen topic to the doctoral program and the specific research problem. For researcher Pancheva, visual elements (such as photographs, graphics, clips, frames, etc.) are undoubtedly used more and more often in news stories, in the presentation of various journalistic positions and assessments, as an attempt to arouse greater interest, not only as an illustration, but also as evidence, a fact, but also a deliberate depiction in the journalistic narrative. The overall study is aptly focused on a detailed and systematic analysis of the theory of framing as a phenomenon of the contemporary media environment, which serves for the increasingly effective transmission of messages and meaning through visual communication in contemporary traditional and online (new or primarily visual, as the PhD student writes) media. As the author also notes, research on visual framing, its specific effects on audience understanding and interpretation, and the development of methodologies in this regard are relatively few, and in

this sense the dissertation is an original and necessary study in this academic field. Its main research hypotheses are related to the theory of framing, mainly in its visual context, and are fully relevant to the overall scientific concept of the work. The various theoretical and cognitive angles from which the main scientific problems of the work can be seen are presented and examined carefully and in detail in the first chapter through the theory of perception, the theory of visual cognition, the theory of aesthetics, the theory of applied media aesthetics, the theory of visual rhetoric, the theory of visual ethics, the theory of visual semiotics, etc. The second chapter of the dissertation traces the development of visual design and the social influence of the media. The PhD student analyses the visual communication of the 19th century, as well as such cultural phenomena as modernism and postmodernism of the 20th century. To quote Professor Mirzoev again, the fascination with the visual and its effects, which is a key characteristic of modernism, gives rise to a postmodern culture that is “most postmodern” when it is visual. The author's ability to navigate the various cultural, social, aesthetic and technological conditions that led to the emergence and change of the phenomenon of visualise in communication is very impressive, as she constantly "holds", if I use this term from phenomenology, the main direction of her research. PhD student Pancheva demonstrates enviable knowledge in the field of aesthetics, photography, related to the theory of the perspective of space and image, communication theory, the history of journalism, media, graphic and media design, as well as unquestionable skills in arguing the philosophical questions of objectivity and subjectivity, presentation and representation, which is also a key problem in contemporary knowledge of the visual. The third chapter is key to the work and is dedicated to clarifying the theoretical foundations of the framing process and multimodal tools for constructing meanings and visual messages. Framing as a fundamental concept in the text is given considerable attention by the PhD student, and her main thesis is defended to the maximum extent. The concept of framing is cognitively conceptualized and typologies successfully in the text of the study together with its various contexts, in accordance with the goals of the dissertation. I write this because framing often encounters the phenomenon of a fuzzy conceptuality (“fractured paradigm”, as the quoted Entman expresses it), sometimes even defined as a metaphor by some authors. Moreover, framing is also appropriately operationalized by the PhD student for the specific tasks of covering the journalistic news or report: for the purpose of presentation and for the purpose of understanding their content. “Multimodality” here is understood as the communicative interaction of meaning, encoded in different modalities. The fourth chapter of the work includes three studies conducted independently by the PhD student to fulfil the tasks of the dissertation text. Text messages, photos, various

journalistic discourses, linguistic figures, videos are analysed and the effects of framing are tracked independently and in detail, with an emphasis on visual framing. As an important part of the research, it is dedicated to efforts to combat the spread of disinformation and fake news. The well-founded conclusion of the overall work is that framing theory is not just an academic concept, but also a practical tool for developing media literacy and critical thinking.

### **III. Notes and recommendations**

I have no notes, but I recommend that PhD student Yotka Pancheva continue to work with commitment and research ambition in the field of framing theory, the phenomena of media effects, and the influence on public opinion through visual elements in the communication process.

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

The doctoral candidate has provided a list of publications on the topic, in Bulgarian and English, presented in academic periodicals, as well as in peer-reviewed scientific collections. It is striking that the young researcher has a publication in an edition in a world-renowned database of scientific information. This is natural, considering the significance of the doctoral candidate's scientific topic and her seriously thought-out research position. The remaining publications are also dedicated to different aspects of the research optics of doctoral candidate Pancheva and are entirely relevant to the main topic of her dissertation work. They have been published in extremely serious academic publications and are evidence of the successful and meaningful scientific production of the candidate.

I also have personal observations of the colleague's participation in scientific forums, international and national. The number of conferences, both in Bulgaria and abroad, that the colleague has indicated in her professional biography is impressive. It testifies to the enduring scientific and research interest in the topic, to the continuous and fruitful efforts of the young colleague to monitor the current trends of its development, as well as to approve the achieved results before an authoritative scientific community in our country and abroad. The PhD student has also described participation in authoritative national projects with a serious scientific team, which convincingly indicates that she is a recognizable and preferred partner there because of her research skills and academic erudition.

### **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to note that in the presented dissertation text, PhD student Yotka Pancheva proves her enviable knowledge in the field of communication practice and theory, of contemporary journalism and other forms of public communication, of public and media information and representations. The trends in the development of contemporary visual communication are eruditely presented, as well as the theoretical uncertainty regarding the consequences or sometimes contradictory effects of framing in journalistic practice. This erudition is combined with detailed analysis, logical argumentation and detailed knowledge of authors, concepts, theories, practical forms and methods of using the presentation of events and processes in the media. Everywhere in the text and presentation of PhD student Pancheva, moral concern and responsibility for the lawful use of visual technologies and their impact on audiences in terms of credibility, rejection of manipulation and ultimately - to the formation of a more informed and socially engaged public.

Based on the presented text, the successfully completed research tasks, the defended thesis in the maximum volume, the proven theoretical and practical-applied contributions by the PhD student, the overall relevance of the dissertation text to the topic and scientific field of the study, I propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to accept the dissertation work of PhD student Yotka Pancheva as successfully completed and, based on her proven scientific and research qualities, **to confer her the educational and scientific degree "doctor/PhD" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Visual Communication).**

As a member of the jury, **I vote with conviction "YES".**

Date: 25.03.2025

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Nikolay Mihaylov