



## OPINION<sup>1</sup>

from Professor Kristina Varbanova-Dencheva, PhD in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences

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

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 the Framing Theory,”

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Presented by Yotka Valentinova Pancheva, a full-time doctoral student in the Department of „Press Journalism and Publishing“ at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication,

Under the scientific supervision of Prof. Veselina Valkanova, PhD

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

The dissertation study examines the relevance of the problem of constructing meanings and visual messages from three perspectives:

1. Changes in content representation with technological developments over the last 200 years and tools for visualizing content.
2. The impact of these changes on the social role of journalism.
3. The emergence of new directions in the development of concepts related to perception and display, as well as changes in how new tools influence audience perceptions and behavior.

The study's relevance is further supported by bibliometric data ( Web of Science , number of published articles and citations on the topic), which indicate exponential growth since 1985.

The significance of the research is justified by the dynamically changing audience attitudes influenced by the effects of new tools on media message perception and their role in shaping public attitudes and opinions. The functional role of framing theory in structuring the new multimedia nature of content and guiding users in a visually dominated communication environment is well-argued.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: The text in italics offers reference points for evaluating the research results. Recommended volume of the opinion - 2-3 standard pages



To establish the theoretical framework of the study, the doctoral candidate has reviewed a large volume of relevant literature from renowned scholars in: Information theory; Communication theory; Applied media aesthetics; Visual ethics; Visual rhetoric; Visual cognitions; Semiotics; Visual intertextuality; Cultural studies; Visual ethnography; Visual narrative.

The first chapter presents a detailed literature review and theoretical justifications for applying visual communication theory to the construction and structuring of meaning. Based on this, the use of framing theory as a tool for shaping perceptions and opinions among users is substantiated.

To support the research hypotheses, the dissertation introduces a new approach to studying trends in news representation in both print and online media. It argues that there is a synergy between visual communication tools and framing theory, which enables the use of multimodal stimuli to shape the meaning of media content and its perception as an intentional message. The research also forecasts the sustainability of this trend in journalistic news presentation.

In the context of the evolution of design and presentation in visual communication—from print to online media—the study examines the role of photography and optical journalism in content construction, highlighting its range from enhancing objectivity and expressiveness to manipulative techniques such as photomontage.

The methodological framework includes: Traditional research methods (observation, literature review, content analysis).

In Chapter Four are applied two methodologies:

1. Textual framing analysis , combining qualitative interpretative and automated approaches.
2. Visual framing analysis , using theories and tools of visual communication.

The three studies presented in Chapter Four aim to address the key research questions. They logically cover:

- Identifying and analyzing the synergy between framing theory and visual communication theories applicable to meaning construction in traditional and online media.
- Examining visual communication in framed messages from a journalistic perspective, particularly in the linguistic and conceptual structuring of framed news using figurative language .
- Exploring positive and negative practices in textual and visual communication , from objective argumentation to intentional audience manipulation .

A specific analysis is conducted on negative effects arising from manipulative use of color and brightness in visual presentations, with examples from conspiratorial images and videos in Bulgarian media.



The dissertation's contributions are based on thorough research and findings derived from an extensive analysis of fake news and disinformation. Conclusions are drawn regarding the need for an analytical methodology that accounts for new digital tools in media content creation, helping audiences develop critical media literacy.

The bibliography includes 140 sources (34 in Bulgarian and the rest in English), demonstrating strong bibliographic literacy, broad awareness, and a well-supported bibliometric approach to the study.

The dissertation is well-structured, logically coherent, and adheres to scientific writing norms. The four chapters are balanced, and the author's abstract provides a concise and accurate summary of the research, aligned with the academic requirements of Bulgaria's Ministry of Education and Sofia University.

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

The contributions are outlined in the conclusion and fall into the category of enhancing and critically analyzing existing knowledge, with applications in framing theory within the modern digital environment, viewed through the lens of audience perception and journalistic challenges.

The key contributions can be summarized as follows:

1. Outlining trends in changes in communication theory and practice in society, driven by shifts in the technological environment and the living conditions it creates.
2. Changes in framing theory, expanding its scope with the development of visual framing, stimulated by the new digital technology toolkit.
3. Tracking, analyzing, and evaluating the dynamic synergy between textual and visual framing in media messages, highlighting both positive and negative trends arising from this complementary relationship.
4. Defining the issue of applying the synergy between textual and visual framing and the creation of a specific visual syntax for the accurate perception of messages by the audience, as well as the risks associated with digital tools—specifically, photographic manipulation—to enhance emotional impact and mislead perceptions of credibility.
5. Identifying linguistic figures as a potential means for expanding and deepening the synergy between textual and visual framing, as well as broadening the scope of methodologies for multimodal framing as a form of media communication.
6. Justifying the need to establish a current standardized methodology for analyzing and identifying the visual framing of messages, including the complexity of color rhetoric, as a preventive measure against the creation and dissemination of disinformation, fake news, and scientific-conspiracy images.



7. Demonstrating the necessity of aligning educational programs for journalism and related visual communication professions with the demands of the new media environment and the challenges it poses to fulfilling journalism's social function—to serve as a creator and guardian of objective, up-to-date, and reliable information for society, thereby fostering high media literacy and culture.

The contributions of this dissertation research are valuable for complementing and expanding knowledge on framing theory, benefiting researchers, professionals, students, and the general audience. It directs perception and cognitive models toward the development of critical thinking, enabling individuals to navigate the overwhelming information flow, which is growing at an exponential rate in both volume and newly generated resources.

With the necessary formatting according to academic standards, the text could be published in two editions: as a monograph and as a teaching aid.

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

I recommend that the doctoral candidate continue and deepen her research on developing a standardized methodology for analyzing and assessing visual framing and to continue disseminating her findings through scientific forums and publications in reputable national and international journals.

Despite the specialized terminology and the need for knowledge in framing theory and visual communication, the dissertation text is accessible and comprehensible to a broad audience.

#### Remarks:

1. The contributions of the dissertation research should be concisely and clearly defined at the end of the abstract rather than presented in a descriptive, albeit synthesized, style.
2. There are very few technical errors, which could have been avoided with an automatic editor (pages 8, 11).

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

The doctoral candidate has been highly active in disseminating the results of her research, participating in scientific forums and publishing articles derived from the dissertation's concept, goals, and objectives. She has also contributed to research teams in projects related to the dissertation's thematic focus.

She has published two articles in scientific journals (one co-authored) and five publications in conference proceedings from international and Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication conferences.



The submitted materials for defense demonstrate compliance with the regulations of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ regarding the conditions and procedures for obtaining scientific degrees and academic positions, meeting the requirements for validation and dissemination of research results under Article 5, Item 5 and the minimum national requirements under Article 63, Paragraph 1, Item 4, and Article 69, Paragraph 3.

#### **V. Conclusion**

The dissertation presented by Yotka Valentinova Pancheva demonstrates excellent theoretical preparation and mastery of the tools and methodologies of framing theory and visual communication. She creatively applies her acquired knowledge to adapt and expand the field of multimodality in visual message analysis.

Based on this, I am deeply convinced to vote in favor of awarding Yotka Valentinova Pancheva the educational and scientific degree Doctor in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Visual Communication).

Jury member:

Date: March 26, 2025