

OPINION

By Prof. Ivanka Georgieva Stapova, DSc – IPS at BAS

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 3.5. Public Communication and Information Sciences (Media and Communications), with a dissertation on the topic: "*Personal Selling as a Communicative Competence: Semiotic and Contextual Aspects*", presented by **KIRIL GRIGOROV YANEV**, a full-time PhD student at the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Hristo Kaftandjiev, DSc.

I. Evaluation of the quality of the dissertation

Doctoral student *Kiril Yanev's* dissertation work entitled *Personal Selling as a Communicative Competence: Semiotic and Contextual Aspects*, represents a fruitful combination of several interrelated aspects of research: on the one hand, *a theoretical analysis* of basic components related to the nature of personal selling (the basic construct) in the context of the dissertation (philosophical, psychological and ideological aspects), of the semiotic basis present in its functioning components related to communicative strategies in personal selling; and on the other hand, the *application* of the theoretically described basic concepts, characteristics, figures and fundamental semiotic interpretations related to the creation of advertising visions and their successful use as a tool of integrated marketing communications.

In the light of this joint functioning of *theoretical, conceptual* supports on the one hand, and, on the other, their *practical application* within this "conceptual framework", it may be noted that the dissertation assumes the difficult but very topical task (provoked by the modern development of technologies, digitalization and the pressing need to create adequate and highly convincing messages) of **constructing a working model for the production of scientifically sound, functional and applicable strategies, concepts, structural components related to personal selling**. The concept of "personal selling" enables searching for, analyzing and establishing a *strategic approach* to understanding the sales process through the prism of communication and the meaning communication carries in its diverse in terms of

communication, and the meaning of this process in its variety of forms and contexts. The integration of various communication elements makes selling not just a technical activity but also a *creative act* influencing the client's perceptions and decisions. Such a point of view defines a creative perspective related to the analysis and exploration of new, different, and alternative creative approaches to the communication between the two active subjects - *seller and customer*.

A particularly valuable perspective in the study is the fact that doctoral student Kiril Yanev has extensive practical experience in management, being a member of teams of active companies, organizations, and institutions. Obviously, his professional qualities have been repeatedly confirmed in his direct creative and managerial commitments. *In this sense, the dissertation work is rather a sharing of the experience of a talented manager and analyst, experience that is confirmed by the fact of his numerous practical activities.*

Life in modern times seems to be inevitably connected with the new attitude and new concepts in sales processes, especially in personal selling. Many structure-forming components are involved here in addition to *personal selling*, such as *communicative components, semiotics, the context, adequate presentation, and advertising*. We are flooded with advertisements coming from all directions. Advertising is a special business activity related to ideas; it is a "culture industry", a center for the production of symbols. It is an influential social institution in which are intertwined communication, science and art, a certain element of manipulation, and, of course, functional and purposive features; all of which shows advertising to be a creative process.

II. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is 308-pages long and consists of: *an introduction, a dissertation body in three chapters, a conclusion*, six author's scientific publications, a bibliography and 10 appendices, including a specialized dictionary of terms in Bulgarian and English. The main text contains 41 figures. The bibliography includes 151 titles, of which 45 are in Bulgarian and 106 in English. In addition, the bibliographic reference also cites the titles of other books by the author, of which three in Bulgarian and two in English.

Thus presented schematically and administratively, Kiril Yanev's dissertation forms an instrumental and conceptual text, which, developed in detail, represents a creative and applied-practical achievement of the author.

The introduction forms the basic administrative grid that sets the dimensions of the study. The author argues the *relevance and significance* of the topic in the context of the introduction of new forms of information transformation. Here the *motives for the choice of topic* are also presented: “the lack of systematic research on this problem” and the multifaceted unfolding of the topic in the dissertation are prerequisites of its scientific significance as well as its practical applied effectiveness based on a rich toolkit of *personal selling*.

The latter term is central to the *goals, objectives and hypotheses of the study*, achieving meaningfulness through the introduction of definitive, structure-forming terms and their deployment in strategies and working matrices. Hypothesis 1 is interesting: “Personal selling as ‘face to face’ communication can be interpreted as an interaction of ‘*media with media*’ communication in the context of the modern digital era, where every person can be both an audience and a media”. Personal selling, viewed as a multimedia communicative competence, requires a wide range of skills and knowledge for the successful use of various media channels, sign systems and contextual factors. The dissertation’s *research methods* include *analysis of texts related to the topic, content analysis and situational analysis*.

The three chapters of the dissertation unite philosophical, psychological and ideological perspectives, aiming at a comprehensive coverage of argumentation, typologies, strategies and models that define personal selling. The *first chapter*, entitled “Philosophy of personal selling”, is subordinated to a motto that transforms Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” into “*I sell, therefore I am*”. The creative play on the emblematic philosophical phrase aims to highlight the two active subjects – *seller and client*. In this chapter, the philosophical argumentation follows the structural components of personal selling, taking into account philosophical-ethical and moral principles and positions. Thus (at each of its stages), the proper substantive consideration of personal selling always takes into account certain strategies, concepts, and moral factors, without which the selling process would be incomplete and impaired.

The *second chapter*, “Psychology of Personal Selling”, which highlights the credo of personal selling, “*You win - I win*”, seeks to identify the principles, strategies and techniques that influence consumer behavior and explores how these approaches can be applied to optimize sales processes. This chapter logically analyzes the psychological models of human behavior as it unfolds in the process of negotiating and concluding agreements. That is why the main discussion here is presented through the prism of needs, interests, motives, preferences, as linked to personal selling. The emphasis is on the interconnectedness between seller and customer.

The *third chapter*, “Ideology of Personal Selling”, is summed up under the motto “*You are what you sell*”. The author examines how the sales process functions in relation to the nature of modern society. Considered in the light of the modern digital environment, communication interactions between a seller and a customer increasingly depend on multimedia channels and marketing strategies.

III. Administrative characteristics of the dissertation. Evaluation of the self-review abstract, contributions, publications

The dissertation work is neatly presented and structured into chapters and small paragraphs, which makes reading easy; the work includes adequate tables, diagrams and appendices (10 in number). The addition of a *Terminological Dictionary in Cyrillic script, a Dictionary of English terms*, and other appendices, is a wonderful idea; these add a practical side to the scientific character of the dissertation; thus, each separate component acquires a specific purpose and target audience. The *self-review abstract* is comprehensive and closely follows the course of the main text. It includes all the required components for such a text, : a list of *contributions* (5 items) adequately reflects the dissertation and the author’s achievements. Kiril Yanev creates his own conceptual grid, meant to provide a communicative matrix applicable to this modern form of presentation and product placement. The *bibliography* is fully relevant to the topic and the theoretical underpinnings of the dissertation. The attached table is proof that doctoral student Kiril Yanev meets the minimum national requirements for the "Doctor" degree.

IV. The author’s creative achievements

1. The dissertation text attests to the author’s competence, erudition and commitment to the topic of research, in which he is involved not as an observer but as participant in the research process.
2. The language of the text is understandable, not cumbersome, while also demonstrating scientific competence and an adequate grasp of conceptual terms and approaches.
3. The author summarizes his practical experience and direct participation in the communication process related to "personal selling".
4. Significantly, this dissertation become the basis of a monograph publication that serves multiple practical purposes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the well-constructed body of the dissertation and the balanced inclusion of theoretical and applied perspectives in it, and based on the qualities of the work (in terms of its goals, tasks, analyses, semiotics used as a basis for a conceptual grid, applicability through a matrix, etc.), I confidently vote YES for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to KIRIL GRIGOROV YANEV in the scientific field 3.5. Public communications and information sciences (Media and communications), with the dissertation work on the topic "Personal Selling as a Communicative Competence: Semiotic and Contextual Aspects". My compliments to the author of the text, doctoral student **Kiril Yanev**, and to his scientific supervisor, **Prof. Dr. Hristo Kaftandzhiev**, under whose supervision no doctoral student has ever failed to defend a dissertation!

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Prof. Ivanka Stupova, DSc