REVIEW

from Prof. Dr. Stefan Serezliev / University of Veliko Turnovo St. Cyril and St. Methodius - Department "Journalism and Public Relations"
 for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications Visual Communication)
with a dissertation on the topic: "Visual Communication and Digital Environment. Content Management, Information Architecture and Online Media Design - Communication and Accessibility ",

presented by Iveta Vanelinova Yordanova-Aneva full-time independent doctoral student in the Department Press Journalism and Book Publishing of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

with supervisor: Prof. Dr Vesselina Valkanova

Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation text

This dissertation continues the successful and well-established tradition in the Department Press Journalism and Book Publishing (and in the Faculty of Journalism at St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University) of significant research topics in multidisciplinary modern communications - as academic theory and successful professional practice.

The dissertation text of the PhD student Iveta Vanelinova Yordanova-Aneva fully meets the scientific speciality with an explicit request for modern research work in the complex multidisciplinary field of contemporary design, particularly in the general paradigm of content management, the information architecture of online media design in the context of communication, and the increasingly important role of accessibility and its requirements.

Congratulate the PhD student and, with special respect to her supervisor, Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova, for their courageous, academic, but also professional, firm and sustainable entry into the complex conceptual territory of design theory and practice, for taking risks, for the legitimate achievement of complex success through contemporary media, design and communication interpretation. This interpretation opens broad perspectives in academic theory and professional practice, but also in the specific field of media accessibility for disabled users - a topical, exciting, and significant topic for our society.

PhD student information. Creative and professional biography.

Iveta Vanelinova Yordanova-Aneva is enrolled as a full-time PhD student in the scientific specialty "Media and Communications-Visual Communication" at the Faculty of Visual Communication of Sofia University from 1 February 2021 to 1 March 2024.

The PhD student has obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism at the Faculty of Communication and a master's degree in design of Electronic Publications and Websites at the NBU, which traces his scientific and professional interests - online media and their graphic design specificity of visual identity and functional relations with various communication phenomena.

Iveta Yordanova-Aneva's creative and professional biography is relevant to the research paradigm. It follows the logic of consistent realization in the field of journalism and sports management, which allows further specialization in certain professional areas. At the same time, in both fields, there is an acute need for continuous optimization in the field of visual communication and design, especially in the online environment and even more so in the focus of digital inequality and

accessibility issues for disabled users.

The relevance of the research topic is gaining importance not only in the media and communication fields and industries but also in many frontier and interdisciplinary fields: economics, culture, business... On the other hand, the accessibility of online media within digital inequality resonates in the public space. Without a doubt, design can and does take on these specific commitments towards people with disabilities.

I note in turn the following points related to the review of the dissertation:

- **The theoretical sources** (126 - printed and online; 60 in Bulgarian and 66 in English) have been carefully selected, thoroughly researched and applied, covering relevant research areas. Very good bibliographical awareness.
- **The contributions are built on a high degree of reliability of** the materials studied.

The main text, figures, graphics and appendices are in the required formats and requirements.

The object and subject of study, aims and objectives are specified precisely.

The study of online media and their visual communication is optimally synchronized with the subject of the study - the aspects of visual communication, respectively, through which the web-based editions of the Bulgarian media scene influence the recipient and affect his perception.

The proposed hypotheses are well thought out and proposed in the relevant research stages, which also leads to relevance in the formation of the tasks. The doctoral student's affinity for psychological aspects is noticeable during the research work, but this challenge is always associated with the exploration and optimization of the different design processes. The suggestions for design analytics could include or analyse some models for optimising the perception of design through different sensory technologies, for example eye tracking. Eye tracking is a sensor technology that captures and converts eye movements into information about human behaviour - its potential applications are vast.

The structure and the methodology (methodological framework) have been carefully thought through and this allows too well define   the challenges in limiting the study. In this sense, there is very good adherence to the compositional requirements of the overall dissertation text.

In terms of content, the structure of the dissertation is well balanced and optimized: an introduction; with three, successively building chapters, a conclusion, contributions, bibliography

and appendices or a total of 258 pages, of which the main text is 178 pages - fully in the spirit and formal requirements for a dissertation.

The study is well visualised with 45 figures and 15 graphs.

The chapters in this dissertation are well balanced:

From Chapter 1 - focusing on theories of visual communication and the specificity of the influence of cognitive processes on the perception and psychological impact of visual language in the context of the digital environment through the impact and effectiveness of the elements of visual communication in Bulgarian online media and the phenomena of information architecture and design (in Chapter 2) to the study of digital inequality in its dependence on design (Chapter 3). Here I would suggest a more careful definition in the title of the chapter - digital inequality **does not stem from design** but rather is also a consequence of ineffective design and its corresponding weak role in developing the accessibility of online media.

The language in the study is readable, accessible and at the same time preserving the academic framework and standards. In places it is unnecessarily essayistic and to some extent tends to argue through more general popular claims of authors rather than as an academic approach (e.g. in the treatment of colours and the spontaneous argumentation of their symbolism through a general relation to painting or through Goethe's colour theory, which is no doubt authoritative in its own right).

There are no systematic misspellings and if there are they are rather occasional, but care must still be taken not to change the meaning or create ambivalence (p. 71, line 3 top to bottom - "researched show..." or research?).

PhD student well defines the limitations of the study to maintain consistency of research direction - individual design elements, principles of image construction and typographic elements, colour characteristics, etc. In this way, the relationship to the phenomena of media accessibility is also modelled.

The PhD student follows and develops consistently the interdisciplinary approach, integrating methods from graphic and web design, journalism, psychology, and some moments from media regulation.

The research methods are well chosen and applied, from content and comparative analysis through observation, online survey, experiment, and online interviews to quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

The citation is relevant and correct.

I agree with the formulation of the five scientific contributions. I have some reservations with the

first one, which is in the framework of providing a comprehensive analysis of the interaction between visual elements and their perception in a digital environment. The phenomenon of visual communication (including online) and different cognitive processes has been the subject of various researchers over the years.

In the fourth contribution mentioned, there is a prospect, in my view, to further explore and propose models for specific media self-regulation that would also encompass the various key professional aspects of design as process and outcome, and the designer as a professional characteristic.

Science metrics met as required.

Publications and participation in scientific forums

The scientific publications (3 pcs.) and the **reports at scientific forums** on the topic (5 pcs.) are fully in the requirements of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for the acquisition of scientific degrees and titles of academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and cover respectively the national requirements - *according to art. 5, item 5 and the minimum national requirements under art. 63, par. 1, item 4 and Art. 69, par. 3.*

Questions and recommendations:

The doctoral student has successfully addressed the preliminary comments and recommendations.

In terms of optimizing the research paradigm, I have two recommendations.

One of my recommendations is for the PhD student to create a glossary of terms that can be widely used in education and research, attempting to comprehensively explore the interdisciplinary relationships of the terms content management, information architecture and online media design with the various disciplines of design, Integrated Marketing Communications and branding in the context of both communication and accessibility and from the perspective of applied psychology.

My other recommendation is that future research should uncover the relationship of the design process to other actors and stakeholders in the communication process (including media).

These persons, as professional characteristics, can be the employees who create the texts and the various verbal constants - so-called copywriters, journalists, editors, etc.

The reason for this is the possible creation of a feeling in the reader and the professionally involved persons that the designer is, in a sense, also responsible for defining the verbal part of the visual communication (beyond the typographic layout). E.g. on page 61 an example is given of the role of

the headline as an image defining factor, which in the above sense can be clarified. The creation of several types of hierarchies in verbal constants also follows a specific creative and communicative logic by analogy with design. For example, the title is more a factor related to the generation of interest (like the function of the image). The transition to the topic is generally realised from the sub-title and subsequently realised through the main text and its paragraphs.

In future research, the PhD student has the potential, based on their research work, to explore the specifics of documentation affecting the development of the design project, such as the design brief. As a result, valuable consistent and relevant contributions can be developed towards adapting this documentation to the specificities of people with disabilities in their interactions with online media.

As questions for the PhD student whose answer would optimise the research direction in a complex way:
- Can new intersections in research and professional activity be conceptually sought between different disciplines in design in the context of online media and disability participation?
- Perspectives and implications in the context of user-generated design content creation in online media (visualization aspects) and artificial intelligence

Conclusion

My categorical conclusion is that the presented dissertation of doctoral student Iveta Vanelinova Yordanova-Aneva on the topic "Visual Communication and Digital Environment. Content Management, Information Architecture and Design of Online Media - Communication and Accessibility", the abstract and the materials of the procedure fully comply with the relevant requirements of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of Doctoral Degrees.

Taking into account the originality and precision of the research, the excellent theoretical knowledge and analytical skills of the PhD student and the high scientific results achieved, which are distinguished by high theoretical and applied value and correctness, I recommend with conviction to the esteemed jury to award the degree of Doctor of Education and Science to Iveta Vanelinova Yordanova-Aneva in the scientific specialty 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Visual Communication).

Date: 17.04.2025   Reviewer:

/Prof. Stefan Serezliev/