

OPINION

from Professor Tatyana Batuleva-Kancheva, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

of obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific field 3.5. Public Communication and Information Sciences, with a dissertation on the topic: "Marketing Communications of Health Care Facilities for Hospital Medical Care", presented by Valentina Marinova, full-time Ph.D. student at the Department "Communications, Public Relations and Advertising" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Scientific supervisor: Professor DSc Hristo Kaftandzhiev

1. Evaluation of the qualities of the dissertation work

The dissertation presented by Valentina Marinova consists of 229 pages, divided into a preface, 4 chapters and a conclusion. The author has used a remarkable number of sources (228), the majority of which (187) are in a foreign language and 26 are in Bulgarian. To these were added 10 documents relevant to the topic. The study includes databases of the National Statistical Institute, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and surveys conducted by the dissertation candidate herself. There is a *correct collection, processing and analysis of empirical data*. This fact testifies to serious *bibliographic awareness* and *reliability of the material* on which the contributions are based. The fact that Marinova has *multidisciplinary expertise* in the field of mass communication, on the one hand, and health care, on the other, also contributes to this. A particularly valuable aspect in this case is her *extensive practical experience*, gained from her work at the National Association of Private Hospitals, as a real motivator and participant in healthcare events. This gives her the incentive and opportunity to explain those not always visible mechanisms that give specificity to the internal and external communication of medical institutions in Bulgaria.

The dissertation is based on a *solid theoretical foundation*. The author provides examples of established practices relevant to the topic with correct references to foreign and Bulgarian authors with contributions to the research field (P. Kotler, M. P. Peters, Jay Lynch, A. Bandura, H.

Kaftandzhiev, etc.). Marinova has presented *a very up-to-date, significant and innovative* study, both in theoretical terms and in terms of the possibilities for practical applications inherent in it. The *main scientific problem* is convincingly addressed, namely: how effective are the forms of marketing communications in the Bulgarian context, which of them achieve the maximum benefit, which remain outside the specifics of communication in health and hospital care, how their action in the Bulgarian environment is different from that in other countries.

The object (hospital care institutions in Bulgaria) and the subject (marketing communication of hospital care institutions) of the study are precisely formulated. Based on this, *the main research thesis* is derived: there is a difference in the degree of effectiveness of marketing practices and tools in the labor market on the one hand and in the sphere of health services on the other. The chosen *methodology is operational* because it allows the application of one of the main qualities of the work: a *synthesis of theoretical and practical discourse*. The work represents a successful solution of several research tasks, through which specific conclusions are substantiated, concerning the legal basis of healthcare in Bulgaria, the theory and practice of marketing communication worldwide and in Bulgaria, practical conclusions about communication. The author convincingly shows (see chapter one) that skills in the field of social marketing are not a sufficiently reliable basis for reflecting the complex matter of health PR. Taking into account the specifics of communications in the studied area, Marinova proposes a “marketing mix”.

Chapter two is a theoretical analysis of the specifics of PR, advertising, influence marketing, and market-stimulating strategies. The complex nature of “health” communications is due: *first*, to the specifics of the “Healthcare” product; *second*, to the national peculiarities of the health system, which Marinova examines in a comparative analysis with international marketing practices in other countries; *third*, the need to take into account the close relationship between healthcare and finance, healthcare and law, or, as she points out, it is a field “whose opportunities for development and expansion are limited by regulations of state institutions and normative acts”. Last but not least, the existence of a relationship between healthcare and ethics.

Approaching the topic from different angles, Marinova substantiates the marketing features of communications in healthcare institutions, subsequently explicates the difference between “hospital communications” in our and other healthcare systems, which determines different communication practices.

The dissertation is marked by a *clear authorial presence*. In the process of presentation the 4 working hypotheses launched in the preface are confirmed: for the leading role of the legislative basis and the commercial form of hospitals in Bulgaria in determining the forms of communication practices; for the higher degree of effectiveness of public relations in contrast to other marketing practices; for the gradual increase of the effectiveness of Internet communication in the field of health care; for the relatively limited scope of action of some marketing communications in the area under consideration. Other *appropriately selected optics* are the analyses in the context of the specifics of crisis communication and the preventive role of health PR.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to hospital associations in Bulgaria - their history, development, activities and communication practices. Non-governmental organizations and the National Association of Private Hospitals are also mentioned. The specificity of hospital management, as well as the peculiarities of PR activities in the field of health services in the national and international context are convincingly analyzed.

The presented text is very *well structured* and complies with the compositional requirements for a dissertation text. The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation. Both in terms of content and form, the work presented by Valentina Marinova “Marketing Communications of Healthcare Facilities for Hospital Medical Care” *fully meets the requirements* necessary for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Public Communications and Information Sciences”. In terms of language and style, the text is at the required high level.

2. Contributions of the dissertation research

The contributions are correctly formulated. The work has an accurate, rarely encountered *balance between theoretical discourse and an orientation towards practical solutions that are particularly needed by society*. Valentina Marinova has quite rightly distinguished the scientific-theoretical from the practical contributions. I will focus on some of them, which seem particularly important to me.

First. With its high practical and social significance, the issues of the dissertation work will undoubtedly receive interpretations in future research, both in a national and international context. This is practically *marking a new research field*, which has its own reserved place not only in the

present, but also in the future. The results of the study are *highly applicable* and are a good basis for introducing changes in the communication policies of medical institutions.

Second. On the basis of a meaningful semiotic analysis, leading elements of the initial architectural design and interior design of medical institutions have been derived, *as factors that create conditions for a certain type of communication and motivate a certain type of choice*. In theoretical terms, this conclusion is evidence of the applicability of sign systems in building the image of health institutions.

Third. The content and role of terms such as “partner” and “partner-competitor” have been substantiated and a *classification of the types of partners has been proposed*, specific primarily for objects in the field of health care. Their activity, unlike that of other collaborators (such as suppliers and subcontractors), implies a strong and not always financially motivated moral impulse.

Fourth. A *working algorithm has been derived* for effective work with different generational groups in the field of Internet communications and the activities of PR experts.

Fifth. The thesis that “not all marketing practices and tools that have proven their effectiveness on the market” have the same degree of effectiveness on the health services market and in the activities of non-governmental organizations has been convincingly proven.

3. Notes and recommendations

I have no comments on the presented text. My recommendation is that it be published as a monograph. In this way, it would become the basis for specific management decisions that are useful to society.

4. Publications and participation in scientific forums

6 studies and articles have been attached to the topic of the dissertation, as well as 6 reports presented at conferences, which offer different perspectives on the dissertation topic.

The materials presented many *times exceed the minimum requirements* of the National Centre for information and Documentation (PF 3.5. Public Communications and Information

Sciences) indicators, as well as those set out in the Regulations for the Implementation of Academic Staff Development Act of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She is the author of one chapter of a collective monograph.

5. Conclusion

Considering the qualities of the work, its practical and theoretical relevance, I will **confidently vote for Valentina Marinova to be awarded the educational and scientific degree Doctor (PhD) of Public Communications and Information Sciences**, and I call on the members of the esteemed Scientific Jury to support this decision.

Professor, DSc Tatyana Batuleva

April 22, 2025