



## OPINION<sup>1</sup>

by Associate Professor Hristina Hristova, PhD, St. St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, regarding the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in scientific field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Integrated Marketing Communications) with a dissertation on the topic: "Stigmatization in Political Discourse in the 20th and 21st Centuries: A Semantic Analysis", submitted by Lazar Svetlozarov Shishmanov, PhD candidate in "Communication, Public Relations and Advertising" Department at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

under the academic supervision of Prof. Dr. Diyana Petkova.

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

The dissertation is dedicated to the current issue of the specificity of the phenomenon of stigmatization and its manifestations in political discourse. The examination of political stigmatization within the dynamic socio-political context and the constantly evolving media and communication environment of the 20th century and the first quarter of the new century represents a significant attempt to explore one of the key phenomena of public life.

The content structure of the dissertation is determined by the aim, objectives, subject, and object of the research, which are specified in the introductory section, where the motivation for the choice of topic and methodology is also presented.

The selection of the applied methods aligns with the research goal. The scope of the dissertation and the limitations within the research framework are precisely outlined. The focus is on media headlines that highlight the collaboration between the political and media spheres, as well as specific events from the 20th and 21st centuries that illustrate the roles, meanings, and suggestive potential of political stigmatization.

**The introductory section** brings together observations and findings that correspond with the formulated research hypothesis of the dissertation—namely, that stigmatization in political discourse is conditioned by the systematic construction of the image of the enemy through various semantic fields, aimed at "transforming the political opponent into a symbol of threat to social order, morality, and cultural identity."

The justification of the research hypothesis is based on a broad range of theoretical sources related to the dissertation topic. Lazar Shishmanov's text demonstrates solid bibliographic awareness and a precisely defined theoretical foundation. The presented factual information and the in-depth analysis across the three chapters reflect accuracy in the selection and presentation of the empirical data.

**In the first chapter** – "*Social Aspects of Stigmatization*" – the evolutionary and psychological roots of stigmatization are examined. The analysis emphasizes the essence and impact of self-concept, cognitive dissonance, and the codification of norms in the process of stigmatization, as well as the outlined relationships between social status and self-concept, and between stigma,

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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



prejudice, and stereotypes. The importance of self-concept is highlighted in terms of personal development and identification, as well as in affirming group identity in contrast to “the other.”

Among the merits of the dissertation is the analysis presented in the first chapter of the semantic dimensions of stigma and its functionality in the social and political discourse. Within this context are addressed the forms of deviance, the differentiated types of stigma—including its manifestations in the socio-psychological and linguistic dimensions, as well as in the physical world or beyond language, expressed through various “markers.”

The assertion that the identification of unacceptable behavior is conditioned by the prevailing social consensus, dominant philosophy, ideology, or religion is convincingly substantiated. A key strength of the research is its focus on stigmatization as a marketing tool. The selected and analysed data related to the communication strategies of specific corporate brands within the context of consumer culture and increasing competition are skilfully integrated into the justification of the research hypothesis and into specific claims about stigmatization in the business sphere.

**In the second part** of the dissertation – “*Stigmatization in Political Discourse during the 20th Century*” – the manifestations of stigmatization in socio-historical and political discourse throughout the 20th century are examined both as consequences of certain processes and as expressions of those processes. A comparative analysis is skilfully applied in the substantiation of the outlined micro-theses. Differences between the communist and Hitlerian perceptions are identified, and intersections between various theoretical frameworks are explored, including the contributions of scholars from different eras such as Plato, Freud, Jung, Richard Dawkins, and Jordan Peterson. The analysis emphasizes the role and influence of the media in the stigmatization present in political discourse.

**The third chapter**, which presents original research on political stigmatization in the new century, I consider the semantic dominant in the content structure of the dissertation. Media content reflecting significant events within the specified historical period is subjected to semantic analysis. The analysis and interpretation of specific historical facts and data correspond to individual micro-theses and develop certain observations stated in the first two chapters. The thoroughly presented semantic analyses of carefully selected media content are divided into three distinct parts of the final chapter: “The War on Terror,” “The COVID-19 Pandemic,” and “The Russo-Ukrainian War.”

The figures, charts, and appendices provide convincing visualizations of the observations and findings related to the dissertation topic.

**The content and compositional logic of the dissertation is reflected in the abstract**, which formulates the object, subject, aim, tasks, and hypothesis of the research. The theoretical basis of the dissertation is also stated.

## II. Contributions of the dissertation research

I acknowledge the indicated scientific contributions of the doctoral candidate, but I would like to emphasize that I primarily associate the contributory nature of the dissertation with the thoroughly presented original research in the third chapter on political stigmatization in the 21st



century and with the focus on the mediatization of significant processes and events in socio-political life in the new century.

The proposed definition of political stigmatization, viewed as a power tool whose influence is linked to phenomena such as disinformation and manipulation, stands out as a contribution of scientific and theoretical significance. The obtained results are valuable for researchers and experts in the field of public communications and media.

### III. Notes and recommendations

A more in-depth examination of the specifics of viral marketing is necessary in the second chapter of the dissertation, including the presentation of concrete theoretical propositions. There are some spelling and punctuation weaknesses in places, and technical errors have been made. Despite this remark, I want to emphasize that the text stands out for its very good language proficiency and style.

The approach to the factual material, the transitions between the outlined semantic cores in the content structure of the dissertation, and the skilfully drawn conclusions are evidence of research potential. Within the context of the individual chapters of the dissertation, as well as in certain articles by the doctoral candidate, well-reasoned opinions and convincingly structured parallels are presented, demonstrating an interest in the thematic dimensions of political marketing. I would recommend Lazar Shishmanov to deepen his research efforts in this field.

### IV. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Shishmanov is the author of four articles and reports related to the topic of the dissertation. He has fulfilled the requirements of the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and has met the national requirements according to the criteria in the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

### V. Conclusion

The merits and contributory nature of the dissertation titled "*Stigmatization in Political Discourse in the 20th and 21st Century: A Semantic Analysis*", along with the publications related to the dissertation's topic, provide me with grounds to confidently recommend to the esteemed jury to award Lazar Svetlozarov Shishmanov the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Information Sciences, professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences, scientific specialty "Media and Communications – Integrated Marketing Communications."

Date: 27.06. 2025

Veliko Tarnovo

Author of the opinion:

Associate Professor Hristina Hristova, PhD