**Scientific Opinion**

on the thesis for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor",

written by **Justin Toms Jadala Maria**,

PhD student in professional field 3.5. Social communications and information sciences

Higher Education Area 3. Social, business and legal sciences

Scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Desislava Bosnakova

Theme of the dissertation: **"Corporate communication with external audiences through own media. Corporate blogs in the context of social networks"**

Reviewer: **Prof. Dr.Sc. Tolya Stoitsova**

Department of Media and Communication, NBU

Justine Toms is a PhD student in our Department of Media and Communication at New Bulgarian University. She has been involved in corporate communication, corporate blogs and social networks for years. On the one hand, she has personal experience in blogging and very successful, on the other hand – as a fellow lecturer at the NBU she also teaches our students in courses dedicated to the areas already mentioned.

The dissertation submitted for defense by PhD student Justin Toms includes 190 pages of text (excluding annexes) structured in 3 chapters, accompanied by an introduction, conclusion, bibliography and 4 annexes or – the total volume is of 268 pages. The topic is relevant for at least three main reasons: The first is the absence of sufficient and serious research in the field of blogging in Bulgaria. The second reason is related to the importance and role of corporate blogs for business and institutions. The third is the practical ability, based on research data, to improve the communication strategies of businesses and organizations.

As the PhD student herself writes in her abstract, 85 sources of information were used, including 45 in Bulgarian and 40 sources in English and French. For me, the illustrations in the dissertation are impressive, which besides the classic tables, diagrams and figures also include 23 screens. To emphasize that the PhD student has a good knowledge of 2 foreign languages – English and French.

The introduction very well justified the objective, tasks, as well as the overall methodology of the study. The compliance of the chosen methodology and the specific methods of research enable PhD student Justin Toms to prove her thesis. It is not to be overlooked the fact that the thesis is perfectly written in three main points (5 and 6 c. of the dissertation).

The classical structure of the dissertation covers a review of the literature on the subject in chapter one, specifying the problem and focusing on corporate blogs in the second as a transition to the third chapter with the author's research, the most essential part of any dissertation.

Thus, chapter one focuses attention on two main problems, divided and structurally into two parts: 1. *Genesis and blogging development* and 2. *The essence of blogs and their place in digital communications*. A very good impression on me is the precise analysis of the PhD student with emphasis on the PhD student's own opinion on certain issues. As a psychologist, the paragraph "Psychology of blog communication" (p. 85) was particularly interesting to me. Enough has been mentioned about the freedom of self-expression of the Self, the blog as a diary and as establishing trust and empathy. And most importantly – that all this applies not only to personal, but also to corporate blogs. The fact that modern blogs are the basis for other digital forms of communication – such as microblogs, vlogs and podcasts – is also highlighted.

The smooth and logically bound transition from chapter one to chapter two is successful. It focuses historically and precisely on contemporary corporate blogs. Again, the question of what requires the creation of corporate blogs is sought in detail and precisely. Problems related to the selection of information sources, how readers interact and feedback from them are addressed. Questions such as the types of corporate blogs, their content as topics and the emphasis on diversity, which according to PhD student Justin Toms plays a key role, are also well analyzed. And one more thing very substantial, the questions of authorship and the need to comply with ethical rules have not been ignored. Despite the analogy with web sites, it was not only interesting for me, but also useful to find out about some specifics when using the success metrics of blogs – both as text and as illustrations (p.134). In my opinion, the PhD student's conclusion is also essential “that all the metrics listed could be considered individually, but it is more important to monitor them in a complex manner" (p. 14 of the abstract).

The final third chapter of the basic text is entirely devoted to the author's study. It is more than impressive because it actually includes 4 studies: 1. Online survey with 213 respondents from all over the country; 2. Quantitative study of 20 blogs in Bulgarian and 8 in English; 3. Quality survey of 12 blogs and 4. 15 in-depth interviews with selected experts. Without doing a detailed analysis, I want to emphasize the precise conduct of the studies, their detailed interpretation and presentation in scientific but also understandable form. The methodology of the different type of studies fully corresponds to the purpose, tasks and hypotheses that the PhD student sets herself. The conclusion I am making is that, without a doubt, PhD student Justin Toms is a very good researcher. I congratulate her sincerely, as well as her scientific supervisor, Prof. D. Boshnakova.

The conclusion justified the confirmation of the thesis on the basis of the results obtained from the author's studies. Summarizing conclusions of the fully developed dissertation are proposed. Contributions divided into (a) scientific and (b) scientific and applied contributions are also included. They are formulated clearly and unambiguously, so I accept them in full. I just want to pay attention to one of them which also wins my admiration. It is about compiling a "Corporate Blog Successful Writing Guide that gives step by step the main stages for creating and maintaining a corporate blog" (page 181 of the dissertation).

The main volume of the author's abstract is 24 pages and the 4 more pages are added to them with citations. The number of citations is also impressive – 35. Again, I notice the PhD student's ability to summarize the most significant of numerous results in a relatively small volume of pages of the author's abstract. As is our scientific law, to point out that Justin Toms has 4 publications on the subject of dissertation, in 3 of them she is the only author and one in co-authorship with another researcher. Her publications are from the last two years – 2019 and 2020, so it is understandable that two of them have been accepted, but still not published.

**Conclusion**

PhD student Justin Toms presents for official defense a seriously developed scientific theoretical and practical dissertation work with conclusions supported by analysis of the data from precisely implemented four different types of author's studies.

The PhD student's ability to both – select relevant scientific sources and refer and analyze them at theoretical level, is evident, creating a good theoretical framework for conducting her empirical research. The theme, especially topical, correlates directly with the practice.

The author’s abstract summarize precisely the content of the dissertation with contributing moments in it. The PhD student has the necessary publications on the subject and has already been quoted many times.

For me, the dissertation meets the highest demands for the requested degree. It's been a long time since I've offered a review or opinion without critical remarks, but in this case I can't criticize the thesis under consideration. I want to ask the PhD student to find a way to publish her dissertation, not only the Handbook developed by her for successful writing of a corporate blog.

I strongly propose to the esteemed colleagues of the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" of Justin Toms Jadala Maria for her dissertation on "Corporate communication with external audiences through our own media. Corporate blogs in the context of social networks".

11.12.2020 Chairman of the scientific jury:

 Prof. Tolya Stoitsova, DSc.