

STANCE

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3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences

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on a dissertation work

The Role of Public Television in Crisis Situations

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for acquiring the educational and scientific degree DOCTOR

The stance is based on a dissertation presented by Maria Cholakova in a volume of 205 pages, including 33 graphics. The structure includes an introduction, three chapters with relevant subsections, conclusion, self-assessment of the contributions and a bibliography covering 72 sources - 27 printed, 51 online and three normative documents. Twelve of the cited sources are in English. In general, the dissertation has a very good graphic layout.

Relevance of the problem developed in the dissertation in scientific and scientific-applied terms.

The focus of dissertation work is set on highlighting the role of public service media in crisis situations based on a comparative analysis between the functioning of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT), public service broadcasters from the EU and third countries. Major management and funding issues of BNT are the subject of the empirical research conducted by the doctorate student.

The introduction of the work represents the problem situation in summary, the main research thesis, the goal, the subject and the object of research, the specific research tasks, as well as the research methodology. The significance of the topic is outlined and special attention is paid to the importance of such kind of research works considering the growing public expectations towards the public media in modern societies in general and especially in crisis situations. This motivates the need to develop a useful model to enhance the public functions of BNT and increase the levels of confidence in the institution as a whole. In fact this is one of the main goals of the dissertation. Another important objectives are analysing the media environment specifics and also defining the essence of public service media globally, as well

as developing a complex approach for enhancing the functioning of Bulgarian National Television especially in times of crisis.

Accordance of the goals and tasks in the dissertation.

Achieving the set goals is tied to the corresponding tasks, developed logically in the three chapters of the work. The task of Chapter One is to define the term „public service media“ as well as to find out how BNT functions in comparison with other public televisions in EU and in third countries. The second task, elaborated in the second chapter, is to explore some of the biggest world crises, the way they are covered by media and to highlight leading good practices in media crisis response. In this second chapter the media coverage of significant crises in Bulgaria is also examined. The third task is to sum up trends for crisis media coverage that could be implemented by BNT considering the public expectations.

Accordance between the chosen methodology of research and the goal and tasks of the dissertation

There is an accordance between the chosen methodology and the goals and tasks of the dissertation work. The first two chapters of the dissertation are theoretical, based on theoretical overview, comparative analysis, interpretation and synthesis of observations, conclusions and recommendations. From a methodological point of view, the third chapter is based on empirical research with qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaires of different target groups, analysis of online materials and comments related to BNT, analysis of the results and synthesis of recommendations are presented.

Scientific and/or applied science contributions of the dissertation work

In the first chapter "Public television and its mission to serve the public interest" the specifics of public television are clarified in depth in terms of management, content and funding. It is pointed out that the parallels made between BBC model and other European public media and BNT, as well as the comparison between their levels of trust are not in favour of BNT, but this outlines some positive directions for BNT development in the future. A key contribution point in this chapter is the research conducted on the funding models of public media - strengths and weaknesses, as well as emerging trends. One of the significant conclusions in this regard, in view of the digital transformation of the media ecosystem, is that EU countries are abandoning the introduction of fees (based on devices used) and are oriented

towards budget support and assistance. As main problem for BNT has been defined the fact that it is not fully financed by public funds.

In the second chapter, entitled "Crises in modern society and their media coverage", as a merit of the work can be pointed out the terminological clarification of the concept of "crisis", the classification of modern crises, an interesting and contributing moment is the analysis of crisis determinants. The chapter logically continues with crisis management and outlines well the fundamental principles of crisis communications. Different communication approaches in crisis management and the effects they reproduce on societies are examined in depth. A contribution point in the second chapter is the application of the crisis phase's model to a number of international and Bulgarian crisis situations.

Special attention is paid to Covid-19 crisis and the role of BNT in it, outlining specific forms of coverage: reportages /Maria Cherneva's film from the emergency Covid-19 ward/, analytical and commentary broadcast "Referendum", dedicated to the topic and last but not least the contribution of BNT 2 and BNT 4 in students' educational process. The comparison with the experience of BBC outlines possibilities for the development of Bulgarian national television in the future. A significant conclusion in this chapter is the correlation made between the type of journalistic materials dominating during the different stages of the crisis, namely - in the initial phase information materials prevail, in the top moments - interviews, expert assessments, information and opinions and in the chronic phase come the analysis and the chronicles.

The third chapter is devoted to empirical research and defining proposals for improving the role of public service television in a crisis situation. It performs the key tasks for the dissertation work, related to specifying the role of public television in a crisis situation. The key objective here is finding out guiding principles for media behaviour in critical moments and also good practices and opportunities for restructuring the program of BNT. The comparison made with BBC and the recommendations made to BNT are undoubtedly a profitable moment.

Scientific and applied contributions of the work are the clearly defined proposals for improving the editorial policy of BNT in crisis situations. Solutions have been proposed for the identified by the empirical research deficits.

The conclusion contains a summary of the most significant results of the study. They are well related to the problems posed in the dissertation. The most important point are the proposals made to improve the role of public television in crisis situations, as well as the need

to clarify the values related to the public mission of BNT. Next comes the need for a change in BNT funding, in general director's election criteria and in the content of the broadcasted programs. In terms of technological challenges, an integral part of the modern media ecosystem, the research points out the need to create a specialized digital platform for BNT.

Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation

The results of the dissertation research are presented in five scientific publications in authoritative publications, two of which are available online, so the main results of the dissertation work have become property of the Bulgarian scientific communities. These are:

- 3 publications in New Bulgarian University editions - one in „Follow“ Journal and two in “Media and Communications“ Department Annual Edition
- 2 publications – one in „Language and Publicity“ Journal and one in “Summer School in PR” Edition.

No data has been presented for citation.

The **abstract** of the dissertation as form, volume and content meets the regulatory requirements.

Opinions, recommendations and notes.

It should be noted that there is a kind of distraction of the attention towards the crises that BNT itself experiences, although in a small part of the dissertation, and this shifts the research focus slightly aside. This can be noticed in survey questions also, where the attention is focused on the financing and management of BNT at some expense of the topic related to the media coverage of society crises. As a recommendation in order to better present the results of the research, the data from the surveys in which the questions coincide could be summarized. Thus, in addition to groups' results, more general picture of the study will be created. These remarks and recommendations can only improve the work and do not harm in any way the positive assessment of the dissertation.

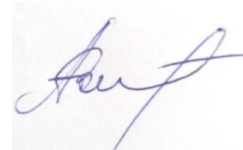
In general, Maria Cholakova has successfully covered the requirements for doctoral student - to show that she is able to conduct a study and that she has the appropriate capacity to perform research tasks. She presents an in-depth dissertation based on solid theoretical and empirical foundations. I would refer the excellent factual and methodological awareness and competence, the demonstrated ability for conceptualization, the ability to structure, systematize and summarize well, as well as the skilful handling of analysis details. Also the clean, analytical

style of exposition, the factual argumentation and logical substantiation of the conclusions, conscientiousness in the citation, conciseness and consistency of the exposition. It has to be mentioned that Maria Cholakova has professional media experience which also contributes to the in-depth reading of the topic and to her commitment and dedication to the work.

In conclusion

Based on the above, in conclusion, I give a positive grade to the dissertation work and I will support the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Maria Cholakova.

10/12/2021



Author of the stance:

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