

REVIEW

By Prof. Greta Nikolaeva Dermendjieva, PhD, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Online Journalism)

on the scientific works for participation in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Digital Communications), School of General Studies, Department of Media and Communication,

69/16.08.2024 with candidate Assistant Professor Justine Toms Jadala Maria, PhD

I. Assessment of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of New Bulgarian University

The Scientific Jury, at its meeting on 31 October 2024, verified the compliance of the publications and activities submitted for participation in the competition with the minimum national requirements as well as with the additional requirements of New Bulgarian University, specified in the provisions of Article 4, paragraph 8, item 2 of the Law on Research and Development, and came up with a decision to admit Assistant Professor Justine Toms, PhD to participate in the competition. She is the only candidate in the competition for the Associate Professor degree.

The groups of indicators A, C, and E are covered; the others significantly exceed the required minimum points.

In the competition for 'Associate professor' Justine Toms meets the above conditions:

- Hold the degree of Doctor of Education and Science from 2021 and hold the academic post of Assistant Professor from February 2023 with a teaching load of 510 hours per year;

- Has submitted a habilitation thesis and publications in specialized scientific journals on the subject.

II. Research (creative) activity and results

For the present competition, Justine Toms has submitted one habilitation thesis, one published book based on the defended dissertation for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education and Science, one chapter of a collective monograph, one textbook for grades 10-11, five articles published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and one in print, as well as participation with five papers at international and four at national scientific conferences.

Since she was a tenured faculty member for many years, the bulk of her publications were before her tenure as an Assistant Professor. She has three solo and fifteen co-authored books on the competition topic, which, unfortunately, are not the subject of this review.

The candidate's publications are devoted to several essential and topical scientific issues, mainly in the fields of digital communications, web design, and the roles of creators of different types of media content in general. Her leading publications are directly related to the topics and requirements of the competition's professional field for the Associate Professor post. The issues analyzed in the scientific works submitted for the competition reflect her scientific interests and are closely related to the scientific disciplines she teaches.

The habilitation thesis entitled "Podcasts. The Voice of the Internet", 2022, Roy Communications, ISBN:.978-954-9335-50-7 is 168 pages long. 67 Bulgarian, German, and English sources are used. The book discusses podcasts in their retrospective, including the history of podcasts in Bulgaria, their nature and application, building on publications on the subject in Bulgarian. Statistics accompany the descriptive analysis of podcasts, typified by year, genre, language, and platform. The podcast's place in digital communication and marketing is outlined, and its specificities, compared to other media forms such as blogs, vlogs, and audiobooks, are highlighted.

It contributes to the classification of Bulgarian podcasts, the description of the technology for creating, planning, maintaining, successfully targeting, promoting and monetizing a

podcast, as well as the study of the motivation of podcast creators through multiple interviews.

Podcasts have emerged as effective communication channels that can build online communities and be vehicles for quality content —informational and analytical — taking over an increasing territory from traditional and web media.

The work has not only a scientific but mostly an applied character, especially the part called "Guide to a successful podcast," in which tips are given in successive steps to help realize a podcast.

The many examples of Bulgarian podcasts are extremely useful in this analysis and are selected as the best examples of the digital presence of media, businesses, and organizations. This is the empirical material on which Justine Toms was able to draw some important conclusions, such as that podcasts have the potential to become a significant part of content marketing to power social networks. Also, that text, as a form of media content in blogging, is no longer enough to retain audiences and build loyalty, so in its place comes the audio content of podcasts. The digital environment, influenced by consumer preferences, is changing media formats and directly impacts management and media content creators, requiring a new type of competence, knowledge, and skills on their part. On this basis, the author has articulated the advantages of podcasts for business purposes, such as greater audience engagement, attractive audio content, chance of viral effect reaching a wider audience, etc.

The topics in Justine Toms' other research publications include:

- Blogging, mainly corporate blogging ("Blogging is dead. Long Live the Blogs", Roy Communications, 2021, ISBN: 978-954-9335-47-7", "Corporate Blogs in the IT Sector in Bulgaria - Opportunities and Prospects. Ж. Toms, Union of Scientists in Bulgaria, 2020,106-114.")
- Website design ("Programming Web design", ed. New Knowledge, 2012 - textbook for grades 10-11, 120 pp. ISBN: 978-954-2907-220."),

- the use of digital technologies in science and education ("Promoting the author and his research on social media. BIC, Training Workshop on Encouraging Academic Staff to Use Digital Technologies Effectively, 22 June 2021"; "Communicating Science through Blogs and Podcasts, J. Toms, Scientific Conference with International Participation "University, Language, Society", NBU, 29 June 2022"; "Blogs and podcasts about science, J. Toms, Youth Scientific Session "BioMedicine and Quality of life", IBFBMI - BAS, 2-3 December 2021".

And online communication in general, in its various media forms and platforms. Digital technologies are undeniably fundamentally changing communication channels and are a catalyst for their metamorphosis. Through competent reading and heuristic methods, Justine Toms gives her own interpretations of current issues and offers adequate solutions and practical advice.

Despite the small scholarly output, Justine Toms' publications are a distinctive contribution, especially to empirical knowledge in this scientific field. This is evidenced by the 36 citations in various scientific journals.

The candidate has selected publications for the competition that correspond strongly to its theme, digital communications, which speaks to the focus and consistency of her scientific interests in this research field.

Justine Toms has been involved as an expert in the work of Information Matters, an international research project funded by the Erasmus program of the European Commission, in the development of lectures and educational materials for the training trainers and trainees in media literacy. She has also established a research program exploring communication through content on social media and online.

III. Teaching and learning activities

Justine Toms has many years of teaching experience - initially as a lecturer at the NBU since 2007 and since 2023 as an Assistant professor in the Department of Media and Communication. She teaches Online Media and Communication, and Online Marketing,

and has been involved in creating courses for undergraduate and graduate programs in social media community management and networking, digital marketing, online reputation management, web design and content for the web, online space, and public relations, blogs and podcasts. In her teaching, Justine Toms applies the diverse skills she has gained in practice to digital marketing, web design, and blog and podcast creation. She has conducted debates and student internships in the media for students in the BA Journalism program. She has supervised four graduates from Bachelor's and Master's programs.

IV. Administrative and public activities

Justine Toms works in several professional fields, combining her teaching work with other experienced and community service activities. She creates and maintains the ArtCast podcast - a podcast about culture and art and "The Creators - Bulgaria's Digital Optimists" (since 2019), organizes competitions for BG Site (1999 - 2014) and Site of the Year (since 2018), is the founder and marketing manager of the digital agency "ABC Design & Communication", conducts seminars and training in Bulgarian schools. He is a member of several professional organizations - SBJ, AEJ, IAB Bulgaria, etc.

Over the years, she has participated in the Program Council of the Mass Communication Department of the NBU as an expert from practice, participated in training seminars organized by the NBU, and, for several years, was a member of the team organizing and conducting spring and autumn conferences of the Media and Communication Department.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate

I have known Justine Toms since her student years at St. Kliment Ohridski". Since then, I have been interested in her career development and am sympathetic to her successes. She approaches all her initiatives and endeavors professionally and competently - as a company founder, initiator of business-oriented competitions, entrepreneur, lecturer, and trainer - all in the fields of digital communications, social networks, online marketing, Internet safety, and web design.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and comments on the candidate's activities and achievements

The scientific works of Assistant Professor Justine Toms, PhD are distinguished by their topicality and focus. A review of her publications shows that her main research interest, in a general sense, is in the field of online entrepreneurship. The style of Justine Toms' publications is as accessible as possible for readers to grasp, which is another advantage of her teaching work. This expertise and her ability to combine a theoretical approach with practical applicability is precious for students, as this will prepare them for the real business world.

I want to make a recommendation. The modern world of communications and the plethora of national and international forums provide a variety of means and opportunities for publishing, much of it online. As a scholar with the privilege of working and teaching in this digital environment, Justine Toms can take advantage of the limitlessness of the global world and increase her scholarly output with more publications in national and international refereed and indexed journals with an impact factor.

Conclusion

The scientific and applied contributions described above and the mentioned qualities of the teaching and public activity of Assistant Professor Justine Toms Jadala Maria, PhD give me grounds to give a positive assessment of her work and to propose her to be elected for the academic position of Associate Professor at New Bulgarian University in the professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Digital Communications).

December 2, 2024

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