НОВ БЪЛГАРСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ

ACADEMIC OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Evelina Antonova Christova, PhD, New Bulgarian University, Department of Media and Communication, professional field 3.5 Public Communications and Information Sciences, in connection with the award of the academic degree "Doctor of Sciences" in professional field 3.5 Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations), with Prof. Dessislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova, PhD, as the candidate

The dissertation submitted for review, entitled "The Communication of Christmas: The Sustainability of Values—from Classical Campaigns to Digital Transformation," comprises 622 pages structured into an introduction, five (5) parts containing a total of seventeen (17) chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and two appendices.

1. Significance of the Research Problem from a Scientific and Applied-Scientific Perspective

The dissertation, "The Communication of Christmas: The Sustainability of Values - from Classical Campaigns to Digital Transformation," examines Christmas as an autonomous and self-organizing communication organism - a "meta-campaign" that operates without a central managing subject while preserving stable visual, auditory, sensory, and value-based codes.

The scientific significance of the problem derives from its interdisciplinary nature. The study combines approaches from media and communications, public relations, marketing, advertising, psychology, behavioral economics, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence research. Christmas is analyzed in historical, psychological, sociological, economic, cultural, and digital contexts.

The dissertation focuses on the communicative aspects of the holiday: deconstructing the mechanism of "Christmas communication" analyzing the sustainability of values, examining the psychological and behavioral profiles of consumers, and exploring the role of digital transformation. The study treats Christmas as a "meta-campaign" and examines communication assets, psychological attitudes, and media formats; it does not, however, provide statistical data or analyses of the financial or macroeconomic impact of the holiday on a global scale.

The applied-scientific significance of the dissertation lies in the development of models and tools for communication planning, consumer segmentation, and the creation of holiday content. These include "Maslow's Christmas Tree," the "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions," a psychographic typology of six profiles of Bulgarian celebrants, the "Christmas Influencer Handbook," the "Successful Christmas Podcast Handbook," and a checklist for a successful Christmas campaign.

2. Clearly Formulated Objectives and Tasks of the Dissertation

The objective is clearly formulated: to deconstruct the mechanism of Christmas communication; to examine its elements, motivations, media formats, and market paradoxes; and to develop an integrated model of the sustainability of holiday communication in the digital age.

Seven specific tasks have been formulated:

- To trace the evolution of the Christmas communication campaign—from pagan ritual and Victorian rebranding to the global media product.
- To analyze the psychological and neurobiological foundations of the "Christmas spirit."
- To define the assets of the "Christmas" brand—visual, auditory, and symbolic.
- To examine the digital transformation of the holiday and the role of social platforms.
- To analyze the concept of "adelok" and the role of the Grinch as a communication antithesis.
- To verify the holiday model through a study of consumer attitudes in Bulgaria.

- To develop scenarios for the future of Christmas communication through AI simulations.

The objective, tasks, and hypotheses are mutually connected and are systematically developed throughout the five parts and seventeen chapters of the dissertation.

3. Evidence of Originality and Non-Repetition of a Previous Dissertation

The dissertation is presented as an independent study with clearly defined subject matter, objective, tasks, hypotheses, methodology, empirical component, and original contributions. Its originality is supported by:

- the development of original concepts such as “Christmas as a meta-campaign,” “value resistance,” and “adelok”;
- the creation of the original model “Maslow’s Christmas Tree”;
- the introduction of the “3AIlogue” method;
- the implementation of an empirical study involving 1,155 respondents;
- the identification of six psychographic profiles of Bulgarian celebrants;
- the development of the “Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions”;
- the development of seven scenarios for the future of Christmas communication.
- The extended abstract also contains separately listed publications and participation in academic forums by the doctoral candidate.

Desislava Boshnakova’s 2006 dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor,” entitled “Forms of Influence and Change of Public Attitudes through Mass Communication,” addresses entirely different subject matter and belongs to professional field 3.3 Political Sciences. The dissertation is available at the NBU Library, and its examination confirms the absence of duplication.

4. Knowledge of the State of the Problem and Relevance of the Literature Used

The dissertation comprises 622 pages and cites 1,160 sources. This demonstrates the broad scope of its literary and informational base.

The sources used are related to the main areas of the research: the history and cultural transformation of Christmas; media; advertising; branding; psychology; neuromarketing; behavioral economics; sensory communication; digital platforms; social networks; artificial intelligence; and the Bulgarian cultural context.

The dissertation demonstrates knowledge of concepts and authors such as Marcel Mauss, Robert Plutchik, Abraham Maslow, Jean Baudrillard, Marshall McLuhan, Benedict Anderson, Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung, David Aaker, Kevin Lane Keller, Kevin Roberts, Ray Oldenburg, Charles Spence, Richard Thaler, Dan Ariely, and James Andreoni.

The literature base corresponds to the interdisciplinary nature of the dissertation and allows the problem to be examined from various theoretical perspectives.

5. Accuracy in Citing a Representative Number of Authors

A significant number of authors are cited, and diverse theoretical approaches are employed. The dissertation refers to representatives of sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, media studies, marketing, and communication studies.

The number of cited sources demonstrates an effort to ensure the representativeness of the literature base. Overall, the references are presented consistently, while the bibliography is extensive and thematically relevant. The citation practices are broad in scope and closely connected to the issues under consideration.

6. Presence of a Well-Founded and Developed Theoretical Model of the Research

The dissertation contains a theoretical model built around the understanding of Christmas as a “meta-campaign” and a communication organism that reproduces itself and adapts to different historical and technological environments.

The model includes:

- the concept of “silent” or “invisible orchestration”;
- the notion of “value resistance”;
- the original model “Maslow’s Christmas Tree”;
- the analysis of the gift as a medium;
- the concepts of sensory and auditory capital;
- the concept of the “platformization of myth”;
- the “adelok” model;
- the idea of Christmas as “the last human algorithm.”

The theoretical model combines historical reconstruction, analysis of communication assets, examination of media channels, market and ethical dimensions, empirical verification, and predictive scenarios.

7. Correspondence of the Methodology and Research Methods with the Objective and Tasks

The selected methodology corresponds to the interdisciplinary nature of the objective and tasks. The dissertation identifies three principal methodological pillars:

Affective economics and neuromarketing - for analyzing sensory orchestration through color, sound, and fragrance.

Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum - for examining the relationship between the media image and holiday reality.

The original “3AIlogue” method - for communication forecasting through role-play simulation involving Gemini, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek.

The methodological framework is complemented by quantitative and qualitative empirical research into the attitudes of 1,155 respondents. As a result, psychographic profiles, somatic markers, and emotional reactions are identified. The methodology corresponds to the research tasks because it enables the simultaneous examination of historical transformations, media formats, consumer behavior, digital platforms, the Bulgarian context, and future scenarios.

8. Original Contribution to the Collection and Analysis of Empirical Data

An original empirical study involving 1,155 respondents was conducted. The data were used to analyze attitudes toward Christmas; identify six psychographic profiles; create the “Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions”; establish the discrepancy between declared values and spontaneous associations; and analyze the tension among family, gifts, the Christmas tree, consumption, and holiday stress.

Specific results are presented: the most frequently mentioned word in the context of Christmas is “Gratitude”, mentioned by 53.2% of respondents, or 615 people—followed by “Love” at 50.2% and “Kindness” at 39.1%. Respondents experience Christmas as an “emotional marathon” (p. 485).

The data demonstrate an original contribution to the collection, systematization, and interpretation of empirical material. A combined quantitative and qualitative approach is applied, described on pages 466 and 467 of the dissertation. Its empirical base includes:

Quantitative data set: A standardized online survey conducted from 30 January 2025 to 5 January 2026 among 1,155 unique respondents. The sample size provides a sound empirical basis for analyzing the attitudes of the participants and allows trends within the studied group to be identified.

Qualitative corpus: An analysis of open-ended responses and associations based on a linguistic corpus of more than 8,000 words, capturing the “voice of the celebrant” - their authentic emotions and rituals.

Description and Evaluation of the Contributions

1. Characteristics and Reliability of the Material on Which the Contributions Are Based

The contributions are based on several types of material:

- systematized theoretical and bibliographic material;
- historical and cultural analyses;
- analyses of media formats, brands, and campaigns;
- analyses of sensory, visual, and auditory communication elements;
- an empirical survey involving 1,155 respondents;
- an analysis of archival Bulgarian publications from the newspaper Rabotnichesko Delo for the period 1945–1989;
- responses from three AI platforms to seven questions;
- applied materials, including handbooks and a checklist.

The reliability of the empirical material is supported by the stated number of participants and the presentation of specific results.

2. Description and Classification of the Contributions

The candidate identifies the following applied-scientific contributions in the extended abstract:

1. Empirical Verification of the Holiday Model

Through quantitative and qualitative research - a survey among 1,155 respondents, the attitudes of the “digital tribe” toward Christmas are systematized. The results provide a basis for the local adaptation of communication strategies, revealing a specific Bulgarian model situated between family tradition and global commercialization.

2. Development of Christmas Consumer Profiles

Based on the results of the survey, different consumer profiles are identified and categorized according to their perceptions of and interactions with Christmas communication. This supports more targeted segmentation and targeting in communication strategies. Although this contribution derives from scientific research, it has direct practical value.

3. Defining the “Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions”

Based on empirical research, a “somatic map” is created and visualized. It locates and categorizes the physical and emotional sensations associated with Christmas in the bodies of respondents. This map provides an innovative tool for understanding deep psychological and physiological responses to holiday communication and may be used for more effective emotional branding.

The applied contributions claimed by the candidate are:

1. “Christmas Influencer Handbook”

A practical guide has been created that offers specific advice and strategies for individual content creators and influencers. The handbook guides them in communicating Christmas content authentically and effectively, taking into account the psychological elements and enduring values of the holiday identified in the research.

2. “Successful Christmas Podcast Handbook”

Detailed guidelines have been developed for podcast producers and hosts. They facilitate the creation of engaging Christmas audio content that responds to listeners’ interests and effectively uses the elements of sensory orchestration and emotional impact established through the research presented in the dissertation.

3. “Successful Christmas Campaign Tool” - Checklist

Based on the comprehensive analysis conducted in the dissertation, a systematic checklist has been prepared. This tool summarizes the key elements of successful Christmas campaign communication and translates them into specific, applicable criteria for planning and implementation. It emphasizes the

importance of context, the cultural moment, sensitivity to the audience, and the team's ability to integrate authenticity and strategic consistency. At the same time, it stresses that the tool structures the process but does not replace creative intuition and systematic work.

Nevertheless, I would also classify the conceptualization of Christmas as a "meta-campaign" and as an autonomous, self-organizing communication organism among the principal theoretical contributions.

The systematization of the communication aspects of Christmas in historical, psychological, sociological, and media dimensions has likewise not previously been carried out in such a comprehensive manner.

I would also draw attention to the analysis of the ideological rebranding of "Grandfather Frost" into "Santa Claus" in the Bulgarian context; the conceptualization of "adelok" as an archetype and communication framework of resistance; and the introduction of the "3AIlogue" method as a methodology for communication forecasting.

3. Assessment of the Candidate's In-Depth Theoretical Knowledge and Capacity for Independent Scientific Research

The dissertation demonstrates extensive theoretical knowledge in the fields of public communications, media, public relations, advertising, marketing, and digital communication. The doctoral candidate works with concepts and models from various academic disciplines and applies them to the specific subject of the study—the communication of Christmas.

The capacity for independent scientific research is demonstrated through the formulation of an independent research problem; the development of original concepts and models; the organization of an empirical study; the analysis of the Bulgarian cultural and media context; the development of a predictive methodology; and the creation of applied tools for communication practice.

4. Theoretical Generalizations and Original Solutions to Scientific and Applied-Scientific Problems

The dissertation contains theoretical generalizations concerning the sustainability of Christmas communication, the role of values in a commercial environment, the transformation of holiday myths on digital platforms, and the tension among consumption, charity, ecology, and authenticity.

The original solutions and concepts are related to:

- the meta-campaign;
- value resistance;
- "Maslow's Christmas Tree";
- the gift as a medium;
- auditory capital;
- "adelok";
- the psychographic typology of the Bulgarian celebrant;
- the "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions";
- the "3AIlogue" method;
- Christmas as "the last human algorithm."

5. Assessment of the Degree of the Doctoral Candidate's Personal Contribution

The contributions of the dissertation are the result of the candidate's personal research work. The choice of topic, the definition of the parameters of the study, and the depth and scope of the work stem from the author's personal research interest, as well as from her personal emotional attachment to Christmas.

The candidate's personal contribution is evident in the analysis of data from more than one thousand respondents and in the implementation of the empirical study as a whole. Original models have been developed, and the author's personal involvement is particularly evident in the creation of the "3AIlogue" method.

The global brands and campaigns analyzed were personally selected and examined by the candidate. No information concerning co-authorship within the dissertation itself is provided. The co-authored publications listed at the end of the extended abstract are clearly identified as such and do not alter the stated personal contribution to the dissertation findings.

6. Assessment of the Correspondence between the Extended Abstract and the Main Propositions and Contributions of the Dissertation

The extended abstract corresponds to the main propositions of the dissertation. It presents:

- the topic, subject matter, and objective of the research;
- the tasks and hypotheses;
- the methodology;
- the structure and content of the five parts and seventeen chapters;
- the results of the empirical study;
- future scenarios;
- the scientific-theoretical, applied-scientific, and applied contributions;
- the candidate’s scientific publications and participation in academic forums.

The main concepts and contributions presented in the extended abstract are related to the content of the dissertation: the meta-campaign, value resistance, the “Maslow’s Christmas Tree” model, “adelok,” the psychographic profiles, the somatic map, and the “3AIlogue” method. Therefore, the extended abstract fulfills its function of presenting the main scientific propositions and results of the dissertation in a synthesized form.

Impact of the Dissertation on the External Environment

1. Assessment of the Publications Related to the Dissertation: Number and Nature of the Publications

The candidate’s publications significantly exceed the minimum requirements under the groups of indicators established by the Academic Staff Development Act, including one monograph and three chapters in edited monographs. The publications are both single-authored and co-authored with Bulgarian and foreign researchers and research teams.

2. Use and Citation by Other Authors, Reviews in the Academic Press, and Other Evidence

The citations of Desislava Boshnakova reflect her publication activity and significantly exceed the required minimum in both Bulgarian and foreign publications. Since the work submitted for the present competition has not yet been published publicly in its entirety, it may be expected that its reception in the coming months and years will also be broad.

Personal Qualities of the Author

(if known to the reviewer)

Prof. Boshnakova is distinguished by her strong research drive. The topics she undertakes are examined in depth and breadth and from multiple perspectives, always with attention to interdisciplinarity but with a clear focus on communication issues.

Her critical thinking and research enthusiasm make her a highly interesting scholar who recognizes problems and solutions in areas that others may fail to explore in sufficient depth. As her colleague, I look forward with scholarly curiosity to the next topic she will undertake.

Opinions, Recommendations, and Remarks

The dissertation possesses significant scientific and applied-scientific value. Nevertheless, two principal weaknesses may be identified in its presentation, related to linguistic accessibility and the volume of the work.

The research conducted, the analyses carried out, and the original models developed have potential that extends beyond the boundaries of the local academic context. Therefore, the fact that the dissertation is available only in Bulgarian limits the possibilities for its dissemination and for the results it contains to reach a broader range of potential readers, researchers, and professionals.

At the same time, the considerable volume of the work, although it testifies to the scale of the research undertaken, to some extent makes it more difficult to comprehend and use in practice within the contemporary dynamics of academic and professional communication. The excessive length of the presentation may limit the immediate applicability of the research results, particularly for professionals seeking clearly structured, synthesized, and practically oriented conclusions and models.

In this regard, I recommend that Prof. Boshnakova consider reworking the extensive dissertation into a popular-science or applied-scientific book intended for a broader audience of Bulgarian readers. Such an adaptation would make it possible for the principal theoretical propositions, results, and practical models to be presented in a more accessible, concise, and communicative form without compromising their scientific validity.

In addition, it would be appropriate to prepare an English-language version of the dissertation or of its principal findings and present it through international academic networks and specialized platforms.

This would increase the international visibility of the research and create conditions for its conclusions and models to reach a broader community of scholars, educators, communication professionals, and practitioners. In this way, the scientific potential of the dissertation could be realized not only in a national but also in an international context.

In summary, the dissertation may be regarded as a comprehensive, independent, and interdisciplinary study of Christmas communication as a sustainable cultural, media, and communication phenomenon. Its scientific value is determined by the effort to construct an analytical model that connects the historical transformations of the holiday with the development of media, advertising, consumer behavior, digital platforms, and contemporary artificial intelligence technologies.

In this sense, the dissertation is not limited to describing individual communication practices. Rather, it offers a conceptual framework for understanding the mechanisms through which Christmas symbols, values, and rituals are preserved, transformed, and adapted to a changing social and technological environment.

In conclusion, I express my positive assessment of the dissertation and will vote in favor of awarding the academic degree “Doctor of Sciences” to Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, PhD.

26th September 2026, Sofia Signature: ……