ACADEMIC OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Justine Toms, 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

I. Assessment of Compliance with the Minimum National Requirements and the Requirements of New Bulgarian University
The dissertation work submitted for review by Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, PhD, entitled *"Christmas Communication: Sustainability of Values – From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation"*, spans 622 pages divided into an introduction, five sections, a conclusion, a bibliography, and two appendices.

II. Scientific and Practical Significance of the Issue
The dissertation *"Christmas Communication: Sustainability of Values – From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation"* places at its center the concept of Christmas as a "meta-campaign" – a decentralized and self-organizing communication organism that continuously reproduces its visual, auditory, and sensory codes.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research brings together communications, PR, marketing, psychology, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence to analyze the holiday within its broad sociocultural and digital context. The focus is entirely on communication mechanisms, psychological attitudes, and media formats, without entering into macroeconomic analyses.

The author's original tools developed for planning and segmentation stand out for their scientific and practical value, including "Maslow's Christmas Tree", the "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions", the typology of six profiles of the celebrating Bulgarian, a checklist for successful campaigns, and handbooks for creating Christmas podcast and influencer content. Or in brief – the applied scientific value: Practical models and tools for communication planning, content, and segmentation have been developed, including:

- "Maslow's Christmas Tree" and the "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions";
- **Psychographic typology** of six profiles of the celebrating Bulgarian;
- **Practical handbooks** for Christmas influencer marketing and podcast formats;
- **A checklist** for designing a successful Christmas campaign.

Here is the English translation of the text:

III. Formulation of Goals and Tasks
The main goal of the research is clearly defined: to deconstruct the mechanism of Christmas

communication through an analysis of its components, consumer motivation, media formats, and market paradoxes, in order to build a comprehensive model of its sustainability in the digital era.

To achieve this goal, the following seven specific tasks have been set:

- **Tracing the evolution** of Christmas communication – from pagan rituals and its Victorian reformatting to its construction as a global media product.
- Analyzing the psychological and neurobiological basis for the formation of the "Christmas spirit".
- **Defining the main identity assets** of the "Christmas" brand (visual, auditory, and symbolic).
- **Investigating the digital transformation** of the holiday and the role of social networks and platforms.
- **Analyzing the concept of "samtsirhC"** *(Note: "аделоК" is Christmas/Коледа spelled backward)* and the role of the Grinch character as a communication antithesis.
- **Verifying the holiday model** through empirical research of consumer attitudes in Bulgaria.
- **Deriving possible scenarios** for the future development of Christmas communication through artificial intelligence simulations.

IV. Uniqueness of the Study

The topic of Christmas communication has not been researched in such depth in Bulgaria. In addition to this massive advantage, the author further enhances the uniqueness of her study by adopting a multi-faceted and highly relevant perspective – sustainability of values – from classic campaigns to digital transformation.

Furthermore, the uniqueness of the dissertation stems from the introduction of new theoretical concepts and interdisciplinary analytical tools. The study formulates original conceptual frameworks such as "Christmas as a Meta-Campaign", "Value Resistance", and "samtsirhC" *(Note: "аделоК" is Christmas/Коледа spelled backward)*, while applying the innovative "3Aialog" method. From both a theoretical and applied-scientific standpoint, the author has developed original models, including "Maslowʾs Christmas Tree" and the "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions".

The empirical value and independence of the work are confirmed by a sociological survey conducted among 1,155 respondents. Based on the gathered data, six psychographic profiles of celebrants in Bulgaria were identified, and seven predictive scenarios for the development of holiday communication were derived. The work is characterized by thematic and methodological independence, with its content clearly distinguished from previous studies by the same author as well as others in the subject area.

IV. Knowledge of the Theoretical Framework and Relevance of the Sources Used and Citations

The volume of 622 pages and the inclusion of 1,160 cited sources demonstrate a high degree of awareness and an in-depth understanding of the subject matter under study. The bibliography used covers key areas of the work, including the history and cultural evolution of the holiday, media studies, branding, psychology, neuromarketing, behavioral economics, sensory communications, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence, all situated within the Bulgarian context.

The theoretical framework is grounded in fundamental concepts and authors from various scientific fields, including M. Mauss, A. Maslow, J. Baudrillard, M. McLuhan, C.G. Jung, R. Thaler, and many others. The selected information base corresponds to the interdisciplinary profile of the dissertation and provides a multi-faceted theoretical analysis of the problem at hand. The scope of theoretical sources, which includes key authors in sociology, psychology, philosophy, behavioral economics, media studies,

and marketing communications, is impressive. All references are consistently formatted and correctly aligned with the subject scope of the study.
The included bibliographic apparatus of 1,160 cited sources confirms the author's pursuit of completeness and representativeness in the literature base, demonstrating deep interest and consistency. The scale and thematic relevance of the literature used provide a solid theoretical foundation for the scientific issues under consideration.
V. Well-Grounded and Developed Theoretical Research Model
The developed theoretical model is built upon the understanding of Christmas as a "meta-campaign" and a self-organizing communication organism with a high degree of adaptability to technological changes. The model combines historical analysis, media theory, market, and ethical aspects, synthesizing key concepts created by the author: "silent orchestration", "value resistance", "Maslow's Christmas Tree", the gift as a media channel, sensory capital, the platformization of the holiday myth, the construct "samtsirhC" *(Note: "аделоК" is Christmas/Коледа spelled backward)*, and the idea of Christmas as "the last human algorithm".
VI. Alignment of Methodology and Methods with the Goal and Tasks
The chosen methodology corresponds to the interdisciplinary specifics of the set goal and research tasks. Three main theoretical and methodological approaches are integrated: affective economics and neuromarketing (applied to analyze sensory orchestration through color, sound, and scent), Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum (used to investigate the relationship between media image and holiday reality), and the author's proprietary "3Aialog" method for communication forecasting through role-playing simulations using the Gemini, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek platforms.
The methodological framework is enhanced with a combined quantitative and qualitative empirical study among 1,155 respondents, allowing for the derivation of specific psychographic profiles, somatic markers, and emotional reactions. The research approach formulated in this manner provides a comprehensive and multi-perspective analysis, covering simultaneously historical development, media formats, consumer behavior, digital platforms, the specifics of the Bulgarian context, and future development scenarios.
VII. Original Contribution in Development and Research
The empirical foundation of the research consists of a original combined study (quantitative and qualitative), with a dataset comprising 1,155 unique respondents surveyed between January 30, 2025, and January 5, 2026. The quantitative information is complemented by a qualitative linguistic corpus of over 8,000 words from open-ended responses and associations. This allows for capturing the respondents' authentic emotional reactions and rituals surrounding Christmas. The collected primary data demonstrates an original contribution to the gathering, systematization, and interpretation of empirical material.
The study results serve to analyze consumer attitudes toward the holiday, derive six psychographic profiles, and construct a "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions." The research reveals significant discrepancies between declared values and spontaneous associations, as well as tensions between family traditions, gift-giving, consumption, and holiday stress. Specific empirical findings show that the leading association with Christmas is "Gratitude" (53.2% or 615 people), followed by "Love" (50.2%) and "Kindness" (39.1%), with the majority of respondents describing their experience as an "emotional marathon."

The applied-scientific contributions in the dissertation work are a direct result of the author's independent research. The choice of topic, the definition of research parameters, and the conceptual scope of the work reflect the author's consistent scientific inquiry approach. The independent nature of the work is confirmed by the comprehensively conducted empirical study, covering a large scale of respondents, as well as by the analyses of global brands and communication campaigns.

Personal contribution is most clearly expressed in the creation of original theoretical-applied models and in the development of the innovative "3Aialog" method. The dissertation contains no data suggesting co-authorship. Co-authored publications listed in the abstract are correctly designated and do not compromise the leading role and independence in forming the main contributions.

VII. Personal Qualities of the Author

Prof. Boshnakova works with genuine passion and research scope. When she takes on a topic, she examines it in depth, views it from all angles, and skillfully weaves together different scientific disciplines. Her critical mind, great creativity, and total immersion in her work make her a captivating person and a brilliant academic mind. The effort put into this work, which I had the honor and task to become closely acquainted with, is enriching for me, and I believe it will take a worthy place in the history of academic development not only of Prof. Boshnakova, but also of the Department of Media and Communication, NBU, and the communication community in Bulgaria. I believe her contribution will be noticed abroad as well, and I strongly hope for a book edition in English.

VIII. Opinions and Recommendations

The work possesses undeniable scientific and applied-scientific value, offering a comprehensive and innovative framework for understanding Christmas as a sustainable cultural and media phenomenon. Despite its high quality, the presentation reveals two main weaknesses – the excessive length, which makes quick practical absorption of the results difficult, and its language limitation solely within the Bulgarian language, which hinders its dissemination among the international scientific community.

To overcome these limitations, it is recommended that the dissertation be adapted into a more compact and accessible popular-science book for the Bulgarian audience, as well as that an English-language edition or a series of publications be prepared. In this way, the significant research potential of the work – connecting the historical transformations of the holiday with digital platforms, media, and artificial intelligence – will reach a much wider circle of scholars, practitioners, and readers both in Bulgaria and internationally.

In conclusion, I express my positive assessment of the dissertation work and will vote **"IN FAVOR"** of awarding the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" to Prof. Desislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova, PhD.

Date: October 14, 2026

Signature: Assoc. Prof. Justine Toms, PhD