REVIEW

of a dissertation for the acquisition of the scientific degree

"Doctor of Sciences"

on the TOPIC: Christmas Communication: The Sustainability of Values – From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation

for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in Professional Field 3.5: Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations) within the Higher Education Area 3: Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences

Author of the work: Prof. Dr. Desislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova,
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Information about the doctoral candidate

Prof. Boshnakova is a well-known name in professional circles and a distinguished scholar and lecturer in the field of communications. She is recognized as an expert and innovator within the professional PR community in Bulgaria, as well as a scholar, researcher, and lecturer in academic circles both in Bulgaria and abroad.

She is a university lecturer at NBU, holding the rank of Professor, and her educational background is in the field relevant to the dissertation. In addition to her academic work, she conducts practical training sessions, organizes scientific forums, and manages projects and programs in the field of higher education.

For the "Doctor of Sciences" procedure, Prof. Dr. Boshnakova submits a dissertation, a monograph, and various scientific articles and papers. According to the provided summary and list, these publications align with the topic of the dissertation. / Principles of Effective Production in Special Events, Yearbook of the Department of Mass Communications 2017. Sofia: NBU, 2018, pp. 43–56, ISSN 1310-8670, https://masscomm.nbu.bg/bg/godishnici/godishnik-na-departament-masovi-komunikacii-2017; Boshnakova, Desislava, Collective Wisdom (Crowdsourcing), Sofia: ROY

Communication, 2016. Cited by: Evelina Hristova, Communication of Charity, Sofia: ROY Communication, 2021, p. 121; The Crowd as a Source of Online Content, Proceedings of the Summer School on Public Relations, 21st Summer School on Public Relations "Boundaries in Communication / Communication Beyond Boundaries," Sofia: NBU, 2019, pp. 44–48, ISBN 978-619-233-186-3, https://masscomm.nbu.bg/bg/lqtna-pr-shkola/sbornik-s-dokladi-ot-lqtna-shkola-po-vryzki-s-obshtestvenostta-2019/
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YqxTHGDtUUerqEzLrLn5rRBZUhPSZhzb/view?usp=sharing; "The Gift as a Medium: The Language of Exchange and Social Pressure," Yearbook of the Department of Mass Communications 2025. Sofia: NBU, 2026. (Electronic format), in press, "Emotions at the Heart of Christmas Communication Campaigns," Proceedings of the PR Summer School, "Media and Communication" 2025, NBU, 2026. (Electronic format), in press; "Emotions at the Heart of Christmas Communication Campaigns," PR Summer School, "Media and Communication," NBU, June 10, 2025 (paper); "Christmas Communication in the Media," Autumn Scientific Conference, "Media and Communication," NBU, May 29, 2025. (report), *PR and Artificial Intelligence*, Roy Communication, Sofia, 2025, 281 pages, ISBN 978-954-9335-55-2 (monograph), etc./

In compliance with regulatory requirements and the established procedure, Prof. Boshnakova submitted the relevant documents for the competition within the deadline. According to the submitted Individual Assessment Table (based on the *Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria*), the candidate meets the required point thresholds across all indicators; her total score is 685 points, which exceeds the required minimum.

Details regarding the doctoral procedure

The procedure for acquiring the scientific degree of "Doctor of Sciences" complies with the *Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria*, the *Regulations for the Application of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria*, and the *Regulations on the Conditions and Procedure for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at NBU*. By Rector’s Order No. 3-RK-238/15.07.26, the composition of the scientific jury was determined; I am a member of this jury, serving as a reviewer.

As the author of this review, I can state that the dissertation is an original work. No plagiarism has been detected, and the thesis complements and advances Prof. Desislava Boshnakova’s research and publication activities. It should also be noted that the content of the dissertation submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" does not

duplicate the content of the dissertation defended by the candidate for a previous educational and scientific degree. It builds upon and expands the scholarly work of Prof. Boshnakova, as reflected in the submitted individual assessment table prepared in accordance with the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB). Her scholarly, teaching, creative, and publication activities, along with the work submitted for review, demonstrate full compliance with the requirements for participation in the competition and render Prof. Boshnakova a worthy candidate for the announced position. Having reviewed the documents submitted by the candidate for the competition, I present the following review:

Details regarding the dissertation and the abstract

- The candidate has submitted a habilitation thesis titled “Christmas Communication: The Resilience of Values – From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation.” The work spans 622 pages and cites 1,160 sources; it is logically organized into seven parts—subdivided into chapters—and includes an Introduction, a Conclusion, Appendix 1 (results of a survey involving 1,155 participants), and Appendix 2 (responses from three AI platforms to seven questions). In terms of structure and content, it fully complies with the formal requirements for a dissertation.
- The relevance of the dissertation is indisputable, as it analyzes and critically examines the “transformation” of Christmas—shifting from a religious, family, and cultural holiday into a “global media product”—through the processes of communication and commercialization, as well as the impact of technological advancements. The author summarizes this process as “Rebranding Tradition: From Pagan Ritual to Global Media Product.”

The text traces the origins of Christmas and its evolution into a communicative, media, social, economic, and commercial "product," driven by social, cultural, economic, and technological shifts over the centuries. Given the profound changes in how the holiday is perceived, communicated, organized, and celebrated, the author characterizes this evolution as a "transformation."

The Nativity and the Resurrection are the two most sacred holidays for both Catholics and Orthodox Christians—and today, for people worldwide, regardless of religious belief. For Christians, these holidays have evolved from their historical roots in ecclesiastical asceticism and austerity to the heartwarming family-oriented Christmas; through the commercialization—broadcast via television—of the Gingerbread Man and the Coca-Cola Santa Claus; and finally to the viral nature and symbols of meme culture,

which resonate with everyone—not just the youth—in today's digital world. Prof. Boshnakova has titled her study "Christmas Communication: The Resilience of Values—From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation." In it, she traces the origins and enduring nature of values, the evolution of the holiday itself and its associated event management—shifting from a family-centric occasion to a public celebration at Christmas markets—and analyzes the symbols and faces of classic Christmas campaigns, the changing imagery of the holiday, and the transformation of the classic Santa Claus figure through commercialization and media coverage into a global meta-campaign. She examines the use and diversification of communication channels over the years—methods used to bring the holiday into every home—as well as the evolution and persistence of the holiday's inherent spirit of giving.

"The subjects of my research—ranging from the century-old Coca-Cola icon to the latest AI-generated emotional protocols—are highly fluid," she writes, as she explores how artificial intelligence attempts to "hack the 'Christmas spirit network'" and tracks the "consumer's psychological profile and emotions within the holiday context" amidst these transformations. Overall, I would describe the result as a "systematic study" of Christmas communication. The dissertation presents a clearly defined, comprehensive, and fully realized original concept regarding the relevance of the issue—specifically, "the consumerist nature and marketing of the holiday, its symbols, the codification of Santa Claus, and the transformation involved in translating these symbols into the realm of TikTok," she writes.

Another focus of the study is tracing the tools and channels used to tell the story of the holiday. The researcher examines the evolution from St. Nicholas to Santa Claus and on to the animated digital Santa, as well as the "Santa Claus" brand and his branding as the face of the holiday. She addresses "sound branding management and the role of music in creating atmosphere." In the text, the author tracks the tools used to shape and manage consumer behavior during the holiday through sound branding and explores "communication strategies for social presentation and decentralization (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Reddit)." "Christmas is the perfect communication virus—it absorbs technologies and subjugates them to its own purpose: maintaining a sense of magic in a world that is increasingly rationalized and surrendered to algorithms," she concludes. Of particular significance to me are section /15.1/ –

“Specifics of the Bulgarian Model: Mixed Cultural Layers and the Ideological Battle Between Grandfather Frost and Santa Claus” – and section /15.2/ – “Reconstruction of Tradition and Media Simulacrum: Christmas Eve as a Lifestyle Project in Contemporary Culture.” There are studies by folklorists and sociologists, but have not previously encountered this specific aspect of the communication and "transformation" of the holiday in our local context.

I find the author's research in Chapter 16 ("Empirical Verification of the Holiday Model: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of the 'Digital Tribe's' Attitudes") and Chapter 17 ("Christmas: The Last Human Algorithm – Scenarios for the Sustainability of Christmas Communication (2026–2100)") to be highly valuable, as are the specific results presented in Appendix 1 (Results of a survey with 1,155 participants) and Appendix 2 (Responses from three AI platforms to seven questions). These results constitute part of the text's practical contributions and can be utilized by both experts and the business community.

Both the dissertation and the abstract clearly define the subject of the research—"The global architecture of Christmas communication and its mechanisms of 'invisible orchestration'"—as well as the research objective ("To deconstruct the mechanism of Christmas communication and examine its individual elements, motivations, media formats, and market paradoxes in order to construct a comprehensive model of holiday communication sustainability in the digital age"), the research tasks, and the working hypotheses. The abstract presents the content of the dissertation and has been prepared in accordance with the required standards. Key sources are cited, along with a multitude of other sources relevant to the text. An integral methodology described in the text has been employed, and the markers of the author's research are clearly outlined. The chosen integral methodology transcends the traditional approach of examining the holiday through the lens of isolated disciplines. The text is written with clarity and professional precision; it presents sound argumentation and substantiates the working hypotheses.

Scientific Significance and Practical Applicability

Firstly, I believe this text builds upon existing research regarding Christmas across various scientific fields. It offers a "theoretical conceptualization of Christmas as a 'Meta-campaign'." Christmas is viewed as an "autonomous, self-organizing communication organism," and information regarding the channels, tools, symbols, and global branding of the holiday is systematized.

Secondly, the study examines the creation of a marketing model for Christmas, the communication of the holiday, and its transformation into a tool for influencing and managing consumer attitudes on a global scale—a process that supplants the traditional significance of the family-centered Christmas celebration observed over the centuries.
Scientific and Practical Contributions: Quantitative and qualitative research was conducted (a survey of 1,155 respondents), the results of which can be utilized by the business sector. An original methodology for communication forecasting is introduced, utilizing simultaneous role-play simulations across three independent AI platforms (Gemini, ChatGPT, and DeepSeek). Additionally, a practical guide has been developed, offering concrete advice and strategies for individual content creators and influencers. I accept the contributions formulated by Prof. Dr. Boshnakova. I consider the presented dissertation to be innovative within the context of Bulgarian research regarding the interpretation, communication, and contemporary public perception of the Christmas holiday.

- Opinions, recommendations, and remarks

As with any scholarly work, recommendations and critical remarks can be made regarding this one as well. I have no critical remarks; my recommendation is that this text be published and read by both researchers and the general public.

CONCLUSION

Based on the proven scientific contributions of the dissertation and the demonstrated research competence, I give a positive assessment of the dissertation titled "Communicating Christmas: The Sustainability of Values – From Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation." In light of the foregoing, I recommend to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury—within professional field 3.5, Public Communications and Information Sciences—that a proposal be made to the Academic Council of New Bulgarian University (NBU) to confer the degree of "Doctor of Sciences" upon Prof. Dr. Desislava Boshnakova of NBU. I cast a positive vote in favor of this.

October 2026

Reviewer: 

Prof. Teodora Petrova