REVIEW

by Prof. Kristiyan Stoyanov Hadzhiev, PhD, New Bulgarian University, Department of Administration and Management, Professional Field 3.7 “Administration and Management”, scientific specialty “Social Management”

Regarding: a dissertation submitted for the award of the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences” in Professional Field 3.5 Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations)

Grounds for submitting the review: participation as a member of the scientific jury for the defense procedure for the award of the scientific degree “Doctor of Sciences”, pursuant to Order No. Z-RK-238/15.07.2026 of the Rector of New Bulgarian University.

Author of the dissertation: Prof. Desislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova, PhD

Title: “The Communication of Christmas: Sustainability of Values – from Classical Campaigns to Digital Transformation”

1. General Characteristics of the Dissertation

The dissertation submitted by Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, PhD, constitutes a large-scale, original and interdisciplinary scholarly study devoted to the global architecture of Christmas communication and the mechanisms of its “invisible orchestration” within a digitalized and hypermedia communication environment. The research focuses on the contemporary transformations of one of the most enduring global cultural and media phenomena – Christmas – considered not only as a religious and sociocultural phenomenon, but also as a complex communication system in which symbols, myths, brands, media, consumer practices and digital platforms interact. The dissertation is impressive in scope, comprising 622 pages and an extensive bibliography of 1,160 sources, as well as appendices containing empirical data and original research models.

The relevance of the study stems from the need to understand how a traditional cultural and festive narrative adapts to the dynamics of the digital environment and how contemporary perceptions of Christmas are constructed and reproduced through sensory branding, the attention economy, visual and audio communication, algorithmic mediation and social media. In this context, the author conceptualizes the holiday as a communication ecosystem capable of simultaneously preserving enduring cultural codes and generating new meanings and consumer behaviours.

Already in the introduction, the author clearly formulates her central scientific thesis, according to which Christmas functions as a “self-organizing communication organism” and a “metacampaign” capable of preserving a stable core of human values despite aggressive commercialization and technological transformations. This conceptual framework is original, well argued and consistently defended throughout the dissertation.

The subject and the principal objective of the dissertation are formulated in direct interrelation. The subject of the research is the global architecture of Christmas communication and its mechanisms of “invisible orchestration”. The study examines the contemporary manifestations of the holiday in the infosphere, the role of sensory branding, the attention economy, and the capacity of the festive myth to regenerate through digital platforms and artificial intelligence. The principal objective is 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 the sustainability of festive communication in the digital era. In pursuit of this objective, Prof. Desislava Boshnakova develops a system of interconnected original concepts and analytical tools. Particularly important among them are the concept of Christmas as a “Metacampaign”, the “Maslow Christmas Tree” model, the concept of “value resistance”, “adeloK”, and the methodological approach “3Allogue”. They are not presented as isolated ideas, but are integrated into an overarching framework through which the capacity of festive communication to preserve its values while simultaneously changing the forms, channels and mechanisms through which they are reproduced is traced.

The dissertation is impressive in terms of its structure, logic and analytical depth. The study is organized into five thematic parts and seventeen chapters, tracing the development of Christmas as a communication phenomenon – from the historical and cultural roots of the holiday to its digital transformation, algorithmic models and futuristic development scenarios. Accordingly, the scientific logic of the dissertation can be traced along the following sequence: deconstruction of Christmas communication → identification of its mechanisms and needs → original conceptualization → empirical research → integrated model of the sustainability of festive communication in the digital era.

A particularly strong feature of the dissertation is its interdisciplinary approach and its ambition to systematize a complex and dynamically evolving communication phenomenon. The author successfully integrates theoretical propositions and methodological tools from communication theory, marketing, psychology, sociology, cultural studies, media studies, digital anthropology and management. This makes it possible to analyse Christmas not merely as a holiday, but as a complex global communication ecosystem.

Particularly relevant is the emphasis placed on the digital transformation of Christmas communication. In the context of social networks, algorithmically personalized content and the attention economy, the festive narrative is no longer transmitted unidirectionally from institutions, media and brands to audiences. Instead, it is reproduced through multiple participants, platforms and user interactions, which changes both the role of communication intermediaries and the mechanisms through which the festive experience is created.

In this sense, the dissertation has the potential to be regarded as a study of the transformation of the traditional festive myth into a digital communication architecture in which cultural memory, symbolic consumption, brand communication and the technological environment are intertwined. It is precisely this feature that gives the study both theoretical significance and practical applicability.

The dissertation is characterized by a clearly defined scientific problem, a topical research orientation, a logically constructed research framework, a well-founded methodology and an aspiration toward empirical verification of the formulated hypotheses. The author demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the research field and an ability to connect theoretical propositions with contemporary manifestations of communication in a digital environment.

2. Evaluation of the Scientific and Applied Scientific Results and Contributions

The scientific and applied scientific results obtained are directly related to the stated objective, the formulated tasks and the research hypotheses. They result from the consistent combination of theoretical analysis, an interdisciplinary approach and empirical research, enabling the author to examine Christmas communication simultaneously as a cultural phenomenon, a communication system and a dynamic environment of interaction among tradition, media, the market and digital technologies. The research design itself is oriented toward deconstructing the mechanisms of festive communication and constructing a comprehensive model of its sustainability in the digital era.

A significant scientific and theoretical result is the conceptualization of Christmas as a “Metacampaign” – an autonomous and self-organizing communication organism functioning without a central governing entity. Closely related to this result is the concept of “silent orchestration”, through which the author proposes a specific interpretative framework for explaining the sustainability and global reproducibility of Christmas communication. This contribution is of considerable importance to the overall conceptual structure of the dissertation, as it integrates the various communication manifestations analysed into a unified theoretical perspective.

Another significant result is the systematization of the communication dimensions of Christmas from historical, psychological, sociological, marketing and media perspectives. The broad scope of the analysis makes it possible to trace the transformations of the festive communication model – from traditional forms of ritual and mass communication to the platformized and algorithmically mediated digital environment. In this context, particular importance is attached to tracing the transition from print, radio and television to social networks, digital platforms and artificial intelligence.

The concept of "value resistance" should also be highlighted as an independent theoretical result. Through it, the author interprets the capacity of values such as empathy, sharing and hope to be preserved and reproduced in a highly commercialized communication environment. This proposition is important to the dissertation thesis because it raises the issue not only of the economic effectiveness of festive communication, but also of the sustainability of its value content.

Particular attention should be given to the author's "Maslow Christmas Tree" model. Its genuinely original and valuable contribution lies in the operationalization and transformation of the theory into an applied communication strategy. Although Maslow's theory has been used in marketing for decades through the classical five-level hierarchical model developed between 1943 and 1954, the dissertation employs the expanded seven-level version from 1970, which adds cognitive needs (knowledge and understanding) and aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1970a), while specifying and adapting the model to the particularities of festive communication. Notwithstanding the need for the individual theoretical relationships within the model to be critically examined in terms of their empirical demonstrability, the effort to construct an integrative model linking sensory comfort, belonging, social identity and the moral dimension of the festive experience should be recognized as a contribution.

The analysis of the transformation of traditional Christmas symbols and communication assets also constitutes a scientific contribution, including the image of Santa Claus, sound and visual identity, festive scenography and the role of public space. The author examines these elements not in isolation but as interconnected components of an integrated sensory communication system. Particular attention is devoted to Santa Claus as a sustainable symbolic and brand asset, as well as to music, colours, light, aromas and the urban environment as instruments for constructing the festive experience.

The conceptualization of "adeloK" as an archetype of resistance constitutes an independent scientific and theoretical contribution. Through it, the author introduces the antithesis of festive communication – anti-consumerist attitudes, criticism of commercialization, environmental reactions and the need for "authenticity". In this way, the dissertation extends the traditional binary perspective of "communication – audience" by incorporating the communicative function of resistance, irony and the rejection of certain festive practices.

The methodological contribution associated with the "3AIlogue" method is particularly topical. The author presents it as a methodology for communication forecasting through simultaneous role simulation using three independent generative AI platforms – Gemini, ChatGPT and DeepSeek. This approach is used to construct scenarios for the future of Christmas communication and represents an attempt to introduce generative artificial intelligence as an instrument in predictive communication analysis.

The results of the empirical verification of the festive model, carried out through quantitative and qualitative research involving 1,155 respondents, are of an applied scientific nature. On this basis, attitudes toward Christmas are systematized and consumer profiles are identified, which the author associates with opportunities for more focused segmentation and targeting of communication strategies. The "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions", developed as a tool for visualizing physical and emotional responses associated with the festive experience, should also be included in this group.

The practical applicability of the results is further enhanced by the developed "Christmas Influencer Handbook" and "Successful Christmas Podcast Handbook", through which the theoretical propositions are transformed into practical guidelines for creating and managing festive communication content.

In summary, the contributions of the dissertation may be classified as theoretical-conceptual, methodological, applied scientific and practical. Their essential feature is the ambition not merely to systematize existing knowledge, but to construct original conceptual models and analytical tools for interpreting Christmas communication under conditions of digital transformation. The results obtained are consistent with the stated objectives and tasks and demonstrate the author's ability to formulate independent scientific theses, develop them within an interdisciplinary framework, and connect them with specific empirical and practical results.

Alongside the high degree of conceptual originality, some of the claimed contributions primarily take the form of new interpretative frameworks and original conceptualizations. Their scientific significance should therefore be assessed above all in terms of the extent to which they are theoretically substantiated, empirically supported and differentiated from existing models in the respective scientific fields. It is precisely this combination of an original conceptual framework, empirical verification and applied orientation that determines the scientific value of the dissertation.

The style of presentation is both academic and recognizably authorial. The text is rich in metaphors and interpretative imagery, which makes it highly readable and distinguishes it from standard academic discourse. In places, this results in a somewhat essayistic development and greater expressiveness; in this case, however, this approach is organically related to the subject of the research and does not diminish the scientific value of the analysis.

Result of the dissertation research: confirmation of the formulated principal research thesis.

3. Description of the Scientific and Applied Scientific Contributions

The results obtained in the dissertation are directly related to the stated objective, formulated tasks and research hypotheses. They arise from the consistent combination of theoretical analysis, an interdisciplinary approach and empirical research, through which Christmas communication is examined simultaneously as a cultural phenomenon, a communication system and a dynamic environment of interaction among tradition, the market, media and digital technologies. The newly introduced concepts, conceptual models, analytical frameworks and methodological solutions – "Metacampaign", "silent orchestration", "value resistance", "Maslow Christmas Tree", "adeloK" and "3AIlogue" – possess a contributory character.

On the basis of the results obtained, seven scientific-theoretical, three applied scientific and three practical contributions have been formulated, all of which are the author's own work. They are correctly formulated, systematized and substantiated by the candidate, and I fully endorse them.

Other substantive scientific merits can also be identified in the research of Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, summarized as follows:

- The chapter on Bulgaria (Chapter 15) is original and well documented, particularly the analysis of the newspaper Rabotnichesko Delo and the ideological contest between Ded Moroz (Father Frost) and Santa Claus;
- The neuromarketing deconstruction of the image of Santa Claus is theoretically competent;
- The six psychographic profiles, notwithstanding methodological questions regarding the instruments through which they were derived – cluster analysis, factor analysis or qualitative coding – have genuine practical value;
- Christmas communication has not been systematically studied within the Bulgarian academic context.

4. Impact of the Dissertation on the External Environment

The immediate results of the research have been presented to the scientific and academic community and have found concrete application in professional communication practice. The impact on the external environment is demonstrated by the numerous citations of the author's publications related to the topic of the dissertation. The abstract lists a total of 23 scientific publications and participations in scientific forums reflecting the author's broader research activity. Four publications are directly related to the subject matter of the dissertation: "The Gift as a Medium: The Language of Exchange and Social Pressure", "Emotions at the Centre of Christmas Communication Campaigns", both as a publication and as a conference paper, and "Christmas Communication in the Media". Publications such as "PR and Artificial Intelligence", "PRAIse for the Future of Communication" and "Where Creativity Resides" are related to individual aspects of the dissertation – AI, communication and creativity. The remaining scientific publications and conference participations demonstrate the author's sustained research activity in the fields of media, communications, digital platforms, artificial intelligence and creativity.

The submitted self-assessment documents a total of 21 citations and reviews of scientific works, a substantial proportion of which appear in refereed and indexed scientific publications, as well as in international monographs and collective scholarly works. Particular attention should be drawn to the international impact of the monograph The 21st Century Meeting and Event Technologies: Powerful Tools for Better Planning, Marketing, and Evaluation, which has been cited in a number of international publications in the fields of event management, tourism and digital technologies. Citations in international scholarly publications and by publishers such as Springer, Emerald, Taylor & Francis and Edward Elgar demonstrate the visibility and scholarly impact of part of the candidate's research output beyond her immediate institutional environment.

The candidate significantly exceeds the minimum national requirements for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" in Professional Field 3.5 Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations).

5. Evaluation of the Dissertation Abstract

The dissertation abstract comprises 32 pages and complies with academic standards. It adequately reflects the content, structure and principal research logic of the dissertation. It presents the relevance and significance of the research problem, the subject and object of the study, the principal objective, research tasks and hypotheses, the methodological toolkit employed, as well as the content and main results of the individual parts of the dissertation. A summary of the principal contributions and a list of publications are also included.

6. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I have no substantive critical remarks regarding the presentation of the ideas, propositions and immediate results of the dissertation. The critical remarks and recommendations formulated during the preliminary defense have been adequately reflected in the final version of the dissertation. I recommend that the candidate publish the dissertation as a monograph. It would also be appropriate for the original and innovative concepts developed in the study to receive broader exposure in specialized international scientific journals, which would contribute to their scholarly visibility, subsequent verification and broader empirical testing in different communication and cultural contexts. One of the principal contributions of the dissertation is that it provides a solid foundation for continuing scholarly discussion.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, I consider the dissertation "The Communication of Christmas: Sustainability of Values – from Classical Campaigns to Digital Transformation" to constitute a significant, original and contributory scholarly study with clearly expressed theoretical, methodological and applied value. The research contains scientific results that represent an independent and original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act and the Regulations for its implementation.

The dissertation demonstrates that the candidate, Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, PhD, possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in Professional Field 3.5 Social Communications and Information Sciences and demonstrates the qualities and skills required for the independent conduct of scientific research.

All of the above gives me grounds to provide a positive evaluation of the dissertation and to propose that the esteemed members of the scientific jury decide to award the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences" to Prof. Desislava Boshnakova, PhD, in Professional Field 3.5 Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations).

Sofia,

4 October 2026 Signature:

/Prof. Kristian Hadzhiev, PhD/