OPINION

by Prof. Efrem Efremov, PhD, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

regarding a doctoral dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations)

Author of the dissertation: Desislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova, Department of Media and Communication, New Bulgarian University

Title: "Communicating Christmas: The Resilience of Values – from Classic Campaigns to Digital Transformation"

Basis for submitting this opinion: Order No. […] / [date] of the Rector of NBU appointing the scientific jury for the procedure.

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1. Procedural Data and Submitted Materials

The candidate has submitted a dissertation of 622 pages, comprising an introduction, five parts with 17 chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography of 1,160 sources and two appendices. Appendix 1 contains the results of a survey of 1,155 participants, and Appendix 2 contains the responses of three artificial intelligence platforms to seven questions. The dissertation is accompanied by an abstract, a list of scientific publications and a statement of contributions.

The dissertation was discussed and approved for defence at a pre-defence before the academic council of the Department of Media and Communication. The submitted materials comply with the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations and the NBU Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff.

2. Relevance and Significance of the Topic

The topic is relevant and scientifically significant. Christmas communication is among the most enduring and most widely reproduced communication practices in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, it has so far rarely been treated as a coherent object of communication science.

The strength of the work lies in approaching Christmas not as a calendar date or a religious holiday, but as a self-organising "meta-campaign". It is traced through historical

transformations, sensory branding, the attention economy, platformisation and artificial intelligence.

The topic also has clear practical value for public relations, advertising and strategic communication. It is significant for the Bulgarian context as well, where the holiday has been marked by the ideological opposition between Grandfather Frost (Dyado Mraz) and Santa Claus (Dyado Koleda), and by the contemporary "Instagrammable" restoration of tradition.

3. Knowledge of the Problem and Structure of the Work

The candidate demonstrates excellent knowledge of the state of the problem. She works confidently with a broad interdisciplinary range of theoretical concepts, including Marcel Mauss (gift exchange), Jean Baudrillard (the simulacrum), Marshall McLuhan, Benedict Anderson, Ray Oldenburg, Charles Spence, Richard Thaler and Dan Ariely, David Aaker and Kevin Roberts. Models from neuroscience, psychology and behavioural economics are also used, and the bibliography is rich and up to date.

The structure follows a clear logic that mirrors the strategic planning of a campaign: "Brief" (strategy), "Brand Assets" (symbols and faces), "Channels and Storytelling" (distribution), "Market Paradoxes and Ethical Dimensions" (results) and "From Local Memory to the Algorithmic Future". The choice of 17 chapters, explained through the symbolism of the Bulgarian Christmas Eve table, lends the text originality without compromising its academic rigour.

The aim, the objectives and the five hypotheses are clearly formulated and consistently developed in the main body. The conclusion and findings return to them.

4. Research Methodology

The methodology is interdisciplinary and appropriate to the stated aims. It combines affective economics and neuromarketing, the concept of the simulacrum and the author's own "3AIlogue" method. This method is a role-play simulation with three independent artificial intelligence platforms (Gemini, ChatGPT and DeepSeek) for the purposes of communication forecasting.

The quantitative and qualitative empirical study of 1,155 respondents provides a solid basis for verifying the theoretical model. The conclusions are formulated with caution. The candidate is candid about the limitations of the study, which relate to the lack of historical

distance and to the dynamic nature of the object of study, and she presents them as part of the "Work in Progress" character of the topic.

5. Characterisation and Assessment of the Scientific and Applied Contributions

I accept the contributions stated by the candidate and find them genuine and her own. I note the following as the most significant.

Theoretical contributions

- The conceptualisation of Christmas as a "meta-campaign" with "invisible orchestration" and decentralised communication that achieves global synchrony without a central governing actor.
- The concept of "value resistance", according to which authentic values survive and reproduce themselves within the commercial system.
- The author's model "Maslow's Christmas Tree", which adapts the hierarchy of needs to holiday communication.
- The conceptualisation of the gift as a medium and of the Christmas card as a "data packet".
- The concept of "adeloK" (Christmas spelled backwards) and the interpretation of the Grinch as a "necessary antithesis" and a corrective mechanism of the campaign.
- The analysis of the ideological rebranding of Grandfather Frost / Santa Claus based on the archive of the newspaper Rabotnichesko Delo (1945–1989).
- The methodological innovation "3AIlogue" and the scenarios to the year 2100, which define Christmas as "the last human algorithm".

Applied scientific contributions

- The empirical verification among 1,155 respondents and the six psychographic profiles of the Bulgarian celebrant (P1–P6).
- The "Somatic Map of Christmas Emotions", which is an original research instrument.

Practical contributions

- "The Christmas Influencer Handbook", "The Handbook for a Successful Christmas Podcast" and the checklist for a successful Christmas campaign.

These contributions have both academic and direct professional value for practitioners in the field of communications.

6. Publications and Participation in Scientific Forums

The candidate has submitted a list of 23 publications and participations in scientific forums. Some of them are directly related to the topic of the dissertation: “The Gift as a Medium: The Language of Exchange and Social Pressure”, “Emotions at the Centre of Christmas Communication Campaigns”, and the papers from the Autumn Scientific Conference and the Summer School of PR of the Department of Media and Communication.

The others concern platforms, artificial intelligence and communications. They include the monograph “PR and Artificial Intelligence” (2025), publications in the Central European Journal of Communication and in Springer, and participation in international collective volumes and proceedings. This demonstrates sustained scientific activity and integration into the international research community.

7. Abstract

The abstract accurately reflects the structure, content and contributions of the dissertation and meets the requirements of NBU.

8. Remarks and Recommendations

The remarks do not alter my positive assessment and are advisory in nature.

1. I recommend that, when preparing the printed version, the terminology in the abstract be harmonised and technical inaccuracies corrected. For example, the title page states the degree “Doctor of Sciences”, whereas elsewhere it is “Doctor”. There are also isolated typographical errors.
2. I recommend further discussion of the methodological limitations of the “3AIlogue” method (reproducibility, dependence on model versions and prompt wording), as well as the limitations of the online sample in the survey with regard to representativeness.
3. I recommend disseminating the contributions in international peer-reviewed journals, for example through English-language publications on the “meta-campaign”, “adeloK” and the “somatic map”.

9. Conclusion

Desislava Boshnakova’s dissertation is an original, extensively documented and well-structured piece of research with clearly expressed theoretical, applied scientific and practical

contributions. It shows that the candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge in the field and the ability to conduct independent scientific research. The work meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, its implementing regulations and the NBU Regulations.

I give a **positive assessment** of the dissertation and **propose that the esteemed scientific jury award Desislava Lyubomirova Boshnakova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences"** in professional field 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications – Public Relations).

Date: 14 October 2026, Sofia

Member of the scientific jury: Prof. Efrem Efremov, PhD

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