



**REVIEW FOR THE COMPETITION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF SCIENCE AT NBU**

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By Prof. Dr. Ivan Yochev Boevsky, New Bulgarian University, 3.8. Economics, for the degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, with candidate Prof. Dr. Kristian Krastinov Bankov

**1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms**

Professor Bankov has submitted for evaluation a dissertation of 375 standard typewritten pages (674 861 characters), which is a monograph published by *Springer Nature* in English. The thesis is divided into 13 chapters, a multi-part introduction, a conclusion, an index of names, a subject index and a unified list of references cited.

The work deals with an extremely topical issue, namely a semiotic approach to the socio-cultural changes occurring after the advent of the Internet and new digital technologies. It covers the research of prof. Bankov from the last 10-12 years, most of which have been published as scientific articles in prestigious journals included in the world's leading scientific repositories. Significant is the fact that on Springer's website Prof. Bankov's book is announced as the first monograph entirely devoted to semiotic research of digital culture. The work emphasizes both important theoretical issues related to the introduction of new paradigms in semiotic theory and applied analyses of a variety of concrete manifestations of digital culture, often involving concepts from borderline sciences such as economics, anthropology, and sociology.

**2. Accurately stated aims and objectives of the dissertation.**

The dissertation has clearly formulated goals and objectives and they are quite ambitious, namely to lay the theoretical foundations of a new type of semiotics applicable to the problems of digital culture. According to the research framework of prof. Bankov, this could not be done in a single work and on the first attempt, but in this initial phase of digital semiotics, one could start by posing important critical questions to the dominant models and outline the direction of the new type of modeling with specific studies of various manifestations of digital culture. The main aim of the work is to do this by observing three main theoretical concerns in all chapters, namely 1) the commercialization of culture; 2) a critique of textualism; and 3) transformations of identity.

**3. Evidence that the dissertation has been developed independently and does not repeat verbatim the topic and a significant part of the content of the work submitted for the PhD.<sup>1</sup>**

This is obvious given the completely different subject matter of the PhD (Philosophy of Language, 2000), as well as the subject matter of the habilitation (2004, entirely pre-digital) and that of the professorship on consumer society (2009).

**4. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and consistency of the literature used.**

Given the novelty of the problem under study, the reader of the work is left with the impression of a fully comprehensive review of the existing literature on the subject, which is also visualized on page *xiii* as a geographical map. At the same time, the author cautions that the pace at which new contributions on the topic are appearing is much higher than usual for the semiotic literature, as gradually authors working in more traditional directions cannot abstract from the new cultural and communication reality.

**5. Correctness in citing a representative number of authors.**

Most of the authors cited are in specialties other than mine, but those whose work I am familiar with, including several classic names in economic theory and marketing, are cited correctly.

**6. Availability of a supported and developed theoretical model of the study.**

The aim of the dissertation is to lay the foundations of a new semiotic theory adequate to the new interactive and highly commercialized communication formats of digital culture. The author follows an established practice in the development of semiotic theory, in which a number of diverse studies are initially conducted and then brought together in a monograph with a common theoretical framework, appearing as a general synthesis of the theoretical and applied results achieved. The author defends his choice with reference to numerous works of the most eminent authorities in semiotics.

**7. Compatibility of the chosen methodology and research method with the stated aim and objectives of the dissertation.**

The work of prof. Bankov does not follow the standard model of scientific research, where an established scientific methodology is chosen, a research hypothesis is formulated, fieldwork is conducted according to the rules and standards of the chosen methodology, etc. The proposed work seeks such a methodology on the basis of a systematic critique of existing models, and in the process the author observes the three main issues cited above. The wide variety of analysed manifestations of digital culture in the individual chapters is systematized and synthesized in a general theoretical framework written after the publication of the individual studies, to which Part 1 of the work is dedicated. The author argues that this is a common approach and method of scholarly contribution to the interpretive semiotics of Umberto Eco, whose student and follower he is.

**8. Availability of own input in the collection and analysis of empirical data.**

The methodological notes to the work note that the usual "terrain" of semiotics is the manifestations of language and culture fixed in a durable discursive form, most often as text. These are secondary sources. It was new to me to learn that "text" can refer not only to works of language, but to anything produced by the creative industries and new media. So there is no typical primary field data collection here, but working with already available sources. What is original is finding examples that demonstrate the limitations of textual analysis in relation to interactive platforms



and works.

***Description of contributions:***

**1. A brief description of the nature and an assessment of the reliability of the material on which the contributions of the thesis are built.**

The dissertation analyzes a wide variety of manifestations of digital culture, such as the new semiotic status of copyright after the heyday of the Internet, the language of cinema after the rise of digital special effects, the transformation of football into a mediated experience, love and sex in the Internet age, digital forms of money, the new digital populism, the *Google* effect as a prosthesis of thinking and memory, the new emotional grammar of emojis, memes, etc., All the examples are based on well chosen and credible readings of contemporary socio-cultural life, the claims are supported by statistics and extracts from official sources.

**2. Description of the candidate's contributions and their classification.**

The contributions in this dissertation are significant and compelling. The chosen field of research, namely semiotics of digital culture, is still building its theoretical foundations and this guarantees the originality of the research done, further strengthened by the fact that this is the first monograph in the world on this topic. Prof. Bankov is one of the most popular and invited semioticians today, this is evident from his international appearances, the positions he has held in international organizations and his publications, all in the field of digital semiotics. Certainly his critique of the most advanced paradigm in semiotics, textualism, sets the author apart from most semioticians working on the same issues. The in-depth semiotic modeling of the money sign and other basic concepts of my specialty - economic theory - such as scarcity, consumption, crypto currencies, purchasing power, fiat money, gold standard, credit, etc. is completely original and opens a long-term perspective for interdisciplinary collaboration. The notion of a "plaforsphere" and all the theory around its definition is also an original contribution with the potential to influence future research. Included in the book are original authorial models of a) the typology of the monetary sign, b) the economic value through the purchasing power of the monetary sign, c) a further developed model of identity; d) a model of the evolution and devolution of the sign according to its historical uses, which give more clarity and applicability to the theoretical postulates.

All contributions are correctly described in the abstract and correspond to what the work proposes.



***Impacts of the thesis on the external environment.***

**1. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published.**

The list of publications on the topic of the thesis is impressive, most of them are included in the most prestigious world databases of scientific literature. In *Scopus* prof. Bankov has 28 articles and book chapters, in *Web of Science* 13, for most of them he is the only author.

**2. Use and citation by other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc.**

Citations are sufficient in number and have increased significantly over the last two years, 17 in the first database and 21 in the second. There are 200 citations in *Google Scholar*, 125 in the last 5 years, mostly from articles on the dissertation topic. It makes a good impression that young NBU authors and PhD students are influenced by the works of prof. Bankov and publish in the scientific journal of the Center *Digital Age in Semiotics and Communication*, of which he is the founder and editor-in-chief.

**Personal qualities of the author (if the reviewer knows him/her).**

I have been acquainted with Professor Bankov for the last few years, but even before that I have had observations of his activities and presence in the NBU scientific community. He is one of the international faces of the university, known for the international semiotic schools he has organized for the past 20 years, as well as for organizing a huge world congress on semiotics at NBU in 2014. He is the Secretary General of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS), which is a great recognition for our scientist. Despite these honors, he is natural and approachable in daily contacts, always ready to help and cooperate.

**Opinions, recommendations and comments.**

Despite the undeniable merits of the work and its fully international status, I would have been more satisfied if it had more citations and attention to Bulgarian authors. This is important not only for the completeness of the study, but also for the promotion of Bulgarian science, as we know that the current scientific conjuncture pushes to the periphery everything that is not published in English.

I have other minor quibbles with the use of economic terminology, but they are minor in the overall interdisciplinary perspective.



## **Conclusion**

In view of the analysis of the dissertation of prof. Bankov I can confirm without the slightest doubt that it contains theoretical generalizations and solutions to major scientific or applied problems, which are in line with modern achievements and represent a significant and original contribution to science. For this reason, I take the liberty of proposing to the esteemed Scientific Jury **to vote positively** and to award **Prof. Dr. Kristian Bankov the degree of DOCTOR OF SCIENCE IN** the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics)

Date 17/09/2023.

Review by:.....

(Prof. Dr. Ivan Boevsky)