

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Traikov Hristov,

University of National and World Economy, Department of International Economics and
Politics

about a doctoral paper for the award of the educational and qualification degree of Doctor
in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics)

Candidate: Sevim Asimova Taneva

Topic of the doctoral paper: Market challenges for the tobacco industry. Integrated
research analysis focusing on semiotic methods

Doctoral adviser: Prof. Kristian Bankov, PhD

General characteristics of the doctoral paper - significance, objectives and methodology

The doctoral paper submitted for review is an extremely thorough work, addressing a rather interesting topic, which provokes ambiguous attitude – cigarettes and the cigarette industry as a whole. Burdened with negativity, this industry nevertheless manages to remain a valuable example of many achievements in marketing and communications, which can benefit a number of companies. In this sense, both because of the above and because of the metamorphoses in the tobacco industry, the work has its value.

At the same time, the content is reason to unequivocally affirm that the issues discussed have the necessary level of topicality and relevance. In this sense, the work can be extremely useful for the theory and practice of communications and can be a step toward more perfect brand communications.

The thesis has all the necessary formal characteristics of a serious PhD thesis. The style is at a high level, the statements are clear and understandable, despite the complexity of the issues under consideration. The practical part has a high degree of autonomy, it is approached responsibly enough, the methodology is presented properly.

Perhaps there is a need to improve the introduction towards more relevant academic requisites. It would be wonderful to present the actuality of the topic, which in this case is not so visible at first glance.

Description and evaluation of contributions (scientific and applied ones)

The doctoral thesis features sufficient achievements and strengths that are the basis for a positive position. These are found, on one hand, in the depth of the work, and on the other - in the relatively new field of research that the PhD candidate is trying to exploit, successfully enough at that. Positives are seen as a contribution to theory, mainly semiotic research, as well as to marketing and communication practice in our country.

In no particular order of importance, the main scientific and applied-science contributions and positive points can be summarized as follows:

1. There is an impressive integration of semiotics and traditional marketing and market research. In fact, the dissertation paper has the potential to fill a significant gap in modern marketing communications. As a rule, the analysis and views on those are either too economic or too subjective. Although as a researcher I am a bit further away from this topic, I can confidently say that semiotics and the creation of meanings is key to a better understanding of how marketing communications work, respectively, to increasing their effectiveness. Here we are talking about an emphasis on how advertising is perceived, how to best comply with the characteristics of the target groups and much more.
2. The analysis of tobacco consumption is thorough and extensive. The approach to the topic is extremely sober, there is no bias or any form of interference of emotionality in the presented and analysed positions. The necessary historical perspective on the topic is given, as well as quite modern aspects of tobacco consumption, and some aspects of marketing communications. The argumentation is stable, the text is well-structured.
3. The scientific analysis in the paper is based on a sufficiently large number of interesting and relevant sources. It may be important to enrich it with more Bulgarian authors, but, anyway, they are used adequately, with the necessary personal contribution.
4. Semiotic analysis and semiotic approach – as formulated in the introduction and further – are methods used relatively rarely. Marketing communications need such point of view, even when it comes to deriving regularities, and where there is creativity, this can hardly be achieved

Observations and recommendations

As noted in the conclusion, the overall assessment of the doctoral paper is positive, but it is important to note two comments that can also be taken as recommendations for improvement.

The first concerns the correspondence between the title and the content. A claim for "market challenges" has been made in the title, while these are generally not explicit in the text. The challenges in question are likely related to the difficulties in the tobacco market lately – which is a result of both regulations and changes in consumer habits and preferences. This is something that the doctoral student should add or clarify.

The second concerns the market share, presented as the final step in the optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis. The problem here is that this is a relative economic category that takes into account other market participants, as well as the overall performance of the industry. For example, if there is a decline in the tobacco industry, the market share of a brand may decrease or increase, and the company's performance may deteriorate. Another indicator would certainly be more accurate in this regard.

The above observations do not diminish the positive evaluation of the doctoral paper and the importance of the scientific achievements mentioned. The text presents the author as a researcher with very good knowledge and skills in the field.

Assessment of publications and citations

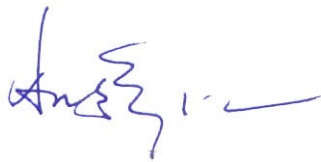
The publications on the topic of the doctoral research are fully relevant thereto which gives grounds for a positive assessment, although they were published well before the presentation of the doctoral paper. It would be useful to publish the current developments, presented properly by the author.

Conclusion

Taking into account the merits of the work, the topicality and specificity of the problems studied, their practicability, the excellent theoretical level of the problems studied and analysed and everything else, my overall assessment of the doctoral paper is positive. In this regard, I would like to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award the PhD degree in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics) to Sevim Asimova Taneva.

22.09.2023

Author of the statement:



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexander Hristov