

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dsc Antoaneta Lozeva Dontcheva, DS, Plovdiv University "P. Hilendarski" on a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Science in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, PhD Program "Semiotics" at New Bulgarian University

Author: Prof. Ph.D. **Kristian Bankov**

Title: **The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture**

Prof. Ph.D. Kristian Bankov presents his book "The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture", Springer, 2022, ISBN 978-3-030-925543 as a dissertation. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three parts, 13 chapters, a conclusion and a list of references. The volume of the work is 375 pages (674 861 characters). References cited: 329 titles.

The report on the fulfilment of the minimum national requirements included 7 studies and 1 article published in journals, refereed in world-renowned databases of scientific information; 1 study and 4 articles published in peer-reviewed journals or edited collective volumes; 7 chapters of collective monographs (only 5 of the publications are attached in the competition materials). Publications in international journals predominate. 7 citations in scientific journals, refereed or indexed in world-known databases are indicated. Google Scholar Citations shows that Kristian Bankov is among the most cited Bulgarian scientists at home and abroad. His teaching, research and organizational activities at the NBU and foreign universities, as well as his prestigious position in the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS), show that he is a scholar of international reputation and influence whose ideas reach a diverse academic audience. The papers and publications presented demonstrate the deep interest and dedication to the topic of this dissertation, as well as the high competence of its author. I have found no elements of plagiarism in the research. The abstract is made according to the requirements of the current regulations and reflects the main results of the research, correctly, synthesized and fully states the content, topic, subject and problem, objectives and method, structure and course of the research. Contributive points are precisely formulated and indicated and reflect the author's achievements. I have no conflict of interest with the author.

1. Topic Relevance and Research Method

The topic and research subject presented in the dissertation of Prof. Ph.D. Kristian Bankov is undeniably and painfully topical. The formulated goals and tasks of the research not only meet the need for orientation in the individual's fragmented social and personal world in the age of ubiquitous digitalization but also actualize possible research horizons and vectors for new forms of equilibrium in the person-society relationship. The topic's significance is beyond any discussion because the penetration into everyday life of Web 2.0 platforms for social interaction is bringing about significant changes in the way people think and behave, and requires that scholarship begin to answer many pressing questions.

The monograph is the first attempt to set a theoretical framework in an innovative field of semiotics, bringing together research on diverse manifestations of digital culture. Its subject matter is *heterogeneous*, and its research method combines *various classical models* of the semiotic tradition. The researcher is responsible for his subject and I believe that the risk taken by Kristian Bankov is fully justified. As detailed in the introduction, most of the content has been published as articles. The work is also *interdisciplinary*, insofar as it addresses concepts from related social and humanities disciplines, with the most significant and original contributions in this regard relating to the modelling of the money sign, scarcity, consumption and other central concepts in economics.

2. Characteristics and evaluation of the thesis

Thematically the work is divided into three parts. *Part I* is devoted to the general theoretical framework, which comes as a synthesis and summary of the research conducted throughout the decade 2010-2020. It is composed of two chapters, the first modelling the commercial core of the digital semiosphere, and the second a critique of textualism about interactivity. *Part 2* brings together all the research that provides a semiotic perspective on the main mechanism by which the cultural sphere is absorbed by the commercial sphere: the *experience economy*. Such themes include the new semiotic status of copyright after the heyday of online experience and content sharing, the changing language of cinema after the

rise of digital special effects, the transformation of football into a highly mediated paid-for experience, the entirely new formats by which love and sex are commercialized in the Internet age, and the common platform for the global circulation of economic value - digital currency. *Part 3* brings together research oriented towards the formation and manifestations of new 'digital' identities. Such a case study is the exploitation by the new digital populism of the symbols of national identity, the Google effect as a prosthesis of thinking and memory in new generations, the new emotional grammar of emojis and similar means of expression in social media, leading to the impossibility of a serious and thorough public debate on any topic, the serious challenge to education built on a textualist notion of knowledge and the new "hypertextual" generations and how identity is constructed with the new consumer rituals in social media.

3. Contributions and Significance for the Development of Science and Practice

The contributions and significant results are correctly derived and formulated. This is the first monograph entirely devoted to the semiotics of digital culture. The main contribution of the dissertation is in rethinking the classical semiotic models and turning them into an adequate tool for the study of the so-called digital culture. The greatest contribution of this work is the methodological renewal of semiotic models.

4. Critical remarks

What at first sight may seem to be a shortcoming of the dissertation presented, namely the looser connection between the different parts, is because the dissertation is an accumulation of articles written over the years. The author could be accused of being eclectic and lacking an explicit methodological project to discipline the research. I see this bricolage method as its advantage, because the text implicitly mediates the development of digital culture over the years, covering a wide field of the subject's social and personal being. The interpretation and representation of the various manifestations of digital culture is impossible without engaging with such a bricolage arsenal.

5. Conclusion

The dissertation "The Digital Mind: Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture" contains scientific and applied results that constitute an original contribution to science and meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. The presented materials and dissertation results fully comply with the national requirements. The dissertation contains original and significant scientific contributions and proves that its author possesses high professional and scientific competence and the qualities of an accomplished researcher. Therefore, I give my positive assessment of the research, the abstract, the results and contributions, and I propose the Honourable Scientific Jury to award the degree of Doctor of Science to Prof. PhD Kristian Bankov in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics).

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