

OPINION
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PROFESSIONAL FIELD: 2.3. PHILOSOPHY, AESTHETICS
ABOUT THE SCIENTIFIC WORKS OF PROF. KRISTIAN KRISTINOV BANKOV, PhD

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1. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms.

The dissertation work of Prof. Kristian K. Bankov, PhD, proposed for consideration is a semiotic study of digital culture. It is presented in English, the original language of the publication, and is entitled "*The Digital Mind. Semiotic Explorations in Digital Culture*" (2022). The book has a volume of 226 pages and includes an introduction, table of contents, exposition, conclusion, index of names and subject index. The exposition consists of three parts, in which thirteen separate chapters are distributed.

The book was published by "Springer" publishing house, "Numanities - Arts and Humanities in Progress" series, which in itself is a testimony to the scientific interest in the researched problems and the high quality of the presented work.

Each of the chapters represents a study, with its own scientific contribution, focused on a certain aspect of digital culture, and the subject of research is analyzed through selected semiotic methods and models.

The result is a semiotic framework for the interpretation of digital culture and an in-depth semiotic analysis of the transformation from textuality to interactivity (part one); a multifaceted deployment of the experience economy thesis presented in a rich set of research topics (part two); analysis of the effects of digital culture on a personal and collective level through concepts such as emotionality, identity, populism, and analysis of the formation of a new "culture of navigation" (third part).

The significance of the problem in scientific terms

The digital age is a relatively new and very dynamic stage in the development of human culture, which attracts the interest of many researchers from various scientific fields. In view of the prospects that digitization offers for the development of science, as well as in view of the race for scientific-technical supremacy, where speed far outstrips the ability to make sense of the results, there is a great need for analyzes that trace and explain the essence and the consequences of the ongoing technological transformation.

Research is very needed on the concepts of knowledge, truth, and mind and how they are influenced by technologies, and to analyze and discuss the consequences of these processes for the way reality is constructed and its supportive value system as well. Prof. Bankov's book is an analysis that responds to this need and discusses changes in the digital environment meeting the theory of the semiotic models with the reality of consumerist practices. To a large extent, the scientific significance of the research problem he raises, constitutes in identification of appropriate concepts, methods and models for the study of digitization and its consequences.



As a result, we have the opportunity to consider the digitization and commercialization of modern culture not only through the lens of a more rigorous scientific methodology, but also in an analytical depth that comes from the fundamental semiotic theories.

Significance of the problem in scientific and applied terms

The role of humanities and social sciences for practice is fundamental. They are fundamental to revealing the concepts that guide the thinking and principles of behavior in a society, and in this sense, trade patents are not the only way to apply scientific knowledge. The illumination of a concept or phenomenon, that is, its “deep reading” through conceptual analysis, becomes an aspect of the applied, practical knowledge through the effect it has on ethics, education, policies and legislation.

In this direction I see the importance of the problem discussed in the book, which is not only tied to specific economic aspects (money, the economy of experience, etc.). The individual aspects of applicability I mean are the socially and politically significant consequences, and I will dwell on them in point 4.

2. Justification of the goals and objectives in the dissertation work.

Each part of the dissertation contains a clear and precise justification of its goals and objectives. The individual chapters generally have completeness and self-importance, and their main objectives and themes are clearly defined. The book is well structured logically and each chapter has its own sub-structure that organizes the argumentation of the thesis and the empirical material.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and the set goal and objectives of the dissertation work

The author knows very well and skilfully applies the various semiotic models for research. From a methodological point of view, the analyzes in the first part of the book are particularly important, where he discusses the encyclopedic model of U. Eco and the Lotman model of Semiosphere and offers them as a reserch tool for explaining digital culture. The application of semiotic concepts and models to the analysis of Web 2.0 is well grounded and argued through the large body of empirical material.

On the other hand, the author is careful about and critical of the limits of applicability of the proposed model to Web 2.0, insofar as it limits the idea of the semiosphere as corresponding most directly to the stage of Internet development where users intensively generate content.

In addition, Prof. Bankov successfully uses various methods such as deductive reflection, statistics, documentary facts and grounded theory to validate his theoretical models.

In the analysis of video games, the semio-economic approach he offers leads him not only to a thorough and convincing presentation of the notion of interactivity "as a basis for a transition to another paradigm", but also to an excellent analysis of the transformation of information from text into experience and of the weakening of the cultural role of language in the digital age.

The use of semiotic methods and approaches according to the problem at hand is crucial to prove and build on the book's general interest in exposing the specifics of the cultural logic of the digital age, which is shown to be economic rather than linguistic.



4. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation work (description and evaluation), including the presence of an original contribution in science.

The study of digital culture through semiotic models is an approach that resulted in a rich palette of significant scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions. I agree with the contributions of the individual chapters described by the author. In terms of scientific-theoretical point of view, I would emphasize the importance of the discussion in the first part of the book. In applied science terms, the contribution of the second and third parts of the study is more pronounced.

Scientific contributions

A search on the internet by keywords „digital semiotics book“ confirms the author's claim that the book is the first monograph entirely devoted to digital semiotics.

I consider very relevant the author's approach to structure and analyze the "life" of the WEB 2.0 culture by means of the semiosphere model. It brings forth the idea of algorithms as a cultural analogue of the biological carrier of information DNA. The possibility/risk of social engineering is explained on the premises laid down in this way - the semiosphere as a biological metaphor. The metaphorical comparison is followed by a broad thematic exploration of the power of algorithms in subsequent chapters. The selection of topics in them contributes to the general idea of the transformative power of digital culture towards the rise of the experience economy.

Each topic builds up to the main ambition of the research – to prove that it is possible and in addition especially productive to apply the semiotic hypothesis to the analysis of digital culture.

The semiotic methods and approaches adopted by Prof. Bankov result in an in-depth analysis of a variety of significant phenomena of the digital age, all of which are distinguished by their significant social effect. The scientific contributions of the presented work come from diverse problems, the commonality between which is their social and cultural importance.

For example, the topics of special digital effects, emoticons, algorithms for sorting and filtering information, socker, money, love and sex in the digital age. The diversity of these problems, on the one hand, and their unity in the body of the book, on the other, make for the leading contribution of the dissertation – to demonstrate the applicability of the semiotic hypothesis to commercial logic in digital culture.

Scientific and applied contributions

The analysis of the topic of ownership in the discussion of social platforms has a scientific-applied meaning (ethical, political). One of the impressive applied results of the comparison of the platfosphere and the semiosphere is the justification of the problem of the inaccessibility of the center of the platfosphere (the platform code and the big data), which should give the meta-level of self- knowledge in it.

The problem becomes obvious when one compares the freedom of access to the meta-level of self-knowledge in the semiosphere - language, literature, the arts - and the private ownership by the major media platforms of the meta-level of self-knowledge in the platfosphere. With this argument, Prof. Bankov builds on the discussion about private ownership of code, which for decades exerts a decisive influence on the development of digital culture and economy.



Contemporary digital culture transforms key cognitive abilities such as memory, attention, logical thinking. Studies such as those of N. Carr, to referred by Prof. Bankov as well, explore the transformation caused by ICT in the processes of learning and production of knowledge and point to the need to restructure the educational system. Prof. Bankov very successfully caught and analyzed in the book the effect that algorithms have on the transformation of knowledge. Specifically, he describes this effect as the replacement of a "culture of erudition" with a "culture of navigation," which brings an important contribution to the discussion of paradigm shift in education in a digital environment.

Part of the scientific-applied aspects of the dissertation come from the exceptional positioning of the author as long-time lecturer, chief editor, project-manager, administrator and a researcher with a wide social network in semiotic milieu. He shows an remarkable knowledge of the semiotic schools, their representatives, the topics and directions in which they work, including and regardless of the language barrier, as far as his ability to use literature in Italian, English, French and Russian is concerned.

Last but not least, it should be noted that the book builds a systematized and analytical picture of research in the field of digital semiotics. It successfully maps the semiotic field by highlighting semiotic studies, schools, and researchers. The goal, which the author states and consistently highlights in the development of each problem, is to present models that can develop a future-adequate and viable semiotic paradigm. Thus, the dissertation outlines a network of researchers, methods, problems, and schools, knowledge of which would be of immense benefit to any student of semiotics.

5. Evaluation of the publications of the dissertation work: number, editions in which they were published.

Thirty publications, all published between 2010 and 2023, with one currently in print, have been listed. These publications encompass works in English from esteemed international publishers such as Routledge, De Gruyter Mouton, and Springer, alongside publications in Bulgarian from NBU's academic publishing house. These presented works meet and exceed the minimum requirements for the degree.

6. Citation by other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc

The author's works have garnered citations that surpass the minimum requirement. They are featured in prestigious scientific publications, referenced in, and indexed by, world-renowned databases. The citation data affirm the acceptance and authority of the author's publications within the scientific community.

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes.

Distinctive of all the publications Prof. Bankov submitted to the competition is the creation of a research filed in which he applies the semiotic approach to the commercial culture phenomena. Digital culture is fundamentally commercialized and has the power to influence the perception of truth, goodness and beauty (three central ideas of human mind) through market mechanisms. I support the author's ambition to rehabilitate semiotics within "a new paradigm in which ethical stance and theoretical advancement go hand-in-hand" (p. xxiv) and I would ask how he sees his ethical position within the semiotics of digital culture?



7. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative assessment of the dissertation work.

The dissertation work presented by Prof. Kristian Bankov is an original scientific study that has a significant contribution to the development of semiotics and digital semiotics in particular. The book, as well as the additional publications presented, are high-quality scientific studies that leave no doubt about the author's scientific contribution.

Based on the stated qualities of the dissertation research, the scientific and scientific-applied contributions in it, as well as the rich, complex activity of the candidate as a lecturer, editor, administrator, project manager and Secretary General of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, I confidently give a positive vote and support the awarding of Prof. Dr. Kristiyan Krastinov Bankov the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the scientific specialty "Semiotics", in professional field 3.1. "Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences".

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