REVIEW

by Professor, PhD Christo Nikolov Kaftandjiev, Sofia University, scientific specialty 05.04. 11 - General and Comparative Linguistics

for the dissertation thesis of Sevim Asimova Taneva for the degree of Doctor in the professional field 3.1 - Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Semiotics)

According to the requirements of the NBU, my review should answer the following questions:

Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms

The analyzed phenomenon is very important - both from economic and social point of view. This determines the importance of the study from its different perspectives - economic, marketing, semiotic, etc.

Accurately formulated goal and objectives of dissertation

The doctoral candidate has formulated the goal and objectives of the dissertation accurately and precisely.

It would be good if Sevim defines the limitations of the dissertation in the introduction.

Degree of knowledge of the problem and adequacy of the literature used

Sevim has cited most of the important scientific books and articles in English and Bulgarian in the field of her PhD. This is evidence that she is familiar with this phenomenon and that she carefully studied some of the most important research in this area.

It is also excellent that Sevim has written the dissertation in English.

Correctness in citing a representative number of authors

The doctoral student has read and correctly cited some of the most important scientific studies regarding the analysed phenomena in the dissertation.

Compatibility of the chosen methodology and research methodology with the stated goal and objectives of the dissertation.

It is also excellent that the candidate has thoroughly justified the value of semiotics as the main method of analysis in this study.

Sevim structured the dissertation in the following chapters:

- Semiotics of tobacco consumption
- Research solutions and analytical integration
- Integrated semiotic analysis of the Corset brand

In the first chapter, Semiotics of Tobacco Consumption, Sevim analyzed the following four phenomena:

- Introduction to semiotics
- Cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption
- The tobacco business today: scope and culture of smoking
- Semiotic analyses of tobacco consumption

In the first chapter, Introduction to the Science of Semiotics, the candidate defines semiotics and defines its scope. At the beginning, Sevim thoroughly analyses the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce. The reason is that these two scientists are the founders of modern semiotics.

The candidate then explores the theories of Roland Barthes, Greimas and Juri Lotman.

The reason for the analysis of these three semioticians are the following:

- Theories about myths, which are very important for advertising and other marketing communications, since consumers largely, think emotionally and therefore mythologically, rather than rationally;
- The semiotic square model, which according to Greimas analyses how we create meanings.;
- The semiosphere - the semiotic space where, according to Juri Lotman, we communicate.

The next chapter is devoted to the cultural and historical context of tobacco consumption.

Here, the candidate explores in depth the following phenomena:

- The importance of tobacco in American-Indian culture;

- the Europeanization of tobacco and its spread around the world;

- pre-cigarette tobacco consumption - ways, rituals and fashions - pipe smoking; snuffing; tobacco chewing;

- the invention of cigarettes and the development of the cigarette industry - the impact of military conflicts; the impact of marketing; cigarette smoking and the emancipation of women; the medical debate and anti-smoking movements and product development and advertising in the post-war period.

The third chapter is about today's tobacco business and smoking culture

At the beginning, Sevim Taneva examines the global tobacco market in depth and abstracts the following three trends - the increasing regulations and bans in the industry; the development of new tobacco products; and the continuous rise in cigarette prices.

The PhD student further analyses important aspects of the operations of some of the world's leading cigarette companies.

An important part of this chapter is devoted to brands and their advertising, product segmentation, the health aspect and regulations of this industry, and the development of next-generation products because of the changing cultural and market environment.

The final chapter of the thesis is an integrated semiotic analysis of the Corset brand, namely:

- Introduction to the research project

- Analysis of retail sales

- Analysis of consumer survey data

- Analysis of Corset brand advertising

- Corset brand mythology

- Communication analysis of the Superslims category

At the beginning, the PhD student correctly formulates the research objectives and methodology. Then she has analysed the retail audit data. An important part of the analysis is about brand culture.

The candidate then examines this brand in terms of its marketing communications. It is excellent that the she studies the cultural codes in Corset's advertising - the codes of provocation, mystery, attraction, seduction and sexuality.

A typology of Corset's advertising codes is also done.

The next part of the chapter is about the mythology of the Corset brand.

The subchapter on semiotic square is also excellent.

<u>The contributions of the dissertation</u>

Here, as a reviewer, I must briefly describe the nature and assess the reliability of the material on which the dissertation's contributions are built.

The doctoral candidate has chosen an important aspect of human civilization, she has thoroughly analysed some of the world's most important scientific research in this field, and she has professionally used semiotics as the main method of analysis in relation to a global cigarette brand.

Ms. Taneva's dissertation shows that she possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge in this field and that she can conduct independent research.

The scientific work contains relevant theoretical generalizations and solutions to scientific and applied problems, which are an original contribution to science.

<u>Assessment of the degree of personal involvement of the doctoral student to the contributions</u>

We can formulate five contributions.

The first contribution according to the candidate is about the optimal research model, which is in 5 steps.

This model does enable a research study that meets the criteria of reliability and validity.

The second contribution is about the semiosphere of tobacco consumption.

As the author underlines, this is probably the first attempt to apply the semiosphere model to this area. Using this model, she identified seven spheres of tobacco culture and consumption: Americo-Indian culture, European culture, Pipe smoking culture, snuff use culture, Cigarette smoking culture, Health consequences and prohibitions, and Transformational use culture.

Using Lotman's model, Sevim structured and traced the evolution of the smoking culture, and demonstrated the peculiar dialogue currently taking place between institutions and tobacco companies - the former defining bans and regulations, the latter developing the business within the regulatory framework.

The third contribution is with respect to the typology of codes. The candidate complemented the typology of dominant, residual and emergent codes with the category of eternal/immutable codes. These codes manage to remain relevant and appealing at any given moment, making them universal. For example, in smoking, pleasure, confidence, sophistication, elegance form the semantic field of eternal codes.

The fourth contribution is in terms of levels of meaning making. According to the PhD candidate, meanings are created at three levels: brand meaning, product category meaning and general market meaning. There is no doubt that some meanings are generated in this way and therefore this postulate can be taken as a scientific contribution.

The fifth contribution is with regard to the way in which the research instruments under consideration function in relation to the cigarette industry.

Regarding the impacts of the thesis on the external environment:

The PhD candidate published three scientific articles, namely:

Asimova, Sevim. Digital culture of the regulated industries. Focus: Tobacco sector, in „Digital Age in Semiotics & Communications", Sofia: New Bulgarian University, 2018

Асимова, Севим. Митология на тютюна в америндианската култура, в „Дискурсите на тютюна", София, Нов български университет, 2017

Асимова, Севим. Употреба на тютюна преди появата на цигарите – форми, ритуали и модни течения, в „Дискурсите на тютюна", София: Нов български университет, 2017

And by this criteria the PhD candidate definitely meets the requirements for an excellent PhD thesis.

With regard to comments, recommendations and observations

The dissertation is written very well and therefore I have no critical remarks.

Sevim should also publish this dissertation as a university textbook.

Of course, upon publication she should edit the work, as there is a significant difference between a dissertation and a university textbook.

I think it is excellent if Sevim develops the dissertation further as a next level doctorate.

Then she should include some other phenomena in her research, namely:

- Analysis of part of the book "Tobacco" by the genius Dimitar Dimov;

- Analysis of the architecture of the tobacco warehouses in Plovdiv and in the Rajkovo district of Smoljan;

- Analysis of the tobacco museum in Kavala, Greece;

- Analysis of the book and the film "Thank You for Smoking". It is a 2005 American satirical black comedy film written and directed by Jason Reitman, starring Aaron Eckhart, based on the 1994 satirical novel of the same name by Christopher Buckley. The film follows not too honest (to put it mildly) PR activities of the chief spokesperson for a major tobacco company, Nick Naylor, who lobbies on behalf of cigarettes.

Conclusion

Definitely Ms. Sevim Taneva has written excellent doctoral thesis. For this reason, without any hesitation, I will vote positively for the PhD student Sevim to be awarded with the scientific and educational title "Doctor".

12.09.2023

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