

OPINION

- By:** Assoc. Prof. Andrei Ivanov Nonchev, UNWE
- Regarding:** doctoral dissertation for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of study 3.1 “Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences (Semiotics)”
- Grounds for presenting the review:** participation in the scientific jury for the defence of the doctoral dissertation according to Order №3-PK-278 от 11.07.2023 of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University.
- Author:** Sevim Asimova Taneva
- Topic of the dissertation:** *Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with a Focus on Semiotic Methods*

The dissertation on "*Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with a Focus on Semiotic Methods*" consists of 192 pages and contains an introduction, three parts, a conclusion, lists of figures/tables/illustrations (36 figures, 13 tables and 28 illustrations), a bibliography and four appendices. The bibliography is composed of 108 main information sources - 48 books, four collections, 31 articles, 23 corporate publications, three institutional documents, as well as 23 additional sources. The appendices to the dissertation are on the following topics: Appendix 1: Advertisement and pack design audit of top selling cigarette brands; Appendix 2: Advertisement, product and point of sales audit of NGPs; Appendix 3: Structured questionnaire for consumer research; Appendix 4: Table report from consumer research. One-dimensional allocation (toplines). Field Work: May - June 2017.

1. Scientific and scientific-applied significance of the researched problem

The dissertation has an original character and is devoted to a relatively understudied theoretical and practical problem. The chosen subject of the dissertation and the adopted perspective to the research problem are significant in scientific and scientific-applied terms.

2. Justification of the objectives and tasks of the dissertation

The goal and tasks of the dissertation research are well formulated and well-founded. It is stated that the purpose of the dissertation work is “to prove that the analytical integration of market research methods, with assigning a central role to the semiotic method, gives substantial advantages to the researcher”. The set goal was fully realized, while at the same time new data about the object of the dissertation research were obtained and original conclusions were drawn.

3. Correspondence between the chosen research methodology and the set goal and tasks of the PhD thesis.

The methodology of the research fully corresponds to the subject of the dissertation. The methodology used and the integrated toolkit for analysis is relevant to the set research objectives. The theoretical framework and methodological tools are adapted to the specifics of the research subject and are characterized by an original author's style.

4. Scientific and scientific-applied contributions of the dissertation

The author is distinguished by a wide erudition and a very good knowledge of the scientific literature, theoretical developments and empirical studies on the topic of the dissertation. Her ability to systematize and critically evaluate diverse theoretical concepts and methodological approaches in the fields of semiotic analysis, qualitative and quantitative consumer research, and retail sales measurement, makes a good impression. She demonstrates very good skills to adequately analyse a significant amount of information and to draw well-founded sound conclusions. One of her significant achievements is the coherent logical connection between the theoretical framework of the research, the chosen research methods, the developed tools for collecting empirical data and the performed analysis of the obtained information.

The thesis is well structured and has a clear logic. The author's views are well-argued. The presentation style follows the good patterns and standards of scientific discourse. The language used is readable and understandable.

I accept the formulations of the dissertation contributions indicated in the abstract, which adequately present research achievements of the doctoral student. In the dissertation can be identified several scientific and scientific-applied contributions, which I would summarize in the following areas, corresponding to the author's self-assessment:

First, an "optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis as the final theoretical outcome" is presented, which is preceded by the development of research programs containing diverse case studies in marketing and sales. The optimal research model with integrated semiotic analysis includes five steps: Step 1. Analysis of retail audit data; Step 2. Analysis of consumer research; Step 3. Semiotic analysis; Step 4. Measuring the semiotic findings; Step 5. Market share results monitoring. The incorporation of semiotic analysis into a common market research tool has innovative character.

Second, a pioneering attempt was made to apply the semiosphere model of tobacco consumption to the tobacco industry. Seven domains of tobacco culture and consumption have been identified: Amerindian culture, European culture, pipe smoking culture, snuff culture, cigarette smoking culture, health consequences and bans, and culture of transformation usage. The evolution in the culture of tobacco consumption and the interaction and communication between the semiospheres has also been traced.

Third, in the semiotic tool "Decoding and Recoding" the typology of dominant, residual and emergent codes is examined, and a new category of universal ("everlasting") codes is proposed. In the consumption of cigarettes as "everlasting" codes have been identified those of pleasure, confidence, refinement, elegance.

Fourth, in the semiotic tool "Discourse Analysis", the author distinguishes three levels in the construction of meaning in business: brand meaning, which is constructed by the individual identities of each brand; product category meaning (created from the common meaning composed by all brand identities); total market meaning (constructed from the collective meanings of all the subcategories that shape it).

Fifth, it is explained how the reviewed research tools in the categories of "semiotic brand research" and traditional market research work in relation to the cigarette industry through examples of industry trends and brand features.

5. Evaluation of publications on the PhD thesis

Three author's articles in the New Bulgarian University publications are presented, which are related to the topic of the dissertation:

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

2. Asimova, Sevim. Mitologia na tjutjuna v Amerindijskata kultura, in "Diskursite na tjutjuna", Sofia: Nov balgarski universitet, 2017
3. Asimova, Sevim. Upotreba na tjutjuna predi poiavata na tsigarite – formi, rituali I modni techenia, in "Diskursite na tjutjuna", Sofia: Nov balgarski universitet, 2017

The author's publications are sufficient in number according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, meet professional quality standards and have received recognition in a critical academic environment.

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

No information on citations of the doctoral student's publications has been presented.

7. Opinions, recommendations and notes

I highly appreciate the work done by the author on her dissertation research, carried out on a well-founded theoretical framework, original research tools and supported by the author's empirical study and in-depth analysis of the collected information.

I recommend the doctoral student to increase the international visibility of her research activity by publishing more actively in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

6. Conclusion

The dissertation was developed in accordance with the normative requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", reflected in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for its implementation, adopted by the Council of Ministers and the Ordinance on the Development of the academic staff of the New Bulgarian University.

Based on the merits of the dissertation and creative achievements of the author indicated in the review, taking into account her extensive knowledge of the topic, the demonstrated capabilities and skills for conducting independent original empirical research and for in-depth analysis, as well as her contributions to the semiotic research of market challenges to tobacco

industry, I express my conviction that Sevim Asenova meets all the legal and professional requirements for being awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

25.09.2023

Signature:

Sofia

(Assoc. Prof. Andrey Nonchev)