
STATEMENT

By Prof. Dr. Kristian Krastinov Bankov, 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences, NBU for the conferment of educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (Semiotics), with candidate Sevim Asimova Taneva.

1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.

Sevim Taneva has developed a doctoral dissertation in English with the original title "Market Challenges of the Tobacco Industry. Integrated Research Analysis with Focus on the Semiotic Methods" with a volume of 310 standard typewritten pages, divided into three parts, introduction, conclusion and four appendixes. The work on the thesis lasted about 5 years and went through various revisions and restructurings. Sevim was among the first PhD students to enroll in the PhD program in Semiotics after it was significantly reformed and oriented towards the labour market. These changes, in turn, are the result of the participation of our semiotic Center in the international SEMKNOW project, which brought together the efforts of 4 prestigious European universities to create the first international PhD program in semiotics with an applied orientation. That is why the main focus of this dissertation is on the applicability of semiotic research. This is where its significance comes from - how thoroughly and reasonably this applicability has been demonstrated, insofar as this topic fits into one of the main problems that led to the current crisis of the humanities - their inapplicability in the non-academic world. But while the applicability of semiotics is the main source of relevance, the choice of the tobacco industry also has its share in the overall weight and scope of the dissertation.

2. Justification of the aims and objectives of the thesis.

The aims and objectives of the thesis are derived from the innovative context of its creation. It does not conform to the typical structure according to which a certain theoretically grounded hypothesis is proved by a specific empirical study. Here, the objectives are related to proving the validity of an integrated model for market research (with semiotics playing a leading role), while the empirical study rather illustrates the thesis. That is, another consumer category could have been chosen with equal success, as long as it had the same deep cultural and historical implications as the tobacco consumption.

3. Correspondence between the chosen methodology and research methods and the

stated aim and objectives of the dissertation.

The work does not follow one pre-established methodology, but rather aims to integrate a number of different but complementary methodologies into a common research approach. Semiotic theory and a large set of its applied models used by real agencies in the market are used as a common framework and as the main approach in the integrated methodology. The real research case study of the KT International brand Corset demonstrates that the candidate is also successful with conventional market research methods.

4. Scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation (description and evaluation), including the presence of an original contribution to science.¹

The main contribution of the thesis is the formulation of a working integrated model for brand market research that puts at its centre a set of working semiotic approaches. This model is completely original, created in the course of real market research, with the potential to be applied across a wide range of product categories in the following marketing situations: new market entry, new product development, negative market share trend, brand positioning/re-positioning and Brand health issues.

Another contribution of the thesis is the cultural analysis of tobacco consumption, which reveals the extreme importance of this phenomenon synchronically and diachronically. The candidate uses the Semiosphere model introduced by the famous semiotician Jurii Lotman. This model aims to reveal the inner mechanisms of the functioning of living culture and to guide the creation of its corresponding typologies. In the case of this work, these are Amerindian Smoking Culture, European Smoking Culture, Pipe Smoking Culture, Snuff Use Culture, Cigarette Smoking Culture, Health Consequences and Prohibitions, and Use Transformation Culture.

Sevim has also applied quite successfully the model for decoding the codes of advertising communication in the cigarette sector, which has not been done for Bulgaria and therefore could be used by managers of other brands in this sector.

There are other more secondary contributions to the work that make it overall quite original and useful for the national context.

5. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation: number, nature of the publications in which they have been published.

The applicant has listed three publications which, although few, are sufficient for the purposes of this procedure. One of the publications is in an international publication.

6. Citations from other authors, reviews in the scientific press, etc.

There are no citations from other authors or reviews listed; the work has not yet been published anyway.

7. Opinions, recommendations and comments.

My main recommendation is to pay more attention to the digital environment and the new approaches to brand and market research that follow from it. Not so much as a criticism that this is missing from the current work, but as a direction for upgrading it with a view to eventual publication as a monograph. While most interesting from the point of view of curiosity, the section on the history of tobacco uses is longer than it needs to be, shifting the balance a little from the more essential for the purposes of the work parts.

8. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative evaluation of the dissertation.

The dissertation "Market Challenges for the Tobacco Industry. An integrated research analysis with a focus on semiotic methods" fully meets the requirements for applied research and deserves maximum marks. It is my categorical opinion that Sevim Asimova Taneva should be awarded the degree of PhD in the professional field 3.1 Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Sciences (scientific specialty Semiotics) and I call upon the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to vote with a positive evaluation.

Date 22.09.2023.

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