

Expert opinion

of Prof. Tsvetan Iliev, PhD on the procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”, professional field 3.7 “Administration and Management”, scientific specialty (PhD program) “Administration and management (Business administration)”.

This opinion has been prepared in my capacity as a member of the scientific jury, determined by Order №63/05.04.2022 of the Rector of IBS – Botevgrad, and meets the requirements of Art. 10 para. 1 of LDASRB and art 32 para. 1 of the Regulations for its application.

Candidate for the procedure: Tsvetelina Nikolai Nikolova

Topic of the dissertation: BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AS A TOOL FOR FORMING A CORPORATE IMAGE (on the example of companies in the market segment “Soft drinks and bottled water”).

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR: Prof. Lalka Borisova, PhD

I. Evaluation of the structure of the dissertation

The version of the dissertation presented by Tsvetelina nikolova is in the volume of 200 standard pages. Structurally, it is well balanced, with the content distributed as follows: introduction, three-chapter exposition, conclusion, bibliography and tree appendices. The dissertation includes 11 tables and 49 figures. The bibliographic reference covers 102 titles, of which 37 in Bulgarian, 11 in Russian, 29 in English, 15 Internet resources and 10 reports from various institutions.

Regarding the structure, I can say that the dissertation has a complete form, corresponding as details to the requirements for such development.

II. Evaluation of the content of the dissertation

According to the PhD student, the main reason for choosing and developing the topic is related to the need to systematize competencies that are to be applied in practice in order to communicate effectively with the external and internal audiences of a company, to stimulate trust and open dialogue in managing and organization – on the horizontal and vertical levels, which is part of the winning formula of modern management to build a positive image of the organization.

The topic of the dissertation has interdisciplinary character, which suggests the possibility of using scientific approaches, methods and tools in the field of communication management, marketing, psychology and behavioral sciences. As a result, the dissertation outlines the practical framework of its research to one of the fastest growing sectors of the food industry – the production of soft drinks and especially bottled water.

The subject of research are business communications and corporate image, and the object – are companies in the “bottled water” sector, specializing in the production and distribution of mineral, spring and table water.

Based on the outlined object and subject, **the aim** of the dissertation is to develop a system of business communications and to determine its impact on the formation of corporate image. In order to achieve the outlined goal, PhD student Nikolova envisages the implementation of the following **tasks**:

1. Research and analysis of the basic theories about the essence of the business communications;

2. Building models and defining activities that shape the corporate image and corporate reputation, as well as outlining approaches and methods for their evaluation;

3. “Analysis and evaluation of the level of business communications based on an empirical study of the experience of the companies in the “bottled water” sector”;

4. To systematize the competencies in the process of communication and digitalization of communication activities;

5. To develop a System for evaluation of business communications for image building;

6. To clarify the place of the corporate image in the Balanced system of performance indicators.

I believe that the fulfillment of the tasks set by the PhD student implies the achievement of the goal of the dissertation.

The thesis that PhD student Ts. Nikolova insists in her dissertation that **business communications are a condition for building a positive corporate image of the organization and there is a connection between them that can be appreciated**. To confirm it, the following research hypotheses are considered:

Hypothesis 1: There is a connection between motivation and achieving satisfaction in communication;

Hypothesis 2: The corporate image of the organization is formed by the personal qualities and competencies of managers.

For the formation of her point of view on the problems of business communications and corporate image the PhD student has taken into account the achievements of a number of Bulgarian and foreign authors. Regarding the theory of business communications Tsvetelina Nikolova demonstrates good knowledge of the works of Mac Cleland, Boyatzis, L. Sencer, Schroeder, Dulevich, Webster. In connection with the basic formulation of the cluster approach in determining corporate image are taken into account the research of S. Thomson, Lindsay, D. Goldman, O. Iverson and others. For the role of corporate image are applied the scientific

analyzes of authors such as: G. Allport, L. Vaitknen, E. Bogdanov, K. Boulding and others, as well as the theoretical statements of R. Kaplan and D. Norton on the Balanced System of indicators.

The research methodology used by the PhD student includes: survey and self-assessment, competence approach, comparative parametric analysis and graphic modeling, method of complex assessment of business communications. To establish the quantitative parameters of the empirical study, the methods of statistical analysis, expert estimates and the method of coefficients are applied. The results of the empirical study have been processed with the SPSS program. This gives me reason to point out that PhD student Nikolova knows and can use a wide range of research methods and approaches, based on which she tests the above hypotheses to confirm his position on the issues outlined.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATIONS AS A MEANS OF IMAGE FORMATION

It provides a literary review of theoretical statements about communication, contacts, image and reputation. In this way the author has tried to clarify the place, the importance and the role of communications in the activities of the organization. A parallel is made between the concepts of “communication” and “contacts” and on this basis the author’s working definitions are formulated for the dissertation research. In particular, the PhD student defines the concept of communication **as a purposeful exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, positions, emotions and evaluations between people in the process of their joint activities in order to achieve effectiveness in communication.** It clearly highlights two main components – exchange and understanding. Communication is the exchange of information between participations. At the same time, it is effective when understanding is achieved between the parties.

In the second paragraph of this chapter and analysis of the types of communications and PR activities to build the image of the modern company. A classification of communication links is applied by reviewing the achievements of other researchers on business communication issues. In it they are grouped in the following areas: internal and external, formal and informal, etc.

Based on the achievements of communication theory, the PhD student takes as a basis the standard definition of the term “image” and gives her connection with corporate image: **an intangible asset of great importance that attracts customers to a company and brand, and is formed in the communication process.** Also, attention is paid to PR activities in the formation of the image.

The approach of the PhD student Nikolova, in clarifying the essence of the image, to draw a parallel with the concept of “reputation” speaks for itself. This approach is not one-sided, in the sense of looking only for commonalities between them. It also implies an assessment of their specifics. According to the author, what unites them are their goal – stimulating target consumers to take certain actions, building and maintaining consumer

confidence, increasing support for a business organization, imposing and differentiating it from competitors, increasing sales. The shades of the differences are noted regarding the fact that the corporate image is the impression we want to create for the brand, and the company's reputation is the actual perception and opinion of consumers about it.

In connection with the outlined approach, models for the formation and management of corporate image and corporate reputation are considered and systematized. A comparative characteristic of their meaning is made and the connection image – identity is considered.

An important point in the first chapter, which presents the research capabilities of the PhD student, is the systematization of approaches and methods for assessment and analysis of corporate image. For this purpose, Ts. Nikolova applies a system of criteria in the selection of methods for analysis and evaluation, which includes: validity/ reliability, available resources, individual capabilities, ensuring the relevance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AND IMAGE BUILDING ACTIVITIES (on the example of the companies from the sector “Soft drinks” with emphasis on the subsector “Bottled waters”)

The second chapter of the dissertation is empirical. The scope of the practical study includes companies from the Soft Drinks sector, for which the types of communications (internal and external) and the activities of corporate social responsibility – responsibility to customers, staff and the environment, to build a positive image in society. The positioning of the companies on the market, the product portfolio and organizational structure, the programs for talent development and the educational platforms are also analyzed. According to PhD student Nikolova, the aim is to show the initiatives and activities that lead to image formation and provide a competitive advantage to companies.

The object of the empirical research in these aspects are the companies Devin Ltd, Coca Cola – Bulgaria, BG – Gorna Banya and Mihalkovo Ltd. An analysis has been performed and an author's assessment has been given regarding the specifics of the business communications in each of the companies. The assessment is formed on the basis of information from a survey, in which the questions are structured in three areas: general information; communications and management style; image formation in society. After the analysis of the answers of the respondents in the survey, substantiated conclusions were made, which prove the formed working hypotheses.

CHAPTER THREE

VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND TURNING THEM INTO A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE COMPANY FOR IMAGE FORMATION

In the third chapter of the dissertation the PhD student presents his vision for building an image in the companies, which are subjects of analysis through innovative communication activities, building a system for evaluating business communications and corporate image and a balanced system of performance indicators. The place of the corporate image in this system is determined from four perspectives – financial, customer, relations, business processes and training and development.

In the first paragraph, the PhD student analyses the communication activities and their digitalization as factors for building a corporate image in customers and society. According to her, digital communication has clear and measurable goals: to attract new customers and keep in touch with existing ones. The changes that have taken place in information technology and in the way people around the world communicate in the recent years have transformed not only the traditional media, but also the way PR professionals work. Nowadays, thanks to online resources, they instantly reach a huge and highly targeted audience.

Companies try to be where their customers are, to hear them more clearly, to follow their interests and to meet their requirements. According to Ts. Nikolova digital PR includes a diverse range of opportunities – from the classic online presence (via a website) to active social Web 2.0 (Facebook, Blog or microblog) communication. On this basis, she concludes that every company seeks to attract new and young audience should develop and implement a digital strategy to ensure a presence on the Internet. The Internet is the second communication channel after television, from which one learns about events by visiting websites and social networks. Moreover, it is strongly emphasized that that digital communication channels are one of the most powerful and accessible tools for establishing emotional connections.

The second paragraph presents system for evaluating business communications, which determines their influence in the formation of corporate image. Thus, I believe that the PhD student also finds evidence to support her thesis.

On the basis of the received evaluations of the companies included in the scope of the empirically researched, PhD student Nikolova concludes that in order to be able to manage, business communications, as a factor for forming corporate image, must be evaluated. The Evaluation System proposed in the dissertation is a mechanism that allows managers to demonstrate competencies in the style of management and communication, as well as a contribution to the formation of a positive image in society.

The third paragraph applies a Balanced scorecard for the development of the organization, developed in the early 90s of the twentieth century by R. Kaplan and D. Norton, and outlines the place of image building in it. This system turns the company's mission and strategy into goals and indicators, organized in four directions: "Financial direction", "Customer relations", "Internal business processes" and "Knowledge and development". This allows a balance to be struck between the short-term and long-term goals of companies.

At the level of the companies, subjects to the study, PhD student Nikolva believes that the system should be used for communication, information and training, and not as a control tool. A measurement and management system must clearly define how improvements in operations, customer service, innovation, employee training, quality of business communications, will lead to increased financial efficiency based on increased sales, profit, faster turnover of assets and reduced running costs.

The conclusion of the dissertation presents the summarized results and conclusions from the empirical research in the companies, subject of research evaluations and their role in forming a corporate image.

III. Evaluation of the contribution of the dissertation work

On the basis of the presented in the dissertation work I accept as author's achievement the scientific contributions determined in the reference. In my opinion, they could be grouped into two aspects. The first and the second contributions are theoretical in nature, and the others – in practice-applied.

IV. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract presented by PhD student Ts. Nikolova has a volume of 49 standard pages, contains all the necessary details for such a development and fully reflects what has been achieved in the dissertation.

V. Evaluation of the publishing activity of the PhD student

In the list of publication for participation in the procedure for acquiring ESD "Doctor" Ts. Nikolova cited five papers, including a monograph, a study, an article and two scientific reports. The article and one of the reports have been published in foreign scientific journals. Both reports are co-authored. All publications are related to the topic of the dissertation and reflect its various aspects.

I believe that this scientific work fully corresponds to the quantitative and qualitative scientometric indicators for the award of the ESD "Doctor" and even exceeds them.

VI. Critical notes and recommendations

The dissertation of Tsvetelina Nikolova has been developed at a high scientific level and has a completed character. In general, I have no critical remarks.

In conclusion, I believe that PhD student Tsvetelina Nikolova meets the requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty (doctoral program) "Administration and Management (Business Administration)" and has the necessary qualities. In view of this, I propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to support the awarding of ESD "Doctor" of Tsvetelina Nikolova on the basis of Chapter Two of the Law of Development of Academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

16.05.2022

Sofia

Prepared the expert opinion:


/Prof. Tsvetan Iliev, PhD/