REVIEW

of the dissertation of Valentina Boyanova Dolmova
Supervisor – prof. Antoaneta Rusinova-Hristova, PhD, D.Sc.

Topic:'USER-VOTER ANALOGY':
FACTORS IN BUILDING AN IMPRESSION ON MARKET AND POLITICAL BRANDS"

Reviewer: Prof. Tolya Stoitsova, PhD, D.Sc.
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The dissertation of PhD student Valentina Dolmova includes a total of 179 pages. The main text of the dissertation without the bibliography is 140 pages. The work is structured in 5 chapters, accompanied by an introduction, bibliography, covering 369 literature sources, 39 figures and five appendixes. Before reviewing the text, I would like to specifically emphasize the precise structure, the doctorate's expression and the logical connectivity between paragraphs and chapters. I would also like to note that the topic is unconventional, seemingly paradoxical with the analogy between consumers and voters. It turns out that not only this is a possible analogy but also studied and presented excellently by the doctoral student. Thus, the dissertation of PhD student Valentina Dolmova is an extremely pleasant to read, which gave me great pleasure.

The introduction touches on the actuality and significance of the topic, as well as the thesis in the form of a research question that the doctoral student defends. The highlights are also presented, which are essentially the aim and tasks of the dissertation to answer the research question.

Classically, the first chapter presents a systematic analysis of the scientific literature studied on the subject. The chapter begins with the outline of the research framework based on theories, trends and currents related to the formation of impressions of market subjects and political context for voters' expression in a wide range of time – the last 40 years (1980 – 2021).

The systematic analysis covers the study of consumer and voter behavior separately and in detail.

With regard to consumer behavior, the precision of the doctoral student is also expressed in the definition and distinction of terms such as acting, act, behavior, and attitude. Traditional theoretical directions and models in terms of consumer behavior and choice are classified into two large types – classical and modern. Thus a total of five groups are differentiated with four in the first type and 1 group with several models in the second. The factors for determining consumer behavior and choice are presented in Figure 1, which are an essential point and therefore PhD student Dolmova has included the figure in her abstract.

The linking of consumer behavior with political psychology in the first chapter is presented with a detailed content of four fundamental pillars, namely: demographic factors; psychological factors; social factors and cultural factors.

With regard to voter behavior and choice again, as with consumer behavior, systematization of theoretical approaches and models is presented. Theories and models are grouped into four scientific directions – sociological; psychosocial; economic and new, modern theories. The conclusion that consumer behavior almost entirely overlaps in the context of politics refers logically to the content of the next chapter of the dissertation.

A second chapter is devoted to the parallel between the spheres through the analogy "user – voter". The main goal of this chapter is the formation of an author's research model based on comparisons between the components of influence in the process of building an impression, the idea of a 'brand' in both contexts (political and market), as well as the derivation of common, basic factors of influence.

A table presents the comparison between influence factors in consumer and political contexts. Particularly interesting for me was the assumption that political parties have a similarity with commercial brands which, according to PhD student Dolmova, leads to the grouping of parties into three types: product-oriented political parties; sales-oriented political parties and market-oriented political parties. The sub-factors with a determining role for political or consumer choice are not omitted, namely: perceived benefit or loss; memory of the past; influence of recognizable

persons and presence of (internal) conflict. In conclusion of a second chapter the own research model of doctoral student in Fig. 2 is schematically presented.

A third chapter contains the empirical part of the study. The main goal is presented along with tasks and subtasks formed to it which are seven in number. Three hypotheses are in line with them: hypothesis 1 with 4 sub-hypotheses; hypothesis 2 also with 4 sub-hypotheses and hypothesis 3.

The research methods, which include semi-structured interviews for data collection, are presented punctually and creation of semantic categories and exploratory inspection. Human subjects are grouped into 4 groups – experts in the field of politics; laymen in the field of politics; experts in the field of trademarks and brands and laymen in the field of trademarks and brands. The procedure also includes a pilot study. Of course, all the initial steps of the procedure are accompanied by analyses.

The third chapter, most essentially author's, covers the results obtained and the preparation for their referencing to the hypotheses raised in the next, fourth chapter. The results are perfectly illustrated with graphs, the understanding of which can realize any reader of the dissertation. A factor model was applied to test hypotheses. The derived semantic units of the analysis are particularly eloquently presented. It is interesting that illustrations have color spots for easier tracking of literally a lot of data.

The most important in my opinion are the conclusions regarding the hypotheses reached by PhD student Dolmatova in the fourth chapter. The confirmation of Hypothesis 1, along with the proof of sub-hypotheses, finds that both types of behavior – political and market – are influenced by all four fundamental factors, demographic, psychological, social and cultural. It is important to emphasize the strong influence of the psychological factor, regardless of the contextual framework in which subjects are. And hypothesis 2, along with the sub-hypotheses, is also confirmed regardless of context. Hypothesis 3 is rejected because no significant difference is found between the weights that layman and expert groups attach to individual factors and sub-factors.

The implication is that the factors and sub-factors that influence the impression building process are the same for both – the experts and the average voter or consumer. The doctoral student also concludes "that we have reason to believe that the research model encompasses components that are fundamental in nature" (p.132 of the dissertation).

The fifth chapter includes discussion and conclusions. In short it summarizes the results and indicates their significance.

I accept the contribution points in the dissertation as they are stated. They are in three directions:

1. In theoretical terms, an original model of the factors and sub-factors of influence in the impression building process is proposed (Fig.6, p.85), which is based on a complete systematization of the theory.
2. In research terms, the study is "the only fundamental qualitative study that we know of addressing the concept of 'consumer – voter' in English language and Bulgarian literature" (p. 137).
3. Attached research plan is a practical framework in which marketing campaigns can be constructed, both politically and consumedly. The derived content components of each factor and sub-factor contribute with specifics to the elements involved in the impression building process and allow for larger quantitative studies in Bulgaria.

Very good impression is also made by the paragraphs related to the reflection on the methodology and model of research, as well as the personal, author's reflection on the process of research, namely the difficulties and lessons learned by the doctoral student. Last but not least is highlighting the limitations of the research, as well as possible directions for future research.

The conclusion is also included in this last chapter. It is too short and unfortunately does not answer the research question asked.

Extremely rich is the bibliography of 369 sources, of which 19 in Bulgarian, the rest – in English. It is also very important that the PhD student cites publications of her supervisor, prof. Antoaneta Rusinova-Hristova.

There are 5 applications:

1. Structure for Exploratory Interviews with 29 items.
2. Declaration of participation of the subjects.
3. Arrangement of components in the main four factors. It is about the demographic, psychological and social factor with their components and the cultural factor, also with its components.
4. Arrangement of the components in the four sub-factors and their components, ordered by number of repetitions, and distributed according to the four groups of respondents.
5. Demographic data of subjects who took part in the research.

The abstract fully and accurately represents the content of the dissertation. It also lists the publications of PhD student Dolmeva on the topic. There are four of them, one in English language. Three were published in 2022 and one – in 2023 online.

I have two small critical notes – one to the abstract and one to the dissertation. I allow myself to present them in my review by considering the aspiration of PhD student Dolmova to perfectionism:

1. The structure of the dissertation in five chapters seems to me a little bloated. Easily the fifth chapter could be included with the previous one. The conclusion is not numbered, as well as the introduction, and it is necessary to include the answer to the main research question, or in other words – whether the thesis defended by the doctoral student is proven.
2. The abstract is too bulky – 60 pages with small spacing between rows. I understand the doctoral student desire to be convincing by illustrations in her abstract as well, but it seems to me that too many of the tables and graphs were included.

I also have one question: What is the answer to the research question – is the thesis proven?

CONCLUSION

The dissertation submitted for review and its abstract not only fully meet the requirements for the award of her educational and scientific degree "Doctor of Psychology", but repeatedly exceed

them. The intensive work done in theoretical and empirical terms as well as the access to practice, show great depth and a level of professionalism, which leads to new knowledge in an unexplored area such as the topic of the dissertation. The abstract is not inferior in perfection to the dissertation.

All this gives me grounds to form my firm opinion in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and Titles and Academic regulations for its implementation, I am confident to propose to the colleagues from the scientific jury to award the educational degree "Doctor of Psychology" to Valentina Boyanova Dolmova for her dissertation on "The analogy 'consumer – voter': Factors in building an impression against market and political brands".

Date: Signature:

29th of May 2024