OPINION

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Evaluation of the doctoral dissertation entitled "THE 'CONSUMER-VOTER' ANALOGY: FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPRESSION FORMATION OF MARKET AND POLITICAL BRANDS" submitted under the procedure for awarding the scientific and educational degree "doctor" in the professional area: 3.2. Psychology

Doctoral candidate: Valentina Boyanova Dolmova

The dissertation presented offers a topic distinguished by its novelty and significance. Its development implies interdisciplinarity and in-depth theoretical knowledge of the fundamental factors in forming impressions and choices regarding market and political brands.

The research objectives are successfully met and supported through qualitative methods, resulting in findings that offer significant scientific contributions. My overall positive evaluation of the dissertation is based on the following assessments according to the specified criteria:

(1) Overview of the dissertation – volume and structure

The dissertation is structured to include an introduction, a theoretical section with two chapters, as well as an empirical section with three chapters. These sections include objectives, tasks and hypotheses, research methods, results, a summary, and a conclusion.

The thesis is 179 pages long, with 369 references, 19 of which are in Cyrillic.

There are 15 tables and 39 figures. All five chapters are well-structured, clear, and consistent.

The abstract fully and accurately reflects the structure and content of the dissertation and presents the most important theses and conclusions of the conducted research.

The first part (theoretical overview) comprises three chapters, which are well-organized and provide a comprehensive theoretical review. They present assumptions that define the theoretical framework of the study and support the objectives, research tasks, and hypotheses. Understanding the processes of decision-making and the scientifically based approach to the consumer/voter ensures the success of election campaigns, as well as marketing strategies for product promotion.

(2) Review of the literature and theoretical background of the study

Fully in line with the topic and objectives of the dissertation, in the literature review, V. Dolmova convincingly outlines the trends in the emergence of various theories and explanatory models of consumer behavior, distinguishing between those based on economic principles and the concept of rationality and those that consider the nuances of human intentions in the decision-making process for purchases.

Since the main idea is to compare voting behavior and consumer behavior, two central questions are included by analogy, which are central to both political psychology and marketing. They relate to decision-making—voting in the first field and purchasing in the second. Because of the centrality of the topic of consumer and voting behavior, the scope of the published works is vast, although limited to the period from 1980 to 2021.

The systematization of consumer behavior theories itself is a sufficiently complex and ambitious task, which the doctoral candidate has approached by following to their chronological sequence but also categorizing them as normative and descriptive based on the scheme proposed by Kahneman and Tversky.

A positive impression is made by the way the candidate defines and examines the main concepts under study, particularly in terms of their operationalization possibilities. After systematizing the theories of consumer behavior and choice, the summary of factors logically follows. The doctoral candidate follows the model of Solomon et al., which identifies four groups of factors: demographic, psychological, social, and cultural. In the second part, V. Dolmova offers an analysis of voting behavior. The frequency statistics also reveal a vast volume of over 200,000 publications on the process of forming voting behavior and the factors influencing it. Following the scientifically grounded approach of their academic advisor in political psychology, V. Dolmova justifies the need for a more targeted investigation of the process of developing voting behavior and its dynamics. The consistency in structuring the content and presenting the theories of voting behavior and the factors influencing political choice is analogous to the presentation of theories of consumer choice. This allows for the comparison and argumentation of the similarities between them at the end of this part of the dissertation, which is elaborated in more detail in the second part of the first chapter.

Based on the analysis of theoretical trends, V. Dolmova identifies a group of four subfactors that synthesize and encompass the influence of the main factors. Terminologically, the word "subfactor" suggests a branch in the structure of the main factor, and in this sense, the choice of this term does not best represent the idea of their complex influence. A possible alternative is to designate them as first-order and second-order factors, with the latter reflecting the influence of the

former. What are the interrelationships between the two groups of factors, and do they differ concerning consumer and voting behavior? Placing the subfactors in a horizontal cross-section provides an idea of the structure of this model, but this is a complex structural model that implies complex interrelationships and, most importantly, explains the dynamics in the development of these behaviors, as the unfolding of the process is particularly informative for their essential characteristics.

(3) Methodological approach

The second part (empirical) contains three chapters. In the first of these chapters, the objectives, hypotheses regarding the influence of the factors identified in the theoretical model, the sample, and the research methods are clearly and correctly described. The choice of qualitative analysis methods determines the parameters of the sample and the tools, as well as the way of processing the obtained data, which fully corresponds to the objectives of the research and is suitable for testing the formulated hypotheses.

The analysis includes data from 28 respondents, whose answers resulted in a 450-page text, requiring substantial work and time resources to analyze. I highly appreciate that V. Dolmova chose qualitative analysis methods, which achieve depth in the analysis, and she has excellently handled the processing of the obtained results.

(4) Significance and strength of the results, interpretations and conclusions

The similarity in the frequency distribution of responses across the four main factors is taken as evidence of their analogous influence in forming impressions regarding a product brand or a political choice. These distributions offer comprehensive insights into the critical elements influencing the formation of impressions for a specific brand, regardless of whether the context is market-driven or political. This supports the acceptance of the first hypothesis, along with the related sub-hypotheses.

The semantic categories within the most important factor for respondents—psychological—are also ranked similarly for both types of choices and for the four respondent groups. The second hypothesis is confirmed by the explicit evaluation from the respondents regarding the importance of each of these subfactors.

The second hypothesis is also confirmed by the explicit evaluations from the respondents regarding the importance of each of these subfactors. The results from the qualitative analysis do not support hypothesis 3, which proposed significant differences between laypeople and experts regarding the weight of the factors in impression formation, indicating that these factors are fundamental.

The empirical research results are presented in an appropriate graphical format and are well-structured in terms of the objectives, tasks, and hypotheses. The conclusions drawn from the hypothesis testing, as well as the summary conclusions, are accurately synthesized and reflected in the fifth chapter of the dissertation.

(5) Critical notes to the dissertation

In the theoretical part, I noticed a minor omission: there is a lack of a more detailed description of the selection of subfactors and the rationale for including them in a horizontal cross-section with the main factors.

Additionally, the dissertation could benefit from incorporating more rigorous statistical tests to verify differences in the comparative analysis of the frequencies of semantic categories across the different factors.

Even though there are no statistically significant differences between novices and experts in the frequencies of categories within the main factors, qualitative analysis and the content of the semantic categories might reveal such differences. Expert representations predominantly include subordinate level categories, while those of novices are primarily at the basic and superordinate levels.

(6) Scientific contributions of the dissertation

I fully acknowledge the scientific and applied contributions derived from the doctoral research as outlined and justified in the dissertation. The theoretical achievement of this work lies in its in-depth analysis, rigorous argumentation, and empirical verification of the analogy between consumer and voter behavior.

The relationships between them are revealed through comparisons of the factors involved in impression formation for market and political brands, providing valuable insights both in theory and application.

The topic and the conducted qualitative research exhibit a high degree of scientific novelty, offering opportunities for applying psychological knowledge to reinforce interdisciplinary scientific connections.

Based on the results obtained, new research initiatives can be initiated, enriching the explored thematic area. Following the established analogy in the dissertation, hypotheses can be formulated about the direction of the studied relationship, exploring whether strategies influencing the formation of impressions of product brands can be transferred through mechanisms of unconscious analogies to the political sphere, and vice versa.

The results support the thesis regarding the pivotal importance of the psychological factor, contributing to further focus on its parameters and characteristics, and guiding policymakers in forming new political brands. The research interest focused on the determinants of human behavior in complex choices holds particular significance for developing a scientifically grounded approach to targeted influence management. This applies to both promoting product brands and organizing election campaigns.

The conclusions drawn from the dissertation emphasize the importance of civic engagement, voter awareness, and values, all of which are crucial for fostering active participation in elections.

(7) Assessment of the quality of the PhD student's scientific work in relation to meeting minimum national requirements

The reference provided to meet the minimum requirements for the academic title "Doctor" confirms compliance with national requirements regarding scientific publications. The doctoral candidate has submitted four independent publications on the dissertation topic.

Furthermore, Valentina Dolmova actively participates in the project and scientific activities of the institute, thereby contributing to their successful implementation.

(8) A motivated response to the question of how much of the research in the dissertation is primarily the candidate's own work:

The research included in the dissertation largely constitutes the personal work of the candidate. The studies included in the dissertation were independently conducted by the doctoral candidate.

(9) CONCLUSION

The scientific work presented by Valentina Dolmova is distinguished by the significance of the addressed issues, along with a relevant and excellently structured theoretical overview, an appropriate research design, and evidence of in-depth knowledge in the field of social psychology, as well as mastery of methodological experience and very good research practices.

The dissertation fully meets the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor", thus providing me with grounds to propose to the esteemed academic jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in Social Psychology to Valentina Boyanova Dolmova.

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Signature: Associate Professor Maria Trifonova, PhD