

OPINION by Prof. PhD Rayna Gavrilova, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

on a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "**PhD**"
in: field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field
3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, doctoral program Social
Anthropology

Author: Bistra Ognyanova Dragoykova

Topic: "Youth influencers: biographical strategies and practices"

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Dragieva Parusheva, Plovdiv University

1. General description of the submitted materials

By order No. RD-22-965 of 28.04.2025 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" (PU), I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury for ensuring a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic "Youth Influencers: Biographical Strategies and Practices" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences, doctoral program Social Anthropology.

The author of the dissertation is Bistra Ognyanova Dragoykova - a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Ethnology, with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Dobrinka Dragieva Parusheva.

The set of materials on paper submitted by Bistra Dragoykova is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv, and includes the following documents:

– a request to the Rector of the University of Plovdiv for the opening of the procedure for the defense of a dissertation; – a CV in European format;

- a protocol from the departmental council for the opening of the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- a statement from the scientific supervisor
- dissertation;
- an abstract in Bulgarian and English;
- a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of the scientific publications;
- a list of noted citations;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; – a certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements.

The doctoral student has attached a dissertation, as well as 3 publications. The review of all proposed documents shows that they fully comply with the requirements and are in accordance with the rules of the procedure.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

Doctoral student Bistra Dragoykova graduated in Philosophy from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (bachelor's degree) and obtained a master's degree from PU "Paisiy Hilendarski". Since 2014, she has been working as a philosophy teacher in secondary education; she has international experience as a coordinator of international educational exchange (2020-2024).

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

"Influencership", writes Bistra Dragoykova, referring to online influencership, "is not just a tool for promotion and marketing, but a complex social practice (p. 5)". The relevance of the research is evidenced not only by the the circumstance that it is a very recent phenomenon that emerged in the 21st century, but also by it is protean character. Despite the fact that it originated outside the Bulgarian reality, its synchronic global proliferation points to the emergence of a major new factor in the social, political,

cultural and economic spheres although few, like the late Prof. Ivaylo Dichev, realized it 10 years ago. The research is not only relevant, but urgently relevant and I find the doctoral student's research task - analysis of the human agency, the influencers - as a good heuristic approach

4. Knowledge of the problem

The text and the attached bibliography demonstrate excellent knowledge of both the terrain and the actors, as well as the relevant classical theoretical literature and the latest research on the problems of the digital world.

5. Research methodology

The key concepts organizing the study - biographical strategy and practice - are not only useful for achieving the goals of the work, but also fundamental to the anthropological approach. The author introduces the main methodological paradigms (Miller, Bourdieu, Giddens, Castells, Appadurai, etc.) and the methods she chooses to work with (observation, interview, diary, digital ethnography, self-reflection, narrative analysis, content analysis, etc.) and examines the concepts used in their social and theoretical context: aside from the two mentioned above others such as youth, digitality, online social networks, etc.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

The main hypothesis of the work is that influencers in its Bulgarian version is “a mechanism for building a recognizable, authentic and sustainable digital identity”; it is not “an isolated communication or marketing activity, but a cultural form of biographical self-presentation” (p. 19). Chapters One and Two introduce and comment the characteristics of digital culture, social platforms and influencers in general. I find this part to be a contributing and useful systematization based on global trends and the latest research. In Chapters Three and Four we enter the specific original research tasks of the doctoral student; here she explains and demonstrates her approach: “to

present and interpret the aspects that content creators transfer from their identity to their online and offline projects and their personal realization as carriers of the culture of influencership” (p. 129). The author presents and analyzes eight cases, which she describes in detail and through her own observation. For each case, specific strategies have been identified that allow conclusions to be drawn about influencership in the Bulgarian context. The chosen methodology has allowed the initial research thesis to be convincingly substantiated.

7. Contributions

Bistra Dragoykova's dissertation is the first study in Bulgaria and on Bulgarian material of a new, important social and cultural phenomenon. The methodological part is the best synthetic presentation of digital culture known to me; the collected field material is valuable and sets a good foundation for future research. The conclusions are justified and offer important observations not only on influencership, but in general on the state and characteristics of digital generations, both creators and users of content.

8. Assessment of the publications on the dissertation work

The publications on the dissertation are three in number and are on the topic of the doctoral studies.

9. Personal participation of the doctoral student

Bistra Dragoykova's text reveals a deep immersion in the field, accompanied by constant conscious and consistent reflection on her own position and relationships with respondents - qualities of a self-critical and ethical researcher.

10. Abstract

The abstract correctly conveys the content of the dissertation and can serve as a presentation of the main theses and conclusions in it.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks about the work, but I would like to receive a specific answer as to whether the choice of the eight cases is random (although the doctoral student indicates the reasons for this choice); is it possible to get an idea of how populated the field of influencership is and to what extent the cases show trends.

12. Personal impressions

I have no personal impressions of the doctoral student.

13. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

I have none.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific results that represent an author's contribution and meet all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADSRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ADSRB and the relevant Regulations of the University of Paisiy Hilendarski. The doctoral student Bistra Dragoykova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and demonstrates qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment of the research and propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "doctor" to Bistra Dragoikova.

Sofia, 14.06.2025

Signature:

Prof. PhD, Rayna Gavrilova