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**COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR POSITIONING A SCHOOL IN A
DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation

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in the scientific specialty “Marketing”

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The dissertation has been discussed and proposed for defense in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics by the Department of Marketing at the Dimitar A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov.

The dissertation comprises 163 pages, of which 151 pages constitute the main text. The work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references including a total of 125 sources. The exposition is supported by 13 tables and 4 figures.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on 18 September 2026 in the Rectorate Conference Hall at the Dimitar A. Tsenov Academy of Economics – Svishtov,

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I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

Relevance and Significance of the Research Problem

The development of digital technologies and the expansion of social networks are significantly transforming communication processes and the way in which organizations build their public presence. In a digital environment characterized by high information density and interactivity, communication is becoming a strategic tool for shaping perceptions, building trust, and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. Positioning is regarded as a process of forming a stable perception of the organization in the minds of its target audiences (Kotler, 2003).

Digital transformation has a direct impact on educational institutions, which operate under conditions of increasing requirements for publicity, transparency, and effective communication. Social media are becoming established as a major channel for interaction with audiences, providing opportunities for two-way communication, engagement, and the building of an institutional image. In this sense, according to Dave Chaffey, digital channels should be considered an integrated part of strategic communication rather than a separate tool for disseminating information.

Practice shows that the communication activities of school institutions in a digital environment are often implemented without a clearly formulated strategy, without a connection between objectives, audiences, and content, and without the use of systematic indicators for evaluating results. This limits the possibilities for the purposeful building of an institutional image and for the effective management of communication processes. In this regard, there is a need to develop a conceptual framework that ensures consistency and manageability in digital positioning.

The scientific relevance of the study is also determined by the extent to which the research problem has been developed. Existing theoretical models of digital marketing and positioning have been developed primarily in the context of business organizations (Kotler & Keller, 2021; Chaffey & Smith, 2022), while their application in the educational sector remains limited. There is an insufficient development of conceptual models tailored to the specific characteristics of school institutions as public

organizations, as well as a lack of clearly defined indicators for measuring the effectiveness of digital positioning.

The significance of the research problem stems from the need to adapt contemporary marketing approaches to the management of communication in education. In the context of Marketing 5.0, defined by Philip Kotler as a synthesis between technology and human behavior, communication is considered a means of creating value through experience, engagement, and trust. This places new requirements on school institutions, which should build their positioning through the strategic management of digital channels.

The relevance and significance of the research problem can be systematized in the following directions:

- **First**, the need for theoretical clarification of the digital positioning of school institutions as an adaptation of classical marketing concepts to the specific context of the educational environment.
- **Second**, the need to develop a conceptual model for the strategic management of communication processes that integrates objectives, audiences, and channels into a unified system.
- **Third**, the need to define indicators for measuring the effectiveness of digital communication, which would allow for the analysis, control, and optimization of communication policy.
- **Fourth**, the need to formulate practically applicable guidelines for the use of digital communication tools in the management of the school institution.

Object and Subject of the Study

The object of the present dissertation is *the strategic communication of the school in a digital environment, including its objectives and the tools used*. In the context of digitalization and the growing importance of online interaction between institutions and users, the school is becoming established both as an educational center and as an active communication subject, which should use its communication activities to build a clear identity in the minds of both its target audiences, namely students and parents, and a wider range of stakeholders, including institutional and public actors.

The subject of the study is *the capacity, including the opportunities and limitations, of social media channels as a tool for implementing the positioning strategy of the school* under conditions of an intensified competitive environment, dynamic technological changes, and increased digital literacy among the target audiences.

In the context of the study, the communication of the school institution includes a wide range of activities: from the processes of identity building, through the management of online presence, to the creation of engaging user experiences through digital platforms. Social media, in particular, provide an opportunity for a deeper connection with the audience through dialogue, authenticity, and continuous feedback, which transforms the role of the school from an institution that “speaks” into one that “listens,” understands, and creates value. Thus, the study seeks a comprehensive answer to the question of how school institutions in Bulgaria can build a sustainable digital presence through the strategic use of social media, based on evidence, data, and measurable results.

The research interest is focused on the interaction between marketing and education, a relatively underexplored field in Bulgarian academic literature that opens new opportunities for innovation in the management of schools as organizations with social and public functions. The focus is on how school institutions can use social media as a tool both for providing information and for building brand identity, trust, and sustainable audience engagement. The study examines digital communication strategies, their effectiveness, impact indicators, and critical success factors in the context of the Bulgarian educational reality.

Research Thesis

The present study is based on the thesis that *the successful positioning of the school institution in a digital environment is the result of purposeful and consistent management of communication processes, grounded in knowledge of the specific characteristics of the audiences, the characteristics of digital consumption, and the logic of interaction on social platforms*. In this context, the communication actions of the school institution are transformed from sporadic informational initiatives into a structured and systematic process oriented toward building trust, engagement, and recognition.

The study assumes that combining theoretical concepts from the fields of digital marketing, institutional communication, and positioning with an analysis of practices in the school environment creates an opportunity to develop an applicable framework for the strategic management of the school's communication. On this basis, it is assumed that, through the systematization of key communication tools, performance indicators, and interaction models, a model can be proposed that supports educational institutions in planning, implementing, and evaluating their digital positioning.

Objective and Tasks of the Study

The objective of the study is to *develop and test a conceptual framework (model) for the process of implementing the positioning strategy of a school institution, based on the use of digital communication channels.*

In accordance with the objective, object, and subject of the study, the following **specific tasks** have been set:

- To analyze the evolution of the digital environment and its influence on the transformation of marketing practices in education.
- To identify the specific characteristics of positioning in the context of school institutions.
- To assess the opportunities provided by social media as a tool for supporting the process of strategic positioning of schools by systematizing existing models, concepts, and studies in the field of digital marketing and institutional communication.
- To identify the key indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of the communication activities carried out by the school institution and to justify their applicability as a tool for evaluating and optimizing marketing activities in the school environment.
- To develop a conceptual framework (model) for the use of communication tools in the implementation of the positioning strategy of a school institution in a digital environment, which integrates analytical, communication, and managerial elements applicable in the context of Bulgarian education.
- To demonstrate the possibilities of the proposed conceptual framework by testing it in a specific school institution.

- To formulate general recommendations for the use of the proposed model in the activities of Bulgarian schools.

Research Methodology

The research methodology derives from its objective, and more specifically, from the aim to propose a model and an approach for the implementation of the positioning strategy of school institutions in a digital environment, based on the analysis and systematization of existing communication practices. Due to the specific nature of the research problem, qualitative research methods have been used as a priority, including literature analysis, comparative analysis of communication practices, the case study method, content analysis of digital channels, and analysis of indicators for communication effectiveness. The combination of these methods creates an opportunity to develop a conceptual framework applicable to the management of communication processes in different school institutions.

Adopted Limitations in the Scope of the Study

Despite the effort to provide a comprehensive and systematized presentation of the processes involved in the implementation of the digital positioning of school institutions, the present study should be considered within certain **limitations** arising both from the chosen approach and from constraints related to the environment.

1. The practical part of the study is based on data from a small number of subjects (schools), which may call into question the representativeness of the conclusions. The choice of this approach is dictated by the fact that the activities examined in the dissertation are very poorly developed among Bulgarian schools, while the use of examples from foreign practice would be inappropriate given the specific features of the organization of education in different countries.
2. The analysis of existing practice is based on data from private school institutions that demonstrate innovation and proactive behavior in the digital environment, which is expected given their greater opportunities, but also pressures, to adhere to “market-oriented” behavior. This fact implies certain limitations when transferring the conclusions to state and municipal schools, where resource provision, management practices, and the organizational environment may differ

significantly. Therefore, the results and recommendations should be interpreted with consideration of the specific features of the institutional environment.

3. The study is based mainly on secondary data, including published reports, marketing metrics, and content analyses of social media presence. The lack of primary empirical data, such as direct surveys with representatives of the target audiences, limits the possibility for quantitative verification of behavior, attitudes, and subjective perceptions. This lack is explained by the existing legal restrictions on collecting such information from students, as well as from teachers and parents.
4. The scope of the study includes only social media as a communication channel. Other digital elements of the marketing ecosystem of the school institution, such as electronic diaries or internal platforms for managing the learning process, remain outside the scope of the present study for reasons again related to regulatory restrictions. At the same time, it should be noted that there is potential for future research that would comprehensively integrate the digital infrastructure for school communication.
5. The dynamics of the digital environment, the frequent changes in the algorithms of social platforms, and the evolution of user practices pose a methodological challenge regarding the relevance of the proposed models. In this sense, the proposed framework should be considered applicable at the present moment, but with potential for adaptation in the event of future transformations in the digital environment.

Structure and Content of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of an **introduction**, a **main body structured in three chapters**, a **conclusion**, and a list of **references**. The content of the dissertation is as follows:

INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the Topic

Object, Subject, Research Thesis, Objective, and Tasks

Methodology and Limitations

Structure of the Dissertation

CHAPTER I. POSITIONING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Positioning in the Context of Educational Institutions
 - 1.1. Essence of Positioning
 - 1.2. Specific Characteristics of Positioning in the School Sector
2. Essence and Evolution of the Digital Environment
 - 2.1. Origin of the Concept of Digital Environment
 - 2.2. Contemporary Technologies and the Communication Process
 - 2.3. Social Media and Digital Communication
3. Impact of Digitalization on the Communication Strategy of Educational Institutions
 - 3.1. Opportunities and Challenges in the Use of Social Networks in Educational Communication
 - 3.2. Evolution of the Communication Strategy of Schools
 - 3.3. Key Aspects of the School's Positioning Strategy in a Digital Environment
4. Managerial and Organizational Challenges in Maintaining School Social Networks
5. Examples of Good Practices

CHAPTER II. MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SCHOOL'S POSITIONING STRATEGY IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Conceptual Model for the Strategic Positioning of the School in a Digital Environment
2. Identification and Analysis of the School's Target Audiences
3. Selection of Communication Channels for Digital Positioning
4. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Digital Communication Tools
 - 4.1. Indicators of Visibility and Reach in Digital Communications
 - 4.2. Metrics for Measuring Interactions in Digital Channels
 - 4.3. Tools and Platforms for Analyzing Digital Communication Indicators
 - 4.4. Data Analysis and Optimization of the Communication Strategy

CHAPTER III. RESULTS FROM THE APPLICATION OF THE MODEL IN A BULGARIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

1. Methodological Framework of the Testing
 - 1.1. Justification of the Approach for Testing the Model
 - 1.2. Justification of the Selection of Measures for Evaluating the Results
2. Strategy for Positioning Nikolay Katranov School in a Digital Environment
 - 2.1. General Presentation of the School and Characteristics of the Environment in Which It Operates
 - 2.2. Key Aspects of the School's Communication Strategy
 - 2.3. Analysis of the Results Achieved Through the School's Communication Channels
3. Recommendations for Improvement
 - 3.1. Measuring Success Through SMART Goals and Strategic KPI Frameworks
 - 3.2. The Communication Calendar as a Tool for Managing Content within the School's Communication Policy
 - 3.3. Tactical Recommendations by Platform and Planning of Engaging Content
 - 3.4. Digital Safety and Risk Management in the Online Environment: Tactical Guidelines for School Institutions

CONCLUSION

References

II. SYNTHESIZED PRESENTATION OF THE DISSERTATION

CHAPTER I

POSITIONING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

The first chapter is theoretical in nature and is aimed at clarifying the conceptual foundations of the positioning of school institutions in a digital environment. The essence and specific characteristics of positioning in the educational sector, the specifics of the digital communication environment, and the role of social media in building

institutional identity and public presence are examined. The opportunities and challenges facing school institutions in the use of digital communication tools are analyzed, as well as existing good practices in the educational sector.

The first part of the chapter examines the theoretical foundations of positioning in the context of educational institutions. Through an analysis of specialized academic literature, the essence and characteristics of positioning as a marketing concept are clarified, as well as the specific features of its application in the school environment. The specific characteristics of the school institution as a communication subject operating under conditions of increased digitalization, competition, and growing expectations on the part of stakeholder audiences are identified.

The next part of the exposition analyzes the essence and evolution of the digital environment and its impact on communication processes in education. The changes in the way institutions and audiences interact, resulting from the development of digital technologies and social platforms, are examined. Based on the analysis, the specific characteristics of social media as a communication tool and the possibilities for their application in building the institutional presence and positioning of the school in a digital environment are identified.

The following part of the exposition traces the evolution of the digital environment and the transformation of communication processes under conditions of technological development and the growing importance of online interaction. The changes in the way organizations, namely school institutions, build their public presence are analyzed, as well as the transition from one-way communication models to forms of digital communication.

The development of social media as an environment for institutional presence and interaction with audiences is examined. Based on the analysis, the specific characteristics of social platforms as a communication tool in the educational sector are identified, including the opportunities for building recognition, maintaining active communication, and forming a sustainable online presence.

Special attention is given to the changes in the communication strategy of school institutions under conditions of digitalization, namely the increasing development of positioning in the digital environment. The factors that influence the effectiveness of

communication activities in an online environment are analyzed, as well as the need for a strategic approach to the management of digital channels. As a result of the analysis conducted, the need to develop an applicable model for positioning a school institution in a digital environment, tailored to the specific characteristics of the educational sector and the characteristics of digital communication, is substantiated.

Various academic publications examining positioning, digital communication, and the role of social media in the management of organizational presence have been synthesized and analyzed. As a result of the analysis, differences have been identified in the approaches to defining digital positioning and communication strategy in an online environment. Some of the studies examine social media primarily as a tool for disseminating information, while other authors emphasize their role in building institutional identity, engagement, and interaction with stakeholder audiences. In the context of the analyzed publications, two main directions have been distinguished in the examination of the digital communication of school institutions. The first direction is related to the informational approach, in which social channels are used mainly for publishing administrative and organizational information. The second direction views digital communication as a strategic process aimed at building recognition, trust, and a sustainable presence of the school institution in a digital environment.

The chapter continues with an analysis of the specific characteristics of the communication environment in the educational sector and the factors that influence their positioning. The specific features of school communication are examined, arising from the nature of the school institution, the public significance of education, and the presence of multiple stakeholder audiences with different communication needs and expectations. Attention is given to the role of digital communication channels as a means of building institutional presence, publicity, and interaction with parents, students, pedagogical specialists, and local communities.

As a result of the analysis of publications on the topic, it has been established that the development of digital technologies changes the way in which school institutions carry out their communication activities and build relationships with their audiences.

The factors that influence the effectiveness of digital presence are analyzed, including the content of communication, the frequency of publication, audience engagement, and the possibilities for measuring communication results.

Following the theoretical review and the analysis of existing scientific concepts, the understanding has been derived that the positioning of the school institution in a digital environment should be regarded as a process requiring strategic management of communication activities and purposeful use of digital tools. In this regard, the need to develop an applicable model for positioning a school institution is substantiated, taking into account the specific characteristics of the educational sector, the characteristics of digital communication, and the possibilities for analysis and evaluation of communication effectiveness.

In the dissertation, the research focus is directed toward the communication elements and digital tools that are directly related to building institutional presence, managing communication activity, and interacting with audiences in an online environment. Several main generalizations have been derived from the analysis of academic publications and good practices in the field of digital communication.

First, the effectiveness of the digital presence of the school institution is directly related to the consistent management of communication content and the maintenance of active communication with audiences.

Second, user engagement in social channels is regarded as a significant indicator of the effectiveness of communication activities and of the degree of visibility of the institution in an online environment.

Third, the possibilities for analyzing communication results through quantitative and qualitative indicators create prerequisites for optimizing the communication strategy and adapting the digital presence to the specific characteristics of the individual audiences.

The first chapter of the dissertation concludes with a summary of the main theoretical concepts related to the positioning of the school institution in a digital environment.

As a result of the literature review conducted and the analysis of academic publications on the topic, the following more important generalizations have been formulated:

- **First**, the positioning of the school institution in a digital environment should be regarded as a process that goes beyond the framework of traditional

informational communication and implies purposeful management of the institutional presence in an online environment. The analysis of academic publications shows that social media and digital channels are increasingly perceived as a strategic tool for building recognition, publicity, and interaction with stakeholder audiences.

- **Second**, the effectiveness of digital communication is determined by the complex interaction among various factors related to the content of communication, the selection of communication channels, the activity of the audiences, and the possibilities for analyzing and measuring communication results. In the academic literature, differences are observed with regard to the approaches for evaluating digital presence and the significance of individual communication indicators, which implies the need to adapt communication models to the specific characteristics of the educational sector.
- **Third**, the development of the digital environment changes the way in which school institutions build relationships with their audiences and carry out their communication activities. This necessitates a strategic approach to the management of digital communication, based on consistency, planning, and monitoring of communication effectiveness. In this regard, the need to develop an applicable model for positioning a school institution is substantiated, taking into account the specific characteristics of the educational environment and the specific features of digital communication.

The theoretical generalizations made and the concepts derived create the necessary conceptual basis for the subsequent development and testing of a model for positioning a school institution in a digital environment. On this basis, Chapter Two of the dissertation develops a conceptual framework for the process of implementing the positioning strategy, taking into account the specific characteristics of the educational sector and the characteristics of the digital communication environment.

CHAPTER II

MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SCHOOL'S POSITIONING STRATEGY IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

The second chapter is methodological in nature and builds upon the conceptual concepts discussed in the previous part of the study. The exposition is aimed at substantiating the logic, structure, and applicability of the model by examining the main components necessary for the purposeful management of the digital positioning of the school institution.

The focus is placed on the development of a model for implementing the positioning strategy of the school institution in a digital environment, based on the analysis of target audiences, the selection of communication channels, and the development of measurable performance indicators. The chapter examines the key elements of the communication process, namely audience segmentation, selection of a digital mix, content policy, and evaluation of results, as interrelated components of strategic management. Within the exposition, a conceptual model is presented that integrates analytical, communication, and managerial elements, which will subsequently be tested.

The first part of Chapter Two focuses on the development of a conceptual model for implementing the positioning strategy of the school in a digital environment. Based on the theoretical analysis conducted, the need for a structured framework that unites the main activities related to digital positioning into a consistent and manageable process is substantiated. In the dissertation, the model is derived as a tool for systematizing the communication actions of the school institution, including audience analysis, selection of communication channels, development of a content policy, and measurement of effectiveness through specific indicators.

Based on the theoretical and empirical analysis conducted, the need emerges to formulate a structured framework (model) for positioning the school institution in a digital environment, which includes stages and activities. Its purpose is to ensure the “adequate positioning” of the school institution. In the context of the present study, the concept of “adequate positioning” refers to a set of communication actions through which the educational institution builds a recognizable presence and sustainable interaction with its audiences in a digital environment. **Starting from the current educational, technological, and social realities**, it can be argued that *the successful digital positioning of a school institution requires the implementation of a logically*

connected sequence of activities that integrates knowledge of the audience, the selection of appropriate digital channels, the creation of relevant content, sustainable management of communication, and measurement of effectiveness through clearly defined indicators.

The second part of Chapter Two of the dissertation is devoted to the conceptualization of an **integrated framework for the strategic digital positioning of the school institution**. Such a framework should combine knowledge of the audience, the selection of appropriate digital channels, the creation of relevant content, the management of communication, and the measurement of effectiveness through clearly defined indicators.

Its synthesized graphical representation is presented in Figure 1.

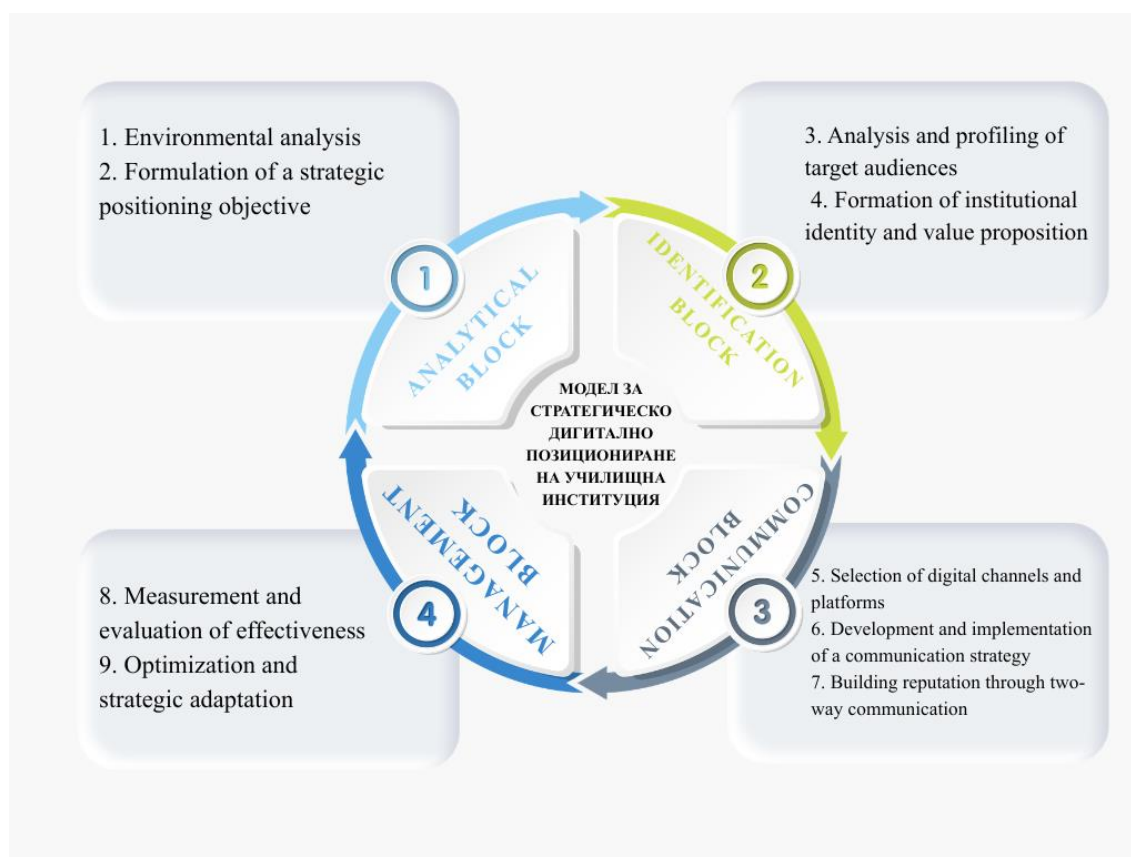


Figure 1. Process Model for the Strategic Digital Positioning of a School Institution.

The model presents strategic digital positioning as a sequential and closed process in which each phase leads to the next and is based on the results of the

previous one. The logic of the model implies constant alignment between the objectives, communication actions, and the evaluation of the results achieved. Feedback from the measurement stage serves as a basis for updating strategic decisions and for the subsequent refinement of communication practice.

1. *Environmental analysis.* The first stage includes an analysis of the external and internal environment: the competitive environment, digital dynamics, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure, and communication capacity of the institution. The analysis allows for the identification of opportunities, limitations, and strategic risks.
2. *Formulation of a strategic positioning objective.* At this stage, the image that the institution seeks to build in the minds of its audiences is defined: an innovative school, an academically oriented school, a technologically leading school, a socially engaged school, etc. The positioning objective sets the direction for all subsequent communication actions.
3. *Analysis and profiling of target audiences.* This includes segmentation and profiling of the main groups: prospective students, current students, parents, pedagogical specialists, and the community. The aim is to identify their communication habits, values, and expectations.
4. *Formation of institutional identity and value proposition.* This stage includes defining the unique advantages of the school, formulating key messages, determining values, and establishing visual and verbal identity, including logo, color concept, slogan, and tone of communication. This ensures alignment between the strategic objective and the communication projection.
5. *Selection of digital channels and platforms.* The selection is based on data regarding the platforms used by the respective audiences and on the resource capacity of the institution.
6. *Development and implementation of a communication strategy.* This includes the creation of a content policy, a publication calendar, the definition of formats, and the integration of various digital tools. The strategy should be consistent and value-oriented.
7. *Building reputation through two-way communication.* This stage includes the active management of feedback, responses to comments and messages, work

- with opinions, and the generation of positive recommendations. Reputation is regarded as a result of sustainable interaction rather than of one-off campaigns.
8. *Measurement and evaluation of effectiveness.* Evaluation is carried out through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators: engagement, reach, attitudes, trust, enrolments, and public reviews.
 9. *Optimization and strategic adaptation.* The final stage includes the interpretation of results and the adaptation of the strategy. The model has a cyclical character: the results of the analysis lead to the reformulation of objectives, correction of messages, and optimization of communication actions.

The proposed conceptual model builds upon operational approaches to social media management by integrating them into a strategic framework that encompasses environmental analysis, formulation of a positioning objective, identity building, channel selection, development of a communication strategy, reputation management, and subsequent evaluation and optimization.

In the context of the objectives and tasks of the present study, our attention is focused on that part of the model which relates to the implementation of the set positioning objectives, because this is where digital communication tools, and social channels in particular, have their place.

First, attention is directed toward the ***identification and analysis of the school's target audiences***. The main objective in identifying the target audience is to determine the groups with the highest level of interaction and influence, so that digital communication strategies can be directed toward their engagement, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty. This process requires demographic and behavioral analysis, as well as an in-depth understanding of the motivations, expectations, and needs of each group.

The dissertation supports the view that different stakeholder groups have specific expectations and motivations with regard to the school institution. For parents, safety, the quality of the educational process, and effective communication are of primary importance, while for students, needs related to a supportive environment, contemporary learning conditions, and a sense of belonging stand out. Alumni and partner organizations participate in communication processes mainly through involvement in initiatives, sharing successes, and developing joint activities. The precise identification

and analysis of stakeholders is an essential condition for developing an effective strategy for the digital positioning of the school.

Theoretical grounds for the need for a strategic and differentiated approach to positioning the school institution in a digital environment are derived from the analyzed academic publications in the field of digital communication, audience behavior, and the management of institutional presence in an online environment. The dissertation examines the relationship between the characteristics of audiences, the content of communication, and behavioral responses in a digital environment. The factors that influence user engagement and the way in which different publics interact with the digital content of the school institution are analyzed.

As a result of the analysis, the understanding has been derived that the effectiveness of digital communication is related both to the characteristics of the communication channels used and to the extent to which the communication content corresponds to the expectations, interests, and communication habits of the individual audiences. In this regard, the dissertation assumes that the different stakeholder groups should be considered in a differentiated manner when planning and implementing the communication activities of the school institution.

Proceeding from this, for a better understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of positioning in a digital environment, the individual elements of the communication process, namely audiences, content, communication channels, engagement, and measurement of results, should be considered in their interrelationship and in accordance with the specific characteristics of the school institution and the characteristics of the digital environment.

Further in the paragraph, the issues concerning the relationship between the identification and analysis of the school's target audiences, the specific characteristics of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, the significance of the intensity of daily internet use, the specific characteristics of the "parents" target audience as strategic decision-makers, including their psychographic and behavioral profile, behavioral characteristics in the context of the digital environment, the role of parents in the positioning of the school, the selection of communication channels for digital positioning, as well as the audience share of each of the platforms indicated in the study, namely Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, are examined.

First, the intensity of internet use in Bulgaria is analyzed, measured through the indicator “Share of people aged 16 to 29 who use the internet daily.” The data show that in Bulgaria this intensity is within the EU average (Figure 2).

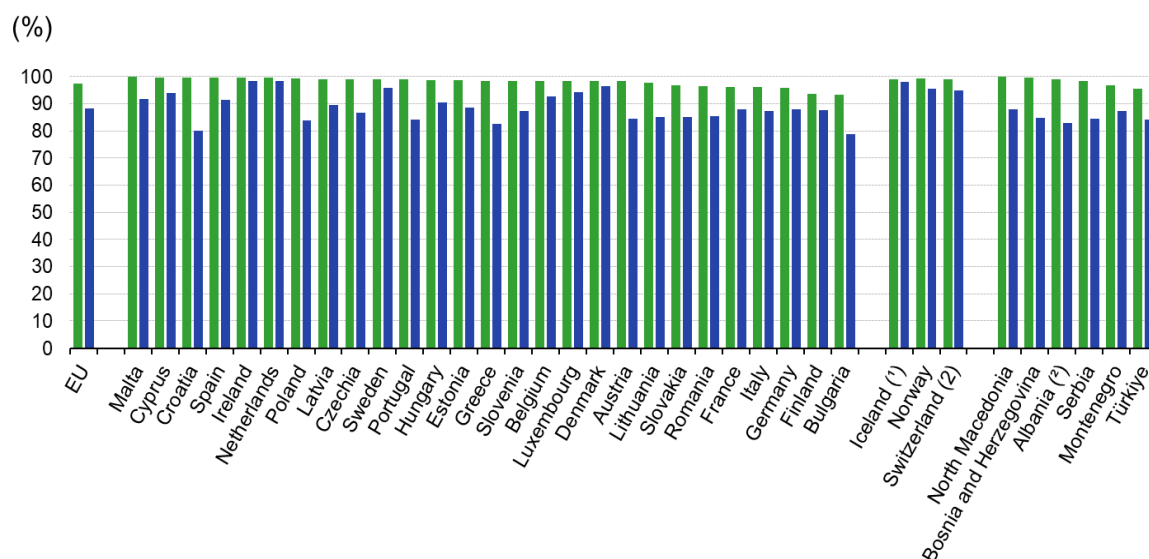


Fig. 2. Share of people aged 16–29 using the internet daily in the EU, 2024

Source: Eurostat

Although a significant part of the research on Generation Z and Generation Alpha has been conducted in a Western European and North American context, a number of digital behavioral patterns are manifested globally and are confirmed by statistical data for Bulgaria. According to data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI, <https://www.nsi.bg>, 2024), over 92% of households in the country have access to the internet, and the most active users are young people and students. At the same time, European data show that almost all young people use the internet daily, and social networks are a main channel for communication and information among the 16–29 age group (Eurostat, 2025). This confirms that the digital communication characteristics described in the international literature are applicable in the Bulgarian educational environment as well, although adapted to the local institutional and cultural context.

The exposition examines the process of identifying and analyzing the target audiences of the school institution in the context of digital communication. The

main stakeholder groups are analyzed, namely prospective students, current students, parents, pedagogical specialists, and the local community, with emphasis placed on their communication characteristics, needs, expectations, and behavior in a digital environment. As a result of the analysis, the need for the school's communication strategy to be aligned with the specific characteristics of the individual audiences and the way in which they interact with digital content is substantiated.

The criteria for selecting communication channels in the process of digital positioning of the school institution are also examined. The characteristics of the different digital platforms and the possibilities for their application are analyzed depending on the specific features of the audiences, the communication objectives, and the resource capacity of the school. The exposition supports the understanding that the selection of communication channels should be based on strategic alignment between the positioning objective, the characteristics of the audiences, and the specific features of the digital communication environment.

The chapter concludes with a review of the approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of digital communication tools and the possibilities for analyzing communication results. Indicators of visibility and reach of communication activities are analyzed, as well as metrics for measuring interactions and audience engagement in digital channels.

Approaches to the interpretation of communication results and their use in the subsequent optimization of content, communication activities, and strategic decisions of the school institution are examined.

Based on the analysis, the following more important conclusions have been drawn:

- **First**, the analysis of academic publications and the theoretical concepts examined shows a lack of a unified approach to the development and management of the positioning strategy of the school institution in a digital environment. In the studies on the topic, differences are observed both with regard to the role of digital communication channels and with regard to the

factors that influence the effectiveness of institutional presence in an online environment.

- **Second**, the analysis of existing approaches to the evaluation of digital communication has established that there is no generally accepted system of indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the positioning of the school institution in a digital environment. In most cases, the selection of specific measures is determined by the objectives of the communication strategy, the characteristics of the audiences, the specific features of the digital channels used, and the context of the communication environment.
- **Third**, as a result of the analysis conducted, the understanding has been derived that the effective positioning of the school institution implies an integrated approach combining environmental analysis, audience profiling, management of communication content, selection of appropriate digital channels, and subsequent measurement and optimization of communication effectiveness. In this regard, the need to develop an applicable model for implementing the positioning strategy of the school in a digital environment is substantiated, taking into account the specific features of the educational sector and the dynamics of the digital communication environment.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS FROM THE APPLICATION OF THE MODEL IN A BULGARIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

The third chapter is focused on testing the proposed model for implementing the positioning strategy of the school institution in a digital environment. Data from a case study and an interpretation of secondary quantitative data, including key marketing metrics, are presented. The chapter contains a structured framework for digital positioning, proposals for measuring effectiveness through KPIs, as well as practical guidelines for improving digital presence and audience engagement. Based on the analyzed results, conclusions are formulated regarding the impact of social networks on the strategic identity and reputation of the school institution.

The main objective set in the third chapter of the dissertation is to assess, through testing at Nikolay Katranov Secondary School in the town of Svishtov, the

applicability of the proposed model for implementing the positioning strategy of the school in a digital environment and to analyze its potential as a tool for the strategic management of digital communication. To achieve this objective, the study is directed toward: **(1) testing the proposed conceptual model in a real educational environment and (2) applying the conceptual model and examining the possibilities for evaluating the effectiveness of the digital presence of the school institution.**

In the first part of the chapter, the choice of a case study approach for testing the proposed model is justified. Its application in the study of processes related to the digital positioning of school institutions is substantiated, as is the possibility, through this approach, to identify working practices, regularities, and applicable solutions in a real educational environment. The formation of the positioning strategy of the school under consideration is subordinated to the model presented in Chapter Two, while the evaluation of the results is based on a methodological framework that includes social media marketing, institutional recognition, institutional image, and the attitude of the audience toward the school institution.

The school selected for testing the model is among the established educational institutions in the region, offering education from the primary to the upper secondary stage and developing profiled training in areas related to foreign language education, natural sciences, and information technologies.

The choice of the school as the object of study is determined by its active communication policy, its status as an innovative school, and its established presence in a digital environment. The institution operates in a competitive educational environment characterized by demographic challenges, the need to attract and retain students, and the growing importance of digital communication in building institutional image and trust.

At the time of conducting the study, more than 700 students were enrolled in the school, distributed across the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary stages. The school maintains an active presence in various social networks and digital platforms, which it uses for communication with its target publics, promotion of students' achievements, and building a recognizable institutional identity.

The choice of a positioning strategy cannot be considered in isolation from the environment in which the educational institution operates. Therefore, an analysis was

conducted of the network of schools in Bulgaria and of the competitive environment in which Nikolay Katranov Secondary School in the town of Svishtov carries out its activities.

The data from the analysis show that in the Veliko Tarnovo region the number of secondary schools is limited, which places the issues of institutional recognition, building trust, and attracting students among the key factors for the sustainable development of the school institution. In this context, digital positioning is regarded as a strategic tool for strengthening the public image and increasing the visibility of the school.

The implementation of the strategy is carried out through the use of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and podcast formats, with the selection of communication channels aligned with the specific characteristics of the different audiences. The applied approach is based primarily on the organic development of digital presence through consistent content publication, presentation of school life, promotion of students' achievements, and active interaction with the community.

The results obtained show an increase in visibility, engagement, and reach among audiences across the main communication channels. The analysis confirms that, even under conditions of limited resources, school institutions can successfully build a recognizable digital identity through strategically planned communication aligned with the needs and expectations of the target publics. The results obtained support the thesis regarding the applicability of the proposed model in implementing a positioning strategy under the conditions of the Bulgarian educational environment.

Within the testing of the proposed model, an analysis was conducted of the results achieved through the main communication channels of the school institution. The analysis allows the following more important findings to be derived:

- The digital presence of the school is realized under conditions of limited resources, characteristic of publicly funded educational institutions, which places additional requirements on the effectiveness of communication activities;
- The school maintains an active presence on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, with each channel performing a specific role in communication with the different target publics;

- Facebook is established as the main communication channel for reaching parents and the local community, reporting high values in terms of reach, engagement, and interaction indicators;

- Instagram and TikTok demonstrate good results in terms of reaching a youth audience and building an emotional connection with students through visual content and short video formats;

- YouTube is used as a platform for building a longer-term institutional presence through video content, podcasts, and the presentation of school initiatives;

- The analysis of communication indicators shows a sustained increase in the visibility, engagement, and recognition of the school institution in a digital environment;

- The results obtained confirm the importance of a consistent communication policy, strategic content planning, and active interaction with audiences for building a positive institutional image and public trust.

The analysis conducted provides empirical grounds for assessing the applicability of the proposed model and confirms the possibility for school institutions to increase their recognition, visibility, and stakeholder engagement through strategically managed digital communication.

Based on the results from the testing of the proposed model and the analysis of communication indicators, recommendations have been formulated for improving the process of digital positioning of school institutions. The main recommendations are directed toward:

- Formulating measurable communication objectives through the use of the SMART approach and linking them to specific indicators for evaluating effectiveness;

- Building a system of key performance indicators (KPIs) that enables the tracking of visibility, reach, engagement, and interaction with target publics;

- Developing a communication calendar as a tool for planning, coordinating, and managing content across the different digital channels;

- Adapting the communication strategy to the specific features of the individual social platforms and the characteristics of the respective audiences;

- Applying a multichannel approach to communication through the integrated use of a website, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube;
- Introducing mechanisms for managing digital safety, protecting institutional profiles, and preventing reputational risks in an online environment;
- Ensuring a sustainable process of analysis, evaluation, and optimization of communication activities based on predefined indicators and strategic objectives.

The proposed recommendations build upon the developed model and expand its practical applicability by providing specific guidelines for planning, implementing, and managing digital communication in school institutions.

Conclusion

The conclusion synthesizes the main findings of the dissertation research, with the results confirming the significance of the set research objectives and supporting the main theoretical assumptions. On this basis, specific recommendations have been formulated for future research and for increasing the practical applicability of the proposed communication models. The appendices include additional data, tables, visualizations, and tools for analysis and evaluation used in the course of the study.

The results achieved in the dissertation can be summarized as follows:

- Analysis of the internal identity and organizational cultural profile, through which the key values, pedagogical principles, and unique value propositions (USP) forming the basis of institutional differentiation are identified and conceptualized.
- Definition and segmentation of the target audiences, as well as the formulation of strategic and operational communication objectives aimed at increasing recognition, building trust, stimulating interest in the institution, increasing enrolment, and establishing sustainable authority in the professional and public environment.
- Selection and integration of communication channels, combined with the development of relevant digital content aligned with the specific characteristics of the audiences, through the use of digital social platforms, video formats,

podcasts, institutional websites, and blogs as part of a comprehensive communication ecosystem.

- Operationalization and evaluation of effectiveness through a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators, including traffic, levels of engagement, number of requests, degree of content dissemination, dynamics of audience growth, and characteristics of user interaction.

The concluding part of the dissertation continues with a synthesized presentation of the results from the testing of the proposed model at Nikolay Katranov Secondary School in the town of Svishtov. The results obtained confirm its applicability under the conditions of a real educational environment and show the possibilities for using digital communication tools as a means of building institutional recognition, increasing audience engagement, and establishing a positive institutional image. The analysis of communication indicators provides grounds to assume that the strategic approach to the management of digital communication can support the implementation of the positioning objectives of the school institution.

The dissertation concludes by deriving guidelines for future research in the following directions:

- testing the proposed model in different types of school institutions and educational stages;
- expanding the model by including additional factors that influence the processes of positioning in a digital environment;
- developing and testing expanded systems of indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of digital communication;
- examining the possibilities for integrating artificial intelligence and other emerging digital technologies into the processes of strategic communication management of educational institutions.

IV. SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE DISSERTATION

Concepts and tools from the fields of marketing, brand management, and digital communications have been adapted to the specific characteristics of school institutions.

- The theoretical concepts related to the positioning of educational institutions in a digital environment have been systematized, and on this basis a conceptual link has been established between marketing theory and the practice of educational institutions.
- The specific characteristics of the digital environment have been systematized, and the impact of social media on the communication strategy and positioning of school institutions under conditions of digital transformation has been substantiated.
- A conceptual model has been developed for implementing the positioning strategy of a school institution through the use of digital communication tools.
- The indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of digital communications in the context of the educational environment have been systematized.
- The proposed model has been tested in a real school environment and, based on the results, recommendations have been formulated for improving the communication policy of educational institutions.

V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION

Articles and Reports

- Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2025). YouTube as a Digital Marketing Tool in Education: Empirical Data and Guidelines for Successful School Positioning. E-Journal VFU – Varna, (23), 837–845, ISSN 1313-7514.
- Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2024). The Use of Social Media and Social Networks in Education and Scientific Research. Yearbook of New Bulgarian University, Sofia, 131–141, ISSN 2535-1079 (online).
- Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2024). Strategies for Positioning Schools in the Digital Environment. Yearbook of Burgas Free University – Burgas, 74–79, ISSN 1311-221X.