



UNIVERSITY OF NATIONAL AND WORLD ECONOMY

REVIEW

From: *Prof. Dr. Krasimir Marinov Marinov*
University of National and World Economy
Scientific specialty "Marketing"

Subject: *Dissertation for awarding an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Marketing" at the Academy of Economics "Dimitar A. Tsenov" - Svishtov*

Author of the dissertation: *Kristiana Nikolaeva Cheshmedzhieva*

Topic of the dissertation: *Communication tools for positioning a school in a digital environment*

Reason for submitting the review: *Participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation according to Order No. 785/ 31.08.2026 of the Rector of the Academy of Economics "Dimitar A. Tsenov" - Svishtov*

1. Dissertation information

The doctoral candidate studied on the doctoral program "Marketing", professional field 3.8. Economics, at the Department of Marketing of the Faculty of Management and Marketing of the Academy of Economics "Dimitar A. Tsenov" - Svishtov. The training was carried out in the period 2022-2026.

The candidate received a bachelor's degree in International Economic Relations from the Academy of Economics "Dimitar A. Tsenov" - Svishtov in 2018, and in parallel - from 2016 to 2017 - a professional qualification in "Economic Pedagogy". In 2017 - 2018 she completed a specialization in "Digital Marketing" at SoftUni, and in 2020 she completed a master's degree in "Advertising Management and Visual Branding" at the New Bulgarian University. In the period 2023 - 2024, Kristiana conducts postgraduate qualification in "Informatics and Information Technologies" at the University of Veliko Tarnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodius".

The dissertation student has significant experience in the field of digital marketing, including as a creator of digital learning content. Christiana has been an intern in marketing and

digital PR with responsibilities in the field of media planning, working with social media, preparing advertising campaigns and budget allocation; communication with influencers and franchise partners. She was a teacher at "Nikolay Katranov" Secondary School, Svishtov. As well as a marketing expert in the Municipality of Burgas with commitments to prepare email campaigns, banners and brochures; consulting and coordination with team members. Since 2023, Kristiana has been a teacher and specialist in social media and digital PR at the same secondary school where the model developed in this dissertation was tested.

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

The presented dissertation is in the volume of 163 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and literature used. In terms of its volume and structure, the present work has parameters that are acceptable and within the limits of what is usual for similar scientific products. The dissertation meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria.

In the introduction of the work, the dissertation, following good practice, has presented the concept and methodological framework of his dissertation.

Regarding the *relevance of the topic* and *the significance of the research*, it can be argued without a doubt that they are present. The arguments for this statement can be systematized in several directions. *Firstly*, the current study outlines the big difference between the need for the use of social networks and other digital technologies for communication by school organizations, and their willingness to do so. *Secondly*, the study addresses the problem of the ability of schools to realize the strategic positioning for them in front of their target audiences – students, parents, local communities. As noted, in many cases communication efforts are sporadic, devoid of a clear intention, without a defined conceptual framework and without systematic measurement of effectiveness. *Thirdly*, the importance of research for marketing science and practice can be related to the enrichment of the research database on the relationship between communication efforts and consumer assessments and behavioral intentions in the context of the positioning of the educational institution. This, in turn, is a reflection of the broader problem for marketing of combining marketing incentives and organization-controlled marketing tools in order to obtain a more attractive and better appreciated result by the consumer.

The object and the subject of the study are correctly formulated and correspond to the research contained in the work. The object of research is the strategic communication (goals and tools used) of schools in the digital environment. The subject of the study is the capacity (opportunities and limitations) of social channels as a tool for the implementation of the school's positional strategy, in the conditions of an acute competitive environment, dynamic technological changes and increased digital literacy of the target audiences.

The formulation of the *goal* - to develop and test a conceptual framework (model) of the process of implementing the positional strategy of a school institution, based on the use of digital communication channels - is precise and adequate to the selected object and subject of research.

The dissertation transforms the goal formulated in this way into a well-founded complex of seven *research tasks*, which are logically arranged and clearly formulated. They are sufficiently specific; their implementation allows you to achieve the set goal; and direct the research in the right direction.

The thesis that the dissertation has defended is that the successful positioning of the school institution in the digital environment is the result of purposeful and consistent management of communication processes, based on knowledge of the specifics of the audiences, the characteristics of digital consumption and the logic of interaction in social platforms. This allows the communication actions of the school institution to be transformed from one-time information initiatives into a systematic process oriented towards building recognition, trust and engagement.

The scientific literature used includes 65 sources – books and monographs, articles in scientific journals and reports from scientific conferences, websites and reference books for statistical information. The literature sources are in Bulgarian and English. The number of cited sources corresponds to the requirements for such scientific work. The bibliography is relevant to the object and subject of research and reflects the current achievements on the range of issues under consideration. The analyzed scientific sources testify to the good awareness of the dissertation student on the problems of the dissertation.

3. Evaluation of the scientific and applied scientific results obtained

The structure of the presented work reflects the logical completeness of the research and is an expression of the existing connections and dependencies between the elements of the presentation - both between the individual chapters and between the points in them. The logical arrangement of the chapters allows the author to ask the right questions to the research problem and to make correct generalizations about the factors for choosing a dance school. The style and language of the PhD student are distinguished by scientificity, while at the same time being understandable and clear.

The first chapter of the work aims to clarify the conceptual foundations of the positioning of school institutions in the digital environment. It examines key theoretical statements related to positioning as an element of strategic management, the role of digital communication and the importance of social media in building an institutional image. The emphasis is placed on the interaction between the school institution and its audiences, as well as on the changes in communication models caused by the development of digital technologies. Through the analysis of sources and modern concepts, a theoretical framework is built, which serves as a basis for the

subsequent empirical analysis and for the development of a model for strategic positioning of the school institution in a digital environment.

The following points can be taken as scientific results in this part of the work:

First, based on a comparative analysis of a number of theoretical approaches, it is shown that despite the different emphasis – on competition, brand, perception or communication – positioning is seen as a strategic process of building a semantic and emotional presence in the minds of the audience. What the concepts have in common is the understanding that the position is not formed spontaneously, but is the result of purposeful management of identity, messages and interaction with audiences.

Secondly, the understanding is defended that in a digital context, the positioning of an educational institution should be considered as a strategic approach through which it shapes its perception of other similar institutions. Arguments are proposed that successful positioning in education requires a clear definition of the unique advantages of the institution – academic achievements, modern learning environment, pedagogical expertise, social engagement, innovation and care for the personal development of students, etc.

In this part of the work, the specifics of the positioning of school institutions in a digital environment are also outlined, and the understanding that they stem from the social function and social significance of the school – that it does not pursue market realization, but fulfills a mission related to education, upbringing and development of social and cultural values. This, in turn, requires a different logic of communication, in which trust, consistency, transparency and public impact become key elements of institutional positioning.

Thirdly, as a scientifically applied result of this research, the typology developed by the dissertation of the stages through which the practice of positioning educational institutions passes, consistent with the development of communication technologies and changes in consumer behavior, can be accepted. The dissertation defends its understanding that in the context of educational institutions, positioning presupposes adaptation of classical marketing principles to the peculiarities of the school environment, with an emphasis on building trust, consistency in communication and clear differentiation from other educational organizations.

The author's merit in this part is also the classification of possible strategies for positioning the school institution in a digital environment, developed on the basis of an analysis of existing practices and the peculiarities of communication behavior in the educational sector.

It is noteworthy that the presentation is well organized. The literature sources used are correctly cited. It is very important that the dissertation student has expressed his own opinion and has given arguments which of the other people's opinions he accepts and which he does not.

The second chapter is methodological in nature and aims to build a model for the implementation of the positional strategy of the school institution in a digital environment, based on the analysis of target audiences, selection of communication channels and the development of

measurable performance indicators.

A scientifically applied result in it is the justification of a conceptual model that integrates analytical, communication and management elements. It is argued that the successful digital positioning of a school institution requires the implementation of a logically related sequence of activities that integrates the knowledge of the audience, the selection of appropriate digital channels, the creation of relevant content, sustainable communication management and the measurement of effectiveness through clearly defined indicators.

Another scientifically applied result in this part of the study is the comparative analysis between the opportunities provided by the different social platforms for positioning a school institution based on indicators such as likes, comments, shares, reactions, interactions, clicks on links, creating stories.

In the third chapter of the work, an analysis of the results of the implementation of the conceptual model in a Bulgarian secondary school is made. The focus of the research in this part is to check to what extent the proposed framework can be adapted to a real educational institution, as well as on the way in which the individual stages function in a practical environment – from the analysis of the environment and profiling of audiences to the development of a communication strategy, reputation management and evaluation of results.

As a scientific result in this part of the work, the justification of the case study approach can be considered as an appropriate research strategy, as it makes it possible to derive good practices, behavioral patterns and effects that could hardly be detected through quantitative sample studies.

A scientifically applied result in this part of the work is also the argumentation of the choice of measures for evaluating the results, as well as the strategy for digital positioning of the selected school. As an essential element of the strategy, the adaptation of communication to the specifics of the individual digital platforms, including their functional characteristics and algorithmic mechanisms for content distribution, is justified; as well as the differentiation of the main audiences – students, parents and local community, as the communication messages comply with their expectations and behavioral patterns.

All of the above regarding the achieved scientific and applied scientific results gives me grounds to conclude that the tasks set for the dissertation research have been fulfilled, and thus the purpose of the dissertation has been achieved.

4. Evaluation of scientific and applied scientific contributions

In the abstract, the dissertation has formulated six contributions. They are described in the abstract of the work and therefore I do not reproduce them in this review. Reading the present research gives me reason to highlight three contributing moments, which are indisputable and undoubtedly found in the present study. By their nature, the contributing moments have a

scientifically applied nature, which is normal for a researcher at the beginning of his scientific research. I would systematize the contributions as follows:

1. The theoretical assumptions regarding the positioning of educational institutions in the digital environment are systematized and on this basis a conceptual connection between marketing theory and the practice of educational institutions is built.
2. A conceptual model for the implementation of the positional strategy of a school institution through the use of digital communication tools has been developed, and the indicators for assessing the effectiveness of digital communications in the context of the educational environment have been systematized.
3. 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.

I would like to emphasize that my scientific and applied contributions constitute *sufficient grounds for awarding the desired educational and scientific degree.*

5. Evaluation of dissertation publications

The dissertation presents three publications – articles in scientific journals, as follows:

1. Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2025). YOUTUBE as a tool for digital marketing in education: empirical data and guidelines for successful positioning of schools. E-Journal VFU - Varna, (23), 837-845, ISSN 1313-7514.
2. Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2024). The Use of Social Media and Networks in Teaching and Research, New Bulgarian University Yearbook, Sofia, 131-141. ISSN 2535-1079 (online).
3. Cheshmedzhieva, K. (2024). Strategies for Positioning Schools in the Digital Environment. Yearbook of Burgas Free University - Burgas, 74-79, ISSN 1311-221X.

All publications are on the topic of the dissertation and present to the scientific community essential parts of the work. In terms of their type and volume, the publications fully meet the minimum national requirements for awarding the PhD degree.

6. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract is presented in Bulgarian and is in the volume of 32 pages. The abstract contains all the necessary elements. It correctly, completely and adequately reflects the content of the dissertation.

7. Academic Correctness

During the reading of the dissertation and the abstract, no plagiarism was found.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks to the author. My recommendation is to continue and expand your research on marketing problems of school institutions, as this is an area with serious potential for research.

9. Questions

In this study, a conceptual model for the implementation of the positional strategy of a school institution through the use of digital communication tools is proposed and tested. My question is whether the dissertation student sees obstacles to the application of the same conceptual model for positioning educational institutions in the field of higher education (universities)?

10. Conclusion

The presented dissertation is an independently conducted scientific research, containing its own critical analysis of the publications regarding the object and subject of research. The study is based on an empirical approbation of a model developed by him, justified by the author. The work contains clearly outlined results and scientific and applied contributions corresponding to the requirements for such scientific work. **This gives me a definite reason to recommend to the scientific jury to award Kristiana Nikolaeva Cheshmedzhieva the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the scientific specialty "Marketing". I myself will vote with conviction with "Yes".**

04.09.2026

Sofia

Prof. Dr. Krasimir Marinov