

Summary of the Habilitation Thesis

The habilitation thesis entitled “**Strategic Communication in the Fake News Era: The Role of Flow State in Understanding Social Media Users’ Behavior**” provides a synthesis of the candidate’s academic career and main scientific contributions in the field of Communication Sciences, as well as the research and professional development directions proposed for the next stage of his academic career. The research presented in this thesis takes as its starting point the study of user experience in the online environment and flow theory, subsequently extending to social media user behavior, the sharing of *fake news*, the effects of disinformation on organizations and on their stakeholders, strategic communication, and resilience to false or misleading content. The thesis is structured into three chapters, devoted to the candidate’s scientific and professional development, his main research contributions in the field of Communication Sciences, and his academic career development plan.

The first chapter presents the candidate’s academic background and the main stages of his academic career, from his studies in Communication Sciences to his doctoral training in Marketing, during which he addressed a topic relevant to online communication. The chapter highlights the original contributions of the doctoral thesis, the results of the research conducted to date, the candidate’s teaching and managerial experience, and his involvement in research projects and teams. It also presents his professional development since receiving his doctoral degree, emphasizing how experience gained through research, teaching, managerial activities, and scientific collaborations has contributed to the development of his academic profile.

The second chapter synthesizes the main results of the candidate’s scientific activity and his individual contributions to the field of Communication Sciences. These are organized into four research directions that reflect the evolution of his scholarly interests. The first direction focuses on flow state and its role in understanding user behavior in the digital environment, ranging from the conceptual foundations and models of flow experience to the empirical testing of its relationships with various forms of online behavior. The second direction addresses social media users’ behavior in sharing *fake news* and the role of flow experience in explaining this behavior in relation to individual, informational, social, and technological factors. The third direction focuses on organizations’ strategic communication in the context of disinformation. It examines the effects of false or misleading information on trust, reputation, and relationships with stakeholder publics, as well as the strategies through which organizations can respond to these threats and strengthen their resilience. The fourth

direction contains the methodological dimension of research. It includes contributions on audience measurement, pretesting research instruments using *eye-tracking* technology, and developing and validating scales adapted to specific communication contexts. A unifying element across these research directions is the sustained interest in the relationships among the user, information, technology, and the social or organizational context of communication. The research has evolved from studying individual flow experience to analyzing more complex communication behaviors and, subsequently, the consequences of disinformation for organizations and their publics. Within this framework, flow experience is not treated as an isolated predictor of *fake news* sharing, but as part of a broader set of individual, informational, social, and technological factors that shape user behavior.

The third chapter presents ongoing research and editorial projects, as well as the directions the candidate intends to pursue in the coming period. The research program is structured around four main axes: (1) user behavior and flow experience in the digital environment; (2) *fake news*, disinformation, and information resilience; (3) strategic communication, communication management, and public relations; and (4) research methodology in Communication Sciences. These directions build on prior research and will be further developed through comparative, longitudinal, and experimental research designs, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and the investigation of emerging topics related to artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalization, automatically generated content, and transformations in the communication profession.

Obtaining the habilitation certificate would enable the continuation and expansion of this activity by assuming responsibilities for doctoral supervision. The candidate's vision of mentorship aims to develop autonomous researchers capable of formulating relevant research problems, constructing rigorous theoretical and methodological approaches, critically interpreting results, and actively participating in the scientific community. Integrating doctoral students into research projects and networks, internationalizing doctoral training, supporting the publication of research findings and participation in conferences, and upholding research ethics and integrity are central components of this approach. By combining research, methodological training, mentorship, and academic collaboration, the candidate's future activity seeks both to develop new research directions and to help strengthen the field of Communication Sciences at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași.

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Daniel-Rareș OBADĂ, PhD