

REVIEW OF A DISSERTATION

**"INNOVATIVE MARKETING TOOLS TO INCREASE THE
COMPETITIVENESS OF AGRITOURISM IN BULGARIA"**

**FOR THE ACQUISITION OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND
SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR"
IN THE PROFESSIONAL FIELD 3.9 "TOURISM",
SCIENTIFIC SPECIALTY "TOURISM"
TO THE NBU**

BY PhD STUDENT KAMELIA EVGENIEVA KARADOICHEVA

SUPERVISOR: ASSOC. PROF. NADIA MARINOVA PhD



REVIEW

on the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Tourism"

1. General information

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Genka Ivanova Rafailova, PhD, Department of Foreign Languages and Communication in Tourism at the College of Tourism – Varna at the University of Economics – Varna, field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)".

This review has been prepared on the basis of **Order No. 3 RK 194/22.05.2026** of the Rector of the University of Economics-Varna for the appointment of a scientific jury and Minutes of the first meeting of the scientific jury for the election of a chairman and reviewers of the competition, held on **16.02.2026**.

The review has been prepared in accordance with the Higher Education Act (HEA), the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for its Implementation (RILDASRB), and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU Sofia (ODAS).

2. Information about the PhD student

Doctoral student Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva has deposited documents and materials in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its Implementation (LDASRB), the Regulations for its implementation, and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU Sofia (ODAS).

The PhD student fulfills the minimum national requirements for acquiring a PhD degree in the field of higher education, in which the competition has been announced pursuant to Art. 6, (1) of the LSASRB by presenting a dissertation, an abstract in Bulgarian and English, eight publications on the dissertation (4 independent and 4 co-authored, 2 in English) and a declaration on the use of generative artificial intelligence.

3. Data about the PhD student (personal characteristics):

Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva has a distinguished professional career and has held positions related to the development of the agricultural sector in Bulgaria and, accordingly, agritourism.

The PhD student has acquired two master's degrees:

- Master's degree in English in 2018 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski";
- Master's degree in Economics and Finance in 2023 at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

After graduating from higher education, the PhD student worked as a

- Host of the show and column at Agro Media Group – private media for agriculture, food, economy and environmental protection from 2019 to 2021;
- Junior Expert at the State Fund "Agriculture", "Public Relations, Communications and Protocol" from 2021 to 2022



- Chief Revenue Expert at the National Revenue Agency, Gambling and Gambling Activities Supervision Directorate from 2022 to the present.

4. Description of the dissertation

The dissertation is 247 pages long and includes six appendices. The dissertation includes 22 tables and 19 figures. The literature sources total 112, evenly distributed between Bulgarian (31) and foreign (35, including 4 in Russian) scientific publications and books, Internet sources, programs, and other documents (46).

The dissertation follows a balanced structure and a clear logical sequence, including an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion with conclusions and recommendations, and a list of used literary and information sources. The first chapter presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study; the second analyzes the current state of the site; the third presents the results of the author's research; and the fourth presents conclusions and results from the approbation of the model developed by the PhD student.

5. Evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is a complete, independent, in-depth, important, and necessary research on current issues for the development of agritourism in Bulgaria. The paper summarizes theory and best practices for developing rural and agricultural tourism, the key digital marketing tools used, and the regulatory and strategic documents related to the topic. The paper also provides an in-depth analysis of the conditions and opportunities for rural and agricultural tourism in the country, as well as tourism in general. The paper presents the results of an author's study of stakeholders on the development of agritourism in Bulgaria, as well as an analysis of the use of digital marketing for rural and agricultural tourism in the country. The dissertation proposes applying digital marketing tools for agricultural tourism in Bulgaria. The dissertation uses an academic style and language.

The dissertation topic is relevant and significant for the development of tourism in Bulgaria. Given the intensified competition between tourist destinations, as well as the need to diversify the tourist product to make it more resilient to crises, implementing agritourism in the country has the potential to meet these challenges. At the same time, objective (natural, economic, and other) conditions and the need to develop agritourism in Bulgaria support expanding income sources in areas where agriculture, viticulture, and livestock predominate.

The dissertation has **a clearly and precisely formulated subject, object, goals and objectives of the research, thesis and hypotheses**. The object covers small and medium-sized businesses with opportunities and potential for agritourism development, whose representatives are included in the survey conducted by the PhD student. The subject is logically defined within the topic, namely the potential and role of digital marketing tools to increase the competitiveness of the agritourism sector in general and specifically. aspect in the field of tourism, as well as for the identification of problems that need more in-depth and thorough research. On this basis, the author of the dissertation has derived a thesis that clearly outlines the parameters and directions of the research.

In the first chapter of her dissertation, the PhD student presented an extensive and detailed theoretical overview of marketing concepts and product positioning, including tourism, classical and digital marketing tools, innovations and technologies that are applied in marketing in general and in the tourism sector, as well as the risks associated with their use. Chapter One proves the possession of in-depth



knowledge by the PhD student in the field of marketing, digital marketing, tourism and specialized types of tourism and consumer behavior.

In the second chapter, the PhD student analyzes the development of tourism, particularly rural and agricultural tourism in Bulgaria, using appropriate tools and data, and explains its essence and importance. The chapter uses a historical retrospective, situational, and SWOT analysis of agritourism, and studies and evaluates in detail the resources, prerequisites, and trends for its implementation in the country. of agritourism in Bulgaria and the methodological framework for assessing its competitiveness. Chapter Two demonstrates the PhD student's strong analytical skills.

Chapter Three presents a scientifically based methodology of the study of stakeholders in agritourism in Bulgaria – tourists, tourism and agricultural business, as well as its results. An appropriate approach is applied to study good practices and a specific case in Italy, which serves as a reference model for the development of agritourism on Bulgarian territory. country for the purposes of tourism in rural areas and their advantages and disadvantages are summarized. In conclusion, a valuable author's model for agritourism marketing through digital marketing tools has been developed. It is appropriately visualized and clarified in detail. Chapter Three demonstrates the PhD student's ability to identify current and significant issues and conduct independent research.

Chapter Four presents in detail the methodology, results, and conclusions from the approbation of the author's model; it proposes an appropriate strategy and specific guidelines for applying digital marketing tools for agritourism in Bulgaria, as well as approaches to reducing the risks associated with their use. Chapter Four demonstrates the PhD student's ability to synthesize and derive scientific, practical, and applied contributions.

The appendices present the questionnaires used for the author's independent research.

6. Contributions of the dissertation

The research work of the doctoral student and her dissertation reveal a number of contributions, which can be categorized in the following directions:

1. Theoretical contributions

- 1.1. The marketing concepts in tourism in general are summarized and deduced, incl. from the point of view of the specifics of agritourism;
- 1.2. The digital marketing tools that are used in general in tourism and agritourism are clarified in detail and with a critical-analytical approach;
- 1.3. Definitions of rural and agrarian tourism are deduced, explaining their distinctive characteristics and significance;
- 1.4. Its own theoretical and methodological framework for assessing the competitiveness of agritourism through the introduction of innovative marketing tools has been developed.

2. Analytical and empirical contributions

- 2.1. A detailed and qualitative SWOT analysis of agritourism in Bulgaria has been carried out, which highlights its advantages and disadvantages, opportunities and threats to development;
- 2.2. An author's study of representatives of the expert community has been carried out, tourism and agricultural business in Bulgaria in order to clarify the barriers,



the need and opportunities to use digital marketing instruments for agritourism purposes.

3. Practical contributions

- 3.1. Valuable and substantive practical guidelines and proposals for implementation of digital marketing tools in the agritourism business, consistent with the peculiarities of the Bulgarian environment;
- 3.2. Proposals have been prepared to overcome the shortcomings and barriers to the development of agritourism in Bulgaria, based on a study of good practices;
- 3.3. A tool has been developed for checking and evaluating the application of digital marketing tools for the purposes of agritourism in Bulgaria.

7. Assessment of the impact of the dissertation on the external environment

The dissertation, recommended for publication as a monograph, will have a positive and important impact on stakeholders in the development of agritourism in Bulgaria, including government and municipal institutions, tourists, and representatives of the tourism and agricultural business. It can be used to develop strategies and policies, statutes, and regulations for potential branch organizations, and to support the work of marketing specialists in the tourism and agricultural sector.

The dissertation presents the results of statistical and empirical studies, methodology, and a model that can be used in further research on the development of tourism and, in particular, in rural areas, in close connection with environmental protection, the circular economy, and the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

8. Plagiarism

The candidate submits scientific papers in which, according to the statutory procedure, the presence of plagiarism, incorrect citation of other people's works and improper use of data are not detected.

9. Questions, criticisms and recommendations

Despite the exceptional merits and indisputable scientific contribution of the dissertation of PhD student Kamelia Karadocheva, some critical remarks can be made. Some parts of the work are either not closely related to the issues under consideration or are overly detailed, for example, on the financing of agriculture, the platforms used, and the activities of associations in the country. Numerous tables and figures in the development are presented without indicating the source or explaining that they are the author's. Some of the data used (specifically for tourism development) are not adequately presented, for example through tables or graphs.

The consideration of the dissertation raises the following questions to the PhD student:

1. Are there rural areas in Bulgaria where the outlined guidelines for the implementation of digital marketing tools for the purpose of increasing the competitiveness of agritourism would have the best effect and have the greatest potential for applicability?
2. How could the considered digital marketing tools be graded by importance and potential for a higher effect in supporting the development of agritourism in Bulgaria?



10. Conclusion

Based on the submitted documents and dissertation, Kamelia Karadocheva meets all external regulatory requirements under the LDASRB and RILDASRB, as well as the internal regulatory framework according to the ODAS of NBU Sofia, for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor".

The PhD student conducted an independent study and accordingly carried out a theoretical review, analyzed the empirical data collected through a stakeholder survey, tested the author's model, and made the necessary conclusions and recommendations for further actions.

No plagiarism has been established in accordance with the statutory procedure.

The results of scientific research, as well as the developed valuable and significant dissertation of Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva, give me grounds to give a positive assessment and to propose to award her the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional field 3.9 "Tourism", scientific specialty "Tourism".

19.08.2026
Varna

Prepared the review:
/Assoc. Prof. Genka Rafailova, PhD/