

REVIEW

From: Prof. Dr. Tsvetana Aleksandrova Stoyanova - Department of Management, UNWE - Sofia, scientific specialty "Social Management", professional field 3.7. Administration and Management

Subject: Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**" in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, in the professional field 3.9. Tourism

Reason for submitting the review: participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation work according to Order Z-RK-194/27.05.2026 of the Rector of NBU

Author of the dissertation: Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva

Topic of the dissertation: "Innovative marketing tools to increase the competitiveness of agritourism in Bulgaria"

The review was prepared in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Implementation and the Regulation on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU.

1. Significance of the research problem in scientific and applied terms.

The presented dissertation is dedicated to a topical and practically significant problem – the possibilities for increasing the competitiveness of agritourism in Bulgaria through the use of innovative and digital marketing tools. The choice of the topic is justified by several interrelated processes: the growing role of tourism for regional and local development, the need for diversification of the tourist offer, the digitalization of consumer behavior and the search for sustainable forms of economic revitalization of rural areas.

The scientific significance of the study stems from the attempt to link the issues of agritourism, competitiveness, marketing positioning and digital transformation into a common analytical framework. The author does not consider digital marketing as an end in itself, but as a tool for reaching new markets, building a recognizable tourism product, overcoming seasonality and activating the resources of rural areas. In this sense, the work has an interdisciplinary nature and combines approaches from marketing, tourism management, regional development and digitalization.



The scientific and applied significance is particularly clear. Bulgarian agritourism is developing with fragmented supply, limited digital visibility of a significant part of small farms and insufficiently systematized information about the sector. The dissertation addresses precisely these deficits through a state analysis, a study of good European practices, the formulation of a marketing strategy, a system of KPIs, a checklist for assessing digitalization and the development of a digital diagnostic tool. This gives the study immediate applicability for small and medium-sized enterprises, local communities, industry organizations and institutions engaged in the development of tourism and rural areas.

2. Precisely formulated goals and objectives of the dissertation.

The introduction defines the object, subject, goal, tasks, research thesis and working hypotheses. The object of the study are small and medium-sized enterprises from Bulgaria, considered in the context of their development, functioning and competitiveness, and for the purposes of the work, over 200 businesses were studied through their positioning on the Internet - agricultural and tourist enterprises with the potential for developing an agritourism product. The subject of the study is the possibilities for implementing innovative digital marketing tools and their impact on the competitiveness of the agritourism sector.

The main goal is clearly formulated – to study the role of innovative digital marketing tools in increasing the competitiveness of agritourism and on this basis to develop an applicable model for assessing and improving digitalization in the sector. The goal is specified through seven tasks: research of innovative marketing tools in tourism; analysis of the state and trends in the sector; outlining changes in demand and supply; presentation of successful models in agritourism; analysis of the potential of rural and agrarian tourism; study of the role of stakeholders and training needs; definition of opportunities for collaboration between agricultural and tourism business operators.

A basic thesis is formulated that digital marketing tools can increase the competitiveness of rural tourism and agritourism in Bulgaria. It is operationalized in three working hypotheses related to the lag in the use of innovative marketing tools, the potential of agribusiness resources and the possibility of Bulgarian agritourism to increase its competitiveness by adapting successful Western European practices. In the final part, the author returns to the hypotheses and summarizes the results of their verification. There is a logical connection between the goal, tasks, research tools, results and conclusions.



3. Degree of knowledge of the state of the problem and relevance of the literature used.

The dissertation is 272 pages long and includes an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, conclusions, recommendations and contributions, as well as 6 appendices. A total of 111 sources in Bulgarian, English and Russian were used, as well as Internet sources containing official documents, statistical data, scientific articles, collections and materials with a practical focus. The work includes 19 figures and 23 tables.

The first chapter builds the theoretical and methodological basis of the study by reviewing marketing concepts and principles in tourism, strategies for positioning a tourism product, the advantages and limitations of digital marketing and communication channels in tourism demand and supply. The second chapter focuses on the essence, status and development of rural tourism and agritourism in Bulgaria, the profile of the modern tourist, SWOT analysis of the sector, marketing positioning, quantitative indicators of competitiveness, financing and innovation.

The third chapter has a pronounced analytical and applied nature. It assesses the tourism potential of rural areas, presents results of sociological surveys, analyzes geographical areas and sites with potential, examines the Italian model and the possibilities for adapting it to Bulgarian conditions, compares European practices and proposes a marketing strategy. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the testing of digital marketing tools, testing hypotheses, synthesis and ranking of results, KPIs for assessing effectiveness, minimizing the risks of digitalization and a checklist for the level of digitalization of the agritourism business.

The review shows a good knowledge of the scientific and applied issues. The author works with both classical marketing statements and modern sources, institutional strategies, statistical information and practical digital solutions. I positively assess the desire to use the literature not only descriptively, but also as a basis for comparison and for formulating one's own position on the development of agritourism in Bulgaria. The text demonstrates a free handling of the terminology of marketing and tourism and the ability to connect theoretical statements with specific problems of practice.

4. Correctness in citing a representative number of authors.

The literary and information sources used are presented in the bibliography and are included in the presentation in accordance with the citation approach adopted in the dissertation. Along with scientific



publications, official strategic and regulatory documents, statistical data and information resources necessary for the analysis of the tourism sector and the processes of digitalization have been used.

During the review, I have not found any reason to question the fair use of the sources. The author has submitted a declaration of originality and reliability of the dissertation work. At the same time, in the future publication of parts of the dissertation as a monographic work, it would be useful for the bibliographic layout to be further standardized according to a single standard, especially with regard to electronic sources and institutional documents. This note is editorial and does not affect the scientific value of the work.

5. Availability of a substantiated and developed theoretical model of the study.

A significant merit of the dissertation work is the consistent transition from theoretical analysis to the development of its own theoretical-methodological and practical-applied framework. The author systematizes and distinguishes the concepts of "rural tourism", "agritourism", "digital marketing", "competitiveness" and "digital marketing tools", then integrates them into a logic oriented towards assessing and improving the market performance of the agritourism business.

Of particular importance is the proposed marketing strategy for small and medium-sized agritourism enterprises. It is conceptual and adaptive, allowing for implementation according to the scale, resources and regional characteristics of the specific business. The model integrates digital channels such as a website, social networks and online booking platforms, and effectiveness is linked to a system of key indicators. Thus, the theoretical model does not remain at the level of general recommendations, but is translated into diagnostic and management tools.

The development of agrotour.digital deserves high praise. The concept, theoretical framework, logical structure, content of the diagnostic model, functional requirements, indicator system and methodological parameters were formulated by the doctoral student, and the technical implementation was carried out with the participation of IT specialists. In this way, a clear boundary between the author's scientific and applied idea and technical programming was achieved. The tool allows diagnostics of the digital state and directs small agrotourism enterprises to specific areas for improvement.

I also appreciate the inclusion of the comparative analysis of the Italian model as a contribution. It was not used mechanically as a model for transfer, but as a basis for identifying applicable practices and



limitations in their adaptation to the specific institutional, economic and regional environment in Bulgaria.

6. Compliance of the chosen methodology and research methodology with the set goal and objectives of the dissertation.

The chosen methodology corresponds to the nature of the research problem and the set goals and objectives. A systematic and analytical approach, comparative analysis, deductive and inductive methods, SWOT analysis, desk and field research were used. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect primary information, and the data were processed through statistical and comparative analysis and presented in tabular and graphical form.

The empirical logic is built in sequential stages – study of the state and attitudes, analytical interpretation, development of an applied model and its testing. The study includes representatives of business, local and expert communities. The consideration of different groups of stakeholders is appropriate in view of the specificity of agritourism, which is formed at the intersection of agricultural activity, tourist entrepreneurship, local resources, cultural heritage and institutional support.

The methodology allows for testing the three working hypotheses. The results support the thesis that a more active and targeted use of digital marketing tools can increase the visibility, market access and competitiveness of agritourism products. At the same time, the author correctly acknowledges the limitations of the study and the need for future studies to use broader aggregated data and larger quantitative samples.

7. Having your own contribution in collecting and analyzing empirical data.

I believe that the dissertation clearly demonstrates a recognizable personal contribution in the collection, systematization and interpretation of empirical data. The author conducts surveys and interviews, analyzes the Internet positioning of over 200 businesses, systematizes competitiveness factors, performs a SWOT analysis and compares Bulgarian and foreign practices.

The empirical part seeks not only a description of the current state, but also a connection between the marketing tools used, the level of digitalization, the constraints facing the business and the potential results. This approach provides a basis for formulating practical recommendations and for building the diagnostic tool. It is essential that the empirical results are used as a basis for testing agrotour.digital, and



are not left as a separate array of observations.

The contributions stated by the doctoral student can be accepted in their essence. Among them, the following stand out: systematization and critical analysis of contemporary concepts for digital marketing in tourism; development of its own theoretical and methodological framework for assessing the competitiveness of agritourism; SWOT analysis of the sector in the context of digital transformation; empirical research among stakeholders; comparative analysis of the Bulgarian and Italian models; practical guidelines for implementing digital tools; model for integrating digital channels; system of KPIs and practical model for assessing the level of digitalization; recommendations to businesses and institutions.

The socio-economic perspective of the study should be added to the scientific and applied results – the outlined opportunities for agritourism to help revitalize rural areas, reduce regional imbalances, preserve local cultural heritage, and create additional economic activities. This expands the applicability of the results beyond the marketing function of the individual enterprise.

8. Impacts of the dissertation work on the external environment.

In support of his research work and as a form of approbation of the results, the doctoral student presents a list of eight publications on the issues of the dissertation work. They have been published in proceedings of scientific and international scientific conferences and examine sustainable development, international marketing, tourism in crisis conditions, graphic design and the tourist brand, modern marketing in the tourism industry, brand management and promotion in crisis situations, decision-making under uncertainty, and innovations and technologies in tourism demand and supply.

The publication activity shows a consistent development of the research interest and public presentation of individual aspects of the dissertation issues. Some of the publications are independent, and others are co-authored with the scientific supervisor, which is a normal form of scientific cooperation. Their thematic focus is related to the main cores of the dissertation and supports the approbation of ideas that are subsequently developed in the overall work.

The practical impact is also associated with the possibility that the developed digital tool, checklist and KPI system can be used by small agritourism enterprises for self-assessment and improvement planning. The proposals to institutions for training, financial support, digitalization and better



coordination between stakeholders also have the potential to impact the external environment. The presented materials do not indicate data on citations or reviews of the dissertation work by other authors, therefore no additional conclusions should be drawn in this direction.

9. Personal qualities of the author (if the reviewer knows him/her).

I do not personally know doctoral student Kamelia Karadocheva and my impressions are formed from the presented materials. The autobiographical data show professional experience in the National Revenue Agency, the State Fund "Agriculture" and specialized media for agriculture, food, economics and the environment. This professional profile has points of contact with the issues of the dissertation - work with administrative processes, communication, the agricultural sector, media content and digital tools.

The dissertation work can be used to conclude that the doctoral student has the ability to systematize diverse information, work with theoretical and empirical sources, formulate research problems and seek applicable solutions. The development of a diagnostic digital tool is an additional indicator of initiative and orientation towards practical application of scientific results.

10. Opinions, recommendations and notes.

The dissertation is a completed study with a clearly expressed practical focus. Along with my positive assessment, I would recommend that Kamelia Karadocheva continue her scientific and applied work in the field of digital marketing, agritourism and competitiveness management, by upgrading the developed tool with broader empirical validation and comparative research at the regional and international levels.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I believe that the dissertation "Innovative Marketing Tools for Increasing the Competitiveness of Agritourism in Bulgaria" represents an independent, complete and up-to-date scientific study with clearly expressed scientific and scientifically applied results. The doctoral student knows the state of the research problem, is able to systematize and critically interpret the scientific literature, construct a research apparatus, collect and analyze empirical data and formulate practically applicable solutions.

As essential merits of the work, I define the developed theoretical and methodological framework, the analysis of the competitiveness of agritourism, the comparison with European practices, the proposed



marketing strategy, the KPI system, the digitalization checklist and the created diagnostic tool agrotour.digital. The obtained results support the main research thesis and the formulated working hypotheses and outline opportunities for practical application by business and interested institutions.

The abstract reflects the main content characteristics, results and contributions of the dissertation work. The presented publications are thematically related to the research and testify to the approbation and publicity of part of the scientific results.

The above gives me grounds for **a positive assessment** that the dissertation work of Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva meets the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulation on the Development of the Academic Staff at the New Bulgarian University. Therefore, I propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to vote "for" awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty "Tourism".

18.08.2026

Sofia

Reviewer:

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