

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Vanya Atanasova Vasileva PhD

Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen

3.9. Tourism (Hospitality and Tourism Markets)

for the acquisition of the scientific degree "doctor" in the professional field 3.9. Tourism, scientific specialty Tourism.

Author of the dissertation: Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva

Topic of the dissertation: "Innovative marketing tools for increasing the competitiveness of agrotourism in Bulgaria"

Basis for submitting the opinion: participation in the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation in accordance with Order No. 3-PK-194 of 22.05.2026 of the Rector of NBU.

1. Information about the dissertation candidate

Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva is a full-time doctoral student at the New Bulgarian University in the Department of "Administration and Management", who is currently enrolled with the right to defend. The topic of the dissertation "Innovative Marketing Tools for Increasing the Competitiveness of Agritourism in Bulgaria" corresponds to part of the doctoral student's work and practical experience in the period 2019-2022.

2. General characteristics of the submitted dissertation work

The dissertation work proposed for consideration and review has a total volume of 272 pages, of which 241 pages are main text and 31 pages are appendices, a list of used literature, lists of tables, figures and abbreviations used, as well as a table of contents. The main text is structured in an introduction, four chapters, conclusion, inferences, recommendations and contributions from the study. The literature used includes a total of 112 sources in Bulgarian, English, Russian, as well as websites containing official documents and data, illustrative marketing information, scientific articles, collections in digital format. The text is appropriately illustrated with 19 figures and 23 tables, some of which are entirely author's.

The author presents a declaration of originality and reliability of the dissertation work, as well as a declaration of not using generative artificial intelligence in writing the dissertation work. A report is also presented to reflect the recommendations and remarks on the dissertation work made at the preliminary defense.

3. Significance of the researched problem in scientific and scientific-applied terms.



The topic under consideration "Innovative marketing tools for increasing the competitiveness of agrotourism in Bulgaria" is relevant and significant due to:

- The aspiration of destination Bulgaria to diversify its tourism product;
- The aspiration of destination Bulgaria to increase its competitiveness;
- The still insufficient use of innovative marketing tools to achieve various market goals.

The significance and dimensions of the topic under consideration are appropriately presented on pages 9 – 10 of the dissertation.

4. Justification of the goals and objectives in the dissertation.

The research goal and the tasks arising from it are appropriately and in detail defined on page 11. They are appropriately justified in relation to the topic of the dissertation.

5. Correspondence between the selected methodology and research methodology and the set goal and objectives of the dissertation.

The selected methodology and methodology of the study includes a variety of methods and tools, which, however, are presented in different parts of the dissertation (pp. 12, 103, 208, 210, etc.). The author's contribution stands out best in probing opinions through 3 focus groups, which contributes to achieving the validity and depth of the scientific research. The methodology used is suitable for achieving the set research goals and objectives.

6. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results

The doctoral thesis presents a comprehensive and completed scientific study. The empirical part of the study includes official statistical data, economic indicators, the use of national and international reports, as well as analytical publications dedicated to the topic under consideration.

In the first chapter, marketing concepts characteristic of tourism in the conditions of digitalization, comparable to classical and modern marketing concepts, are studied and analyzed. Special attention is paid to the advantages, disadvantages and opportunities in the use of digital marketing in tourism, as well as to the communication channels in digital marketing in the context of tourist demand and supply. A sequence for positioning the tourist product is proposed. The conclusion is made that digital transformation is an indispensable part of modern tourist marketing and for successful competitiveness, agrotourism sites must move to a higher level of digital integration.

In the second chapter, attention is focused on the essence and specifics of agritourism, as well as its peculiarities in our country. The second chapter also examines the topic of the image and reputation of Bulgaria as a tourist destination, as well as some indicators and trends characterizing the modern tourism development of the country. Opportunities for financing the local agri-food business are also indicated. The conclusion is made that the marketing of local foods, artisanal goods and production traditions is an excellent opportunity for simultaneously promoting tourist services.

A significant authorial contribution is noted in the third chapter, which is dedicated to studying the tourism potential of rural areas in Bulgaria, as well as specific opportunities for increasing the competitiveness of agritourism through digital marketing tools. This chapter presents the empirical research conducted among the main participants in the agritourism sector in Bulgaria - farm owners, tourism entrepreneurs and service users. The empirical part of the research confirms the growing importance of



digital channels for information, booking and sharing tourist experiences. The presented analysis reveals the attitudes, challenges and potential for digital transformation in agritourism. A comparison is made with the foreign experience of the example of Italy and opportunities for applying this experience in the local conditions of our country are indicated. The annexes aptly present the questionnaires and links to the conducted studies, as well as the responses received.

The fourth chapter stands out with an analytical author's contribution regarding the testing of digital marketing tools for the purposes of increasing the competitiveness of tourism in rural areas of Bulgaria. This also includes proposals for the introduction of intelligent technologies in the agritourism business. The tool www.agrotour.digital is presented, a diagnostic practical-applied model for determining the level of digitalization of an agritourism enterprise, which has been further developed into a model for digital maturity of the agritourism business in the form of a self-assessment checklist and specific guidelines for digitalization of the sector. The practical value of the study is expressed in the proposed solutions for increasing the visibility of Bulgarian agritourism, attracting new target groups and creating a sustainable environment for the development of rural areas. The thesis is substantiated that the application of new technologies in marketing is of crucial importance for the future and adaptability of businesses in tourism, but at the moment digitalization in rural tourism in our country is extremely insufficient. Other current and pressing problems are also highlighted.

The conclusion aptly summarizes and emphasizes the main points, making important conclusions and recommendations.

7. Scientific and applied scientific contributions of the dissertation work (description and assessment), including the presence of an original contribution to science.

The presented comprehensive list of applied scientific contributions of the dissertation work includes 2 theoretical contributions, 3 of an analytical and empirical nature, 5 applied contributions, as well as 2 of a socio-economic nature. The indicated contributions directly correspond to the obtained scientific and applied scientific results of the study.

8. Assessment of publications on the dissertation work: number, nature of the publications in which they were published.

The doctoral student presents a list of eight scientific publications. They cover a wide thematic spectrum related to the tourism industry, but not directly to agrotourism in Bulgaria. Half of the submitted publications are by a single author (the doctoral student), and the rest are co-authored with the scientific supervisor. Most of the submitted works have been published abroad. All of the publications listed are in collections of scientific papers. There are no publications in specialized scientific journals.

9. Evaluation of the abstract

The presented abstract correctly and synthesizedly presents the most important highlights of the dissertation work.

10. Opinions, recommendations and notes.



The critical remarks and recommendations made to the doctoral student during the pre-defense have been taken into account, which has led to the improvement of the dissertation presented for consideration. However, the volume of the dissertation remains large.

I urge the doctoral student Kamelia Karadocheva to enrich her future scientific research activities with scientific articles in specialized scientific journals, indexed in world databases, which would increase their visibility and, accordingly, significance.

My question to the doctoral student is the following: Can we expect, and if so, in what period, a real increase in the competitiveness of agrotourism in Bulgaria through the use of innovative marketing tools?

11. Conclusion with a clearly formulated positive or negative assessment of the dissertation.

The presented dissertation fully meets the requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the scientific specialty 3.9. Tourism. In connection with the above-mentioned positive qualities and contributions of the dissertation work under consideration, I give my positive assessment for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" by the candidate Kamelia Evgenieva Karadocheva.

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Signature.....