

REVIEW

by Professor Bistra Konstantinova Vassileva, PhD

from the University of Economics-Varna

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

for the academic position of “Associate Professor”

in the Higher School of Insurance and Finance (VUZF)

in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences,

professional field 3.8 Economics (Marketing and Digital Business)

In the competition for “Associate Professor” in professional field 3.8 Economics (Marketing and Digital Business), published in the State Gazette, no. 30 from 15 April 2022 and on the VUZF website, the only candidate is Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD from VUZF.

1. General information on the procedure and the submitted materials

By order № 170 from 25 July 2022 of the Rector of VUZF, I have been appointed to be a member of the scientific jury in a competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” at VUZF in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8 Economics (Marketing and Digital Business).

The only candidate for participation in the announced competition is:
Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD from VUZF.

The set of electronic materials presented by Dr. Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of VUZF and includes the following documents:

- Application for admission to participate in the announced competition;
- Resume (CV) in European format;
- Recommendation from Dr. Sabrina Kalinkova;
- Copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree "PhD";
- Monographic work with summary;
- List of publications after the defense of the PhD thesis;
- Summaries in Bulgarian and English language of the publications after the defense of the PhD thesis;
- Medical certificate;

- Criminal record certificate;
- Certificate of required experience;
- Evidence of participation in scientific projects and other research tasks;
- Reference on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "Associate Professor";
- Reference for the original scientific contributions in the works and for the citations;
- Consent form for the processing of personal data in connection with participation in the contest.

The candidate, Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD, submitted a total of 15 scientific works, including 1 monograph, 1 book published on the basis of the defended PhD thesis, 7 articles and 6 papers.

Fifteen scientific works that are outside the PhD thesis are accepted for review and are counted in the final evaluation. The distribution of scientific works by relevant headings, in the country and abroad, is as follows: 12 publications in Bulgaria, of which 1 monograph, 1 book, 6 articles and 4 reports; 3 publications abroad, of which 1 article and 2 reports.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Based on the applicant's attached professional resume, I draw the attention of the scientific jury and the scientific community to the following facts from her career and academic experience, which serve as a basis for her admission to the competition, namely:

- In the period 2002-2007, the candidate completed his secondary education at 9 FEG "Alphonse de Lamartine", humanitarian profile with intensive study of French language, literature and history;
- During the period 2007-2011, she successfully graduated from the Bachelor's degree programme at UNSS;
- The candidate studied for the Master's degree, specialty "Marketing" at UNSS in the period 2011-2013 and successfully graduated;
- In the period 2015-2019, she studied for a PhD in Marketing at UNSS and successfully defended her dissertation on the topic "Market Orientation of Companies Applying Direct Marketing in Bulgaria";
- Worked as a part-time assistant professor at UNSS in the period 2014-2017 and at VUZF from 2020 to the present;

- In 2019, she worked as a business analyst at "Tinkin" AD, and from September 2021 until now - as a "Digitalization" project manager at "Bulstrad Life Vienna Insurance Group" EAD.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activity

Regarding the educational and pedagogical activities of the candidate, the following main points can be made:

In the period 2014-2017, when she worked as a part-time assistant professor at UNSS, Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD was involved in organising and conducting seminars in Bulgarian and English language on disciplines such as "Product Policy", "Fundamentals of Marketing", 'Sales Management'. Since 2020, the candidate has been working as a part-time assistant professor at VUZF, organising and conducting lectures and seminars in Bulgarian and English language in the disciplines "Academic writing and working with information sources", "Introduction to business digitization", "Digital marketing and communications". For the taught disciplines, she develops and updates teaching materials for digital and face-to-face learning.

Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD has no published textbooks and handbooks/manuals, but her targeted publication activity in the field of digital and direct marketing is a good basis for future work in the direction of the development and publication of educational materials.

Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied activity

Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD participated in the competition with 15 scientific works, of which 1 monograph, 1 book published on the basis of a defended PhD thesis, 7 articles and 6 papers with a total volume of 393 pages. All presented scientific works are individual without co-authors. A structured quantitative overview of the publications submitted for review by the applicant is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

Quantitative overview of the publication activity of Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD

Types by groups of publications	Individual		With co-authors		Total	
	Number	Volume, pages	Number	Volume, pages	Number	Volume, pages
1. Monographs	1	125	-	-	1	125
2. Scientific articles, incl.	7	47	-	-	7	47
- Bulgarian editions	6	42	-	-	6	42
- international editions	1	5	-	-	1	5
3. Scientific papers, incl.	6	36	-	-	6	36
- Bulgarian editions	4	26	-	-	4	26

- international editions	2	10	-	-	2	10
4. Other publications	1	185	-	-	1	185
Total	15	393	-	-	15	393

Note: The applicant has not provided information on the number of pages for each publication. The number of pages in the table is not adjusted to the standard page size of 30 lines x60 characters (1800 characters).

Of the presented publications, six are written in English language and include 4 articles and 2 reports with a total volume of 28 pages.

The candidate has not submitted articles and reports published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

Dr. Mihaela Mihailova's publications are thematically focused predominantly on (1) direct marketing (with an emphasis on studies of direct marketing companies), (2) digital marketing (with an emphasis on websites as a marketing tool and key factor in the digitalization process) and (3) the market orientation of the companies (with the object of research being the companies applying direct marketing).

The main interest is the individual monographic research (Mihailova, M. (2022) Realities and challenges facing the websites in Bulgaria. Publishing house of the "St. Gregory the Theologian" University of Higher Education, Sofia). In this publication, an attempt was made to research and analyse the websites of Bulgarian companies as an external manifestation of digitalization on the Internet and as a key component of the online presence and company identity. Two critical indicators for the quality of the websites were derived - interactivity and usability, which the candidate also researches and analyses in her other scientific works (articles and papers). The conducted parallel empirical studies among Bulgarian companies and customers make it possible to identify the points of intersection between the expectations of the customers and the real web performance of the companies. Another publication that should be specifically noted is the candidate's book, which was written on the basis of a defended PhD thesis (Mihailova, M. (2020) Direct marketing and market orientation in companies in Bulgaria, publishing house of St. Gregory the Theologian University of Higher Education, Sofia). The focus of this study is placed on the market orientation of firms that apply direct marketing. Based on the data analysis and the verification of five research hypotheses, conclusions and recommendations are made to the companies applying direct marketing in the context of the concept of market orientation.

After my detailed acquaintance with the publications proposed by the candidate for participation in the competition, I can state that the national requirements according to the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria have been met (Table 2).

Table 2

Actual performance of the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position "Associate Professor" by groups of indicators, field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Group of indicators	Number of the indicators	Minimum national requirements (points for Assoc.Prof.)	Actual performance	Con-formity
A	Indicator №1 (PhD)	50	50	Yes
B	Indicator №3 (Habilitation work)	100	100	Yes
C	Sum of the indicators from №4 to №10	200	205	Yes
D	Sum of the indicators from №11 to №13	50	80	Yes
E	Sum of the indicators from №14 to №21	-	-	-

Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, applied) and citations

Based on the scientific works presented for participation in the competition by Mihaela Mihailova, PhD and her contributions to each of the publications, I can suggest the following findings:

- The applicant has not categorised the submitted contributions as scientific, scientific-applied or applied.
- Some of the studies, analyses and recommendations that are presented as contributions to the monographic works could be defined to some extent as applied, but a significant part of them, especially those referred to the papers and articles, I do not consider as contributions from the point of view of their significance for theory and practice.
- Some of the contribution points in the candidate's scientific works (outside the main monographs) related to the competition can be classified as applied in relation to the object of research.

I classify the contributions in the monographic works (publications numbered 1 and 2 according to the document "List of Contributions") as scientific-applied in the relationship "digitalization - direct marketing - market orientation - innovations" and systematise in the following order:

- Identification of key quality indicators of websites as a digital marketing tool – interactivity and usability.
- Development and testing of a methodological framework for assessing the level and approaches of applying direct marketing by companies, including from the positions of the concept of market orientation.

- Development and testing of a methodological framework for complex analysis in the company-customer relationship of the websites of Bulgarian companies.
- Identification and validation of the relationships "level of market orientation - degree of application of direct marketing" and "achieved results - degree of application of direct marketing and level of market orientation".
- Systematisation of knowledge and identification of guidelines for its application in the field of direct and digital marketing, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I classify the contributions in the scientific works (outside the main monographs) as applied and systematise them in the following order:

- Development and testing of a methodological framework for analysis of the level of market orientation of companies that implement direct marketing in Bulgaria (publications with numbers 3, 4, 12 and 13).
- Identifying the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on firms' marketing activities (publications with numbers 5, 6, 10 and 14).
- Bringing innovative approaches in digital and direct marketing to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (publications numbered 7, 8 and 9).

The candidate has indicated a total of 12 citations, of which 4 citations are in monographs and peer-reviewed collective volumes. Of these 4 citations, 3 are in one monograph (one citation each to 3 different publications of the candidate). One of the cited publications was cited by another author in a separate monograph. The remaining 8 citations are to 3 publications of Dr. Mihaela Mihailova in non-refereed journals with scientific review. Two of these citations are from foreign authors.

Implementation activity

The applicant has not submitted evidence of entrepreneurial activity such as copyright certificates, patents, etc.

4. Evaluation of the candidate's personal contribution

All publications presented by the candidate are individually developed, including the conducted empirical research.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

The findings regarding the candidate's performance in the teaching and research fields are the basis for defining the following recommendations:

- To strengthen the creative activity of Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD in the theoretical-methodological field of her research work, which will create a solid background for publishing articles and reports in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information, somehow not presented at the moment.
- The candidate should form or join research teams and collectives, as well as seek forms of cooperation with business partners in her research field, which will generate a synergistic effect in her scientific development and career growth.
- To activate the work on the development and publication of textbooks and handbooks/manuals, especially since in the candidate's research field there are many topical problem areas and creative niches with great research potential.
- The candidate should strengthen her work on research and applied projects, including on an international scale.

6. Personal impressions

I do not personally know Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD and I have no personal impressions of her performances outside the competition.

CONCLUSION

The overview of the publications, the facts from the attached references, as well as the impressions from the attached publications of Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD give reason to underline the results achieved by her in the teaching and research sphere, namely:

- Eight years of experience in educational and teaching activities and more specifically in the field of competition.
- Published two individual monographic works in the field of digital and direct marketing.
- Thirteen published individual articles and papers.

The documents and materials presented by Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRASRB and the relevant regulations of VUZF.

The candidate in the competition has submitted a sufficient number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the PhD thesis. The candidate's works contain

original applied contributions, as a representative part of them are published in journals and scientific collections published by Bulgarian and international academic publishing bodies. The scientific developments of the candidate are practically oriented to business and more specifically to companies applying direct marketing.

The results achieved by Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD in her educational and research activities are fully in line with the Regulations of the VUZF for the application of ZRASRB.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analysing their significance and the scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and to recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Academic Council for election of Mihaela Metodieva Mihailova, PhD to the academic position of "Associate Professor" at VUZF in professional field 3.8. Economics (Marketing and Digital Business).

23 August 2022

Reviewer:

Prof. Bistra Vassileva, PhD